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**THE PLIGHT OF
WORKING MOTHERS IN PAKISTAN:
ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF
A JOINT FAMILY SYSTEM**

By

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INTRODUCTION

In Pakistan, the issues of women's status, their autonomy and equality have frequently been raised on the premises that a nation cannot progress when a vast segment of society is denied its due share and not allowed to play an active role in nation building. Without ensuring equity in all economic and social opportunities and provision of basic rights to everybody, irrespective of all sorts of biases, a country is bound to lag behind. The traditional right to food, shelter and clothing are not enough. The right to education, health, and empowerment equally for women are also essential in this fast changing global economy.

The first section of the paper provides an overall socio-economic profile of south Asian women vis-a-vis Pakistan. The status of woman with regard to their levels of education, and health is expounded on. Further, their lack of participation from the labor force is also explained in this section. Section two of the paper deals with the concept of women's role as workers and mothers. The concept of the two types of household systems is also introduced in this section. Section three and four give some advantages and disadvantages respectively of the joint family system. The compromising factor at the household level is discussed in section five. Section six of the paper deals with the issue regarding efforts for empowerment and the last section provides some concluding remarks.

Section 1 South Asian Women vis-à-vis Pakistan

Women played a vital role in breaking the shackles that brought the dawn of independence and the birth of Pakistan. However, while being an Islamic republic and a democratic country, Pakistan fares poor on the front of gender equality; not only with respect to other developing countries but also with respect to South Asian countries where gender disparities are believed to be the worst. Unfortunately, when this disadvantaged segment enters the stream of the labor force to acquire some status and power her situation further deteriorates. Inadequate education and a high reproductive burden on women collectively has a negative effect on labor force participation. Women are thus, bound to stay at home in our country

engaged in bearing and rearing children. In short, women considered the “domestic finance minister” are the most deprived segment of the society in terms of provision of services. Even if she manages to work outside the home, then the dual nature of her responsibility at home comprising household responsibilities along with mothering puts her into a much more miserable situation. In order to have a deeper insight into the plight of working mothers in Pakistan it is equally necessary to understand the status of women in the country.

The overall status of women in Pakistan in comparison to other South Asian countries can be easily judged by analyzing their socio-economic indicators from Table 1. Female population in all these south Asian countries is almost 50 percent starting from 48.2 percent in Pakistan to 50.6 percent in Sri Lanka. But the education status is quite alarming for Pakistan whereas Sri Lanka, situated in the same region shows very good educational level. Adult illiteracy rate for females was highest in Nepal in the year 2001 at 75 percent and Pakistan has similar levels at 71 percent. A similar situation exists for youth illiteracy for females, which is the highest in Afghanistan at 60 percent; but this is justified as the country has been embedded in conflict for several years. For Pakistan to show a similar figure of 57 percent is not justifiable, although it has been reduced from 69 percent in 1990. By looking at the indicator of “average years of schooling” it appears that in these countries with the exception of Sri Lanka there is little inclination towards investment in education in general and with regard to females in particular.

Countries	Women in decision-making positions % of total at ministerial level	Female population (% of total)	Average Years of Schooling		Adult Illiteracy Rate (% ages 15 and above)				Youth Illiteracy Rate (% ages 15 - 24)			
			Male	Female	Male		Female		Male		Female	
			1998	2001	2000	2000	1990	2001	1990	2001	1990	2001
Afghanistan	n.a	49.0	2.6	0.8	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
Bangladesh	5	49.6	3.3	1.8	56	50	76	69	49	43	67	60
India	3*	48.4	6.3	3.7	38	31	64	54	27	20	46	34
Myanmar	0	50.3	3.0	2.5	13	11	26	19	10	9	14	9
Nepal	3	48.7	3.4	1.5	53	39	86	75	33	23	73	56
Pakistan	7	48.2	5.1	2.5	51	42	80	71	37	28	69	57
Sri Lanka	13	50.6	7.2	6.6	7	5	15	11	4	3	6	3

Source: 2003 World Development Indicators
Note: * refers to the year 1994.

But it is an undeniable fact that the social returns to education do exist. Some of them particularly related to health care are worth mentioning like reduction in fertility levels, infant and maternal mortality rates, an overall improved health status of the family, improved

reproductive health care behavior, etc. Apart from that, an educated woman can fight for her rights and can have better employment opportunities.

Furthermore, in this region cultural factors like patriarchy and limited decision-making authority restricts women's access to social services such as health and education services as well as income generating opportunities. The resultant factor emerges in the shape of poor health and nutrition status not only of women but also of the next generation. A malnourished child is, therefore, unable to compete and continue education till the desired level.

Pakistani women indeed suffer by comparison to most developing countries. Even today the rate of maternal mortality and deficiencies among women of various nutrients is very high in Pakistan. Consequently, the relatively poor health of Pakistani women, when she reaches the status of a mother affects their offspring. The resultant factors appear in the form of high infant mortality rate, malnourishment among children, poor immunization and poor learning among the children. On the contrary, women's health is important for her, as she has to bear the burden of household responsibilities and sometimes the old parent's as well. But all her activities with respect to children, home and parents are un-paid and not measurable. Man, on the other hand, is not bound to do any household work as is not perceived respectful. Therefore, women are crushed under these multiple responsibilities and are unable to take much care of herself if she is working outside also. Pakistan being an agrarian economy most women here are engaged in agricultural activities, which are very difficult to measure. Whereas women in the urban areas are left with only two options, which are considered to be safe and secure that is to take up teaching or become a doctor.

The same situation is reflected in the Table 2 in which we find that births attended by skilled health staff in Pakistan during 1996-2000 are just 20 percent whereas in Srilanka 95 percent of the births are attended by trained staff. Only Bangladesh and Nepal are worse than Pakistan showing a figure of 12 percent for the same indicator. Even in the case of fertility rate in the year 2001 Pakistan stands at 4.6 births per women and this comes after Afghanistan that has 6.8. Rest of the countries under consideration except for Nepal has fertility rates ranging from 2.1-3.0 births per women. The high fertility rate is a clear indication of the fact that the contraceptive prevalence rate is low; besides it is also a consequence of early marriages and low literacy rates. Religious factors also plays a role in making this issue more problematic. Contraceptive prevalence rate is very low in our country

whereas in India and Bangladesh it is 52 percent and 54 percent respectively during the decade of 1990-2001.

TABLE 2 REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN SOUTH ASIA							
Countries	Access to an improved water source (% of population)		Total Fertility rate (births per woman)	Women at risk of unintended pregnancy (% of married women age 15-49)	Contraceptive prevalence rate (% of married women age 15-49)	Births attended by skilled health staff (% of total)	Maternal Mortality ratio (per 100000 live births)
	1990	2000	2001	1990-2001	1990-2001	1996-2000	1995
Afghanistan	n.a	13	6.8	n.a	n.a	n.a	820
Bangladesh	94	97	3.0	15	54	12	600
India	68	84	3.0	16	52	42	440
Myanmar	n.a	72	2.9	n.a	n.a	57	170
Nepal	67	88	4.2	28	29	12	830
Pakistan	83	90	4.6	32	28	20	200
Sri Lanka	68	77	2.1	n.a	n.a	95	60

Source: 2003 World Development Indicators

Table 3 provides female participation in the labor force for south Asian countries. Accordingly in 2001 Pakistan accounts for just 29 percent of women's participation, which is lowest in the region. In fact if we trace it backwards to 1980 then at that time too it was the lowest among all the countries in south Asia at 22.7 percent. Myanmar continues to reflect highest female participation rate whereas Srilanka has shown substantial increase of ten percentage points with 26.9 percent in 1980 to 36.8 percent in 2001. Improvements show efforts of the government with regard to employment opportunities, awareness and provision of facilities for the working mothers. It is evident that the educational indicators for Srilanka are very good and this is one of the all-important factors, which translates into improvements in the labor force participation. Since Pakistan's educational record is not very sound and this is a clear indication of the fact that there are very few women available for work. Moreover, those few who are available do not have ample opportunities and facilities to work outside the home. But a Pakistani women, if provided with all sorts of facilities will still be willing to stay at home because of the restrictions placed by male members, excessive household work and non-availability of adequate child care facilities.

TABLE 3
SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN

Countries	Labor Force		Unemployment		Average annual population growth rate (%)	Population age composition			Dependency ratio (dependents as proportion of working-age population)	
	Female % of labor force		Male % of male labor force	Female % of female labor force		Ages 0-14 %	Ages 15-64 %	Ages 65+ %		
	1980	2001	1998	1998	1980-2001	2001	2001	2001	2001	2001
Afghanistan	34.8	35.7	n.a	n.a	2.6	43.7	53.5	2.8	0.8	0.1
Bangladesh	42.3	42.4	n.a	n.a	2.1	37.0	59.7	3.3	0.6	0.1
India	33.7	32.4	n.a	n.a	1.9	33.1	61.9	5.0	0.5	0.1
Myanmar	43.7	43.4	n.a	n.a	1.7	32.7	62.7	4.6	0.5	0.1
Nepal	38.8	40.5	1.5	0.7	2.3	40.7	55.5	3.8	0.7	0.1
Pakistan	22.7	29.0	4.2	14.9	2.6	41.2	55.5	3.3	0.8	0.1
Sri Lanka	26.9	36.8	7.1	16.2	1.2	26.0	67.6	6.4	0.4	0.1

Source: 2003 World Development Indicators

On account of the overall situation of Pakistan's economy and the lack of employment opportunities in the country not only for women but also for men, we find that the labor force participation rate for males has also fallen from 76.7 percent in 1975 to 70.3 percent in 2002 as indicated in Table 4. But in the case of females it has increased from 6.4 percent in 1975 to 14.4 percent in 2002. In both cases, the change occurred mainly because of changes in rural areas. The impact of the urban areas appears to be not that substantial. The effect of this decrease in the labor force participation rate for males is reflected in the unemployment rate, which has increased from 1.8 percent in 1975 to 6.7 percent in 2002 and it is the resultant effect of unemployment in both urban and rural areas. The increase in the female unemployment rate from 0.7 percent in 1975 to 15.5 percent in 2002 gives a very different picture. This phenomena is the outcome of very high female unemployment in the urban areas which was 1.8 percent in 1975 and 24.2 percent in 2002.

TABLE 4
LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN PAKISTAN

Year	Labor Force Participation Rate						Labor Force Unemployment Rate					
	Urban		Rural		Total		Urban		Rural		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1975	69.6	3.5	79.8	7.6	76.7	6.4	2.8	1.8	1.4	0.6	1.8	0.7
1979	70.3	5.3	80.1	14.3	77.3	11.8	4.6	14.6	2.4	6.4	3.0	7.6
1985	71.1	4.1	79.8	10.7	77.1	8.7	5.8	4.1	3.2	0.8	4.0	1.4
1991	66.6	8.6	73.6	14.8	71.3	12.8	5.9	27.7	3.9	13.7	4.5	16.8
1995	64.3	7.0	71.3	13.3	69.1	11.4	5.3	22.6	3.6	11.7	4.1	13.7
2000	65.0	8.8	73.1	16.1	70.4	13.7	7.5	29.6	5.4	14.0	6.1	17.3
2002	66.9	10.0	72.2	16.8	70.3	14.4	7.9	24.2	6.1	14.1	6.7	16.5

Source: Social Development in Pakistan, Annual Review 2002-03 "The State of Education".

Here the issue of provision of facilities and opportunities arises. In the rural areas women are mostly engaged in agricultural activities and most of the other family members are also involved in a related activity. Families and relatives live together in the same area or sometime at the same place. Normally there are large families and numerous children who can take care of each other as they hardly go to school and look after the little household work. In the case of the urban areas the situation is entirely different as the family set-ups are different and needs are different. What is considered a luxury for a rural settlement is a necessity for those living in the urban areas. The needs and requirements emerge on account of the multiplicity of urban issues. But the fact remains that a woman whether she lives in rural areas or urban areas requires help and support if she has to play some additional roles. The nature, quality and extent of support is the only difference.

The seed of the traditional role of women in our society cannot be taken away as it is deeply embedded in our culture. Women's domain is the domestic sphere inside the home and the man's domain is the public space outside the home. It would not be incorrect to say that our system is associated with clearly defined male female role where men are the breadwinners and women the producers and nurturers of children. This is one of the very important roles of women that she has to involve in childcare activities. The issue of childcare imposes a very serious responsibility on women especially when she leaves her house for work. But the nature and extent of this responsibility is different for those working mothers who are living in a joint family system and for those who are not.

Table 5 provides the trend for education in Pakistan from 1975 to the year 2001. The country's standing, in general, for education indicators, is not only inadequate but the imbalance in terms of gender is even more acute. The literacy rate among females has increased from 12.6 percent in the base year to 38.0 percent in 2001. But it has been constantly less than that of males in the corresponding years; the increasing trend not only reflects awareness but also improvement in the provision of facilities as well. The same situation is with the mean years of schooling, which was 0.5 in the initial year for females while 2.2 for males. But as we move on and reach the latest year we see that it becomes 8.2 for males and 3.4 for female. The combined enrollment rate also shows an upward trend. The fact that there is a continuous gender disparity requires serious attention.

TABLE 5
EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

Year	Literacy Rate		Mean Year of Schooling		Combined Enrollment Rate	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1975	31.4	12.6	2.2	0.5	28.7	13.4
1980	34.0	15.1	2.7	0.6	27.3	13.5
1985	37.9	18.3	3.2	0.9	30.7	15.4
1990	43.2	22.4	3.4	1.0	35.9	18.8
1995	50.5	27.9	3.9	1.4	36.1	22.7
2001	63.0	38.0	8.2	3.4	37.3	28.9

Source: Social Development in Pakistan, Annual Review 2002-03 "The State of Education".

The third target of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) refers to universal primary education. It further stresses to ensure that, by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary education. But unfortunately another serious educational problem is the very high percentage of students who drop out before completing a particular cycle. The dropout problem is more serious mainly because of poverty and ignorance. The analyses from the available data in Table 6 shows that from 1975 to 2001 the enrollment rate for females in the primary stage has increased from 27.8 percent to 63.5 percent which is more than double but the situation in the case of males is not so. This is because it started from a higher enrollment and now reaches 83.9 percent. Even the percentage of cohort reaching grade V is almost 50 percent for males and 40 percent in the case of females. The last two indicators of this table show a decline during the decade of 1980 to 1990 but after that it started taking an upward turn. The highest increase in these two indicators is seen in the period from 1995-2001.

TABLE 6
PROFILE OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

Year	Availability of Primary Schools		Availability of Primary School Teachers		Enrollment rate (Primary)		Percentage of cohort reaching Class V		Ratio of Boys to Girls Primary	% of Female Teachers Primary
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female		
1975	167	343	70	124	56.6	27.8	45.2	33.7	2.2	34.1
1980	176	352	76	131	56.2	28.5	41.3	32.2	2.1	34.9
1985	136	348	61	123	63.7	32.9	36.1	29.5	2.1	31.7
1990	112	268	53	97	73.7	40.0	36.5	27.9	2.0	33.4
1995	110	267	42	87	82.9	55.6	37.3	30.4	1.6	31.1
2001	112	257	51	59	83.9	63.5	49.4	40.0	1.4	44.2

Source: Social Development in Pakistan, Annual Review 2002-03 "The State of Education".

The Tables 7a and 7b shows the profile of secondary education in our country. In the secondary stage enrollment rates among male students have increased from 26.1 percent to 33.1 percent reflecting an increase of 7 percent. But female enrollment rates show a substantial increase starting from 1975 with 9.7 percent to 23.3 percent in 2001. Although this is a positive sign, these students who enter the secondary stage are unable to complete their matriculation. The table indicates that the percentage of the cohort reaching class X in the case of females is revolving around 40 percent from 1975 to date. No improvement appeared so far, whereas the situation among males has gone worse over a period of sixteen years under observation as the enrollment rate dropped down by 5.5 percent.

TABLE 7A PROFILE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN								
Year	Availability of Secondary Schools		Availability of Secondary School Teachers		Enrollment rate (Secondary)		Ratio of Boys to Girls	% of Female Teachers
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Secondary	
1975	924	1954	92	103	26.1	9.7	3.3	41.7
1980	983	2084	91	102	23.9	9.8	2.9	42.8
1985	907	1947	87	92	26.5	11.5	2.7	45.0
1990	757	1288	50	94	32.6	15.7	2.4	31.9
1995	719	1201	44	86	35.9	19.8	2.0	31.6
2001	309	1079	46	35	33.1	23.3	1.6	54.3

Source: Social Development in Pakistan, Annual Review 2002-03 "The State of Education".

TABLE 7B CONTINUATION RATES IN PAKISTAN				
Year	Percentage of cohort reaching Class VI		Percentage of cohort reaching Class X	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1975	79.4	63.2	44.5	40.1
1980	82.3	69.0	38.9	39.9
1985	84.6	73.7	38.6	37.7
1990	85.0	85.8	37.9	35.7
1995	84.6	77.6	46.6	42.7
2001	79.2	80.5	39.0	40.1

Source: Social Development in Pakistan, Annual Review 2002-03 "The State of Education".

Like many other countries, public health expenditures in Pakistan have generally been urban-biased, resulting in hospital-oriented, curative models. Whereas nearly 70 percent of the population is located in rural areas, almost 90 percent of all the doctors are serving in urban areas.

Even today, there are a number of cases when women give birth at home with traditional birth attendants called “Dais”. According to the Pakistan Integrated Household Survey (PIHS) 2001-02 only in 19 percent of the cases the delivery is undertaken by a “Doctor” whereas 38 percent of the cases are done by “Dais”. In some instances the “purdah” system prohibits women from approaching hospital facilities. Further, childbirth is considered to be a common natural process, which does not require any special attention and care. All this results in complication throughout the pregnancy, during birth and even after that. But, Pakistani woman in spite of her poor health and weak educational status leaves the house in search of better living and improved status even if not for herself then at-least for her next generation.

Year	Fertility rate (per woman)			Population (in ‘000’) per female doctor	Percentage of live births in medical institutions		
	Urban	Rural	Total		Urban	Rural	Total
1975	6.6	7.1	6.9	210	13.7	0.6	4.1
1980	6.6	7.1	6.9	14.6	13.0	0.5	3.8
1985	6.2	7.8	7.1	6.2	19.8	2.5	10.1
1990	5.2	6.7	6.2	4.0	26.8	4.6	10.6
1995	4.7	5.9	5.5	3.1	35.1	9.7	16.4
2001	3.7	4.9	4.3	2.2	38.7	13.9	23.8

Source: Social Development in Pakistan, Annual Review 2002-03 “The State of Education”.

Section II Concept of Joint Families

In this connection, it is important to explain the two types of household systems prevalent in our country. One is the joint family system and the other is the nuclear family, mostly prevalent in urban areas. In a joint family system a woman apart from her husband and children, lives with her in-laws comprising her husband’s parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters and sometimes some other family members. In a nuclear family she simply lives with her husband and children. There are several advantages and disadvantages of both systems. Mostly, it is seen that a girl after getting married prefers to live in a nuclear family system. But a man as a husband is always in favor of living with his family and his parents share the same opinion.

From the point of view of the working mother initially a nuclear family system sounds satisfactory but with children this systems creates problems. In a country, like Pakistan,

where there are no developed and reliable childcare centres, joint family system is an asset. Non-availability of proper childcare centres also keeps women away from the labor market. The concept of childcare centres is basically very new in our country. It is not even considered safe and the elder generation does not even appreciate the idea; rather they will prevent women from working if there is nobody to look after the children.

Section III Some Advantages

Apart from children's responsibility, for a working woman household responsibilities are in itself a full time job. However, when she is working it is not possible for her to manage the house properly. Further, given the strong cultural values in society our elder generation is unable to accept easily the idea of a woman working outside the home. For instance, there are various engagements and commitments even to the extended family and these social obligations that are also considered important to be looked after. In living together they are easily handled by the elderly people of the house. A working women after her day long activity, is exhausted and thereby, unable to attend this type of activity. Thus, all sorts of responsibilities together impose a heavy burden on her. In-fact, she is hardly able to take care of her children and husband. With a job, she is left with a very little time for her immediate family of a husband and children. Justifying their rights is only possible when there is someone at home to understand. In short, when she is with her husband there are others to see their children. On the other hand, if she is giving time to her children then at least there are others to provide company to her husband.

Another important feature that is associated with employment activities is that both man and women if they are working and they really want to develop their career then they have to indulge in socializing normally away from the work place or such public relations. This is very important for future prospects especially in the case of a switchover of jobs. All this can be easily done if there are people to look after the home and children.

There is also a concept of care giving to each other, which is not possible if living separately. Specially, in times of illness and any other unforeseen problem atleast you have people to share the burden. For instance, if there is someone elderly or very sick and needs full time attention then it is a real problem for the family. But living together makes life easier as the responsibility for caring is shared. This enables the development of a bond and strong relationship. The parents, brothers and sisters of the husband takes care of the younger ones

as if they are their own offspring. Even for children, these relationships become so important that they often supersede that of their parents. There is no doubt in the fact that there is no replacement to the love and care of grandparents. The value of grand children for the grand parents is at times much more higher than their own children. No maids or day care centres can give that level of love and affection to a child. A child's personality is the biggest evidence of this. It creates closeness to these relations. But all this requires patience and tolerance. Living in this set up enables you at times to learn how to respect other's decisions and tolerate their attitudes. All this, makes a women participatorier in the labor force activities. There is no replacement for such help. She can leave the house devoid of any worries of her household issues.

Section IV Some Adverse Consequences

There are cases when a joint family system becomes troublesome and a woman even if she is working starts thinking to have her own set up. This is usually a resultant factor of the attitudes and intolerant behavior of those living with her. It is an undeniable fact that every individual has his/her approach towards life. Giving respect to that is an utmost responsibility of every individual. But failure to do so creates issues and problems. In our society, there is a strong hierarchical system. Parents and among parents, the father is considered the head of the family. After him comes the eldest son. They are also the main income generating people or the key earners. In the situation when the father gets old or unable to earn then his son takes over.

Sometimes the role of the father continues to remain the same as of the head but there are cases when either son or the mother takes over. But the problem arises when the mother takes over the charge and becomes the head of the family. At this stage she starts dictating to her husband and children. The situation gets worse when the woman becomes mother-in-law. In spite of the fact that she is not responsible for earning and her duties are just to manage the daily activities related to household, she expects her son to give her the household expenses. In case he is married then his relationship with his wife becomes very strained. The fact is that in our society a girl after marriage is expected to place her husband at a very high position where she respects and obeys him. Contrary, to this in the case of a ruling mother-in-law she is confused and is unable to understand who is the final authority in decision-making and further, who is the head of the household. Sometimes, for very minor things she is expected to ask her mother-in-law, her husband and some other elderly people of the house.

Automatically she occupies a secondary position. This is the point where conflicts begin. After marriage she wants independence in decision-making and in other activities of her personal life for which she is denied her due right. Thus, even after getting married she is bound to obey her in-laws. Her status and value in the house becomes the same as was when she was at her parent's house. She is expected to do the household work as it is considered the responsibility of a woman to look after children and her household.

For a working woman this joint system, at times becomes hard when she is expected to fulfill her household responsibilities in a parallel fashion. It becomes even tougher when she is expected to spend her income on her in-laws. Parents of her husband keeps on putting pressure of expenses on the understanding that since both of them are working therefore, they can bear it. In this way, there are situations when instead of saving which is considered natural and a benefit of this type of set-up, a working woman while living in a joint family system is unable to save anything. The end result is that she gains nothing except anxiety and tensions thereby reducing her life expectancy. Regarding her children as they stay with their paternal grand parents and others in the house they too become more inclined towards them. In this scenario, the concept and the place of parents in the minds of a child is lost. No matter how much they love and care they can provide in whatever little time they have, their children starts depending on others members of the house. The family members at times create negative pictures of the mother implying that she does not care and is easily able to leave the child behind. In short, the parent-child relationship and the rights of kinship are lost in the world of employment, relationships and misunderstandings. In-fact parents at times have no say in the affairs of their children. Thus, when in-laws are not cooperative life for a working woman life is more than hardship and struggle, always trying to bridge the gap in a short span of time. If the environment is not good at home then her work is also affected outside the house. She loses concentration and dedication in her work. Although, apart from all its shortcomings, a joint family system is still very supportive for the working women in this insecure world. It has its own strengths and has no replacement.

Today, western societies are losing their web of relationships just because of their nuclear families. The ratio of women in actual labor force is much higher there. They are therefore, bound to have small families having one or two children. As their mothers are mostly working they live in day cares because the elderly generation is also in the working force. They have a type of environment where there is no concept of relatives living together and

caring for each other. Every single person has his/her own life. They have well-established child care centres for children and parallel to that they have old homes for their elderly parents. Caring for children and the elderly requires collective effort and time, which is not available with the individuals of their society.

On the contrary, it is found to be a normal feature of our society that elders usually stay at home. Old females usually are not educated enough to work. They belong to a cultural background where a woman or girl used to observe “purdah” and stay at home learning to do household work comprising cooking, stitching, and do some other handicraft work. Eventually they would get married at a very early stage and from their own parents the parents of their husband would assume the role of their guardian. The practical training of a girl’s married life is mostly received by her in-laws as it is easier to shape an immature mind. There was hardly any concept of going to school among females. Today when a girl gets married she is normally not all that young. She is educated and mature enough to exercise her control. If she belongs to the working class then it is often observed that she has some very set ideas and normally refuses to compromise. With due course of time this change of culture and traditions create conflicts of opinion among the older ladies of the house and the working mothers of today.

Even today we find in our society that as the female child grows older parents becomes conscious regarding her safety and security. Sometimes parents are not comfortable in sending their daughters to school in particular if it is not close-by. This is the time when the girls enter the age of maturity and parents start making efforts for their marriages. Specially, in the poor families of rural areas the responsibility of a girl child is shifted in a very early stage to her in-laws or her husband. The extent of illiteracy is so high that in several instances a girl has not even reached the stage of maturity when she is handed over to the groom’s party. On the other hand, unemployment among their male counterparts is not considered to be a problem. Their life in these cases is no better than those of animal. Thus, the woman is then at the mercy of traditions and culture with no voice.

Section V Who Should Compromise?

It is worth mentioning, that in our country it is considered that it is not men but it is women who are the root cause of all evils. A mother is the one who provides mis-information to a man about his wife. The denial from this while having face to face discussion results in a hot

exchange of words and the whole environment of sacred relationship loses its flavor. She is unable to prove herself as a mother for her daughter-in-law while at the same time expecting her to behave like a daughter. Sometimes it is often seen that parents want their son(husband) to give the same amount of time even after marriage to his brothers and sisters. This proves to be a difficult situation if his wife is also working as they themselves are normally left with very little time for each other. The issue as to who should compromise is simple, as both sides should have the capability and courage to compromise for a healthy living. Both must realize and value the worth of the other. It is easy to break the web but very difficult to knit it again. The strong relationships always pay off in the future and the younger generation also learns a lot from it. Patience, caring, sharing and forgiving must become part and parcel of the relationships.

Some people in our society are of the view that an educated woman becomes vocal and head strong. This is not the case because our society is so male oriented that when a woman starts demanding her rights it is not considered acceptable. The male members of our society or family want to dominate and places themselves at a decision making position. They feel insulted if they have to obey females be they their wives, mothers or daughters. Although with a mutual discussion a man and a woman together can reach a better conclusion. This is because a man has a different approach towards life than a woman. But there is always an optimal solution to a problem and that can be reached if we give some autonomy to the other person and develop a capacity to hear and be patient.

Section VI Efforts for Empowerment

Good governance and proper management of resources is the need of the time. Advancement in human development is not only an issue of long-term progress. There is also a need, for policy-making and for advocacy, to monitor short-term progress. Keeping the masses healthy is as important as providing them with basic education and with facilities to gain empowerment. An educated woman is usually progressive and is less conscious with respect to the limitations imposed on account of cultures and traditions. She is able to gain empowerment and in her way can fight back the hardships associated with it. Needless to say that education is the road to success and empowerment.

Investment in educating women is not considered to be of much worth in our country. The cases of dropouts from schools among male children are normally seen in the form of child

labor while the girl child become involved in household activities. There is a lot of labor work in rural areas where almost 70 percent of the population resides. This work is related to farming and women usually do some handicrafts work and assist their men in farming. For women this entirely is un-paid work.

TABLE 9 CASES AND REASONS FOR DROPOUTS IN PAKISTAN						
Reasons for leaving school before completing Primary (10-18 years)	Percentage of cases, reason was cited 2001-02					
	Boys			Girls		
	Urban	Rural	Overall	Urban	Rural	Overall
Overall Pakistan						
Parents didn't allow	4	2	3	16	18	17
Too Expensive	35	26	29	24	17	19
Too far	0	2	2	1	7	6
Education not useful	0	0	0	0	0	0
Had to help at work	8	6	7	2	2	2
Had to help at home	1	4	3	7	8	8
Completed desired education	1	0	0	1	1	1
Child not willing	39	49	46	28	24	25
Other	11	11	11	20	22	21

Source: Pakistan Integrated Household Survey, 2001-02 (Federal Bureau of Statistics)

The availability of schools for children is not that serious an issue but what is important as discussed earlier is that awareness has increased but not to the extent that a country could reach the MDG target. The constraint to awareness arises when a child is required at home to help the elders in earning their bread and butter. Moreover, long term planning fails when you have to think daily as what food there will be the next day. There are actually more mouths to be fed relative to income earners. Hence, as soon as the young ones are able to stand on their own two feet they are asked to earn, rather than involve themselves in the so-called "unproductive work of learning". The Malthusian Theory, stated "man multiplies like mice in a barn". This phenomenon is true even today in the present circumstances because the pressure of the population explosion offsets all policies and programs.

Pressure of changes in population, employment, education all run in a vicious circle and are interdependent. For instance, the nature of a mother's employment has a subsequent effect on her child's schooling. From case studies it has emerged that an educated woman with a high

status job, involved in the formal sector have more children in school both boys and girls as she is financially strong and has an awareness with regard to proper, adequate education and its long term effects. On the contrary, a poor working mother of the informal sector usually keeps her girl child at home either for sharing her workload or to look after the younger siblings.

CONCLUSION

Today this plight of working mothers is also a consequence of large family burden. The need to control the population growth rate requires concerted effort; there is a need for understanding and reaching a consensus on the issue that unless and until we reduce the family size and release the economic burden from the bread earner both man and woman nothing positive can be done. We will not be able to escape the vicious circle of poverty. One factor is the religious constraint but this can also be tackled tactfully and diplomatically if there is a real willingness on the part of the leaders. Nothing is impossible if there is motivation and dedication to solve the problem. Serious thinking is needed to improve human capital and to cross all sorts of barriers.

The role of public policy in reducing gender inequality can go a long way in improving the overall socio-economic condition of the country. The need of the day is of gender responsive budgeting. Enhancement in the income generating capabilities and opportunities are required for woman to become a part of mainstream life. The most crucial policy decision is the provision of day care centres at the workplace or close to workplace and fixation of high but reasonable age of marriage in our laws.

Hence, for the working mothers in the present scenario a joint family system is a better option in order to remain safe from un-necessary pressures both social and economic in their initial stage of life. On account of an un-healthy ageing process this eventually turns into a nuclear family. But by that time young families get established and the children are trained under the supervision of elderly people under the umbrella of cultural values.

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