

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH VOCATIONAL TRAINING: A CASE STUDY FROM SUJAWAL, SINDH

EMPODERAMIENTO DE LAS MUJERES A TRAVÉS DE LA FORMACIÓN PROFESIONAL: UN ESTUDIO DE CASO DE SUJAWAL, SINDH

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of vocational training on women's empowerment in rural Sindh, focusing on the district of Sujawal. Drawing on qualitative fieldwork conducted under the project titled *Strengthening the Socio-Economic Reliance of Youth by Promoting Their Economic Self-Resilience* (Project Code: PAK 1118), implemented by the Pakistan Research and Development Foundation (hereafter, RDF) with the support of the non-profit German agency for development aid and cooperation Welthungerhilfe (hereafter, WHH), and funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (hereafter, BMZ), the article documents how skill development in trades such as tailoring and beautician services has transformed the lives of marginalized women. As the individual researcher for the Gender Studies trainees, I led this research, focusing on case studies that highlight how economic independence fosters social mobility, self-confidence, and leadership among women.

Gender equality and community development. In rural areas of Pakistan, particularly in Sindh, patriarchal structures and socio-economic barriers often hinder women's access to education, employment, and leadership. However, targeted vocational training programs have emerged as a transformative tool to empower women economically and socially.

Keywords

Women's Empowerment, Vocational Training, Gender Equality, Rural Development, Socioeconomic Inclusion, Skill Development, Community Transformation

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in the capability approach (Sen, 1999), which argues that development should expand individuals' freedoms and choices. Women's empowerment is understood as a multidimensional process that involves increasing access to resources, decision-making power, and agency. The intersectional feminist perspective is also adopted to understand how gender, poverty, geography, and education intersect to shape women's empowerment pathways.

Vocational training is conceptualized as a means of achieving economic independence while challenging gendered occupational segregation. The empowerment process is examined across personal, relational, and societal dimensions.

2. METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a qualitative case study methodology, drawing on field visits, direct observations, and semi-structured interviews conducted between March and July 2024. The research was part of the project *Strengthening the Socio-Economic Reliance of Youth by Promoting Their Economic Self-Resilience* (Project Code: PAK 1118), where I, as the individual researcher under the Gender Studies trainees, focused on women beneficiaries from various villages in Sujawal, including Fateh Muhammad Soomro. Data sources include project reports, student success stories, post-training satisfaction surveys, and monitoring data collected through RDF's CRM system.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Socioeconomic background

This study investigates the impact of vocational training on the empowerment of women in rural Sindh, particularly in the district of Sujawal. The research was conducted as part of the *Strengthening the Socio-Economic Reliance of Youth by Promoting Their Economic Self-Resilience* project (Project Code: PAK 1118), implemented by RDF and supported by WHH, funded by BMZ. As the individual researcher in the Gender Studies trainees program, I conducted qualitative research with women beneficiaries of the training program, focusing on how vocational skills in trades like tailoring and beautician services have enhanced their socio-economic status.

3.2. Impact on economic independence

Graduates of the tailoring and beautician programs began earning through home-based services. For example, Safia from Fateh Muhammad Soomro village earns a regular income

from bridal makeup and tailoring, enabling her to contribute to household expenses and support her siblings' education. These microenterprises offer a sustainable model of home-based employment.

3.3. Psychological and Social Empowerment

Participants reported increased confidence, decision-making ability, and social recognition. Many women began mentoring others in their villages, creating a ripple effect. Their mobility increased as they began interacting with markets, NGOs, and training centers.

3.4. Gender Norms and Community Perceptions

While some initial resistance was reported from male family members, community attitudes gradually shifted. The visibility of women's economic contributions helped reshape perceptions around women's roles.

3.5. Limitations and Challenges

Challenges include limited access to raw materials, marketing networks, and financial services. Infrastructural barriers, such as lack of dedicated workspaces or transport, were also noted. The need for follow-up mentoring, business incubation, and linking with microfinance institutions was emphasized.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Vocational training has proven to be a catalyst for women's empowerment in Sujawal, Sindh. By equipping women with practical, market-relevant skills, the RDF-led program contributed not only to poverty reduction but also to broader social change. Economic independence enabled women to challenge traditional gender roles, improve household well-being, and support others in their communities.

Future programs should focus on sustainability by offering entrepreneurship support, digital literacy, and market linkages. Policymakers must prioritize investments in localized vocational programs that integrate gender-sensitive approaches.

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