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Sociological Perspectives on Women's Empowerment in Lahore: A Quantitative Analysis of Key Determinants

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Abstract

This study explores the most critical issue of women empowerment and its interrelation with the lack of access to education, gender inequality and limited availability of job opportunities. Women empowerment remains a significant challenge in Pakistan, particularly in urban centers like Lahore, where these factors continue to restrict women's progress. A sample of 384 respondents was selected through random sampling from the general population of Lahore, and data was collected using standardized questionnaires. The gathered data was investigated using a statistical package for social sciences (SPSS), and the results unfold a strong relationship between gender inequality, limited access to education, the availability of jobs, and women empowerment. The findings contribute to existing literature and provide crucial insights for policymakers and stakeholders working to advance women's empowerment in Pakistan.

Keywords: access to education, gender inequality, job availability, Lahore, women empowerment

Introduction

Women empowerment as a concept was initiated at the United Nations' third world conference on women, which defined women as a social and economic power, while also focusing on controlling resources and opportunities in favor of women to empower some of the most important participants of society. The United Nations Development Funds for Women (UNDFW) emphasizes the factors of developing self-worth, gender empowerment, sense of gender relations, socio-cultural barriers, health of women and belief in their self-secure desires, while defining women empowerment (Mousumi & Yasmin, 2022).

The background of women's empowerment can be traced back to various historical and social movements that advocated for gender equity and female's rights. These movements emerged in response to the systemic

discrimination and marginalization faced by women throughout history (Diplomat, 2011).

One of the earliest manifestations of women's empowerment was noticeable during the suffrage campaigns, which fought for the right of women to vote, as they were also a crucial part of society. In the late 19th and 20th centuries, women in different parts of the world, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and several European countries, organized protests, marches, and advocacy campaigns to secure their political rights (Library of Congress, n.d.)

Women empowerment and gender equality are intricately connected, advancing hand in hand. According to Sustainable Development Goal 5: dedicated to achieving gender equality, it's alarming to note that universally, 26% of women with the age group of 15 and above, estimated at 641 million, have experienced physical and sexual violence at the hands of their partners. A recent survey conducted in 2012 across 13 countries revealed that 45% of women faced violence during the COVID-19 lockdown (UN Women, 2021).

In Pakistan, gender equality remains a formidable challenge in specific regions, often due to deeply rooted socio-cultural beliefs and traditional norms. These norms sometimes hinder parents from investing in their daughters' education or higher studies. Shockingly, the female literacy rate is only 48%, in stark contrast to men's 70%, and merely 1% of women participate in entrepreneurial endeavors compared to 21% of men (Rana et al., 2022).

The situation is particularly dire for women in rural Pakistan, where age-old societal constructs, often misinterpreted as teachings of Islam, perpetuate gender inequality. This dynamic results in a male-dominated society. The society's expectation for women to rely on their male family members for financial support is a substantial obstacle to their educational and career aspirations (Chaudhry, 2007).

Gender inequality significantly hampers Pakistan's economic growth, with women and girls disproportionately affected, particularly in education and professional opportunities. For instance, many studies highlight that addressing gender disparities is essential for unlocking women's potential and enhancing overall economic performance (Ali & Jiang, 2016; Bukhari & Ramzan, 2013).

Between 2018 and 2021, a mere 26% of countries had established comprehensive frameworks to tackle gender inequality, out of which 59% had partial components, and a significant 15% lacked any discernible structure (United Nations Statistics Division, 2022).

The inequalities stemming from gender disparity translate into educational gaps and restricted career horizons. Feudalism wields a profound influence on girls' education, particularly in rural areas like Sindh and Balochistan. The notion of co-education faces resistance due to societal norms, not limited to rural locales, but also extending, with less intensity, to urban settings.

A sobering report suggests that, if projections from 2017 are indicative, it could take 217 years to bridge the gender gap in workplace equality worldwide, with a further 100 years needed for complete gender parity. While gender equality in health and education seems to be making strides, economic and political disparities between genders remain stubbornly constant, if not being worsened (World Economic Forum, 2017).

The pursuit of decent work shares an unequivocal relationship with empowerment of women, signifying progress in the modern age. Nevertheless, the challenge persists as women strive for equitable job and career opportunities, often constrained by standardized educational systems and societal norms dictating predefined paths (World Bank, 2018)

Pakistan's labor market witnesses a diminished women's participation, an outcome of cultural norms, religious beliefs, and historical barriers that continue to curtail their entry (Sadaquat & Sheikh, 2011)

Problem Statement

In contemporary society, women continue to face numerous challenges and barriers that hinder their empowerment and full participation in various spheres of life. Despite advancements in gender equality, there remains a significant gap in achieving true women empowerment, impeding the progress of individuals, communities, and nations at large. This problem statement aims to identify the key obstacles hindering women's socio-economic empowerment, analyse their causes, and propose sustainable solutions to foster a more inclusive and equitable society. By addressing these challenges, we can generate a habitat that enables women to unleash their entire perspective and come up with meaningful assets for social, economic, and governmental development.

As mentioned in the Gender Gap Index 2018, Pakistan was ranked 148th overall among 149 countries. From the perspective of the gender gap, Pakistan ranked 146th in women's economic participation, 145th in health, 97th in political empowerment, and 139th in educational attainment (Masitoh & Pramesti, 2020).

Access to and control over resources is crucial for achieving women's economic empowerment, contributing to their overall prosperity. This issue holds significant importance as it encompasses aspects such as enhancing women's self-esteem, gaining respect from family members, attaining economic stability, enjoying unrestricted mobility and possessing decision-making authority (Klugman et al., 2014).

In Pakistani society, domestic violence is often perceived as a private matter due to its prevalence within the confines of the family structure. This perception hinders the assessment, appropriate intervention, and implementation of policy changes needed to address the issue effectively, as it is considered to be within the realm of cultural boundaries. The prevailing issue of male dominance is frequently identified as a significant contributing factor to domestic violence, leading to approximately seventy to ninety percent of Pakistani women experiencing violence on a daily basis (Khan et al., 2009).

At a micro level, the challenges to women's education include low household income (poverty), religious stereotypes, cultural standards and barriers and shortage of female schools as well as a lack of availability of female teachers (Shah & Shah, 2012).

Research Questions

This research aims to answer the following questions:

RQ1: To what extent are women's empowerment and gender inequity interconnected?

RQ2: Is there a connection between women's empowerment and limited educational opportunities?

RQ3: Does the limitation of employment have an impact on women's empowerment?

Research Objectives

The particular objectives of the research study are as follow:

RO1: To investigate the connection between women's empowerment and gender inequity.

RO2: To investigate the connection between women's empowerment and limited educational opportunities.

RO3: To investigate the connection between women's empowerment and the limitation of employment opportunities.

Research Framework

According to Almalki ([2016a](#)) and Creswell ([2014](#)), the ideas which offer a track to research can be termed as theoretical framework. The research framework is the essential support of any research intent and plan, it also work like the heart of the whole research study (Ngulube, 2018). The research framework made up of associated pack of ideas and concepts that navigate the research study's control and management, and it is frequently called as the theoretical framework, an idea also concede by Almalki ([2016b](#)) and Creswell ([2014](#)). Within this research framework, it becomes obvious that gender disparities, including limited access to education and limited job availability are the (IV) independent variables, while women empowerment is recognized as the dependent variable (DV).

Figure 1
Hypothetical Model
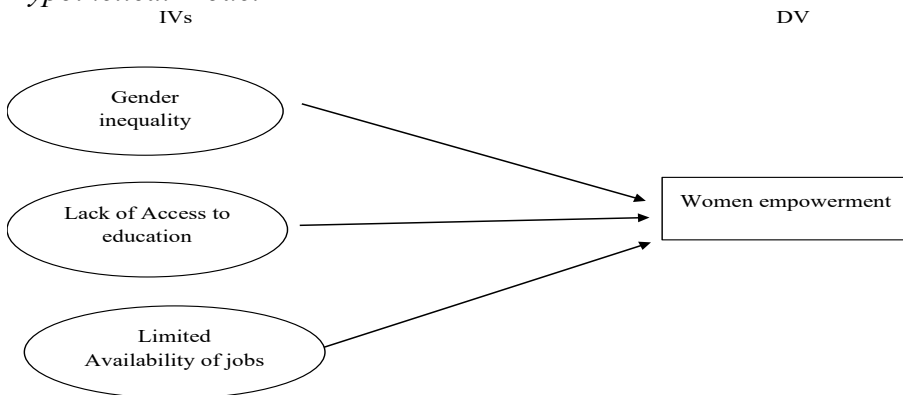
Research Hypothesis

The following hypotheses are developed in light of the study's goals and inquiries:

H1: Women's empowerment and gender equality are significantly correlated.

H0: Women's empowerment and gender equality do not significantly correlate.

H2: Women's empowerment and access to education are significantly correlated.

H0: Women's empowerment and educational access do not significantly correlate.

H3: Women's empowerment and employment availability are significantly correlated.

H0: The availability of work and women's empowerment do not significantly correlate.

Significance of Study

Study on women empowerment holds extensive importance for numerous reasons. First of all, it assists in breaking the barrier of gender inequality by picking out and challenging the comprehensive barriers that limit and hinder women's progress. By considering the root causes of discrimination, researchers can advise for societal changes that encourage gender justice, equality, and respect for women's rights. Then, secondly, this research acknowledges that women's empowerment is coordinated with other forms of abuse as well like racism, classism and ableism. This study promotes an inclusive approach that deals with multiple aspects of discrimination and makes sure that no woman is left behind in this society.

Furthermore, The aim of this study is to amplify the voices and experiences of women. It serves as a platform for women to share their stories, challenges and resilience, ensuring their insights are acknowledged and appreciated. By delving in women's empowerment studies, the present and future generations of women can be empowered, by generating outcomes that benefit societies hollistically. It aligns with the principles of social justice by advocating for equal rights, opportunities, and resources for women, thereby promoting a fair and equitable society (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018).

Additionally, women's empowerment studies contribute to existing literature review. Research in this field also challenges stereotypes and

outdated gender roles, paving the way for a more diverse and inclusive understanding of gender identity and expression (Haq et al., 2019).

Literature Review

Mandal (2013) studied that empowering women is not just a necessity; it has become an urgent requirement. In recent decades, there have been significant efforts by women's organizations, NGOs and progressive governments to actively work towards women's empowerment. However, the overall status of women in various countries remains alarming, characterized by oppression, discrimination and deplorable conditions. These issues persist regardless of the political leaders' party affiliation or the gender of those who hold power. It is important to highlight some instances of discrimination and violence against women to gain a deeper understanding of their situation in social, economic, and political spheres.

Throughout history and in various societies, women have experienced significant suffering inflicted by individuals who should have been their protectors. This pain has been inflicted at different stages of their lives: from fathers, brothers, uncles, and neighbors during childhood; to boyfriends and partners during adolescence; to husbands and in-laws in marriage; and, tragically, even by sons and others in their later years. Men have subjected women to unspeakable harm by systematically subjugating them in different stages of their lives, spanning generations. The query of female's rights is not restricted to a determined region or era; it is a universal matter that has persisted since the dawn of humanity (Turesky & Warner, 2020).

Furthermore, the autonomy of married women can be influenced by their husbands and mothers-in-law (Hadi, 2017). Interestingly, women living in Barani areas exhibit higher levels of participation in household decision-making compared to other areas in Punjab highlighting how cultural and geographical factors uniquely influence women's decision-making autonomy in the Barani areas (Lassi et al., 2021).

A number of current research studies have dug into the matter of empowerment of women, like Shahzad (2021), Bhuwania et al. (2024), Kabeer (2009), and Hanmer and Klugman (2015). Their studies furnish valuable perspectives into an important subject. Muhammad et al. (2022) in their research point out that education, family type, age and marital status are the dominant elements influencing women's empowerment. According to Sathar and Kazi (2000), there exists a positive and notable connection

between women's independence and decision-making within the domestic sphere, based on data collected from 138 married women across four districts of Sialkot.

Women in society are often marginalized and neglected, making them face various challenges, including inadequate nourishment. As stated by Rana et al. (2022), women in Pakistan have historically experienced greater deprivation compared to men. More than half of them suffer from a lack of opportunities in terms of income, health, and education. Even though overall poverty rates may have decreased, the gender disparities between both genders have definitely widened. This highlights the persistent inequalities and disparities faced by women, particularly regarding their chances for social and financial development.

Butler (1990) emphasizes the intersectional nature of gender inequality, acknowledging that it bisects with other forms of abuse like race, standard, and sensuality. These power dynamics are perpetuated through cultural practices, institutional structures, and discourses, thus reinforcing the inequality and limiting opportunities for individuals who deviate from traditional gender roles. Understanding these concepts sheds light on the multiplex and multifaceted nature of gender inequality and calls attention to the required transformative efforts to challenge and dismantle these systems (Butler, 1990).

According to the Gallup World Poll, both men and women consider decent work equally important, despite their association in the labor force. However, in the Middle East, North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa, there is a noticeable gender gap. A study by International Labour Organization 2016, found that 90% of men in these regions expressed the importance of having a high-quality job (International Labour Organization, 2016).

Consequently, it is essential to investigate how education can facilitate women's empowerment by addressing potential barriers. Education is complicatedly connected to an individual's evolution, decision-making effectiveness, and mobility of women, and it directly affects the socio-economic development of households, communities, and even nations (Haq et al., 2019). According to Nowak et al. (2016), a lot of research has emphasized the approving impact of education and employment status on building up women's empowerment. Considering the historical educational disparities between both genders has mostly been faced by women in

patriarchal societies, such as those in South Asia, grasping the importance of education in empowering women in Pakistan becomes crucial.

In Pakistan, there are noteworthy reductions in the portability of girls. They are only permitted to travel outside if they go along with a male family member. This demand is executed to protect the honor of girls and their families. Nevertheless, these measures have had adverse consequences on girls' access to education and overall opportunities. Pakistan, being a country with intensified concerns for the welfare and safety of girls, has imposed severe limitations on their mobility, thereby hindering their ability to pursue education (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2017).

Limited job opportunities have a crucial effect on the empowerment of women. When women face restricted access to employment, it undermines their ability to achieve economic independence, making decisions, and exercise agency in various aspects of their lives. The lack of job opportunities exacerbates gender inequality, reinforcing traditional gender roles, and hampers progress towards gender equality. Limited job opportunities also contribute to a vicious cycle of poverty and inequality. Without access to decent employment, women are more likely to experience financial insecurity, limited access to healthcare, and reduced educational opportunities for themselves and their children. This perpetuates intergenerational poverty and restricts upward mobility, hindering progress towards gender equality and overall societal development (Porter, 2013).

Prejudices and stereotypes often impede women's progress in various fields, resulting in limited job options. Certain professions are still predominantly seen as suitable for men, while women face barriers and bias when attempting to pursue careers in those fields. Females, generally, continue to make less money for doing the same work as men. This wage gap can discourage females from pursuing certain careers or hinder their opportunities for growth and advancement (Baruah, 2023)

Research Methodology

This study uses a quantitative methodology, gathering information through in-person questionnaires administered to a sample of Lahori women, offering a hollistic perspective of the city's inhabitants. . A structured, closed-ended questionnaire was used in the survey with women of Lahore as the units of analysis. According to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size chart, the sample population for this study consisted of 384 women

from Lahore, a city with a sizable and diversified population of about 14 million people (as of 2023). The estimated population of women in Lahore is 6,659,595.6, based on the 2017 census executed by the government of Punjab. The simple random sampling method was used to collect the data from the women of Lahore. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data, allowing for frequency distribution calculations, table creation, and data summarizing. The views and opinions of the respondents were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale. By offering insights into the frequency and severity of the phenomenon being studied, this scale made it possible to comprehend the research findings in a more nuanced manner.

Ethical Consideration

Formal ethical approval was not obtained for this study. However, informed consent was secured from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation. Cultural sensitivities were respected and strict confidentiality and anonymity of data were maintained.

Data Sampling

The ideal sample size, according to the sample size table based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) study, should not have been fewer than 377 respondents. According to Krejcie and Morgan, the present study's sample size was 384. The Lahore women's questionnaire was used to get the data. 384 people were thought to be suitable to survey in accordance with the research design. The researcher received 384 questionnaires, all of which were promptly returned, yielding a 100% response rate. Nevertheless, 360 of these surveys were found to be legitimate, yielding a 94% valid response rate. 24 individuals did not finish the survey, even after cautious instructions, thus, their questionnaires were not included in this study.

Table 1

Summary of General Response Rate

No. of distributed questionnaires	384
No. of returned questionnaires	384
No. of unreturned questionnaires	0
Ratio of response rate	100%
No. of incomplete questionnaires	24
No. of final usable questionnaires	360
Ratio of valid response rate	94%

Results and Discussion

Data analysis was conducted using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) software. 377 individuals' worth of data were analyzed using SPSS. Cronbach's alpha was used to evaluate the questionnaire's reliability and validity. The questionnaire is valid and dependable, as indicated by its Cronbach alpha of 0.95. The data gathered from the participants was analyzed using the multi-regression linear model approach and descriptive statistics. Since the study was only focused on women, all participants were female.

The age group of 26–33 years old accounted for the largest percentage of survey respondents (35.6%), however, age group differences were unable to affect the research' outcomes. Most participants held a bachelor's degree, followed by a significant number with a master's degree, and very few had a matriculation degree. This indicates that most participants were literate and comprehended the questionnaire's context. The majority of participants, approximately 42%, had an income ranging between $25,000 and $30,000.

Overall, it demonstrates that respondents to this poll came from a wide range of backgrounds, including gender (women), age, income, and credentials. Table 2 offers a succinct and straightforward overview of the profiles of the 360 individuals that were part of the investigation. The study findings are more interpretable and pertinent when the traits and demographics of the respondents are better understood thanks to these descriptive data.

Table 2
Respondent Profile

Demography	Indicator	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	-	-
	Female	360	100
Age	18-25	121	33.6
	26-33	128	35.6
	33-41	108	30
	41 and above	3	0.8
Qualification	Primary School	-	-
	High School	12	3.3
	Bachelors	239	66.4
	Masters and above	109	30.3

Demography	Indicator	Frequency	Percentage
	15000-20000	38	10.6
	20000-25000	51	14.2
Income	25000-30000	153	42.5
	30000 and above	118	32.8

Table 3

Model Summary

R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	SE	R^2 Change	F Change	df1	df2	p
0.74	0.55	0.54	0.40	.549	71.608	6	353	.000

The multiple correlation coefficient, or *R*, has a value of 0.55, which indicates how strongly and in which direction independent and dependent variables are related. The percentage of variation is shown by the R Square number. The R^2 value in this model is 0.54.

Table 4

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	67.114	6	11.186	71.608	.000
Residual	55.141	353	.156		
Total	122.255	359			

The predictors' significance was displayed in the ANOVA table. The incredibly low significance value (*p*-value=0.000) suggests that the issues of gender inequity, limited educational opportunities, and job scarcity all significantly affect women's empowerment.

Table 7

Coefficients

Model	B	SE	β	t	p
(Constant)	.667	.218		3.055	.002
Gender equality	.371	.048	.363	7.725	.000
Access to Education	.376	.058	.358	6.521	.000
Availability of jobs	.034	.057	.034	5.597	.005
Age	.114	.035	.161	3.304	.001

Model	B	SE	β	t	p
Education	.075	.055	.066	1.382	.168
Income per month	.040	.032	.064	1.252	.211

According to the discussion, the main obstacles to women's empowerment in Lahore are gender inequality, limited educational opportunities, and a lack of employment opportunities. The government's policies on women's empowerment are not serving the public interest, which is why this problem persists in our society. The study's first hypothesis, according to which gender inequality is significantly impacted by women's empowerment (B=0.363, t=7.725, $p = 0.000$), indicates that participants believe the hypothesis to be true based on the variables' significance values. This aligns with research indicating that patriarchal structures and traditional beliefs in Pakistan often confine women to domestic roles, limiting their participation in public and economic spheres (Punjab Commission on the Status of Women, 2017).

H2 states that there is a direct correlation between women's empowerment and a lack of educational opportunities. The findings indicate that there is a need to improve the rate of education access because it increases the barriers that prevent women from achieving their full potential and contributes to the gender gap in the community (B= 0.358, t= 6.521, $p = 0.000$). This supports findings that educational attainment enhances women's decision-making power and economic participation (Habib & Shafiq, 2018). In Pakistan, a significant proportion of working-age women have not completed primary education, limiting their access to employment and contributing to persistent gender disparities (Mahsud & Ali, 2021).

Likewise, H3 (B=0.034, t=5.597, $p = 0.005$) indicates a high and positive correlation between women's empowerment and the scarcity of employment opportunities. Consequently, these variables demonstrate their influence on women's empowerment. Limited job prospects hinder women's financial independence and reinforce traditional gender roles (Habib & Shafiq, 2018). Addressing these employment gaps is essential for promoting gender equality and enabling women to contribute meaningfully to economic development (Mahsud & Ali, 2021).

In order to do the ANOVA and calculate the coefficients of the data gathered from the participants, linear regression is also run on SPSS. The degree and direction of the relationship between gender inequality,

unemployment, lack of access to education, and women's empowerment is indicated by a multiple correlation coefficient R-value of 0.741. The R^2 Square value indicates the fraction of the variation. The R^2 value in this model is 0.549. The relevance of the predictors was demonstrated by the ANOVA findings, which showed an exceptionally low p-value of 0.000, indicating its significance. This demonstrates how gender inequality, restricted educational opportunities, and a lack of employment opportunities all have a significant impact on women's empowerment. The relationship between women's empowerment, lack of access to education, and restricted employment opportunities involves illustrating the scope and directionality of these issues. When all other factors are maintained constant, the expected change in women's empowerment may be represented as a one-unit shift in each predictor variable. Since all of the linked significance levels (0.000, 0.000, 0.005) fall below the conventional significance threshold of 0.05, they all attest to the statistical significance of the coefficients. In order to solve the consistent issue of many women's lack of access to education, women's empowerment is essential. Women are more inclined to make choices that go against cultural norms and historical barriers when they are empowered, which eventually improves educational chances. Breaking cycles of limited educational access is facilitated by empowered women standing up for their own rights and their children's education. This connection shows how programs that support women's empowerment can make education much more accessible, opening doors for both personal development and larger social progress. Moreover, Women's empowerment factors in Pakistan are negatively correlated with the limited availability of jobs, which is a reflection of limited economic engagement and also showed that women's empowerment is hindered by limited economic prospects, is consistent with this finding (Bushra & Wajiha, 2014).

The critique of governmental policies in your discussion resonates with analyses suggesting that, despite legislative efforts, the practical implementation of women's empowerment initiatives in Pakistan remains inadequate. Challenges such as insufficient enforcement of laws, cultural resistance, and lack of political will impede progress (United Nation Women Pakistan, 2023). Effective policy measures must go beyond legislation to address underlying societal norms and provide tangible support systems for women.

Practical Implications and Future Perspective

This study provide us the clear background of women empowerment by delving into the challenges that has the direct contribution to the emerging issue world widely. It has shown that how women empowerment is essential to achieve overall growth of a country by highlighting the significant impact between women empowerment, access of education, gender equality and availability of jobs. Policy makers needs to delve into the major challenges that is affecting the women empowerment so that policies can be made by enhancing overall growth of positivity in this sustainable development growth.

Interventions must be properly planned to target important obstacles and aspects of women's empowerment in order to have a transformative impact on the results of women's empowerment. For interventions to have an impact on multiple dimensions of empowerment or on outcomes that are hard to change, they must be designed to address the various causal pathways of each type of intervention in order to better target the outcomes where they have a significant impact. If empowerment outcomes are desired, then explicit program components that target them must be created and implemented by solving the major challenges and providing women access of education, availability of jobs and gender equality.

A thorough awareness of the obstacles to empowerment in their particular contexts is need to be reflected in programs that produce effects beyond the immediate, primary results they were intended to achieve. This is needed to be achieved, in part, by critically analyzing gender. Future studies can examine how women's empowerment affects various industries over the long run and look at other issues that affect employment prospects and gender equality. Regional differences may also be better understood through cross-cultural research.

Conclusion

To sum up, in light of these crucial elements, the research findings have offered remarkable insights into the dynamics of women's empowerment. The outcomes of the study have illustrated a powerful and arithmetically important association between gender inequality and women's empowerment. This underscores the crucial role of addressing and highlighting gender imbalances in fostering women's empowerment and promoting gender equality. Empowering women through better access to

education is crucial in encouraging their personal growth and socio-economic development. The study outcomes have validated this hypothesis reiterating that limited job opportunities hamper women's empowerment and involvement in the workforce. It spotlights the requirement for policies and initiatives that upgrade gender-inclusive economic chances for females. Policymakers, government officers, and stakeholders must acknowledge the significance of the study outcomes. Implementing policies that address gender inequality, improve access to education, and enhance women's economic participation can significantly contribute to the empowerment of women. It is anticipated that the findings of this study will support further initiatives to create a more inclusive and egalitarian society in which women may lead, prosper, and fully engage in all facets of life.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

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