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**ABSTRACT... Objective:** To Investigate the Level of Empowerment of Women in accordance with human rights. **Design:** A cross-sectional study. **Setting:** Residence Colony of Punjab Medical College, Faisalabad. **Period:** August - September 2007. **Material & Methods:** There were 600 houses and 6 Blocks A, B, C, D, E & F in the Colony. By Simple random sampling 10 houses were taken from each Block by drawing lots. Sixty married women's between the age of 25 – 45 years (One from each house) were interviewed using a pre-tested structured questionnaire. **Results:** The mean age of the respondents was 37.2 years. Among the total 60 (100%) Women, 16 (26.6%) were illiterate, while 44 (73.3%) had primary education and above. Only 10(22.2%) out of 44 educated women had graduate and above degree. Thirty-Eight (63.3%) women had the opportunity to use the reproductive health services and family planning, while 22 (36.6%) could not utilize the family planning methods. A total of 40 (66.6%) women had good nutritional status, while 20 (33.3%) had imbalances in nutrition. Nineteen (31.6%) women were doing jobs in different public and private institutions, while 41(68.3%) had not got opportunity for jobs. Thirty-Three (55%) women had monthly income less than Rs.10,000/- per month and 27(45%) had Rs.10,000/- and above. Forty (66.6%) women were given importance and active participation in decision making, in children marriages, house-hold and in political process (vote casting) at all levels, while 20(33.3%) were not given importance in decision making of above matters. Forty -Three (71.6%) woman were given their right of inheritance / property. Fourteen (23.3%) women were forced to wear veil while going out of house. Forty (66.6%) woman admitted to have suffered from violence either psychological, physical or sexual in their life. Safe drinking water supply was available to 30 (50%) women, however sewage disposal, toilet facilities with in house were available to majority of the respondents. A total of 40 (66.6%) women were over all empowered. **Conclusions:** Women do have human rights as well. The results obtained from this study are encouraging but not up to the standards of International Human rights Principles, which are universal, inalienable; indivisible; interdependent and interrelated.

**Key words:** Human Rights, Woman Empowerment, Decision Making, Education, Family Planning, Reproductive Health.

**INTRODUCTION**

Gender refers to the different roles that men and women play in society, and the relative power they wield. Gender roles vary from one country to another, but almost everywhere, women face disadvantages relative to men in the social, economic, and political spheres of life.

Where men are viewed as the principal decision makers, women often hold a subordinate position in negotiations about limiting family size, contraceptive use, managing family resources, protecting family health, or seeking jobs<sup>1</sup>. In 1993, the United Nation (UN) World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna confirmed that women's rights were human rights<sup>2</sup>.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) defines the right of women to be free from discrimination and sets the core principles to protect this right. It establishes an agenda for national action to end discrimination, and provides the basis for achieving equality between men

and women through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life as well as education, health and employment<sup>2</sup>.

In 1994, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo articulated and affirmed the relationship between advancement and fulfillment of rights and gender equality and equity. It also clarified the concept of women's empowerment, gender equity, and reproductive health and rights. In 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing generated global commitments to advance a wider range of women rights<sup>2</sup>.

Human rights principles are universal and inalienable; indivisible; interdependent and interrelated. They are universal because every one is born with and possesses the same rights. Inalienable because people's rights can never be taken away. Indivisible and interdependent because all rights – political, civil, social, cultural and economic – are equal in importance and non can be fully enjoyed without the others. Interrelated, for instance,

fulfillment of the right of health may depend, in certain circumstances, on fulfillment of the right to development, to education or to information<sup>3</sup>. When girls get educated, poverty has no chance. Educated girls become national asset when they grow up. They are better mothers and grow better families. They earn and share the economic burden of the family and while doing so contribute to national growth<sup>4</sup>.

The strong links between women's status, health, and fertility rates make gender equality a critical strategy for policies to improve health and stabilize population growth. The empowerment of women is seen as a key avenue for reducing the differences between the sexes that exist in nearly all societies. Empowerment refers to "the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives". It means not only greater control over resources but also greater self-confidence and the ability to make decision on an equal basis with men<sup>5</sup>.

The World bank calls women's education the "single most influential investment that can be made in the developing world"<sup>6</sup>. Society for Human Development (SHD) in Pakistan carries out women empowerment program as its cross cutting theme. Its strategic vision "empower women for their equal citizenship rights" are in Women's Political, legal, economic and social empowerment. It designs programs for women to equip them in different skills so they can earn with that activity and can have control over the income which enhances the opportunity to become economically independent. Despite the active involvement of women in the economic activity at every level, they have no role in the social structure of the society. They are the "followers" to the decisions of the men. Society for Human Development (SHD) Human Rights Desk along with training the women on their legal rights like law of inheritance/ property, law of evidence, procedure of getting case registered with the police also provides legal assistance to women in the police and court. It is a part of national level networks like Action against Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (ASHA), Network against Honor Killing (NHK), Pakistan Peace Coalition, Pakistan Social Forum and have strong links with Joint

Action Committee for Peoples Rights (JAC) to struggle for the advocacy and lobbying for the legislation and constitutional reforms for equal citizenship rights. It believes that strength of women at the local level influences the policy makers. It prepares reports highlighting the gender discrimination in the school syllabus, case studies of honor killing and false cases of Haddood Ordinance (rape cases) and submits to the federal education ministry, Women ministry and interior ministry in Islamabad<sup>7</sup>. In a study, done in Hyderabad (Pakistan) for screening for violence against women, 82.98% gave definite history of violence of different types and 17.02 % women did not accept any act of violence on them<sup>8</sup>.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines domestic violence as "the range of sexually, psychologically and physically coercive acts used against adult and adolescent women by current or former male intimate partners. There is also growing awareness of the importance of sexual violence and coercion as a component of overall domestic violence"<sup>9</sup>. In Bangladesh, violence against women is closely linked to the institution of marriage, as is in India. Marriage related norms and practices reinforce women's relative powerlessness, often exposing them to domestic violence. Domestic violence is used in both Bangladesh and India to extort dowry payments and other property from the families of young married women. The factors identified as determinants of women's rights and vulnerability in marriage are: women's education, women's participation in micro-credit lending programs, women's contribution to covering household expenses, dowry arrangements and marriage registration<sup>10</sup>. Most young women cannot freely choose safer sexual practices or refuse unsafe sexual activity, but instead must negotiate within unequal social relationships<sup>11</sup>. Gender expectations limit young women's power to negotiate safe sexual behaviors in their relationships. The impact of the power dynamics between adolescent women and women in sexual relationships on women's ability to negotiate safe sexual relations has been well described in contexts with relatively low rates of HIV infection<sup>12</sup>. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and

Directive Principles. Policy prescriptions consist of Judicial Legal system, Decision Making, Poverty Eradication, Women Economy and Industry, Social Empowerment of women like, education, health, nutrition, drinking water and sanitation, housing and shelter, environment and violence against women<sup>13</sup>.

## METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional survey of women in a government residential colony of Punjab Medical College Faisalabad was conducted using a pre-tested, structured questionnaire to study the human rights and women empowerment from August - September 2007. There were 600 houses and 6 Blocks A, B, C, D, E & F in the Colony. In blocks A, B and C, the officers of grade 16 to 20 are residing while in blocks D, E and F the employees of grade 1 to 16 are residing. By Simple random sampling 10 houses were taken from each Block by drawing lots. Sixty married women's between the age of 25 – 45 years (One from each house) were selected and interviewed using a pre-tested, structured questionnaire. The married women between the age of 25 – 45 years whether pregnant, lactating, non-pregnant, widowed, divorced or separated were included in the study. Women below the age of 25 years and above 45 years were excluded from the study. The data entry and analysis was done SAS (Statistical Analysis Software) version-9, Chi-square test / Fisher's exact test was applied to compare proportion difference for various categorical variables. P-value <0.05 was considered significant.

## RESULTS

According to table-I mean age of the respondents was 37.2 years and range 25-45 years. Among the total 60 (100%) women, 16 (26.6%) were illiterate, while 44 (73.3%) had primary education and above. Only 10(22.2%) out of 44 educated women had graduate and above degree. Inter-categorical / block wise results were as follows. Ten (100%) women were educated belonging to block A and B, 9(90%), 7(70%) women were educated belonging to block C and D respectively while only 4(40%) women were educated belonging to E and F category. The proportions were significantly different as p-value is 0.0005.

Ten (100%), 8(80%), 7(70%) and 8(80%) women belonging to A, B, C and D category respectively had access to Reproductive Health Services and Family Planning services (RHS& FP) while only 4(40%) and 1(10%) women had access to this type of services belonging to E and F respectively. The proportions were significantly different as p-value is 0.0002. A total of thirty-eight (63.3%) women had the opportunity to use the reproductive health services and family planning.

Ten (100%) women belonging to block A and B were taking good nutrition, 8(80%), 6(60%) women were taking good nutrition belonging to block C and D while only 4(40%) and 2(20%) women were taking good nutrition belong to block E and F respectively. The proportions were significantly different as p<0.001. A total of 40 (66.6%) women had good nutritional status.

Seven (70%) women belonging to block A were doing job, 4(40%) women were doing job belong to B and C category while only 1(10%), 2(20%) and 1(10%) women were doing job belong to D, E and F respectively. The proportions were significantly different as p-value is 0.038. Only nineteen (31.6%) out of 60 (100%) women were doing jobs in different public and private institutions. The house hold income of ten (100%) women belonging to block D, E and F was less than Rs.10,000/- P.M while 3 (30%) women belong to Category C having income less than Rs.10,000/-P.M. The house hold income of ten (100%) women belonging to block A and B was Rs.10,000 /- P.M and above. The proportions were significantly different as p<0.001.

According to table-II Ten (100%) women belonging to block A were given importance in decision making, 8 (80%), 7 (70%) and 8(80%) women were given importance in decision making belonging to block B, D and E respectively while only 5 (50%) and 2 (20%) women were given importance in decision making belonging to block C and F respectively. Proportions belonging to above categories about decision making were significantly different as p-value is 0.0025. Overall forty (66.6%) women were given importance and active participation in decision making, in children marriages, house-hold and in political process (vote casting) at all levels.

**Table-I: Distribution of women according to Age, Education, Access to Reproductive health & Family planning services, Nutritional Needs, Employment/Job and Monthly income.**

Category	A	B	C	D	E	F	Total	%age	P-value
Distribution of women according to age									
25-35 years	3	3	4	2	3	2	17	28.33%	0.983
36-45 years	7	7	6	8	7	8	43	71.67%	
Distribution of women according to Education									
Education primary & above	10	10	9	7	4	4	44	73.33%	0.0005
Illiterate	0	0	1	3	6	6	16	26.67%	
Distribution of women regarding access to reproductive health & family planning services									
Utilization of R.H.S & F.P	10	8	7	8	4	1	38	63.33%	0.0002
Non-Utilization of R.H.S & F.P	0	2	3	2	6	9	22	36.67%	
Distribution of women according to nutritional needs									
Good nutrition	10	10	8	6	4	2	40	66.67%	<0.0001
Under nutrition	0	0	2	4	6	8	20	33.33%	
Distribution of women according to employment / job									
Doing job	7	4	4	1	2	1	19	31.67%	0.038
Not doing job	3	6	6	9	8	9	41	68.33%	
Distribution of women according to monthly income									
Less than Rs. 10000/-	0	0	3	10	10	10	33	55%	<0.0001
Rs. 10000/- and above	10	10	7	-	-	-	27	45%	

Ten (100%) women belonging to block A were given right of inheritance and 9(90%), 7 (70%) and 6(60%) women belonging to block B, C, F and D respectively were given right of inheritance while only 5(50%) women were given right of inheritance, who belonged to block E. Overall forty-Three (71.6%) woman were given their right of inheritance / property. Five (50%) women belonging to block D and F were forced to wear veil, 3(30%), and 1(10%) women were forced to wear veil belonging to block E and C respectively while zero (0%) women were forced to wear veil who belonged to block A and B. The proportions were significantly different as p-value is 0.006. Overall fourteen (23.3%) women were forced to wear veil while going out of house.

Nine (90%) women belonging to block D, E and F faced violence while 6(60%), 4(40%) and 3(30%) belonging to C, B and A respectively faced violence. The difference in proportions was Statistically significant as p-value is 0.0042. Overall forty (66.6%) woman admitted to have suffered from violence either psychological, physical or sexual in their life.

Ten (100%) women belonging to block A had available safe drinking water supply. Eight (80%) and 6(60%) women respectively had available safe drinking water supply belonging to B and C while 3(30%), 3(30%) and zero (0%) women had available safe drinking water supply belonging to block D, E and F respectively. The

**Table-II. Distribution of women according to Importance in Decision Making, Right of Inheritance/ Property, Forced veil, Violence, Safe Drinking water, Sewage and Over all empowerment.**

Category	A	B	C	D	E	F	Total	%age	P-value
Distribution of women according to importance given in decision making (house hold, children marriage, vote casting)									
Importance given	10	8	5	7	8	2	40	66.67%	0.0025
Importance not given	0	2	5	3	2	8	20	33.33%	
Distribution of women according to right of inheritance / property given									
Right given	10	9	7	6	5	6	43	71.67%	0.848
Right not given	0	1	3	4	5	4	17	28.33%	
Distribution of women according to forced to wear veil									
Forced to wear veil	0	0	1	5	3	5	14	23.33%	0.0055
Not forced to wear veil	10	10	9	5	7	5	46	76.67%	
Distribution of women according to violence (psychological, physical, sexual)									
Violence, Yes	3	4	6	9	9	9	40	66.67%	0.0042
Not Available	7	6	4	1	1	1	20	33.33%	
Distribution of women according to safe drinking water supply available									
Available	10	8	6	3	3	0	30	50%	<0.0001
Not available	0	2	4	7	7	10	30	50%	
Distribution of women according to facility of sewage & latrines available in home									
Available	10	10	10	10	10	8	58	96.67%	0.1525
Not available	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	03.33%	
Distribution of women according to overall empowerment									
Women empowerment	10	10	7	6	5	2	40	66.67%	<0.0001
women not empowerment	-	-	3	4	5	8	20	33.33%	

proportions were significantly different as  $p < 0.001$ . Overall 30 (50%) women had available safe drinking water supply. Ten (100%) women belonging to block A, B, C, D and E had available facility of sewage and latrines in home while 8 (80%) women belonging to F had available facility of sewage and latrines in home. Majority of women had the above facility in their homes.

Ten (100%) women belonging to both category A and B were empowered, 7 (70%), 6 (60%) women were empowered belonging to block C and D respectively while only 5 (50%) and 2 (20%) women were empowered belong to E and F respectively. The proportions were significantly different as  $p < 0.001$ . Overall 40 (66.6%) women were empowered in the above-mentioned residential colony.

## DISCUSSION

Surveys in the United States, conducted in obstetric and gynecological settings, revealed that the prevalence of domestic violence reported by women was as high as 46%<sup>14</sup>. According to a survey conducted on 1000 women in Punjab (Pakistan), 35% of the women admitted in the hospitals, reported being beaten by their husbands and in domestic violence approximately 70 to 90% of women experience spousal abuse<sup>15</sup>. In the present study, according to table-II, Nine (90%) women belonging to block D, E and F faced violence while 6(60%), 4(40%) and 3(30%) belonging to C, B and A respectively faced violence. The difference in proportions was statistically significant as p-value is 0.0042. Overall forty (66.6%) women admitted to have suffered from violence. The results of the study in hand are consistent with the above national and international studies.

Worldwide about 64% women are literate while nearly all boys and girls (100%) in more developed countries are enrolled in both primary and secondary schools and only 48% in less developed countries. Women in less developed countries complete few years of education and on average are more likely to be illiterate<sup>16</sup>. According to table-I in the present study overall 73.3% women have education primary and above and are literate, while 26.7% are illiterate. But inter-categorical proportions were significantly different as p-value is 0.0005. The women in category "A" are 100% literate, while women in category E and F are only 40% literate; so the results of this study are nearly consistent with the above worldwide scenario.

Employment is another way that women can evaluate their status. The few studies that are available on how women's time is used (in more developed countries) show that women spend 50% to 70% as much time as men on paid work<sup>17</sup>. According to table-I in the present study only 31.7% women are doing employment or paid jobs in different public and private institutions. Inter-categorically the proportions were significantly different as p-value is 0.038. The employment status of women is also less in this study than the women in developed countries. Utilization of Reproductive Health Services and family planning (RHS & FP) worldwide rose from less

than 10% of married women in the 1960 to about 60% in 2003<sup>18</sup>; While in countries like Mexico and Thailand, the Reproductive Health utilization is closer to 70%, the levels of use found in developed countries<sup>19</sup>. In the present study table-I shows that 63.3% women had the opportunity to use Reproductive Health Services and family planning. Overall the results are consistent with the above studies, but inter-categorically the proportions were significantly different as p-value is 0.0002. In category "A" there was 100% utilization and in category F only 10% utilization of Reproductive Health Services and family planning (RHS & FP).

## CONCLUSIONS

Women's Rights are Human Rights. The results obtained from this study are encouraging but not up to the standards of International Human Rights Principles, which are universal, inalienable; indivisible; interdependent and interrelated. It is suggested that further studies should be done in the rural areas of Pakistan to find the ground realities and true picture of the women rights in the society.

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*"A friendship founded on  
 business is better than a  
 business founded on  
 friendship."*

**John D. Rockefeller (1874-1960)**