Problems of Working Women
in Karachi, Pakistan
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By

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The women of Pakistan have always experienced disadvantage relative to men of the same class. Social, cultural and religious factors have reduced the number of women entering the job market.

Throughout the history of Pakistan, Muslim women have suffered a great deal of unnecessary restrictions due to the misconceptions of Islam. Women are brought up to believe they should stay within the four walls of their homes and avoid any contact with men they are not related to. These misconceptions are still prevalent in the society, and women, particularly working women, face lots of problems. This is not just the subject of discreet debate; these days it is a topic arousing impassioned argument and ideological fervor. Nor is the controversy limited just to the Muslim population: everyone has an opinion.

Much has changed in the last decade, but even in urban areas, when a woman travels to work, she must still be ready for stares and rude remarks from strangers. The influx of women entering the job market has brought about a certain level of change in public attitudes and promoted acceptance of women’s professional potential. Many employers prefer women for certain jobs, since they are thought of as and expected to be obedient and docile. Still, most people simply assume that working women do not possess good characters.

For years, women in rural areas of Pakistan who have chosen to work have been the subject of books and papers supporting and explaining their problems, but no work has been done in support of working women in urban Pakistan. Most popular books for women in Pakistan are on topics such as marriage, veiling and seclusion, the status of women in Islam and in society, and rural women working on farms. Implicit in such books are explanations of the rights and roles of women within Muslim society, but thus far there has been little exploration of the problems faced by working women in cities.

The book begins with a short history of Pakistan in relation to working women, from the time of Pakistan’s establishment as a country to the commencement of Martial Law. Data on employment and gender inequality in Pakistan is compared with that of several other countries, and different tables are provided listing information about the employed population (male and female) of Karachi in different occupational groups.
The traditions, cultural values, and status of women in Pakistan are also explained.

The women interviewed were divided into three categories, representing the three predominant socio-economic groups of employed women: these socio-economic characteristics are age, educational level, salary, marital status, status of the head of the household, number of family members, etc. These are all explained separately for each category.

This book explains why the women of Pakistan have taken up paid work and professions, and how they select a job. Then it discusses the major problems for each category: the first and the most common problem is sexual harassment in this traditional society, including abusive/meaningful remarks, offers for lunch or dinner dates, unnecessary physical contact and lustful ogling/stares. The attitude of the society towards working women is also explained: family members, relatives, neighbours and co-workers all had opinions on the subject, offered either first-hand in interviews or reported by women who discussed their experiences.

Veiling and seclusion are also issues dominating the experience of many women, as is marriage, because it is something usually decided by the parents of both parties rather than the couple themselves. Confident, self-possessed young women are rarely liked by a suitor’s parents, so the very thing that gives women a sense of self-esteem and empowerment many times becomes a threat to an aspect of life still vitally important in most women’s lives. They have to work against both discrimination and their own feelings of guilt and conflicting needs. Other problems include work-related travel and transportation, and appropriate dress.

*The Problems of Working Women in Karachi* explains the situations and stresses endured by working women in cities. The women offered their comments and histories during face-to-face interviews, giving insights into their lives. These collected narratives create a picture of the current status of working women of Pakistan and the turmoil they go through as they fight to break the traditional rules imposed on them. Women in numerous different jobs and from different socio-economic backgrounds illuminate all the various challenges affecting their experiences of working life: it is not hard to see how a Pakistani woman who reads books on the status of women in society or in Islam can end up feeling guilty working in a job where she cannot wear a veil or maintain seclusion. *The Problems of Working Women in Karachi* will, I hope, make them feel that they are not alone in this challenge.

With this book I wish to restore balance to the debate and to debunk some of the wilder ideas about working women in Pakistan. My intention
is to inject some much-needed reasonability into this overheated topic and put in a few good words for tolerance and respect for an individual’s choice. These women have long needed a champion to stand up for their views.

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Feedback and suggestions from readers are welcome. You can send your comments and suggestions to Iffat_hussain123@hotmail.com.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The women of Pakistan have always experienced disadvantages relative to men of the same class. Social and cultural factors have historically kept most women from entering the job market. But with the recent changes in society caused by increased economic pressures, expansion of educational facilities and increased access to learning, more and more women are entering the job market at all levels.

Karachi society is a varied mix of social classes and walks of life, and women can be found working in a broad assortment of professions. There are highly qualified women working in white-collar management, administrative, and creative and academic positions; women of the middle class have entered the ranks of retail and restaurant workers, as well as other responsible positions. And then there are women of lower class working at the lowest level, fighting for survival.

In this study I assess the major problems these working women face as they aim to break traditional rules and restrictions on their employment and how they deal with such problems. Through a series of interviews, women explained how they handle their problems, how they are being accepted by the society, how they stand up to society’s restrictions, and the effects of paid employment on their lives.

The women interviewed have been divided into three categories based on salary levels. In the interest of the respondents, some names have been changed or withheld. Category one consists of domestic workers. Category two includes telephone operators, secretaries, receptionists, technologists, clerical workers, office assistants, schoolteachers, client services, sales, lab technicians, broadcasters, and counter staff (for banks, ticket agents, post offices, etc.). Category three includes doctors, managers, coordinators, chemists, senior technologists, lecturers, journalists, technical writers, editors, supervisors, consultants, computer programmers, lawyers, dentists, and student counselors.
Methods and Surveys

I chose Karachi for my study of the problems faced by employed women for several reasons. First of all, it is well populated and the most developed city in Pakistan. Also, the number of female workers in the Karachi job market has increased tremendously over the last 50 years, since the establishment of Pakistan in 1947. Another reason for the selection of East Karachi is that it is a cosmopolitan and metropolitan city where one can find women of different races, cultures, socio-economic status, geographical origins, education and occupations. Because there are women of different status and different occupations, I was therefore able to identify sufficient numbers of employed women in different occupations who were later categorized into the three grades (domestic workers, clerical and management/supervisory level).

I interviewed women who were working full time as well as part time, at different levels of jobs in various organizations. Most of the respondents had been employed for a considerable period of time, more than half for over seven years. Most of the respondents were young working women; about 75 percent were aged 35 years and younger (the mean was found to be 30 years). Married women comprised 41.7 percent of the respondents; 54.6 percent were unmarried and only 4.2 percent reported being separated/divorced/widowed. All the married women had children.

I interviewed 240 women and took 50 case studies. Most of the questions I asked were open-ended. I was able to obtain completed questionnaires from all except 8.3 percent of the women, who left some of the questions unanswered. Women in categories one and two returned the incomplete questionnaires. Category three women, as compared to those of one and two, had the highest response rate.
The women in the sample were divided into three categories by their occupations and salary. Twenty-five percent of all the women interviewed belonged to category one, which were all domestic workers who earned less than 2,000 rupees ($28.03 USD) per month. Women working in clerical/sales and related positions made up 37.5 percent, earning between 2,100–12,000 rupees ($29.43–168.18 USD) per month. Finally, 37.5 percent were those at the upper levels of hierarchy with salaries more than 12,100 rupees ($169.58 USD) per month. There were sufficient numbers to take a random sample from all three categories.

Through my interviews I also studied the socio-demographic variables of the interviewees, the cultural roles and values accepted by them, the working conditions provided by their employers and by their families, and attitudes of families and communities towards their work.

![Figure 1.2 The Percentage of Respondents in Each of the Three Categories](image_url)

Respondents were divided into three major categories by their occupations because of the extreme variations in socio-economic status among them: arranging the respondents according to these categories reduced this variation.

The socio-demographic variables are age, qualification, salary, marital status, status of the head of the household and number of family members. The variation in these variables is related to their occupations: 25 percent of the respondents were domestic workers, 37.5 percent were sales/clerical, and 37.5 percent were managerial and executive. Data regarding fathers’ educational and occupational levels suggests that those who had attained higher levels of education and/or worked in well-paid occupations tended to have more career-oriented and innovative daughters.

The history of women’s employment tells us that the very first jobs for educated women were teaching or nursing, jobs which were considered
as the extension of the household duties and where the contact with the males was minimal. These are still referred to as traditional jobs. Things are beginning to change: there is now a social and cultural expectation for young women to achieve a certain level of education, even for their chances in the marriage market. Now women have begun working at non-traditional jobs as well: many respondents in categories two and three worked in jobs considered only a few years ago to be exclusively male employment (particularly in category three).

Domestic workers (category one), clerical/sales workers (category two) and managerial/executive workers (category three), all have different cultural values and family set-ups. Karachi’s multiethnic composition allowed me to gather a respondent pool from many different classes, races, life experiences and different cultures, all living in the same society. These cultural differences between communities effected women’s participation in different ways.

Figure 1.3 Household Work and Employed Women

Culturally, household work (in her own home) is considered a woman’s primary role. Due to the increase of economic pressures on families in the past few decades, the traditional restrictions on women have lessened and large numbers of women have taken on paid employment; but domestic work remains a woman’s principal duty. Seventy-five percent of the women included in the sample reported that they are physically tired out by managing both their work at home and at their place of employment. The largest percentage of working women across Pakistan have concentrated on occupations such as health workers, educational professionals and clerical workers. They have entered into professions that are less attractive to men because of poor working conditions, lower pay, lack of control, monotony, and lack of opportunity for advancement. Women feel discriminated against in terms of their salaries and promotions. A very strong factor negatively influencing the participation of women in the work force is the practise of seclusion:
traditionally seclusion means wearing an over-garment that covers the whole body, including the head and face.

Working women are assumed to be at risk of sexual activity outside marriage, whether voluntary or otherwise, because they spend part of the day outside the home. To protect these women in the workplace is the responsibility of every corporate employer: therefore the social construction of the workplace is an important element for young women, and it is usually portrayed as a protective environment. For the purposes of this study, data concerning working conditions has been derived from information provided by respondents relating to employee facilities and their likes and dislikes in their work and whether such conditions stimulate them positively at their work or the reverse. Domestic workers reported the poorest and least stimulating working conditions—their work was monotonous and repetitive, with the fewest amenities. Most of the women in category three reported good working conditions with comfortable, air-conditioned rooms, and found their jobs interesting and challenging, giving them the chance to use their abilities.

Women’s work experience is related to the socio-economic status of their families. Women from families with little or no education usually take domestic work or very low-level jobs. Women from moderately educated and/or religious backgrounds are often found working in traditional jobs, and women from well-educated and socially advanced families have the opportunity to pursue non-traditional jobs and careers, where they compete with males. Parents’ encouragement plays a very important role for girls pursuing male-dominated occupations. It was found that parental support was one of the strongest predictors of young women’s career aspirations and motivations: those who were career-oriented girls faced less pressure from their parents to marry early and have children.

Different variables reflect respondents’ attitudes and their opinions and perceptions towards their jobs, as well as towards traditional roles and values. The attitudes of neighbours, relatives, and their families are all relevant to these women and play a vital part in their lives. Families who adhere strongly to tradition are particularly influenced by the opinions of their relatives and acquaintances: this causes women to take precautions, which in turn increases stress and tension.

The attitudes of men and other women towards the respondents at their workplaces are also predicted by different variables, which indicate the social conditions and aptitude of the respondent. Personal grooming and personality development are also factors.
The Women of Category One

Female migrants to come to Karachi from rural areas such as interior Sind and Baluchistan, and take domestic work to survive. They are unskilled, poor, uneducated and know very little Urdu (the official language of Pakistan); instead they speak with a mixture of Urdu and the language of their native village. Because of their cultural and/or religious backgrounds, domestic work is thought appropriate for these women because they come in contact only with the mistresses of the houses. They usually work in the morning hours when the male members of the household (are supposedly) at their jobs. These women are permitted to work as domestic servants because it is an extension of a woman’s typical role in a household; they prefer it because it does not require any specialized skill. Their work includes different activities such as washing dishes, laundry, cleaning, sweeping, mopping, or cooking in different houses. It is a very low-paid job, but they can choose their own hours and locations. The average pay is 100–200 rupees ($1.40–2.81 USD) per activity, per month: it varies from location to location, and in expensive residential areas they charge more. Groups of women from the same community will often try to find work in houses close to each other so that they can travel to and from work together and take short walks between shifts.

The women of category one live in small houses, grouped together in small communities. Their furnishings are old and rustic, often given to them by their employers or picked up from the streets. Several generations of a family may live together, including children, grandparents, siblings and sometimes distant relatives. The men are usually unemployed, addicted to drugs, or just lazy, and their laziness is socially accepted. They work as labourers on a contract basis or street vendors. The women also work due to the uncertainty of their spouses’ income, which may be caused by sickness, old age or the institutional irregularity of working as a day labourer.

Salima, who works in four different houses, says:

I work in different houses and by the end of the day I get very tired, because at home I also have to take care of the kids and house work. My husband does not help me in anything.

Khatoon, a 40-year-old married domestic worker, said:

My husband doesn’t work. I have six children to take care of and my husband just eats, sleeps and gives us orders. He doesn’t care about
anything. He is free from all worries. It is not only my husband—all the men in our community are like this. Very few of them go to work. By commanding at home they feel superior.

Category Two

The women of this category can be separated into two sub-categories. There are families who allow and/or encourage their sisters and daughters to attain sufficient education to qualify for respectable jobs like teachers, nurses or clerical positions—but these families cling to the traditions and culture of the society at the same time, not wanting their women to work in any job considered degrading. Other families give their women sufficient education to enter any kind of job, whether it be sales, marketing, counter staff, receptionists, factory workers, etc.—these are not very traditional families. Due to increased economic pressures, the concept of seclusion has been reduced to a great extent. The women of this category are educated, but due to financial pressures they leave school early and enter the job market: even so, they are usually not career-oriented. Their families are also not well-educated, and their fathers and husbands are not in highly-paid jobs. Since they are not from well-established families, most cannot afford to keep a full-time domestic worker to help with household work, although some do employ part-time help. Women whose families can’t afford to pay a domestic worker must also take care of the housework, which is considered her primary occupation. Domestic work is traditionally considered unrespectable for men, so it is very rare for one of them to help. These families cannot afford to buy cars, so the women travel in buses unless their employers provide a transport service. Taxis are too expensive for them, and travelling in buses in Karachi is a tough job in itself.

Most of these middle-class women become teachers, where most of their contact is with children and a gender-segregated environment is easily maintained. This job is considered respectable for girls because the need to interact with men is kept to a minimum. Khalida, a 39-year-old government schoolteacher, said:

I teach in a girl’s school because my husband’s salary is not sufficient for us. In my parents’ family girls are not allowed to work. But I am glad they gave me opportunity to get some education, so at least now I can teach in a school. And now after marriage, I belong to a family where I was given permission to teach, but only in a girls-only school. I do this job for the sake of my kids, so that I can give them a better standard of living.
Category Three

The women of category three are career-oriented. They come from well-educated families, live in expensive areas of the city, and their husbands and fathers earn high salaries. These women do not need to work to augment the family income—they work for the sake of a career and for self-fulfillment. (Women of the wealthiest class, whose husbands or fathers are involved in big businesses, do not enter the job market and are not included in this study.) Category three women live in fairly large houses and have all the basic necessities of life, as well as certain luxuries. They are permitted the opportunity to get a good education, and since their families can afford to keep domestic workers they are not expected to shoulder the family’s entire burden of house work. They are subject to fewer traditional restrictions and like to compete with men, work side by side with them.

Twenty-five-year old Samina works as an assistant marketing manager. She has recently completed an MBA from a private college:

I am working to utilise my education and get some experience. This is my first job after graduation. My working life is totally different from my life as a student—people in my office take notice of everything I do and report it. I cannot be as carefree as I used to be when I as a student; I have to be very careful. But here I am learning a lot of new and different things. I think this is what life is.
CHAPTER TWO

PAKISTAN

Pakistan and Culture

Pakistan is located in South Asia. It shares borders with Afghanistan and Iran to the west, India to the east and People’s Republic of China in the far northeast. It has a thousand kilometre coastline along the Arabian Sea in the south.

Politically the country has undergone several revolutions and transitions since its creation in 1947. It has endured several periods of military rule. Geographically and administratively the country is divided into four provinces: Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan and the NWFP (North-West Frontier Province). Each province has its own native language, but the official language is Urdu. Outside the province boundaries in the North West corner of Pakistan, there are the northern regions of Azad (“Free”) Kashmir and other tribal areas (FATA).

The Punjabi people belong to the province of Punjab, which is home to some of the world’s oldest civilizations. The Punjabi people comprise the largest national group of modern Pakistan. The Sindhi are natives of Sind (Sindh) in Pakistan. Sind province is located in the southern part of Pakistan. The people are Muslim, but diverge from orthodox Islam by worshipping Muslim saints. They have a strong cultural heritage: their folk literature and poetry dates back to the fourteenth century. Sindhi women are still very traditional and they like to wear very colourful traditional clothes; the men wear Shalwar Kameez (the national dress), and turbans or traditional Sindhi caps on their heads. In cities, those who have attained some education and are financially prosperous tend to dress in the contemporary, fashionable styles popular in places such as Karachi; but those who are poor, usually found living in squatter settlements, wear their traditional clothes. The literacy level remains low among Sindhis, but it is improving.

The Baluchis are the people from the province of Baluchistan. They are originally an Iranian people who settled in the south-west of what is now modern Pakistan. Pushtuns, or Pathans are from the NWFP province:
they have a strong identity as warriors, and while they are a very hospitable people they also place high value on blood feuds and defending the honour of the women of their tribes. They strictly maintain the practise of secluding their women.

At present Pakistan’s population is some 169,300,000 citizens. Its land area is 796,095 square kilometres (excluding disputed territories) or 803,940 square kilometres (including Pakistan-administered disputed territories, Azad Kashmir and Northern Areas). It is the sixth most populous country in the world, and the second most populous Muslim country.

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan came into existence in 1947, when what was then all India was divided into two (the Partition), thereby creating a separate homeland for South Asian Muslims on the sub-continent. Many Muslim women actively participated in this freedom struggle and worked side by side with men, creating new opportunities for themselves as well as for other women. They explored and participated in new fields of education and work, thus inspiring new hopes and ideas to women of the newly-formed Pakistan. These hopes and ideas created a new consciousness and awareness among people, and more rights were given to women in the inclusion of the family law ordinance in Pakistan’s Constitution in 1973. Article 27 of the Fundamental Rights stated that “there should be no discrimination on the basis of race, religion, caste or sex for appointment in the services of Pakistan.” This gave positive encouragement to women to enter and participate in different fields of education and work.

In 1977 when martial law was imposed in Pakistan, the country’s women, Muslim and otherwise, faced complete social regression. The chief martial law administrator General Zia-ul-Haq announced that Islam would be imposed in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, stressing the segregation for women. In the name of Islam new laws and policies were designed and the constitutional family law ordinance was suspended. The extremist Muslim clerics, who were themselves ignorant of Islamic laws which condemn discrimination against women, brainwashed people to

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5 Pakistan Constitution, Article 27
think that modesty for women means they should be veiled from head to
foot in public or better yet, stay home. In order to practise this (anti-)
Islamic law, barriers were instituted to discourage and prevent women’s
education, employment and professional careers, even their taking part in
activities outside their homes (particularly those activities which involved
competing with men). In order to limit their freedom of movement they
were encouraged only in activities inside their homes, or anything which
required submission and docility. Such policies and conditions degraded
and threatened not only the human rights of women in Pakistan but their
very lives—particularly employed women. Women were mostly assigned
subordinate roles in the civil, political and managerial hierarchies.

In 1988, when the martial law period ended, the anti-Islamic ways
preached by the extremist Muslim clerics during Martial Law remained;
few people changed their minds. However, as democracy took hold, so did
gradual changes which encouraged women to enter new fields of
education as well as professional careers. Today there are an increasing
number of women in traditional as well as non-traditional services and
professions.

Karachi is the largest city in Pakistan (and one of the largest cities in
the world), with a population of 11.5 million and a land area of 3,527
square kilometers. The population is predominantly Muslim (96.49
percent); there are also Christians (2.35 percent), Hindus (0.83 percent),
and others (Qadiani, Parsi, Jews, Buddhist—0.03 percent). Karachi is the
financial capital of Pakistan, providing a large portion of Pakistan’s GDP,
and generating about 65 percent of its national revenue, which provides a
Gross Metropolitan Product (GMP) of $263 billion USD and a GMP per
capita of $21,917 USD (rivaling Western European and American cities).6

Karachi is a center of industry, finance and trade. Most of Pakistan’s
industrial activities take place there, and it is a popular locale for the head
offices of public and private banks. It is also the home of the offices of
many foreign multinational corporations and the largest stock exchange of
Pakistan (the Karachi Stock Exchange). Karachi’s location on the shore of
the Arabian Sea makes it an ideal shipping port and billions of tons of
cargo come through its harbour every year. It has the largest international
airport in Pakistan and is the chief terminal point for Pakistan’s railway
transportation system. It has a higher number of universities and colleges
and a higher literacy rate than any other city in Pakistan. Students come
from all over the country to pursue their higher education in Karachi. Most

6 “Economy and Development,” Official Web Portal of the City District
of the higher institutes in Karachi are considered the premier educational institutions of Pakistan and have competitive admission processes.

Karachi is a new and modern city compared to other cities of Pakistan. Its people love glamour and keep themselves up-to-date in terms of fashion, trade, and social activities. They are considered more westernized by the people of other cities of Pakistan, and in many aspects they are very different. They enjoy the city’s nightlife, often staying up late at night and waking late the next morning. The main road in Karachi called Shahrah-e-Faisal is busy 24 hours a day; the only time the traffic slows is between four and five in the morning, but even then the road is never without traffic. The attractions of this city are its colourful market places, bazaars and its beaches. The shops and marketplaces are lavishly decorated and remain open till late night; restaurants and street vendors remain open long after midnight.

People who come from other cities of Pakistan find it difficult to adjust to Karachi’s environment. The culture of Karachi is a blend of Middle Eastern, South Asian and Western influences: the culture, intensely and uniquely diverse, is unmatched in the country. People have very liberal attitudes and do not appreciate over-emotional and conservative views. Most of the people live in medium-sized houses or apartments rather than in large open houses as in other cities of Pakistan; the very wealthy prefer to live in large houses like those found in the Defence Housing Authority of Karachi. The feudal living style does not exist in Karachi.

Since Karachi is located on the coast, the humidity level remains high throughout the year. The summers, which last from March until August, are hot, with temperatures ranging from approximately 33 to 42°C (91 to 107°F). The rainy season or monsoon rains appear for only a couple of days. The winters, lasting from November to March, are very mild: it is the most temperate time of year, with mild days and lovely sunshine, but nights may be cold.

The city is multiethnic, and the dominant ethnic group in Karachi are the people who migrated to Pakistan from different parts of the subcontinent after the Partition of India. The government of Pakistan allotted properties left by the departing Hindus and Sikhs to the incoming refugees who settled in Karachi. Other large groups include Sindhis, Baluchis, Punjabis and Pashtuns. A large number of Afghan refugees have also settled here since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

Many people come to Karachi from rural areas in search of riches and job opportunities, lured by the promise of the wealth they believe it has. These people have developed into the vast squatter population in Karachi.
One hundred and fifty years ago Karachi was a small community of fishermen, numbering some 15,000 people; now it is the most important city of Pakistan, with a population of more than ten million. Because Karachi is the location of Pakistan’s largest port and large-scale manufacturing, it is now dominant in terms of economic and social indicators.

Pakistani family life is based on the traditional roles and values of family members. The husband is the breadwinner, major decision maker and head of the family. The wife’s role is to bring up children, take care of the household and to provide emotional nurturance to her husband. If any family member fails to behave properly as demanded by the tradition, that person brings disharmony and shame to the family. For Pakistani women, their domestic, parental, and conjugal roles have the highest priority, whereas the occupational and community roles are secondary. A married woman’s primary role is to maintain her marriage: she is held responsible for its quality, whether it is considered successful. And as a wife and mother she is expected to be selfless, ever-nurturing and indefatigable. A Pakistani woman is usually perceived as existing as a member of a kin group rather than as an individual: a typical Pakistani woman grows up in a sheltered environment, with most decisions affecting her life made for her by others. She learns moral and social codes of behavior early in life. The birth of a girl child is greeted with less enthusiasm than that which welcomes a male: they are less valued and cared for than male children, and receive less education, health care and food because parents traditionally do not expect financial support from their daughters later in life as they expect it from sons. Girls are usually viewed as a burden because of the associated difficulties in maintaining the honor of the family: the girls’ virginity must be safeguarded, and dowry must be provided. Early childhood socialization, reinforced by parents, religion and community teaches a girl to emphasize home and family and to defer her career pursuits to the career priorities of her husband. People are too sex-starved to view women as simple human beings: this forces women to learn to submit to the demands of society.

After certain age, usually during or after high school, fathers become responsible for their sons, whereas mothers are responsible for their daughters’ upbringing and training. Mothers teach their daughters household chores and have high expectations from them in terms of domestic responsibilities and child care. Older daughters are given the responsibilities of raising their younger brothers and sisters as if they are their own sons and daughters, and if money is scarce then the son and the daughter are also sent to work outside the home to provide additional
income as well as taking care of their younger siblings. A married woman faces the same responsibilities, earning money if required and taking care of her children. Boys’ and men’s responsibilities take place outside the home. Parents of low financial status make good use of their children, both sons and daughters’ work and labour, if they are not traditional. More traditional families, however, do not allow their daughters to work even if the financial conditions are precarious.

Families are portrayed as groups of close relatives (parents, children, and sons- and daughters-in-law) who are obligated to work and support each other, with the men obviously dominating. Children are expected to help provide for the family and participate in the family’s social as well as financial progress. Parents enforce these practices to secure their stable financial future, and because their children’s marriages depend so heavily on their financial status.

A woman has no control over her property—in fact she is the property of her husband and his family. If a woman tries to leave her husband for any reason, he can forcefully reclaim her, as if she were a slave. Women may not sue alone in the court: claims for divorce, religious factors or complicated legal procedures may be allowed on certain grounds, but women risk losing their homes, children and property.

Pakistani women reflect the contrasts and diversities prevailing in the country at all levels. Millions of poor, illiterate women workers are exploited, earning low wages for heavy burdens of work. In most cases they are also bound by traditional family roles and structures. There are well-educated housewives who have social status and economic security; there are dynamic, creative and articulate women who are broadening their horizons, working in high-level jobs and professions. But all these women are subject to the same degrading and discriminatory laws, customs and prejudices against women prevailing in the country. Due to the “male breadwinner” ideology, women are persistently undervalued as wage earners, their abilities to conduct themselves in a professional capacity and make decisions for themselves regularly under-appreciated. The ability to earn income has helped some women increase their independence and maintain self esteem, but if her family’s economic condition requires her to work, then she has to work “double days,” performing multiple roles.

Pakistani women rarely leave their home towns on their own to look for employment: they usually move as a part of their fathers’, brothers’, or husbands’ families. The opportunities for women to attend school have increased, and as a result women have gained higher standards in self esteem, personal goals and ideals, but most of the women must still bury their expectations, sacrificing the opportunity to be the individuals they
had set out to be, especially after marriage. Despite—or perhaps because of—this it must be remembered that there are women who have escaped this pattern: there are women executives who have built their success upon rigid determination. They have overcome their difficulties and made their lives success stories. They fought against the roles and relationships and responses that put them at risk.

The position Pakistani women have achieved was not granted to them voluntarily or out of any kindness. Pakistani women struggled hard for the rights to education and freedom of work and earning. They went through painful experiences, sacrificing many natural rights. They have come a long way, but they have not yet won: they still have a long way to go and must continue to struggle in order to achieve the status they deserve.

**Gender Inequality**

There are great misconceptions about Islam and its laws. These misconceptions are pervasive not only in the non-Muslim world, but in the Muslim societies as well; such misconceptions are powerful and influence millions of lives. The origin of the bulk of these misconceptions is the heavy influence different cultures have had on Muslim society over time—many elements of such influence were adopted and preached as Islamic laws or as religious sanctions by Muslim clerics, and religion has been exploited by the dominant class in their own favour. Another reason is that Muslims were never interested in following the laws in their true sense; they were not willing to adopt new ways of life, sticking instead to social habits left over from Middle Eastern and South Asian cultures before the advent of Islam.

Because of these misconceptions the Muslim women of Pakistan have suffered a great deal of unnecessary restriction. Most are required to stay within the confines of their homes and forbidden to come in contact with any male outside their family. Because of the conditions imposed on women, the preferred occupations were those of a school or college teachers and female doctors, because in these occupations segregation of the sexes can be easily maintained. These occupations are also preferred because women could get medical and educational services from women. The idea that both men and women need the satisfaction of achievement in the outside world does not hold for women in this society. Well-paid jobs that offer good prospects of promotion are reserved for men; women are granted jobs and professions which are less attractive to men because of the few benefits attached to them. This discrimination against women is justified on the grounds of perceived lower productivity, lack of physical strength, inability to easily take business trips, high absenteeism and turn-
over. More women these days are now pursuing careers in certain male-dominated fields such as engineering, business and law, but their level of pay still lags behind that of men of the same status.

Throughout most of Pakistan’s history, women have had fewer legal rights and career opportunities than men. Motherhood and marriage are regarded as the most important aspects of a woman’s life. They are considered intellectually inferior to men and a major source of temptation and evil. They are thought of as naturally weaker than men, unable to do work which requires physical and intellectual effort and development, so they are left to do domestic chores which result from the stereotype that “a woman’s place is in the home.” Maternity—the natural biological role—is regarded as their major social role. The cultural and social pressures for women to become wives and mothers prevent many talented women from pursuing careers. They learn from their childhood that cooking, cleaning and caring for children is the behavior expected of them when they grow up. When they marry, their husbands virtually own them (and their children) as they do their material possessions. Legally they are defenceless to some extent to object to his decisions: culturally (and financially) they are completely dependent on their husbands.

![Figure 2.1 Traditional Roles in the Household](image)

Traditional gender roles dictate that a wife’s job is to look after the home and family, and a husband’s job is to earn the money. Women are expected to submit, men are expected to dominate. Because of this practise, the differentiation between genders in access to social and economic opportunities is obvious.7

---

7 Female employment in industry, agriculture or services as defined according to the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) system (revisions 2 and
Table 2.1 Female Employment in Services (as Percentage of Female Labour Force), 1995–2003.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HDI Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>Russian Federation</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>121</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>126</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>128</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>136</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>148</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>158</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bangladesh stands third last in the Female Labour Force Participation with 23 percent of females employed in services. Pakistan is the second last with 20 percent of females employed, and Yemen is last with only 9 percent of females employed in services.

Results in Table 2.2 below show the magnitude of the gender inequality: it is well pronounced in the labour force participation rate. It declined during late 1970s, which shows that the gender inequality decreased during these years, and women were given more chances to enter

3) Industry refers to mining and quarrying, manufacturing, construction and public utilities (gas, water and electricity). Agriculture refers to activities in agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing. Services refer to wholesale and retail trade; restaurants and hotels; transport, storage and communications; finance, insurance, real estate and business services; and community, social and personal services. United Nation Development Program, Human Development Report, 2007-2008. Reprinted by permission from the publisher.

8 Reprinted by permission from the publisher.
Table 2.2 Magnitude of Gender Inequality Index for Pakistan\textsuperscript{9}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Education Attainment index</th>
<th>Labour force participation</th>
<th>Composite Gender Inequality Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>148.82</td>
<td>196.67</td>
<td>148.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>149.06</td>
<td>198.13</td>
<td>149.13</td>
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<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>146.35</td>
<td>197.88</td>
<td>148.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>146.05</td>
<td>194.03</td>
<td>146.69</td>
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<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>145.95</td>
<td>189.87</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>144.24</td>
<td>186.14</td>
<td>143.44</td>
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<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>145.16</td>
<td>182.63</td>
<td>142.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>143.26</td>
<td>181.94</td>
<td>141.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>141.04</td>
<td>181.29</td>
<td>140.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>138.52</td>
<td>182.25</td>
<td>140.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>141.52</td>
<td>183.87</td>
<td>141.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>140.88</td>
<td>185.58</td>
<td>142.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>140.33</td>
<td>187.31</td>
<td>142.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>139.12</td>
<td>185.14</td>
<td>141.34</td>
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<td>1987</td>
<td>138.30</td>
<td>177.84</td>
<td>138.63</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>136.87</td>
<td>181.67</td>
<td>139.42</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>136.61</td>
<td>179.63</td>
<td>138.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>137.59</td>
<td>177.45</td>
<td>138.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>137.86</td>
<td>173.63</td>
<td>137.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>138.42</td>
<td>170.29</td>
<td>136.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>136.22</td>
<td>172.11</td>
<td>135.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>131.02</td>
<td>171.51</td>
<td>134.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>129.65</td>
<td>176.20</td>
<td>135.31</td>
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<td>129.50</td>
<td>176.02</td>
<td>135.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>127.10</td>
<td>171.20</td>
<td>132.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>125.06</td>
<td>171.12</td>
<td>131.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>126.86</td>
<td>171.04</td>
<td>132.46</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>125.64</td>
<td>170.98</td>
<td>132.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>114.44</td>
<td>168.94</td>
<td>127.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>113.70</td>
<td>169.60</td>
<td>127.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>113.58</td>
<td>169.41</td>
<td>127.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>113.22</td>
<td>166.03</td>
<td>126.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>112.30</td>
<td>165.92</td>
<td>125.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

the job market. But during the period of Martial Law instituted in 1980, the trend reverted to earlier conditions and all the progress made with

\textsuperscript{9} Source: SPDC estimates 2007–2008. Reprinted by the permission of the publisher.
respect to women’s equality and participation in the work force during the 1970s was lost. During the first half of the 1980s, the policies for female segregation were fully enforced, and we can see the difference in the table. Since then there has been recovery and improvement.

In Table 2.3, data shows substantial gender inequality in countries such as Egypt, Algeria, Pakistan, India, Morocco and Sudan. In the ratio of labour force participation rate, the inequality between the genders is most pronounced in Egypt, Morocco, Sudan and Pakistan. Egypt stands first, Sudan and Morocco stands second and Pakistan is third in female economic activity, compared to the percent of male rate. Pakistan, Nepal and Morocco show the greatest difference in literacy rates.

Table 2.3 Gender Inequalities in Literacy and Economic Activity in a Sample of Countries (1995–2005)\(^{10}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Adult Literacy Rate: Percentage aged 15 and older, 1995-2005</th>
<th>Female Economic Activity as Percentage of male rate, 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>60.1</td>
<td>79.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>53.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>88.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>83.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>73.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>86.8</td>
<td>94.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>76.8</td>
<td>88.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>77.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>93.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>65.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>62.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>60.1</td>
<td>78.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pakistan</strong></td>
<td><strong>35.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>64.1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Philippines</td>
<td>93.6</td>
<td>91.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>84.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>92.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>71.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>94.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>95.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{10}\) UNDP Tables (2007–2008). Reprinted by the permission of the publisher.
Changing Society

In the urban areas of Pakistan, women’s contribution to family economy and the job market has increased a great deal in the last 50 years. The tradition of secluding women and confining them to traditional jobs, thereby keeping male contact to a minimum, has also changed (to an extent). This is more prominent in the upper- and middle-class families in Karachi. The pressure to conform to traditional female behavior, including submission to household interests as dutiful wives and daughters, has also changed. Women can choose from a broad range of occupations such as laboratory assistants, clerks, sales and marketing professionals, journalists, lawyers, IT analysts, engineers, broadcasters, scientists, sailors, police officers, army, navy and air force personnel, nuclear scientists, etc., although the numbers in some of these categories are still small.

Women are often found working as waitresses and chefs at newly decorated and fully modernized fast food outlets. In many modern department stores women are working as salespersons. Until recently such sales and marketing jobs were considered exclusively male jobs, and no women dared apply. Large numbers of women are found working in small and large factories; they are also employed in pharmaceutical and electronic industries. As the ratio of educated girls has increased, these young women have entered into white collar jobs competing with men and working side by side with them. There are entrepreneurs, architects, administrators, bankers, beauticians, fashion designers. Women are into sports like cricket, hockey, badminton, and table tennis. There are models, TV producers, singers, directors. Women are preferred for secretarial work and are often paid better salaries than men in that particular field. The medical profession is very popular with women: female doctors come from the upper- and middle-classes, health workers and nurses from the lower class. A large number of girls in schools and colleges dream of