

Profile of the Rural Woman of Pakistan

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Abstract

The majority of Pakistani womanhood belongs to the silent, invisible peasantry in the rural areas. Essentially belonging to an underdeveloped region, the rural female toils relentlessly from morning till night. Her status is highly complex. In certain roles she is exalted; on other counts her very being is negated, which, when translated to human development indicators, depicts the profile of a woman with a very disadvantaged status, in fact, one of the lowest in the world. This study collects and collates data to present the profile of the rural female of Pakistan. It clearly shows that without concrete moves to do so, the mere acceptance and recognition of her contribution to society would do much to elevate her status.

In Pakistan the role of the woman is strongly defined by religious and cultural/social norms. Due to illiteracy and misinterpretation, the latter is vastly perpetuated (UNESCAP 1997 p 3) under the garb of the former. There is “widespread misconception about the place Islam accords to women...” (Report of the Commission of Inquiry for Women 1997 p ii). Pakistan is a classic case where steady economic growth has not been accompanied by concurrent growth in the social sector. Within the confines of this phenomenon, the rural population suffers from inequitable distribution of resource availability and human development services. The condition of rural women is not hard to conceptualise, given the above circumstances.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The study aims to provide a profile of the rural woman, by using the parameters defined by human development index indicators. The study has relied heavily on the latest statistical information. Where required, literature dealing with reports on women vis-a-vis the different provinces of Pakistan was considered. In certain instances, in-depth case studies of specific areas of social development were also assimilated.

The main aim of the report is to state the profile of the rural female within the contextual factors of Pakistan.

The specific objectives of the above were to:

- identify information and data pertaining to the Pakistani female, in general;
- establish the status of the rural woman vis-a-vis the urban woman;
- State the status of the rural woman vis-a-vis the rural man.

The latter two were considered essentially to highlight and focus on the status of the rural woman within a holistic perspective.

1.2. Limitations of the Report

- The rural woman can in actuality be further categorised according to her socio-economic status. It needs to be clarified that this study does not focus on the rural female belonging to the privileged class.
- One of the objectives of the study was to provide a comparison between the rural male and the rural female. It was difficult to sift through the available printed material. At a general level the male-female ratios were mentioned statistically, but no such information was available for the rural male and rural female. In many cases, latest statistical data was not available, and in certain cases, this study refers to 1981 statistics. (Undoubtedly, data pertaining to the 1990s would have been more valid and preferable.)
- Discrepancy in available data was at times very conspicuous (see Table II). The reliability of available data is a question beyond the scope of this study.
- Regional data has been drawn from the limited available material as available and added where appropriate. It is basically stated as province-wise differentiated data. It needs to be added that province-wise data needs further elaboration.
- In dealing with provincial statistics, it needs to be pointed out that statistics regarding Sindh are skewed. Karachi has very different characteristics compared to rural Sindh. A generalised estimation of Sindh is not valid for the province.
- This study has not dealt with abstract concepts such as “attitudes” towards women. Also the rural woman needs to be discussed as per her role in environment-related issues.

1.3. Format

The study tackles the rural woman and her status following a breakdown of various topics. Keeping in view the specific objective, the report establishes the status of the rural woman in comparison to the rural man. To show regional disparities that exist, the rural/urban divide has also been tackled. The study in essence concentrates on the data on the Pakistani female and with the help of sex and region wise differentiated information identifies the status of the rural female.

II. Demographic Characteristics

About 72 per cent of the country's population live in rural areas (UNDP 1996 p 171, states it as 66 per cent). Females constitute 47 per cent of the rural population.

II.1. Sex Ratios

Pakistan is one of the few countries where males outnumber females. As per the 1981 Census there are 113 males to 100 females. The difference is visible in all provinces.

Table I: Sex Ratio (males per 100 females) by province and rural/urban residence

	Urban	Rural	Total
Pakistan	115.3	108.7	110.6
Punjab	114.0	109.7	110.8
NWFP	117.1	107.3	108.7
Sindh	116.4	106.6	110.7
Balochistan	--	108.7	108.7
Islamabad	124.5	110.9	118.9

Source: GOP N.D. *Census Report of Pakistan* 1981.

One possibility of the sex ratio being significantly higher in urban areas is due to men dominating the rural-to-urban migration. (It is important to note that despite greater male migration out of rural areas, there are still more males than females.) Sex ratios also vary widely across age groups, possibly due to variations in age-specific mortality and also differential migration (UNESCAP 1997 p 16).

According to the 1981 Census data, compared to the national average there were fewer males than females between the ages 0-9 years and it became higher than the average for ages 10-19 years with the difference becoming much more at 50 years and above. Between the ages 20-49 sex ratios were lower than the average. Data show the rural population with a lower sex ratio than the corresponding urban population. Exceptions are the ages 0-4 years where females outnumber males (i.e. 95.21 males for 100 females) and the ages 35-44 years where there are less males than females (Table 2).

Table 2: Sex Ratios (males per 100 females) by age group and urban/rural residence

Age Group	Urban	Rural	Total
0-4	97.2	102.7	95.2
5-9	107.5	107.3	107.7
10-14	118.41	112.7	120.8
15-19	117.4	116.1	118.0
20-24	110.54	122.0	105.12
25-29	111.7	121.6	107.12
30-34	107.1	119.3	102.2
35-39	102.1	109.3	98.8
40-44	100.4	115.1	95.0
45-49	109.8	124.9	104.3
50-54	123.3	136.4	118.3
55-59	114.3	132.6	108.5
60-64	141.6	148.8	139.9
65-69	128.6	139.0	125.7
70-74	140.1	129.3	140.4
75+	133.xx	131.8	133.3
All ages	110.5	115.2	108.7

Source: GOP (N.D.) *Census Report of Pakistan* 1981.

II.2. Age Composition

It is evident from Table 3 that 44.5 per cent of the country's population is between 0-14 years. Coupled with elderly persons above 60

years, this means that as per the 1981 Census, dependency ratios are high and higher in rural areas while those for urban were lower than the average.

Table 3: Distribution of Female Population According to Age Groups and Area of Residence

Age	Urban Female	Rural Female	Pakistan (both sexes)
0-14	44.0	45.5	44.5
15-59	50.1	47.9	48.5
60+	4.8	6.6	7.0
Dependency ratio	97.2	108.8	106.2

Source: *Population Census Organisation* 1981

II.3. Marital Status

Table 4: Percentage Distribution of Marital Status of Population 15 years and over by sex, and urban/rural areas (1981 Census)

	Never Married			Currently Married			Widowed			Divorced		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Total	31.5	17.8	25.1	65.2	72.7	68.8	3.1	9.1	5.9	0.2	--	0.3
Urban	35.7	22.8	29.9	61.4	68.2	64.5	2.8	8.7	5.5	0.1	0.3	0.2
Rural	29.6	15.8	23.1	67.0	74.6	70.6	3.2	9.2	6.0	0.2	0.4	0.3

Source: GOP (N.D.) *Population Census Report of Pakistan* 1981.

It is evident from Table 4 that more men compared to women “never married”, and the situation is similar in the case of the rural areas. In comparison the “never married” for urban areas was higher. In fact in all the other categories that denote marital status i.e. “currently married”, “widowed” and “divorced”, the percentage for the rural population was similar to the overall male/female percentage. The figures were visibly different in the case of the urban population.

It is clear that the proportion of “never married” women is significantly lower in rural than in urban areas. Similarly the proportion of “currently married” women is higher than in urban areas.

In the country as a whole, the proportion of “never married” women aged 15 and above increased from 10.8 per cent in 1961 to 17.8 per cent in 1981. Similarly during this period the proportion “currently married” women declined from 76.1 per cent to 72.7 per cent. These trends are similar for the provinces of Sindh, Punjab and Balochistan. In NWFP the proportion of “never married” did increase from 11.6 to 17.2 per cent while the “currently married” women stayed constant at 73.8 per cent. Another difference among the provinces was the fact that in the case of Sindh the proportion of “never married” women in urban areas was twice the percentage for rural women.

II.4. Fertility Levels and Trends

Fertility levels have been a disputed research activity, since the various data collection census agencies such as Population Growth Estimate, Population Growth Survey, Pakistan Fertility Survey, Pakistan Contraceptive Prevalence Survey, Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey, all give different estimates for the crude birth rates and total fertility rate. One point is eminently clear. Pakistan's fertility rates are and have been very high by regional and global standards. Though the past two decades show a gradual decline (UNESCAP 1997 p 18), the fertility rates are higher than those of neighbouring countries (UNDP 1996 p 179).

Fertility levels vary according to rural/urban residence. The total fertility rate for urban women (4.90) was much lower than for rural women (5.58). The major cities had the lowest fertility rate (4.67) (NIPS 1992).

Among the four provinces, while Sindh has the lowest total fertility rate (4.86) compared to the average for all Pakistan (5.16), while NWFP has the highest (5.30) with Punjab (5.24) and Balochistan (5.28) being closer to the average total (NIPS 1992). Higher fertility rates means that the proportion of young dependents is very high (WB 1989p xviii).

II.5. Mortality Levels and Trends

Despite the inadequacy of data available, it is clear that the crude death rate (CDR) as well as infant mortality rate (IMR) have been declining over the years. From 11.4 per 1000 persons in 1968-71 to 10.0 in 1984- 86 (UNESCAP 1997 p 19), the CDR has declined to 9.1 in 1993 (UNDP 1996 p 179). The rural CDR, though, is significantly higher than in urban areas.

Infant mortality has declined from 163 per 1000 live births in 1960 to 89 in 1993 (UNDP 1996 p 149). Infant mortality in rural areas is much higher (102.2) than in urban areas (74.6) (NIPS 1992). High infant mortality rates also prevail in low-income areas of towns and cities. Within this set

up, the infant mortality rate for boys (102) was 1.2 times higher than that for girls (85) (UNESCAP 1997, p 20).

Improved health status has brought about a subsequent rise in life expectancy of the average person from 40 years in 1970 to 61.5 years by 1995. And while males outlived females by 2.5 years in 1975, as of 1995 Pakistani females outlive their male counterparts an average of two years. (In countries with similar levels of economic development women generally outlive men by five to six years.)

III. Educational Characteristics

III. 1 Educational Enrolments

According to data available from the Central Bureau of Education, there have been dramatic increases in student enrolment between 1981-1994 at the primary, middle and secondary levels. Female enrolments nearly trebled during this period at all the three levels, and yet the girls constitute between 31-37 per cent of all students at these levels (UN ESCAP 1997 p 21).

The above figures mask wide variations in ratios between rural/urban areas as well as across the provinces. In 1984-85 primary enrolment rates were much higher for boys and girls in urban than in rural areas. The rural girl enrolment was one third that of the urban girl.

Table 5 Enrolment Ratios at Primary (I-V) and Secondary Levels (VI-X) by Sex, Province and Rural/Urban Area (1975-76 and 1984-85)

Region	Year	Primary				Secondary			
		Urban		Rural		Urban		Rural	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Pakistan	1975-76	62.2	58.2	49.5	17.7	52.8	30.3	16.8	2.0
	1984-85	67.3	63.5	60.0	21.1	53.9	32.0	16.4	2.5
Punjab	1975-76	64.5	66.8	54.3	23.8	59.5	31.2	20.2	2.7
	1984-85	60.6	68.1	61.5	30.2	55.3	33.7	20.8	4.0
Sindh	1975-76	72.6	53.1	43.6	6.7	44.8	32.8	7.1	1.3
	1984-85	76.0	57.8	54.8	8.9	51.4	34.6	10.9	0.7
NWFP	1975-76	57.1	28.7	45.1	7.4	44.7	18.2	19.1	0.8
	1984-85	71.8	42.0	65.9	11.6	40.1	16.4	17.0	1.1
	1975-76	46.9	29.9	31.6	4.9	34.6	10.1	4.0	0.2
Balochistan	1984-85	64.1	45.8	29.6	3.2	52.2	34.9	3.1	0.2

Source: Mahmood and Zahid 1992 p 19.

Provincial disparities are also visible in Table 5. Sindh has the highest ratio of primary and secondary education enrolment for urban males and females (evidently because of Karachi) but in rural areas only Balochistan has lower ratios, The rural female of Punjab fares the best while the rural female of Balochistan has the lowest enrolment ratio in both primary and secondary education. Between 1975 and 1995, the rural female of Punjab has shown the greatest strides in improvement in the enrolment ratios.

Pakistan's primary school enrolment rates are over-estimated and yet the lowest in the region. In the case of rural women, the low enrolment and high dropout rates are due to poor physical facilities in schools (UNESCAP 1997 p 23):

- long distance to schools (only one third of schools are within a mile radius of any village and public transport is also rare),
- shortage of teachers,
- non-availability of female teachers,
- economic and socio-cultural constraints,
- inadequate government investment in education,
- unsafe school environment.

Shortage of female teachers is the single most important constraint to the raising of enrolments at the primary level in rural areas (WB 1989 vol. II p 5). Though steady increases have been noted over the years, the overall female enrolment percent stays low i.e. in 1993-94 it was as follows:

Primary classes (I-V)	54.9
Middle (VI-VIII)	30.5
Secondary/High (IX-X)	19.4

Undoubtedly the rural female rates would be far less. Though female enrolment in 1993-94 in arts and science colleges was 41 per cent, 25 per cent in professional colleges and 13 per cent in universities, it could be safely assumed that these figures refer to the urban female.

III.2. Educational Attainment

Table 6: Participation Rates in Literacy and Educational Attainment by Sex 1996-97

Educational Level	1996-97	
	% Male	% Female
Literacy	50	25
Primary School	85	58
Middle School	56	35
High School	40	22

Source: GOP (N D.) Education Policy 1998-2110 pp 170-171

The educational status of Pakistani women is the lowest in the world. In 1990 the mean age of schooling for males was 1.9 years and for females 0.7 years. Only 25 per cent of women are literate and within this, the literacy for urban females is five times that of their rural counterparts.

Though literacy rates including female literacy rates have increased since 1961, they are still very low. Table 7 shows the differential gender-wise and area-wise in all age groups. The rural female is at the negative end of the scale.

Table 7: Literacy Rate by Age, Sex and Residence

Age Group	1981	
	Male	Female
All ages 10 and over		
Urban	55.3	37.28
Rural	26.2	7.34
10-14 years		
Urban	48.0	43.1
Rural	24.7	9.3
15-19 years		
Urban	63.3	54.1
Rural	36.2	13.0
20-24 years		
Urban	65.3	48.0
Rural	35.3	10.9
25 years and over		
Urban	53.2	27.6
Rural	22.7	4.6

Source: GOP (N. D.) *Census Report of Pakistan*.

Province-wise literacy rates show distinct differences. In the overall picture Sindh has higher literacy rates but the rural area of Punjab has a higher rate (Karachi boosts the overall ratio). Balochistan has the lowest rural female literacy rate.

Table 8: Literacy Rates by Province, Sex and Area 1981

Province	Rural		Total
	Male	Female	
Pakistan	26.2	7.3	26.2
Punjab	29.6	9.4	27.4
Sindh	24.5	5.2	31.4
NWEP	27.7	3.8	16.7
Balochistan	9.8	.7	1.3

Source: GOP (N.D.) Handbook of Population Census Data

IV. Rural Women and Family Life

IV. 1. Household/Family Structure

In Pakistan family ties are strong and the focus of social life. Family structure is patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal (UNESCAP 1997 p 26). There is a marked division of roles between sexes and though women are limited to house and family work, it does not entail their being homebound.

The rural female is like her urban counterpart, socialised into submission and a home-centred role but she does not enjoy the same accessibility to education, wage employment, exposure to media and knowledge which is leading to a change of the traditional family value systems.

IV. 2. Household size

Population has increased markedly in Pakistan, and the household size has increased from 5.9 in 1960 to 6.8 in 1980. In 1980 the number of persons per household was more in urban than in rural areas, but in Sindh and Balochistan the number was the same for both.

In 1990-91 (Household Integrated Economic Survey 1990-91) the number of persons per household dropped marginally to 6.6 from 6.8 (with a 0.2 drop in rural and urban areas), which might mean a slowing of the trend.

In 1980, 76 per cent of the country's population lived in one or two

room units with an average family size of 6-7 persons. There is high congestion in both urban and rural areas. The Housing Census Reports of Pakistan for 1960 and 1980 show the trend of a drop of nearly 13 per cent in the use of one-room units in urban areas and 6 per cent in rural areas. While the same period shows a 5 per cent increase in two-room housing units for both rural and urban areas.

IV. 3. Household Headship

Men head 90 per cent of Pakistani households. Women may assume this role when widowed or divorced.

IV. 4. Family Formation

Marriage customs and practices show the following salient features:

- women marry early,
- most are arranged marriages,
- preference is for marriage between blood relatives,
- dowry is given to women,
- dower is also given by the groom's family in many cases,
- polygamy is permitted by Islam but not widely practised nor socially acceptable.

The following trends are visible in marriage patterns over the past few years:

- delay in the age of marriage,
- increase in mean age at marriage from 23.4 for males and 17.9 for females in 1951 to 25.5 for males and 20.7 for females in 1991 (UNESCAP 1997 p 31),
- according to the Pakistan Demographic Survey of 1991 the mean age for marriage for urban women is higher (25.5) than rural women (20).

Differences in mean age at marriage for males and females has been narrowing (from 7 years in 1961 to 5 years in 1991 (GOP 1995). The difference is slightly higher in rural areas compared to urban areas (GOP

1995).

Fertility behaviour is affected by religious teachings and socio-cultural norms whereby motherhood is exalted. Lack of education and traditional family systems contribute to high levels of fertility, which has declined as denoted by the completed family size stated earlier. The rural woman has far higher fertility rates than the urban woman. Urban residence and education tend to lower the completed family size. Women with secondary and higher education have on average two children fewer than women who have never been to school (UNESCAP 1997 p 34).

IV. 5. Marital Disruption

Marital disruption is the state wherein a segment of the population lives as widowed or divorced. According to the 1981 Census, more women were widowed compared to men. It could be owing to the following reasons:

- in marriage men are older than women and hence die earlier,
- remarriage for widowed men is a brighter prospect.

In Pakistan, divorce rates are low because of the stigma it carries, and widowhood for women means more vulnerability to societal pressures.

IV. 6. Domestic Violence

Though no data exists, the Pakistan Commission on the Status of Women does note that cases of women's abuse are reported particularly in rural areas and poor urban communities (Pakistan Commission on the Status of Women).

V. General Health of Women

Women have poor nutritional status, coupled with overwork, and this makes for poor general health. Various nutritional surveys show that (UNESCAP 1997 pp 38-39):

- Caloric intake of women is less than men;
- Caloric intake of pregnant and lactating mothers is below recommended levels;
- 45 per cent of pregnant and lactating mothers suffer from non-deficiency anaemia;
- Women are deficient in certain vitamins and minerals compared to

men (especially pregnant and lactating mothers);

- Ill-health of children is due to the poor health of mothers (such children are underweight at birth, die in childhood or are prone to illness throughout their lives);
- Evidently all the above multiply in the case of the rural woman.

V.1. Family Planning Practices

Data (NIPS 1991) according to 1990-91 statistics show that though 80 per cent of "currently married" knew of contraceptive methods, only 18 per cent of these according to the 1994-9? data were using any methods of contraception.

Contraceptive use is higher in urban areas (32 per cent) and lower in rural areas (11 per cent), while differences exist province-wise [4 per cent in Balochistan to 20 per cent in Punjab (UNESCO 1997 p 35)]. According to the Pakistan Contraceptive Prevalence Survey (PCPS) 1994-9? (Rosen and Shanti 1996) nearly 50 per cent of rural females and 60 per cent of urban females wanted no more children.

V.2. Maternal Health

The maternal mortality rate for Pakistan is 300 per 100,000 live births. The poor health of Pakistani women is because of:

- excessive reproduction burden,
- inadequate nutrition,
- lack of proper sanitation facilities,
- heavy physical load,
- inadequate medical care during and after pregnancy.

All this makes the women more vulnerable to different diseases. The situation is more marked in rural areas.

In a 1985 study, the contact of pregnant women to at least one antenatal service stood at 21 per cent for rural women and 60 per cent for urban women. Only thirty-five per cent of the rural population lives within 5 kilometres or half an hour of any fixed health facility (UNICEF 1992).

Table 9: Type of Assistance during Birth

Area	Person Providing Assistance	
	Doctor/Nurse/Trained Birth Attendant	Traditional Birth Attendant
Total	35	65
Total urban	61	39
Major city	70	30
Other urban	48	52
Rural	24	76
Punjab	36	64
Sindh	49	61
NWFP	19	81
Balochistan	52	48

Source: NIPS 1992.

Table 9 shows that in rural areas, only 24 per cent of the births are attended by a trained person. There was a correlation between educational attainment of mothers and delivery assisted by trained personnel.

V.3. Nutritional Deficiencies

Women require three times more iron than men and are less likely to get it. 45 per cent of pregnant and lactating women suffer from iron-deficiency anaemia, and 10 per cent were severely anaemic (WB 1989 p 51). Older women are more anaemic than younger mothers. Caloric and protein deficiency and Vitamin A deficiency is also highest among pregnant and lactating women. Iodine deficiency prevails in the mountainous regions of northern Pakistan. With most deliveries taking place at home, unassisted by trained health personnel, there are increased chances of infection for the mother during and after childbirth. Exposure to smoke and ash from wood stoves makes the rural woman more prone to respiratory diseases.

VI. Rural Women in Economic Life

VI.1. Economic Background

The rural areas of Pakistan are mainly agrarian in structure and the most underprivileged in terms of human and resource development. A vast majority of the rural population live near or below the poverty line. The

poorest are those who have no land holdings and work as agricultural or skilled labour. Rural women are pushed by poverty and other economic/ social pressures (dowry) to seek remunerated work; the majority of the workers are young and unmarried; they are unskilled when they start work (in cottage and small scale industries); and their levels of income are very low—a reflection of the exploitative conditions of work (Nazeer and Aljalay 1983).

Variation exists in the activities of the rural women vis-à-vis the different regions of Pakistan. In the Punjab, the input of females in economically productive activities declines with rise in economic status, as gauged by the size of holdings (Zaman and Khan 1987). This pattern cannot be confirmed in other provinces. Family female workers are more likely to be full-time workers in NWFP (89 per cent) and Sindh (15 per cent). Punjab shows an almost equal division (56 per cent), while in Balochistan a few (17 per cent) are full-time workers. Stricter cultural dictates in NWFP and Balochistan means lower participation rates than in other provinces. Even within provinces, different communities reveal different levels of women's participation in agricultural-related tasks (Saeed 1966; Qadri and Jahan 1982).

The lives of women in these areas are hard because the migration of males to earn alternative livelihoods puts the entire burden on the women and children. The human deprivation index is high in these regions and the highest for the women of these areas.

VI.2. Data Limitations

In this sector limitations in the collection of data cast a shadow on the reliability of the statistics. Women's participation in the labour force in the Population Census is grossly underreported. This could be because of the following reasons:

- Overlap in women's work inside and outside the home. Though housework means money saved it is categorised as unpaid labour and not noted as productive labour;
- In rural areas, the activities of rural women peak or slacken depending upon the season in which the survey is carried out, since there are peak demand agricultural seasons;
- Women themselves do not consider work outside the home productive since it is not "paid". This brings in fake reporting of data (economic activity has an ambiguous definition);
- Underreporting has been noticed when data is collected from men

compared to women respondents (former underreported female activity outside the home);

- Labour force participation rates have been collected in the past by offering different concepts of economically active persons i.e. reference periods, age of respondent and so on. All this makes it difficult for any meaningful comparative analysis of the data thus collected (UNESCO 1997 p 44).
- Available data is not desegregated by gender for variables like household income and women's share in different subsections of major industrial sector or occupational categories.
- Most data on rural employment covers only agricultural households i.e. farm household and livestock holders. These show the female participation rate as 73 per cent (Hussain 1990 p II). However, rural women's participation rates may well be much higher since non-agricultural households are not included. Non-agricultural households constitute 31 per cent of rural households and their females typically have a higher participation rate than women in agricultural households.
- Very few rural women are acknowledged as full time workers, since full time workers are defined as those who do only one particular type of work. Women by virtue of doing house work along with the agriculture related activities are, instead, defined as part time workers. This classification is unfair and needs to be re-assessed.

All the above make it difficult to assess the level of women's economic participation or income or occupational categories by age.

VI.3. Women's Economic Activities

Women play a vital role in economic production especially in rural areas, where they contribute significantly to the development of agriculture, livestock and cottage industries.

Rural women participate in operations related to:

- crop production,
- caring for and rearing of animals and poultry,
- processing and marketing of animal products,

- cottage industries such as brick-making, road laying and the like.

All the above is in addition to their normal domestic chores of:

- cooking,
- care of children,
- fetching water and fuel,
- cleaning, maintaining and even construction of the home.

The rural woman typically works 12-15 hours a day on various economic activities and household chores.

VI.4. Labour Force Participation

Due to gross under-reporting, women are shown as 16 per cent of the economically active labour force (FBS 1993 :Labour Force Survey 1991-1992), though they account for 47 per cent of the total population in the working age group. Rural women's labour force does not include non-agricultural households which account for 31 per cent of all rural households. This brings about skewed information since women's labour force participation is higher in non-agricultural households than in agricultural households.

Rural women's labour participation rates since 1961 have, on the average, been more than double that of the urban female (7.3 for urban females and 16.5 for rural females). This is probably due to the fact that rural life offers greater opportunities for women to participate in economic activities. There are valid reasons for low urban female participation but it is beyond the scope of this paper. It would not be wrong to estimate that a rural woman has a considerably higher labour force participation rate than the 16 per cent projected. In fact, conservative estimates place it between 25 and 45 per cent (Shaheed and Mumtaz 1990 p 24) while others place it at 47 per cent (Hussain 1990 p i). The 1980 Agricultural Census states that the female participation rate in agriculture is 73 per cent compared to 93 percent for rural males. These statistics are very high compared to developed and developing countries. This data does not include non-agricultural households. Clearly, the rural female is far more active in the rural economy than is generally believed (WB 1989 p 21; Shaheed and Mumtaz 1990 p 23). In agricultural households women account for 25 per cent of all full-time workers and 75 per cent of part-time workers across age groups for sexes. Marked differentials are exhibited in labour force participation rates, with

males maintaining much higher rates through 10 + years to 65 + years. Men's rates peak at 25-60 while for women, in general, it is 35-55 years.

VI.5. Labour Force Status

Economically active persons fall under two categories, employed or unemployed. The Labour Force Survey of 1991-92 shows 4.2 per cent as employed and 13.6 per cent females as unemployed. Table 10 also shows that the unemployment rate for urban females are considerably higher than the corresponding rates for the rural female at all ages.

Table 10: Age Specific Female Unemployment Rates by Residence 1991-92

Age	Urban Females	Rural Females
10-11	45.3	39.2
12-14	29.0	15.5
15-19	26.1	15.3
20-24	25.2	12.4
25-29	13.8	9.8
30-34	9.8	6.0
35-39	10.5	9.9
40-44	6.5	5.5
45-49	24.5	5.5
50-54	25.0	16.2
55-59	38.6	19.9
60-64	30.7	23.3
65+	43.5	29.7
All ages 10+	19.2	13.5

Source: GOP 1992

Table 11 below shows the difference in type of activity of the employed female both rural and urban.

Table 11: Percentage Distribution of Employed Females aged 10 years and over by Major Individual Sector and Residence, 1991-92, and 1993-94

Major Industrial Sector	1991-92		1993-94	
	Rural Female	Urban Female	Rural Female	Urban Female
Agriculture, hunting, fishing, forestry	79.4	14.7	12.40	0.18
Mining, quarrying	0.1	0.0	10.35	--
Manufacturing	10.8	32.4	0.88	0.55
Electricity, gas, water	0.1	0.0	0.01	--
Construction	0.9	0.4	0.13	0.03
Trade, hotels, restaurants	2.2	6.7	0.21	0.19
Transport, storage, communication	0.2	1.3	0.04	0.04
Finance, insurance, business services	0.2	0.9	--	0.01
Community social, personal, services	5.6	43.2	0.78	1.15
Activities not adequately defined	0.5	0.4	--	--

Source: 1991-92 statistics FBS 1993
1993-94 statistics GOP 1997 p 92

(In Table 11 above, a discrepancy is evident in the percentages calculated for 1991-92 and 1993-94.) As is true of the country, the majority of rural female tasks are agriculture-related as opposed to community, social and personal services for the urban female, with manufacturing having the second highest urban female percentage. Both combined match the percentage of rural females in agriculture-related occupations.

The occupational structures reflect the pattern of industrial attachment. As a whole, the majority of both males and females of Pakistan are employed in agriculture and related occupations, with the second highest being production, transport and labour occupations (Table 12)

Table 12: Percentage Distribution of Employed Females aged 10 years and over by Major Occupational Group and Residence 1991-92

Major Occupational Group	Urban Female	Rural Female
Professional, technical, related workers	26.4	2.7
Administrative and managerial workers	0.8	--
Clerical and related workers	3.8	0.2
Sales workers	6.7	2.5
Service workers	11.7	2.2
Agriculture and related workers (fisheries)	14.6	79.3
Production, transport operators, labourers	36.0	13.0

Source: FBS 1993

Urban females actually exceed males in percentage terms in the areas of professional, technical jobs, as service workers and in agriculture and related areas. The rural female percentage exceeds the males' in only agriculture and related fields. And the number of rural females at administrative jobs is negligible.

The FBS Labour Force Survey of 1991-92 also shows that female workers in agriculture and related fields are more than males in the province of NWFP, Punjab and Sindh, while it is not so in Balochistan. Here females outnumber males in production, transport and the labourer category of occupation. In all provinces, females outnumber males in the professional and technical group except in the NWFP, with the difference most visible in Sindh.

Since females constitute a very small proportion of the labour force of the country, their proportional share in various occupational groups is also very low. There has been an increase over the years though. Labour Surveys 1984-8J (FBS 1986) to 1991-92 (FBS 1993) show a decline in the female share in agricultural occupations, but increase in professional, technical and service-related occupations.

Educational attainment of employed females is shown in the following table:

Table 13: Percentage Distribution of Employed Females aged 10 years and over by Level of Education and Residence 1991-92

Level of Education	Urban Female	Rural Female
Illiterate	54.2	90.7
Literate	45.8	9.8
No formal education	1.8	1.6
Nursery/Kindergarten	0.1	--
Nursery, but below primary	1.6	1.1
Primary, but below middle	7.9	3.2
Middle, but below matric	5.1	0.9
Matric, but below inter	11.1	0.9
Inter, but below degree	7.0	1.3
Degree and above	11.2	0.8

Source: FBS 1993

The 1991-92 Labour Force Survey reveals that 57 per cent of employed males and 55 per cent of employed females, 60 years and above are illiterate. The difference in literacy between rural females and urban females is significant. As it is, the illiteracy of rural women stands at 90 per cent.

VI. 6. Decision-making within the Family

Despite lack of data, evidence gathered from surveys on limited scales show that women, especially rural women of the Punjab, make decisions more often or as often as men in traditional farm activities such as threshing groundnuts, maize, weeding, husking etc. How applicable this is to other areas of Pakistan remains to be assessed. Several studies, though, point to the greater role women play in decision making than is generally believed (Masood and Mahjabeen 1989). The more income a woman earns the more decision-making authority she wields in the household (Hussain 1990 p 14). They have greater control over income for activities in which they are involved (Freedman and Wai 1988). The social ethos exists whereby the social attitude of 'controlling women' is preserved and perpetuated (Murntaz and Shaheed 1987 p 29). In concrete terms this translates to denying women access to economic, social and political power, thus limiting their decision-making within and without the family. This is more than true for the rural female.

VII. Women in Public Life

At a religious and constitutional level, the women of Pakistan have no constraints on active participation in public life. How socio-cultural and economic factors actually work on the ground in real life is another picture - so much so that seats for women have to be reserved to observe representation in various legislative bodies (except the Senate).

According to the data of the Election Commission of Pakistan, women accounted for 46.3 per cent of the votes in 1988 and 45.5 per cent in 1993, with 46.4 per cent in the Punjab and 42 per cent in NWFP (which was the lowest). Women do not exercise their right of voting in its entirety and in addition feudal/tribal structures do not give them the freedom to exercise their independent judgement (UNESCAP 1997 pp 54-55).

The percentage of women in the National Assembly has grown very slowly from none in 1970 to 2.0 per cent in 1993, and in the Provincial Assemblies from none in 1977 to 0.6 per cent in 1993. In the Senate from 1.1 per cent in 1985 to 2.3 per cent in 1994 (GOP 1995). (In 1988 women representatives peaked to 4.0 per cent in the National Assembly.)

At the local level, reserved seats for women for district councils have increased over the years. Though small in number, it had a significant impact on widening their power base. At the same time, it has also raised questions about the number of seats that need to be reserved for women, the modality for filling these seats, and the extension of the provision to the Senate. (The UN has recommended that women have at least 33 per cent representation in all representative bodies). Political parties have no clear record of female membership and women representation in the decision-making bodies (i.e. in the central executive committee of the two major political parties) is still inadequate. The reason cited by political parties that women are reluctant to come to the political arena is questionable (Report of the Commission of Inquiry for Women 1997 p 10).

The urban female has representation in the professional and technical occupational services, which does not hold true for the rural female. The urban females have a comparatively larger share of 1.0 per cent at grades 16-22 than at grade 1-15 (4.7 per cent), yet not a single woman was in a key decision-making position, either in the executive or the judiciary (grades 21 and 22) (Federal Government Civil Service Census Report 1989). Women have a low marginal share in ministries such as Planning, Finance, Industries, Food and Agriculture, Foreign Affairs and Police. Another area where women are grossly underrepresented is the legal profession.

VIII. Women and Law

Pakistan's present constitution and the various 5-year plans, all uphold the law that there be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone. It is obvious that the case of women has a direct link with constitutional and democratic governance.

According to the Report of the Commission of Inquiry for Women (1997 pp 1-8), there are various laws that need revision so as to safeguard the fundamental rights of women. It also recommends reconsideration concerning The Council of Islamic Ideology, Federal Shariat Court, Eighth Amendment, Judiciary and Fifth Schedule.

Even the Pakistan Citizenship Act (1951) has examples of both conscious and subconscious discrimination against women, and needs appropriate modifications.

The Family Laws of Pakistan are another important arena that needs to be discussed since it affects women very acutely.

VIII.1. The Family Laws

The Family Laws are a blend of codified law and customary law based on religious norms. The Report (*ibid* p 20) has recommended modifications in laws regarding Muslims, non-Muslims, marriage, dower and maintenance, polygamy, termination of marriage, dowry and bridal gifts, the Guardian and Wards Act 1890, Special Marriages Act 1872, Government Servants (Marriage with foreign national) Rules 1962, Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929. In all the above cases, laws showing discrimination against women have been pinpointed.

VIII.2. Labour and Service Laws

Labour and Service Laws exist. But many problems faced by working women are neither identified, nor do minimum standards exist to ensure that women workers can be protected and are not exploited. Recommendations have been made repeatedly to create a non-discriminatory system of laws. The Pakistani female in general faces immense discrimination as a worker outside the home, be it in any capacity. The working rural female specifically needs legislation to safeguard her rights. But, first and foremost, her labour needs to be recognised. As it is the mechanisation of the agriculture sector is reducing her role in this sector (Shuja 1993 p229).

VIII.3. Criminal Laws

Criminal Laws revolve around a patriarchal structure and reinforce a gender biased concept in favour of men (*ibid* p 56). Laws regarding *qisas* and *diyat* leave a wide margin for the discretion of the courts. Gender is apt to be a factor in this exercise. Laws regarding abortion, assault on women, procurement of a minor girl, unnatural offences, sexual harassment, honour-killing as well as Code of Criminal Procedures (*ibid* pp. 62-64), Probation of Offenders Ordinance (p 64) need to be amended so that females do not suffer unnecessarily. Special reference needs to be made to *zina* and *qazf* under the Hudood Ordinances promulgated in 1979. "Both these have direct and indirect discriminatory effects on women" (*ibid* p 65). Nearly half the women prisoners in the jails of Pakistan have been accused of *zina* Considering the fact of low conviction rate of 5 per cent (the Daily Muslim 9-3-93) most cases of *zina* are either false or based on false suspicion. The plight of female prisoners who suffer undue harassment in jails, in some cases with their children, makes this ordinance all the more disturbing. The fact that not a single case involves the wealthy or the privileged shows that exploitation carried out under this law is restricted to those who have no voice or strength to protest against injustices. This law is irrational and has exploited rather than protected women (*ibid* p 74).

Table 14 below shows the disparity in data between *zina* and *qazf* cases:

**Table 14: Federal Shariat Court 1980-87
Province-wise cases of Zina and Qazf**

Region	Zina	Qazf
NWFP	147	1
Sindh	198	0
Balochistan	21	0
Punjab	12,778	33
Islamabad	12,155	9
Total	14,399	43

Source: Report of the Commission of Inquiry for Women 1997 p 67.

VIII.4. Law Regarding Witnesses

The Ordinance regarding witnesses also leaves much to the discretion of the courts. Considering that there are differences of opinion, strict consistency can hardly be expected. And so the law can be seen to be

unfair in taxing the courts with laying down the law, where varying interpretations of Islamic injunctions are possible. It may lead to much confusion and injustice (*ibid* p 76).

VIII.5. Violence Against Women

Violence against women exists at all levels of society and has diverse forms. In recent years it has become a major area of concern and has brought an awareness of its incidence and impact. It ranges from covert acts, that is, abusive language, coercion in marriage, to overt acts such as wife-beating, torture, marital rape, custodial violence, honour-killing, burning, acid throwing, incest, rape, gang-rape, public stripping, trafficking and forced prostitution and sexual harassment (Hassan 1995). Many forms that exist are so entrenched in our culture that they are ignored, condoned or even found acceptable by large sections of our society (Report of the Commission of Inquiry for Women 1997 p 78). For example, social attitudes that the wife is a property of the husband; that whatever happens in a family is a private, internal family matter; that behaviour meted out to the wife was necessary as "corrective measures" all lead to the condoning of acts of violence and abuse towards women in their role as wives.

VIII.6 Statistics Regarding Violence Against Women

Sexual violence in the workplace is largely class-based (*ibid* p 82). A 1992 report found that 70 per cent of women in police stations were subjected to sexual and physical violence and not a single police officer was criminally punished for such abuse (*ibid* p 83). In 1994 two psychologists of Karachi did separate informal studies which had identical findings showing that 20 per cent had suffered unpleasant sexual experiences as children and 30 per cent knew someone who had abused a child (quoted in Khan 1995 p 15). These findings are similar to the child-abuse figures in the West (Report of the Commission of Inquiry for Women 1997, p 84). A 1995-96 research report conducted over 1991-93, indicated that 100 - 150 Bangladeshi women are brought into Pakistan as human cargo every day. And of 200,000 Bangladeshi women in Pakistan, 2,000 languish in jails and shelters and face innumerable problems. Women who are caught suffer, while the real criminals (pimps, agents and even police working with the former two) go scot free (*ibid* p 85-86).

The Hudood Ordinance in 1979 deleted the Pakistan Penal Code provision that treated marital rape as an offence, thus empowering men to negate women's rights. In the case of rural women, it leads to having more children and poorer health.

Apart from the above, there are many other customary practices which aim at preserving female subjugation. Many inhuman practices continue for the custom of *badl-e-sulh*, *karo kari*, *siah-kari*, *swara*, and practice of *kammis* are defended and condoned by society¹ (*ibid* p 87). The practice of *karo kari* and *siah kari* are more prevalent in upper Sindh, but are also practised in the Punjab and Balochistan. These honour-killings target women since they are considered expendable (*ibid* p 88), and owing to the social restraints of the rural environment, are more prevalent in this area. The practice of *walwar* is reported in Balochistan while *Swara* is prevalent in NWFP and the tribal areas.

IX. Conclusions

It is an established fact that the wealth of nations is not totally dependent on financial assets. Surely physical and natural capital contribute to the wealth of a nation, but a bigger share, 64 per cent, is attributed to human and social capital (Haq 1997, pp 15-16). Pakistan's biggest handicap is the deplorably low level of development of human capital. In a holistic scenario, Pakistan suffers from:

- economic deprivation,
- neglect of social services,
- poverty of basic human capabilities,
- galloping population rate.

IX.1. Gender Profile

The following profile indicates the human capital existing in Pakistan.

¹ Note: *Badl-sulh*: barter of girls to settle disputes
Karo-kan: illicit relationship settled by death
Siah-kari: killing of women having an illicit relationship
Swara: marriage of girls to the Quran
Kammas: bonded labour
Walwar: price of bride

Table 15: Gender Profile of Pakistan

	Male	Female
Education Profile		
Adult literacy	4923	
Gross enrolment rate (% of levels 1, 2 and 3) 1993	49	24
Mean years of schooling	2.9	0.7
Health Profile		
Life expectancy 1993	61	63
Maternal mortality rate 1993		340
Total fertility rate 1993		6.1
Women using contraception % 1986-93	12	
Economic Opportunity		
Labour force	72	28
Earned income	81	19
Economic activity rate 15 +1994	88	15
Administrators and managers % in 1995	97	3
Political Participation		
Share in parliament % 1994	98	2
Share at ministerial level % 1995	96	4
HD Indicators		
HDI in 1993		0.442
GDI in 1993		0.383
GEM in 1993		0.165

Source: Haq 1997 pp 25.51

At the outset, it needs to be pointed out that gender disparity does exist the world over. No society has achieved the gender development index (GDI) score of 1.0. But women in Pakistan suffer deprivation many times over. The society as a whole is impoverished, as it is the HDI stands very low at 0.442 (UNDP 1996 p 136). The GDI is even lower at 0.383 (UNDP 1996 p 139) so women as a whole are deprived in many ways.

The data collected in this report clearly show that in Pakistan the rural areas as a whole have less HDI factors than urban areas. For example (UNDP 1996 p 171):

- 66 per cent of the population live in rural areas,
- 35 per cent of the rural population has access to health services,
- 71 per cent of the rural population has access to safe water.

- 19 per cent of the rural population has access to sanitation.

The above data amply points out the utter neglect of the female population which is even more so for the rural female since she belongs to an area where all the negative factors are highly pronounced. The needs of the rural woman cannot be divorced from the overall situation that exists in Pakistan. The lot of women and specifically the rural woman can be bettered by an improvement in the country's HDI. This is not to say that GDI depends on HDI. In Pakistan, GDI improvement also depends upon changes in intangible factors such as "attitudes" towards women.

The profile of the rural woman that emerges from the foregoing data is that:

- Rural women, despite male migration to urban areas, are outnumbered by men. Rural women outnumber rural men between the ages 0-4 and 35-44 years. But though dependency ratios are higher for rural females as compared to urban females, this is questionable in the light of the fact that economic participation rates of rural females shown in existing literature need to be revised and restated.
- Rural women tend to marry at an earlier age (with fewer in the "never married" category) making for longer years of reproduction and more children.
- Though there has been a dramatic increase in female enrolments in the educational system, rural female enrolment is still one-third of the urban female. This is one sector where provincial disparities are visible, with the rural women of the Punjab showing the maximum strength and improvement, and Balochistan the lowest enrolment rates. By way of educational attainment, it is obvious that while rural females have made strides at the primary level, there has been very little increase at the secondary level. Higher education enrolment is negligible.
- The rural woman submits to the socio-cultural role delineated for her within the home-related focus of the female role in general. Earlier marriage translates into higher fertility rates for the rural woman, and this is buttressed by lack of education and stronger ties of traditional family systems. These very reasons lead to a poor incidence of family planning practices in rural areas, despite the fact that 50 per cent of rural women want no more children.
- Pakistani women have poor nutritional status, and, coupled with

overwork, it makes for poor general health. The rural woman suffers from under-nutrition compared to the rural male, or the urban female. And coupled with higher fertility rates and inadequate care during and after pregnancy it leads to poor general health.

- Considering the limitations of conflicting data, the role of the rural woman in economic life is not difficult to assess. It is evident that women play a vital role in economic activity in rural areas. Almost all rural women work. In fact they do double their share of work. In addition to their normal housework, they actively participate in crop production, poultry and animal rearing and cottage industries. Rural women are involved in agriculture-related activities and as such outnumber males in agriculture-related fields in the Punjab, NWFP and Sindh. It would be reasonable to assume that 80 percent of the rural females are involved in economically productive work.. Rural women are erroneously stated as unproductive. The percentage of rural females in professional and technical fields and service areas is considerably smaller within administrative areas.
- Despite assertions to the contrary, rural women make decisions as often as men in farm activities. It could be that she exercises this control in areas where she is involved. As it is, the decision-making authority of the female increases with her ability to generate income.
- Rural females show a negligible presence in public life. The reservation of seats for women at district council levels has had a significant impact on widening their power base. Though there are women elected to public offices who are rural area-based, they belong to the privileged class, mostly with a feudal background. They are possibly as far removed from the plight of the rural woman as the urban female/male. Unfortunately, major decisions that affect the lives of women in the form of laws and policies are made primarily by male-membership bodies with virtually no participation by women. Hence, many existing laws are discriminatory and most policies marginalise women. Considering that the rural woman's participation is literally negligible, it is safe to conclude that policies/laws that safeguard the interests of rural women are a remote possibility.
- The present Constitution of Pakistan and various Laws and Acts of the country show conscious and subconscious discrimination against women. Coupled with lack of education, this creates poor legal status of the rural woman. The rural woman is most affected by

Family Laws of Marriage, Divorce and Inheritance. This is worsened by the fact that women are not treated as equal participants in the economic and socio-political life of the country. Rural women contribute to work outside the home and yet continue to play the role of homemakers single-handedly. No law exists that could help recognise these contributions and hence give them security. Within the ambit of labour laws, certain sectors of the economy such as agriculture, are excluded. This leaves the rural woman unprotected. Being considered an informal sector of the economy, it not only goes unmeasured and unrewarded, but also unprotected by law. And since rules that exist provide protection to the female factory worker, many women who are home-based fall outside the protection of these rules. Family Laws generally, and the Hudood Ordinance—*zina* and *qazf*—specifically show a bias against females. Abundant evidence exists to show that the result of the Zina Ordinance has been the victimisation rather than the protection of women, and more so for the least privileged members of society. Since rural women fall under this category, it can safely be concluded that they face the maximum brunt of the inadequacies that exist in the legal system and its pattern of execution.

- Reported cases of violence against women, at home or at the workplace are class-based. Very few cases pertain to women of the privileged class. Taking into consideration the possibility of under-reporting for this class, it can be safely assumed that women belonging to poor urban or rural areas are more hard-hit by such like social attitudes and norms. Furthermore, the family structure, living and environmental conditions, economic dependence of the woman upon the man, and social censure all add to conditions which make for the helplessness of the rural women to counter violence directed at her. In the light of the foregoing data, laws that do exist for guarding the rights of women in general, show definite shortfalls leaving much to the discretion of the courts. Hence, execution of these laws increases the possibility of discrimination against rural women. The above situation is compounded by the rural woman's lack of awareness of her rights and negation of her economic contributions.

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