



## **Women Empowerment in Pakistan: Multilevel Measurements, Spatial Differences, and Contributing Factors**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Based on Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS) 2017-18 data covering a sample of 15068 currently married females aged 15-49 years, the study intends to investigate the women empowerment situation across the regions and districts of Pakistan as well as to explore the factors affecting women empowerment in Pakistan. An index of women empowerment (ranging from score 0 to 7) was constructed by taking the sum of the seven indicators on the five dimensions: woman's participation in decision making, awareness, employment, self-esteem, and financial inclusion status. The extent of women empowerment regarding each particular indicator is gauged (in percentage) at a national level as well as at regional and district levels. Regarding each particular indicator of women's empowerment, spatial differences exist across the country at the regional and district levels. At the country level, women empowerment is poor in Pakistan. Nearly 86% of respondent women said they were currently not working (unemployed). Similarly, 92% said they did not have an account in a bank or financial institution. At the same time, 57% percent of women reported that they do not own a mobile phone, 87% indicated that they never used the internet, and 40% stated that they were not watching television. At the country level, the women empowerment index's mean score was 2.14. The mean score of the women empowerment index at the regional level stood between 0.52 (in FATA) and 3.43 (in ICT), whereas at the district level, the mean score of the index stood between 0.03 (in South Waziristan) and 4.82 (in Hunza). Out of a total of 143 districts in Pakistan, in 13 districts, the mean score of the women empowerment index remained less than 1. Findings of the ordered logit regression showed that women's higher education, age, husband's higher education, household wealth status, female headship of household, number of living children, and belongingness to the urban area are positively associated with the empowerment of women.



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## 1. Introduction

Women and girls account for half of the world's population, and their empowerment is important for sustaining economic growth and social progress. Still, for women and girls, gender inequality is a daily reality. It starts shortly after birth and lasts the rest of a woman's life. Despite significant progress in recent history, women in all countries and at all socioeconomic levels can experience a variety of unfair treatment, including discrimination, harassment, domestic violence, and sexual abuse.

Forced marriage, honor killings, denial of education, land and property rights, and lack of access to jobs and health care are some abuse prevalent in certain countries or cultural situations. One out of every three women in the globe has been subjected to sexual or physical violence at home, in her community, or at work. Human rights violations can occur at any stage during a woman's career, including during the recruitment, hiring, promotion, and termination procedures and in daily contact with coworkers and supervisors.

Women are typically particularly sensitive to the social and environmental consequences of commercial operations outside the workplace. Women and girls, for example, are primarily responsible for fetching and hauling water in many underdeveloped nations. When company operations contaminate local sources, they bear the burden of trekking, often for hours, to the nearest replacement, which can prevent them from working or attending school.

Gender equality refers to "the social qualities and possibilities associated with being male and female, as well as the connections between women and men, girls and boys, and women and men," according to the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). These characteristics, opportunities, and connections are socially built and learned through socialization.

Furthermore, gender equality refers to "women and men, as well as girls and boys, having equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. Equality does not imply that men and women will become equal, but that women and men's rights, duties, and opportunities will not be determined by whether they are born male or female."

In many cases, the full involvement of women in the workforce would boost national growth rates by double digit percentage points. Gender equality advancements have a ripple impact on all aspects of sustainable development, from lowering poverty, hunger, and even carbon emissions to improving the health, well-being, and education of entire families, communities, and countries, according to evidence from around the world. "Equality between men and women is viewed as a human rights issue as well as a requirement for, and an indication of, sustainable people-centered development," according to the report (Blackwell, 2018).

There will be no discrimination based on gender, according to Article 25 (2) of the Pakistani Constitution. As a result, plans and policies for promoting gender equality, women's rights, and empowerment have steadily changed in light of their major impact on long-term socioeconomic development. Women account for 51% of the total population and 22.7% of the workforce. Women's status remained in the shadows despite their recognized constitutional, legal, and religious rights. To enable people to contribute to socioeconomic growth actively, their safety, well-being, empowerment, and involvement must be strengthened. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan are among the SAARC member states with the region's lowest levels of social and economic development. The goal of Vision 2025 and the upcoming

11th Five-Year Plan is to create an enabling environment and equal opportunities for women to reach their full potential and benefit from economic growth, prosperity, and social development as a result of initiatives taken by the federal and provincial governments, as well as by stakeholders. Women have equal access to all development benefits and social services under Pakistan's National Policy for Development and Empowerment of 2002. A consistent structure and rules will be required for women's growth to be fair across all regions. Pakistan has pledged to meet the Millennium Development Goals, particularly MDG-3, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, and MDG-5 enhancing maternal health and is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have been replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and much work remains to be done to achieve long-term goals for women's development. The Pakistan National Policy for Development and Empowerment, adopted in 2002, establishes a strong foundation for ensuring women's equal access to development benefits and social services. According to Pakistan's MDGs Report 'Gender Parity Index in Schools' (2013), the GPI at the primary level is 0.9, the secondary level is 0.8, youth literacy is 0.81, women's wage employment in the non-agriculture sector is 10.45%, and women's involvement and holding seats in Parliament is 22.2 percent. 60 seats in the National Assembly are designated for women nominated from provinces out of 342 MPs (Punjab 35, Sindh 14, KPK 8, and Balochistan ). In addition, 14 women are represented in the National Assembly, with 74 seats (20 percent).

During the 2014-15 fiscal year, Pakistan took several steps to promote women's growth and empowerment. Women's participation in decision-making has been increased, particularly in Punjab, through significant measures such as land reforms, which have ensured women's land ownership, day-care facilities for working women's children, and the development of women crisis centers around the country. National Plan of Action, Gender Reform Action Programs, Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), National Rural Support Program (NRSP), Pakistan Bait-ul-Maal, First Women Development Bank, and National Commission on the Status of Women are all notable women-friendly programs. Women development departments have been established in provinces where the 18th Constitutional Amendment has empowered. These departments lead in establishing working women's hostels, daycare centers, women's crisis centers, and shelter homes, among other things (Initiatives, 2016).

Young women's participation in social activities is nonetheless hampered by persistent standards, notwithstanding variances in their application based on rural-urban, geographical, and socioeconomic status. Their participation in official political processes has continuously improved, but it is still insufficient compared to their demographic proportion. Only 85% of women aged 18 and over have CNICs, even though nearly 12 million are not registered voters.

Scholarships, dowry support, maternal care, restricted skills training, and loans are all available to young women under social protection policies. Most cash transfer programs do not consider unmarried young women because they depend on family support (e.g., BISP).

Women's decision-making is equally important. Most young women rely on their male family members to make life decisions, including school, economic opportunities, marriage, healthcare, and home purchases. The level of dependency varies by region, rural/urban location, and social/cultural norms, such as in ex-FATA or Balochistan, where leaving the house for any reason is culturally prohibited. As a result, young women cannot pursue their goals or achieve social and economic security.

Physical violence is far more common than sexual violence, and it is more prevalent in rural regions than in urban areas and in KP, Balochistan, and ex-FATA. There are no comprehensive statistics on violence against women by age or form of violence. Punjab's WESW Survey 2018 is the country's only one that establishes a baseline for the province. The PDHS,

which includes ever married women, finds that 44 percent of young married women and a similar number of young males believe a husband is justified in abusing his wife. During the previous 12 months, 14% of married young women experienced marital physical violence, and 4% experienced spousal sexual violence. Most survivors do not tell anybody about their ordeal and do not seek medical or psychological care. Women survivors of abuse, particularly young women, do not have easy access to support services (shelters, helplines, and legal assistance).

Young women's literacy rates and school enrolment have improved, and evidence suggests that the next generation of young women will have an advantage over today's 15–29-year-olds. Girls (10-14 years old) have a higher literacy rate (72%) than female youth (15-29 years old) (63%) or older adult women (30-40 years old) (45%). An alarming 48 percent of female youngsters (ages 15-24) are not in work, education, or training. In rural areas, the GPI for girls drops from 85 in primary schools to 70 in middle and high schools. Only 14% of young women have completed secondary education, and only 17% have completed Matric.

Only 21% of young women (ages 15-29) are in the labor force, compared to 72% of young men. When enhanced work is factored in, female labor force participation jumps from 21% to 34%. Agriculture employs 61 percent of young women, manufacturing employs 21 percent, and community, social, and personal services employ 16 percent. Employed young females earn a median pay of PKR 7000 per month, compared to male peers who earn PKR 14000 per month, resulting in a 50 percent wage disparity. The salary disparity is greater for women without a high school diploma, but it narrows to 17% for women with a high school diploma among workers with a bachelor's degree or higher.

In Pakistan, not all young women have access to the internet. Permission is required to use a mobile phone or access the internet. One out of every three people is prohibited from using a cell phone. Over three-quarters of women in each province do not have access to or use a mobile phone, yet many do. Only 3% of the population has a bank account. Education, possessing a cellphone, using the internet, and knowing how to operate a computer are all characteristics that affect young women's financial inclusion (Women, 2020).

## **2. Literature Review**

Women's empowerment has gained higher importance nowadays because it strongly correlates with many development outcomes. It implies the fifth Sustainable Development Goal to be achieved by 2030. Considerable literature has emerged on the concept of women empowerment to indicate its dimensions and the factors affecting women empowerment.

Education is an important socioeconomic determinant for developing skills, society, and empowerment. Many researchers have used women education as an independent variable to measure its effects on women empowerment. Each study has approved its positive association with women empowerment. A woman gets more and more education, she becomes aware of her rights, due to which she becomes more empowered (Baig, Nusrat, & Bano, 2020; Chaudhry & Nosheen, 2009; Faridi, Chaudhry, & Anwar, 2009; Haleem, Nabi, & Hussain, 2021; Sanawar, Islam, Majumder, & Misu, 2016; Shetty & Hans, 2015; Mariam A Soharwardi & Ahmad, 2020; Upadhye & Madan, 2012; Varghese, 2011). Hence, in the light of previous literature, we formulate our first hypothesis and assume that:

H<sub>1</sub>: Education has a positive effect on women empowerment in the context of Pakistan

Wealth status also matters in the empowerment of women. If a woman is financially strong, she can take decisions about her life, and her living standard will also improve. Many researchers have used household wealth as a determinant in studies regarding women's empowerment (Abbas, Isaac, Zia, Zakar, & Fischer, 2021; Haleem et al., 2021; Mariam A

Soharwardi & Ahmad, 2020; Varghese, 2011). The previous literature guides us in formulating research hypotheses relating to wealth and women's empowerment:

H<sub>2</sub>: Household's wealth status has a positive effect on women empowerment in the context of Pakistan

Women's age is also an important factor in determining women empowerment. Many studies have shown that as women age increases, she becomes more empowered. She takes part in decisions and also gains importance (Abbas et al., 2021; Awan & Naqvi, 2016; Baig et al., 2020; Batool, Rehman, & Ashagar, 2020; Faridi et al., 2009; Haleem et al., 2021; Kazembe, 2020; R. E. A. Khan & Noreen, 2012; Menon & Sharma, 2020; Nayak & Mahanta, 2009; Niaz & Iqbal, 2019; Upadhye & Madan, 2012). In the light of previous literature, a research hypothesis relating to a woman's age and her empowerment status can be formulated in the context of Pakistan:

H<sub>3</sub>: Woman empowerment increases when a woman turns older

In their research work, many researchers use a number of living children. Some studies have been showing a negative association between women's empowerment and the number of children that a woman has (Abbas et al., 2021; Faridi et al., 2009) while some studies predict that the woman having more children are more empowered as compared to a woman that has fewer children (Niaz & Iqbal, 2019). Here, we formulate our research hypothesis relating to the number of living children and women empowerment as:

H<sub>4</sub>: In the context of Pakistan, having more living children makes a woman more empowered and vice versa

The household head plays a vital role in empowering the family. In a family where the household head is a woman, the women of that family will be more empowered than the women having a male as the household head (Paul, Sarkar, & Naznin, 2016). Here, we formulate our research hypothesis relating to the gender of the household's head and women empowerment as:

H<sub>5</sub>: As compared to male headed households, women are more empowered in the female headed households

The region has a significant impact on the empowerment of women. There are many regional disparities in Pakistan. Opportunities for women also vary from region to region. Many studies showed that the women of Punjab and ICT are more empowered than the other regions (Mahmood, 2002; Nayak & Mahanta, 2009). In the context of Pakistan, we formulate our research hypothesis relating to region specificity and women empowerment as:

H<sub>6</sub>: As compared to those living in Punjab province, women are relatively less empowered in the other regions of Pakistan

The area in which a woman is living has a significant impact on her demographic and economic status. Most studies have proved that women living in rural areas are less empowered than those living in urban areas (Haleem et al., 2021; Kazembe, 2020; Mahmood, 2002; Nayak & Mahanta, 2009; Paul et al., 2016). At the same time, some studies have predicted that women in rural areas are more empowered (Sanawar et al., 2016). At this point, the research hypothesis relating to the area of residence and women empowerment seems appropriate as:

H<sub>7</sub>: Women residing in the rural areas of Pakistan are relatively less empowered as compared to those living in the urban areas

Husband education is also a very important factor that has a significant impact on the empowerment of women. Different researchers have taken Husband education as an independent variable to determine the level of women empowerment. Their work has shown a positive association with women empowerment (Baig et al., 2020; Chaudhry & Nosheen, 2009; Faridi et al., 2009; Haleem et al., 2021; Sanawar et al., 2016; Shetty & Hans, 2015; Mariam A Soharwardi & Ahmad, 2020; Upadhye & Madan, 2012; Varghese, 2011). Keeping in view the prime importance of education of her own as well as of her husband, the following research hypothesis seems appropriate:

H<sub>8</sub>: Educational status of her husband has a positive effect on the empowerment status of a woman in Pakistan

The employment status of women also plays a vital role in their empowerment. An employed woman is financially stable. She can fulfill her wants or desires and takes decisions on her behalf as compared to the unemployed woman (Chaudhry & Nosheen, 2009; Haleem et al., 2021; Paul et al., 2016; Sanawar et al., 2016; Mariam Abbas Soharwardi, Khan, & Khalid, 2015).

Violence against women in any form reduces their self-esteem and empowerment. To empower women, we have to eliminate violence and harassment towards women. This is a major obstacle in the way of women empowerment. Women who face any violence at any place or level are less empowered than women who are not facing any violence. Many studies have shown its negative relationship with women's empowerment (Chaudhry, Nosheen, & Lodhi, 2012; S. U. Khan & Awan, 2011; Shetty & Hans, 2015).

Nowadays, media is playing a vital role in every field of life. Also, the media is playing a leading role in women's empowerment. Women exposed to media are more aware of their rights and laws for their social security. Women having access to media are more empowered than those with low or no access to media (Chaudhry & Nosheen, 2009; S. U. Khan & Awan, 2011; Nayak & Mahanta, 2012; Paul et al., 2016; Varghese, 2011).

Literature shows that many studies have investigated different determinants and proxies or dimensions for women's empowerment. Also, in the case of Pakistan, a lot of work has been done in this area. But still, some factors are underexplored. In this study, "*Women Empowerment*" was taken as an outcome variable using *women's economic empowerment, financial inclusion, decision making, self-esteem, and awareness status* as its dimensions. Along with these dimensions, the women empowerment index was calculated, which is not yet calculated in any study to the best of our knowledge. Another gap that this study has covered is the situation of Pakistan at regional and sub-regional levels from the perspective of women empowerment.

### **3. Conceptual Framework of the Study**

Women empowerment is a broad concept. There is no certain definition for women empowerment. Due to its various dimensions, researchers used its different dimensions in their work. Some researchers calculated the index for women empowerment, and some use one or two dimensions as the proxies of women empowerment.

Proxies used in various studies conducted by different researchers are women's decision making in employment and education (Haleem et al., 2021), women political and personal autonomy (S. U. Khan & Awan, 2011), decision making and economic empowerment (Upadhye & Madan, 2012), female labor force participation (Faridi et al., 2009), women's decision making and political autonomy (Chaudhry & Nosheen, 2009), Decision making index, women participation index (Baig et al., 2020), decision making index and Freedom of Movement index (Varghese, 2011), women's work status, awareness, participation in decision making, self-

esteem, self-confidence (Mariam A Soharwardi & Ahmad, 2020), Economic and household decision making (Paul et al., 2016), Decision making, perception on violence (Obayelu & Chime, 2020), Gender equality, decision making, freedom of movement (Menon & Sharma, 2020), Women's decision making (Mariam Abbas Soharwardi et al., 2015), Economic empowerment (Alonge, 2014), selection of spouse of children, purchase of basic goods and decision of household savings (R. E. A. Khan & Noreen, 2012), self-esteem, decision making (Kazembe, 2020), Decision making, economic participation & opportunity (Bushra & Wajiha, 2015), Decision making power (Awan & Naqvi, 2016), Awareness status, access to internet (Akhter & Naheed, 2014), decision making, property ownership (Abbas et al., 2021).

### 3.1 Construction of Women Empowerment Index

Various dimensions have measured women's empowerment. In this study, five dimensions of women empowerment were taken to calculate a composite women empowerment index (WEI). The dimension of "decision making" was measured by women's participation in making decisions about their health. Women's awareness status was proxied through the woman's status regarding watching television, having their mobile, and using the internet. Economic empowerment was calculated by using women's employment status as its proxy. Women's self-esteem was measured by asking her whether or not beating by her husband was justified if she was going outside the home without telling him. Financial inclusion was measured by using women's status regarding having a bank account.

A summative index of women empowerment was calculated by taking the sum of the five dimensions' seven proxies.

**Table 1**  
**Operationalization of Women Empowerment Index**

Dimensions of Women's Empowerment	Proxies	Codes
WE1: Decision Making	A person who usually decides about the respondent's healthcare	Women alone or along with husband = 1, Otherwise = 0
WE2: Awareness Status	Use of Internet	Yes = 1, Otherwise = 0
	Having Own Mobile	Yes = 1, Otherwise = 0
	Watching TV	Yes = 1, Otherwise = 0
WE3: Employment Status	Current Employment Status	Employed = 1, Otherwise = 0
WE4: Self-esteem	Beating is justified if the wife goes out without telling the husband	No = 1, Otherwise = 0
WE5: Financial Inclusion	Having Bank Account	Yes = 1, Otherwise = 0
WEI: Women Empowerment Index	WEI = WE1+WE2+ . . .+WE5	WEI Score range: 0 to 7

### 3.2 Women Empowerment Categories

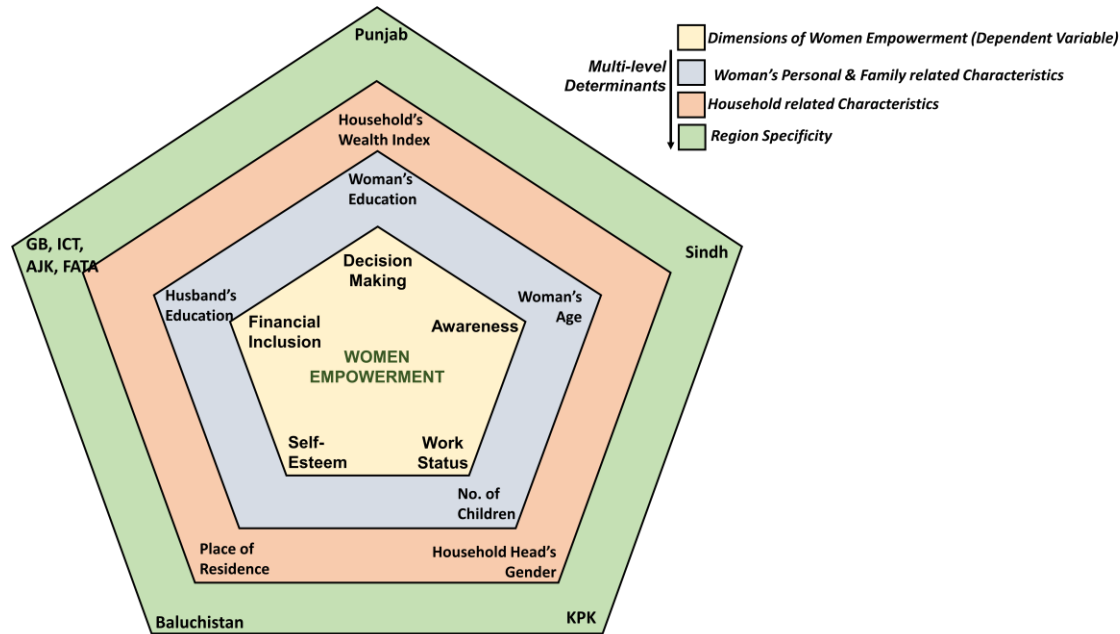
**Table 2**  
**Categorization of Women's Empowerment**

	Women Empowerment Index Score	Women Empowerment Categories
<b>Women Empowerment</b>	0	Completely Disempowered
	1 to 2	Less Empowered
	3 to 4	Moderately Empowered
	5 to 6	Highly Empowered
	7	Fully Empowered

Based on the score of the index of women empowerment (ranging between 0 representing complete disempowerment and 7 representing full empowerment, the categories of women empowerment are given in table 2 above.

### 3.3 Determinants of Women's Empowerment

In the current study, women empowerment is modeled as an outcome of multilevel attributes. Women's personal and family related characteristics, household related characteristics, and region specificity, respectively, constitute the individual, household, and region levels. A woman's personal and family related characteristics include the woman's age, educational level of the woman, educational level of her husband, and the total number of living children of the woman. Household level characteristics comprise the household's wealth status, the area of residence of the household, and the gender of the household's head. Region level attribute implies toward belongingness of the respondent from any of the eight geographical locations, i.e., Punjab, Sindh, KPK, Baluchistan, Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK), and Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA). A schematic diagram of women empowerment's multilevel correlates is given below (see figure 1).



**Figure 1: Dimensions and Determinants of Women Empowerment**

## 4. Data and Methodology

### 4.1 Model Specification

The following is the functional form of the model specified to investigate the enablers and barriers to women empowerment in Pakistan.

$WEI = f(\text{age, respondent's education, husband's education, No. of children, gender of household head, household wealth status, region area of residence})$

Based on the above functional form of the model, the econometric form of the model can be as follows:

$$WEI = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{age} + \beta_2 \text{respondent's education} + \beta_3 \text{husband's education} + \beta_4 \text{household wealth status} + \beta_5 \text{no. of children} + \beta_6 \text{gendre of household head} + \beta_7 \text{region} + \beta_8 \text{area of residence} + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$



## 4.2 Sample and Data Source

The data for this study was taken from Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017-2018. Women empowerment status has been gauged by constructing an index. A sample of 15068 currently married females aged 15-49 years was taken to gauge their empowerment status and investigate the correlates of women empowerment.

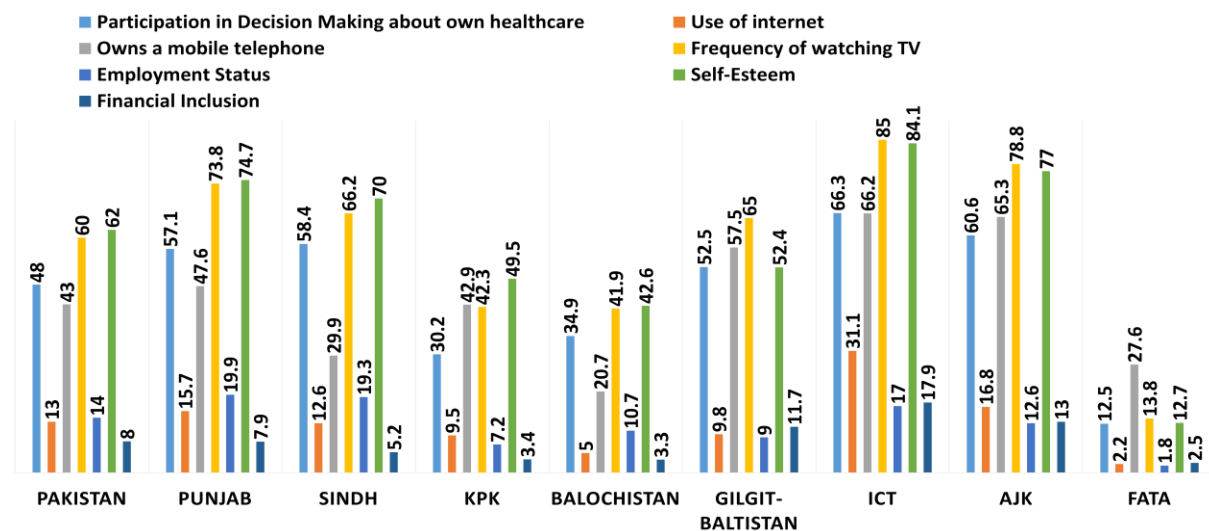
## 4.3 Estimation Techniques

Descriptive statistics are used for national, regional, and district empowerment measurements. To estimate the enablers and barriers to women empowerment, the ordered logistics regression technique was employed using SPSS version 21. Ordinal logistic regression is a method that can be used to check the relationship between an ordinal response variable and one or more explanatory variables. The outcome variables can be continuous and categorical (Parry, 2016). The ordered logit model (cumulative logit model) estimates the effects of independent variables on the log odds of having lower scores on the dependent variable (Adepoju & Adegbite, 2009). The purpose of using ordinal scales is to categorize individual probability or likelihood judgments (O'Connell, 2006). The current study's ordinal variable has clear categorical orders, comprising five categories concerning women's empowerment status.

## 5. Results and Discussions

### 5.1 Dimensions and Indicators of Women Empowerment: Multilevel Comparisons

At the national level, nearly 48% of women (66.3% in ICT whereas 12.5% in FATA, 87% in Karachi South while 3% in Dera Bugti, Pishin, FR Bannu, & South Waziristan) reported that decisions regarding their health care are made by their own. Nationally, only 13% of women (31.1% in ICT while 2.2% in FATA, 52% in Hunza, and 0% in 39 districts of Pakistan) said that they had used the internet in the last 12 months or before. Across the country, 43% of women (66.2% in ICT whereas 20.7% in Balochistan, respectively 84%, 83%, 81% in Poonch, Hunza, and Abbottabad districts whereas 0% in 11 districts of Pakistan) reported that they own mobile phone. At the country level, 43% of women (66.2% in ICT whereas 20.7% in Balochistan, respectively 84%, 83%, 81% in Poonch, Hunza, and Abbottabad districts whereas 0% in 11 districts of Pakistan) reported that they own mobile phone. At the country level, 60% of respondent women (85% in ICT while 13.8% in FATA, 100% in Jamshoro and Shikarpur, whereas 0% in 6 districts of Pakistan) stated that they were watching television daily or at least once a week.



**Figure 2: Situation regarding women empowerment indicators at the national and regional levels**

Nationwide, 14% of respondent women (19.9% in Punjab while 1.8% in FATA, 51% in Jacobabad, and 0% in 14 districts including FR Bannu, & South Waziristan) said that they were currently working (employed). While asking if the beating was justified if the wife goes outside without telling the husband, overall, 62% of women (84.1% in ICT whereas 12.7% in FATA, 100% in Mandi Bahauddin while 0% in Washuk and Orakzai Agency) negated the attitude towards wife beating. Nationally, only 8% of women (17.9% in ICT, whereas 2.5% in FATA, 45% in Hunza, and 0% in 51 districts of Pakistan) said they had an account in a bank or financial institution.

## 5.2 Women Empowerment Index Score at National, Regional, and District Levels

Overall in Pakistan, the average or mean value of the women empowerment index is 2.14. ICT is the most empowered region in the context of women empowerment. In the context of women empowerment, FATA is at the bottom among the regions of Pakistan. In Pakistan, the score of WEI is between 0.0336 and 5. In the case of Pakistan regarding Women WEI (Mean score), Hunza, Lahore, and Karachi South are the top three districts where the high mean score of WEI exists, which are 4.8276, 3.9433, and 3.9412, respectively. South Waziristan Agency, FR Bannu, and Mohmand Agency are the Pakistani districts with the lowest WEI mean score, which is 0.0336, 0.0603, and 0.2941, respectively. In 13 districts of Pakistan, the mean score of the Women Empowerment Index (WEI) is even less than 1.

**Table 3**  
**Women Empowerment Index Score at the National and Regional Levels in Pakistan**

Regions	Women Empowerment Index (Mean Score)
Punjab	2.7318
Sindh	2.3677
KPK	1.6252
Balochistan	1.6180
GB	2.4533
ICT	3.4306
AJK	2.8673
FATA	.5276
<b>Overall Pakistan</b>	<b>2.1489</b>

In Punjab, the Women Empowerment Index score was between 1.2 and 3.9. In the case of Punjab, according to WEI (Mean score), Lahore, Islamabad, and Gujranwala are the top three districts where the high mean score of WEI exists at 3.9433, 3.4306, and 3.357, respectively. Rajanpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, and Okara are the districts with the lowest WEI mean score, which is 1.2188, 2.0000, and 2.1194, respectively. In Sindh, the score of WEI is between 1.2 and 3.9. In the case of Sindh regarding WEI, the Mean score, Karachi South, Karachi Central, and Karachi East are the top three districts where a high mean score of WEI exists, which is 3.9412, 3.7107, and 3.6348, respectively. Tharparkar, Dadu, and Sanghar are the Pakistani districts with the lowest WEI mean score, which is 1.2000, 1.3390, and 1.6269, respectively. In KPK, the score of the Women Empowerment Index is between 0.4828 and 2.98. In the case of KPK regarding Women Empowerment Index (WEI; Mean score), Abbottabad, Malakand Protected Area and Mansehra are the top three districts where a high mean score of WEI exists at 2.9825, 2.8148, and 2.4754 respectively. Hangu, Upper Dir, and Tank are the Pakistani districts with the lowest WEI mean score, which is 0.4828, 0.7759, and 0.7848, respectively.

In Balochistan, the score of WEI is between 0.4356 and 2.7. In the case of Balochistan regarding WEI, Mean score, Jafarabad, Sibi, and Kech (Turabat) are the top three districts where a high mean score of WEI exists 2.6746, 2.6000, and 2.5789, respectively. Kalat, Sherani, and Kohlu are the Pakistani districts with the lowest WEI mean score, which is 0.4356, 0.6875, and

0.6957, respectively. In Gilgit-Baltistan, the score of WEI is between 1.27 and 4.8. In the case of Gilgit Baltistan, regarding WEI, Mean score, Hunza, Gilgit, and Ghize are the top three districts where the high mean score of WEI exists, which is 4.8276, 2.8719, and 2.8235, respectively. Diamer, Astore, and Ghanche are the districts with the lowest WEI mean score, which is 1.2740, 1.5641, and 1.8200, respectively.

In FATA, the score of WEI is between 0.0336 and 1.2256. Kurram Agency, Khyber Agency, and Bajaur Agency are the top three districts with high mean WEI score, which is 4.8276, 3.9433, and 3.9412, respectively. South Waziristan Agency, FR Bannu, and Mohmand Agency are the Pakistani districts with the lowest WEI mean score, which is 0.336, 0.0603, and 0.2941, respectively. In AJK, the score of WEI is between 1.8043 and 3.5636. In the case of AJK regarding WEI, Mean score, Mirpur, Kotli, and Poonch are the top three districts where the high mean score of WEI exists, which are 3.5636, 3.2897, and 3.2427, respectively. Haveli, Neelum and, Sudhonti, Muzaffarabad are the districts with the lowest WEI mean score, which is 1.8043, 2.1515, and 2.5467, respectively.

### 5.3 Women Empowerment Categories in the Regions and Districts of Pakistan

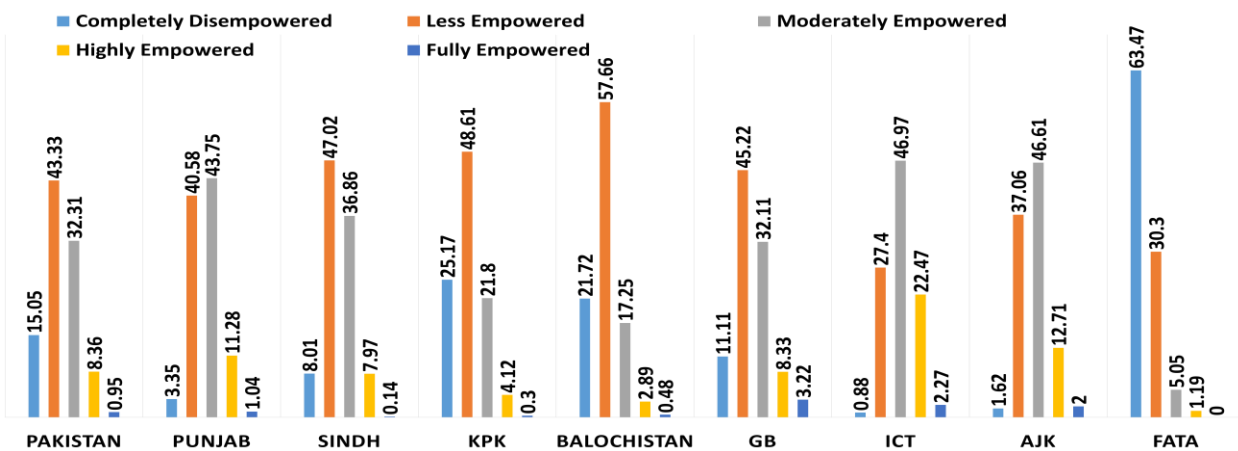
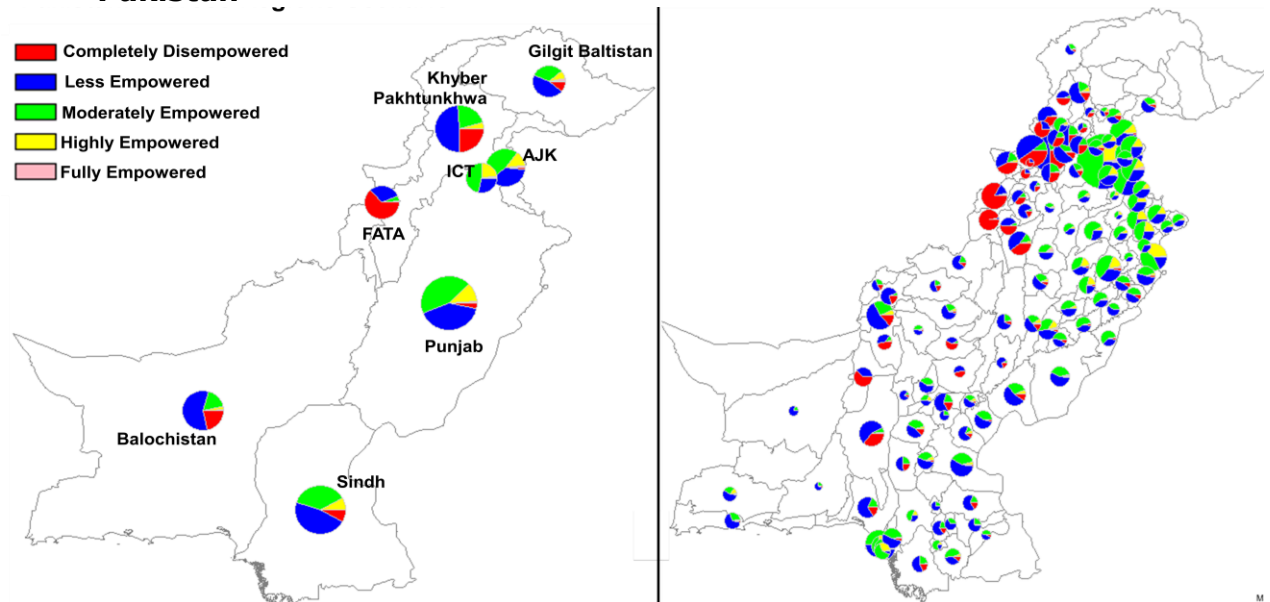


Figure 3: Regions and Districts of Pakistan Regarding Categories of Women Empowerment: Cartographic and Graphical Presentations

**Table 4**  
**Districts of Pakistan concerning the Women's Empowerment**

Empowerment Index (WEI)									Rank orders in the context of WEI in Pakistan	
District	Dimensions of Women Empowerment							WE Index (Mean Score)	National Rank Order w.r.t. WE Index Score	Regional Rank Order w.r.t. WE Index Score
	Participation in Decision Making about own healthcare	Awareness status			Employment Status	Self-Esteem	Financial Inclusion			
		Use of Internet	Owning a mobile	Frequency of watching						
<b>PUNJAB</b>										
Attock	36	5	42	51	27	53	2	2.1525	72	32
Bahawalnagar	34	7	30	73	46	70	3	2.6418	45	23
Bahawalpur	56	7	23	67	45	56	2	2.5472	48	24
Bhakkar	43	10	47	63	18	90	12	2.8333	36	19
Chakwal	42	18	53	84	9	71	13	2.9111	31	15
Chiniot	85	2	45	67	8	83	0	2.9000	33	17
Dera Ghazi Khan	35	8	25	23	27	80	2	2.0000	84	35
Faisalabad	69	22	47	74	7	74	10	3.0279	23	10
Gujranwala	55	30	61	85	10	93	2	3.3571	10	2
Gujrat	51	33	61	71	4	94	6	3.2021	17	6
Hafizabad	52	16	69	64	14	86	12	3.1207	19	7
Jhang	64	23	43	57	11	93	7	2.9889	26	13
Jhelum	46	42	67	92	8	75	0	3.2917	13	4
Kasur	49	4	36	72	8	75	2	2.4632	56	26
Khanewal	45	7	37	72	48	44	0	2.5333	52	25
Khushab	42	8	47	89	11	97	6	3.0000	25	12
Lahore	58	43	76	88	16	97	16	3.9433	2	1
Layyah	46	8	44	39	4	73	0	2.1549	71	31
Lodhran	42	2	29	64	45	47	0	2.2909	62	28
Mandi Bahauddin	50	22	50	83	6	100	17	3.2778	15	5
Mianwali	36	0	21	79	25	71	0	2.3214	60	27
Multan	57	20	42	68	20	61	5	2.7217	43	22
Muzaffargarh	41	10	34	49	21	57	1	2.1341	75	33
Nankana Sahib	54	13	21	71	33	96	0	2.8750	34	18
Narowal	70	12	47	58	5	98	5	2.9302	28	14
Okara	45	4	40	76	10	36	0	2.1194	76	34
Pakpattan	40	0	20	58	24	76	0	2.1778	69	30
Rahim Yar Khan	43	1	24	64	42	50	1	2.2587	64	29
Rajanpur	28	0	0	0	47	47	0	1.2188	121	36
Rawalpindi	59	35	64	82	8	56	7	3.0962	20	8
Sahiwal	69	5	44	78	22	58	5	2.7969	39	20
Sargodha	47	6	44	91	22	94	2	3.0521	21	9
Sheikhupura	70	2	28	90	18	82	0	2.9000	32	16
Sialkot	44	15	54	74	17	88	8	3.0000	24	11
Toba Tek Singh	56	31	68	79	8	84	9	3.3375	11	3

Vehari	37	3	40	85	48	62	2	2.7667	41	21
<b>SINDH</b>										
Badin	59	0	14	49	36	68	4	2.2973	61	12
Dadu	32	0	3	59	0	39	0	1.3390	117	28
Ghotki	62	2	9	68	36	35	5	2.1758	70	16
Hyderabad	23	0	7	67	9	68	0	1.7368	98	26
Jacobabad	42	0	0	38	51	45	0	1.7629	96	25
Jamshoro	69	20	29	10 0	31	89	0	3.3714	9	5
Kambar Shahdadk ot	51	0	8	53	45	80	3	2.3956	58	10
Karachi Central	64	49	72	82	2	87	15	3.7107	4	2
Karachi East	57	40	71	90	9	92	3	3.6348	5	3
Karachi Malir	46	8	35	65	5	64	1	2.2358	65	14
Karachi South	87	32	74	82	6	97	16	3.9412	3	1
Karachi West	47	11	39	67	18	80	5	2.6616	44	7
Kashmore	49	32	27	54	27	61	5	2.5366	51	9
Khairpur	65	0	6	74	28	50	3	2.2653	63	13
Korangi	63	25	57	85	10	87	3	3.3056	12	6
Larkana	43	7	9	63	14	76	3	2.1494	74	17
Matiari	29	0	0	67	14	86	0	1.9524	87	22
Mirpurkha s	44	2	6	44	42	67	0	2.0417	83	20
Naushahro Firoze	74	5	20	79	19	58	0	2.5432	50	8
Sanghar Shaheed	54	1	18	33	28	27	1	1.6269	104	27
Benazirab ad	59	6	15	54	35	33	5	2.0610	79	18
Shikarpur	48	0	22	10 0	15	33	0	2.1852	67	15
Sujawal	69	1	6	27	12	79	2	1.9753	86	21
Sukkur	38	12	26	40	19	59	0	1.9310	90	23
Tando Allahyar	73	19	65	77	12	92	4	3.4231	8	4
Tando Muhamma d Khan	40	0	17	51	20	77	0	2.0571	81	19
Tharparkar	58	0	0	3	2	57	0	1.2000	122	29
Thatta	56	0	3	36	10	68	6	1.7778	95	24
Umerkot	73	0	12	54	15	81	0	2.3462	59	11
<b>KPK</b>										
Abbottaba d	33	16	81	77	14	70	7	2.9825	27	1
Bannu	4	6	44	52	0	13	0	1.1852	123	19
Batagram	39	17	61	30	9	61	4	2.2174	66	5
Buner	23	12	27	38	4	38	0	1.4231	113	14
Charsadda	21	5	23	36	9	43	0	1.3766	115	16
Chitral	18	9	68	32	6	53	6	1.9118	91	7
D. I. Khan	19	1	30	36	5	25	1	1.1788	124	20
Hangu	7	0	10	14	3	14	0	.4828	137	24
Haripur	35	15	47	61	1	79	3	2.4167	57	4
Karak	15	12	44	41	6	24	3	1.4412	111	12
Kohat	18	8	42	50	1	33	0	1.5208	110	11

Lakki Marwat	4	2	46	30	39	17	0	1.3704	116	17
Lower Dir	13	14	43	13	5	51	3	1.4127	114	15
Malakand Protected Area	48	15	61	61	9	87	0	2.8148	38	2
Mansehra	48	18	59	39	8	75	0	2.4754	55	3
Mardan	30	6	41	29	7	50	0	1.6372	103	10
Nowshera	24	12	39	55	5	66	4	2.0438	82	6
Peshawar	29	12	36	47	4	44	4	1.7554	97	9
Shangla	12	0	54	19	0	19	12	1.1538	126	21
Swabi	18	11	53	26	3	32	0	1.4333	112	13
Swat	22	12	36	37	8	69	6	1.9008	92	8
Tank	13	3	24	13	5	19	3	.7848	132	22
Tor Ghar	38	0	28	0	0	66	0	1.3103	118	18
Upper Dir	14	0	26	0	0	31	7	.7759	133	23
<b>BALUCHISTAN</b>										
Awaran	84	5	11	53	26	11	5	1.9474	88	8
Dera Bugti	3	0	0	49	8	11	0	.7027	134	22
Gwadar	81	9	26	49	7	34	3	2.0882	78	6
Jafarabad	21	38	53	97	3	62	3	2.7647	42	1
Jhal Magsi	24	0	0	60	24	60	0	1.6800	101	12
Kachhi (Bolan)	8	0	0	81	23	54	4	1.6923	100	11
Kalat	15	0	1	6	18	4	0	.4356	138	25
Kech (Turbat)	61	18	61	75	12	23	7	2.5789	47	3
Kharan	62	7	24	59	3	34	3	1.9310	89	9
Khuzdar	40	1	7	16	13	24	2	1.0230	130	21
Killa Abdullah	27	0	24	49	0	70	0	1.7027	99	10
Killa Saifullah	19	5	24	38	0	65	5	1.5676	105	14
Kohlu	15	0	0	35	9	11	0	.6957	135	23
Lasbela	30	3	16	39	32	29	4	1.5217	109	17
Lehri	25	0	0	79	0	63	0	1.6667	102	13
Loralai	27	12	31	46	9	88	4	2.1791	68	5
Mastung	27	5	9	20	17	29	3	1.0909	127	19
Nasirabad	19	6	10	81	45	82	5	2.4839	54	4
Pishin	3	0	12	18	3	72	0	1.0789	128	20
Quetta	28	11	34	56	3	69	6	2.0580	80	7
Sherani	13	0	0	0	0	56	0	.6875	136	24
Sibi	24	24	12	96	16	80	8	2.6000	46	2
Sohbatpur	17	0	6	33	33	67	0	1.5556	108	16
Washuk	53	0	28	28	6	0	0	1.1563	125	18
Zhob	26	0	16	26	4	84	0	1.5614	107	15
<b>GILGIT-BALTISTAN</b>										
Astore	49	3	51	26	3	26	0	1.5641	106	9
Diامر	26	0	48	19	5	23	5	1.2740	119	10
Ghanche	28	2	54	51	6	36	5	1.8200	93	8
Ghizer	52	10	67	63	9	68	15	2.8235	37	3
Gilgit	57	16	63	72	7	62	10	2.8719	35	2
Hunza	76	52	83	83	48	97	45	4.8276	1	1
Kharmang	56	0	41	50	6	47	9	2.0938	77	6
Nagar	68	10	42	76	10	54	18	2.7800	40	4
Shigar	46	0	50	65	2	26	9	1.9783	85	7
Skardu	45	11	59	66	7	51	9	2.5000	53	5
<b>ICT</b>										
Islamabad	62	30	62	81	12	84	13	3.4306	7	1
<b>FATA</b>										

Bajaur Agency	10	1	59	1	0	5	17	.9320	131	3
FR Bannu	3	0	1	1	0	2	0	.0603	142	7
Khyber Agency	15	2	35	17	4	30	1	1.0401	129	2
Kurram Agency	10	8	51	32	3	15	5	1.2256	120	1
Mohmand Agency	10	0	1	12	0	6	0	.2941	141	6
North Waziristan Agency	8	3	3	10	3	1	2	.3017	140	5
Orakzai Agency	6	0	28	0	0	0	0	.3333	139	4
South Waziristan Agency	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	.0336	143	8
<b>AJK</b>										
Bagh	70	12	78	50	9	89	10	3.1831	18	4
Bhimber	69	23	50	76	9	73	5	3.0513	22	5
Hattian Bala	70	3	49	68	8	89	5	2.9211	29	6
Haveli	55	2	36	13	5	68	0	1.8043	94	10
Kotli	70	18	67	64	9	86	15	3.2897	14	2
Mirpur	54	35	68	86	15	82	16	3.5636	6	1
Muzaffarabad	65	9	64	58	12	79	7	2.9192	30	7
Neelum	55	0	36	29	3	83	9	2.1515	73	9
Poonch	49	19	84	80	9	71	12	3.2427	16	3
Sudhonti	41	5	69	73	23	40	3	2.5467	49	8

#### 5.4 Determinants of Women Empowerment in Pakistan: Ordered Logit Estimates

Data from Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS) 2017-18 was used in this study to check the situation of women empowerment in Pakistan. A sample of 12339 ever-married females was used in this study. Descriptive statistics were calculated using SPSS and MS Excel to portray the Pakistan landscape at regional and sub-regional levels concerning the Women Empowerment Index (WEI). The Ordered Logit Regression technique was used to analyze socioeconomic factors' impact on women's empowerment. The purpose of using this technique was that our dependent variable, which is an index, has five categories.

**Table 5**  
**Determinants of Women Empowerment: Ordered Logit Estimates**

Main Variable	Categories of the Variables	Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	Df	Sig.
Respondent's Age (in 5-year groups)	15-19	-.674***	.194	12.085	1	.001
	20-24	-.443***	.164	7.330	1	.007
	25-29	-.234*	.159	2.163	1	.141
	30-34	-.012	.158	.006	1	.937
	35-39	.133	.159	.695	1	.404
	40-44	.181	.174	1.085	1	.297
Respondent's Education	45-49	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	0	.
	No Education	-2.27***	.075	915.684	1	.000
	Primary	-1.73***	.079	483.282	1	.000
	Secondary	-1.24***	.067	345.447	1	.000
	Higher	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	0	.
	No Education	-.235***	.063	13.826	1	.000

Respondent's Husband's Education	Primary	-.184***	.068	7.384	1	.007
	Secondary	-.143***	.052	7.489	1	.006
	Higher	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	0	.
	No Child	.146	.220	.442	1	.506
No of Living Children	One Child	.257***	.075	11.870	1	.001
	Two Children	.252***	.063	15.900	1	.000
	Three Children	.223***	.061	13.398	1	.000
	Four Children	.210***	.062	11.452	1	.001
	Above Four Children	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	0	.
Gender of Household Head	Female	.724***	.062	138.429	1	.000
	Male	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	0	.
Wealth Index Combined	Poorest	-1.77***	.085	434.185	1	.000
	Poorer	-1.26***	.076	278.275	1	.000
	Middle	-.918***	.068	183.514	1	.000
	Richer	-.659***	.064	106.402	1	.000
Area (Type of place of residence)	Richest	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	0	.
	Rural	-.254***	.043	35.060	1	.000
	Urban	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	0	.
Region	Punjab	2.741***	.085	1046.19	1	.000
	Sindh	2.662***	.085	981.503	1	.000
	KPK	1.090***	.083	171.799	1	.000
	Balochistan	1.715***	.088	383.180	1	.000
	GB	2.604***	.099	687.700	1	.000
	ICT	2.955***	.105	794.030	1	.000
	AJK	2.794***	.094	891.055	1	.000
FATA	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	0	.	
<b>Pseudo R-Square</b>						
Cox and Snell			.458			
Nagelkerke			.497			
McFadden			.242			

\* significant at 10%, \*\*\* significant at 1%

Age is an important determinant for the estimation of women empowerment. Respondent's age is categorized into 7 groups (15-19, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49). The age group "45-49" was taken as a reference category. The results of ordered logit regression show that women empowerment is positively associated with the age of the women. With the increase in age, the coefficient value also increases. According to the results, as the age of the respondent increase, she becomes more empowered. Our results matched with many previously conducted studies by different researchers (Abbas et al., 2021; Awan & Naqvi, 2016; Baig et al., 2020; Batool et al., 2020; Faridi et al., 2009; Haleem et al., 2021; Kazembe, 2020; R. E. A. Khan & Noreen, 2012; Menon & Sharma, 2020; Nayak & Mahanta, 2009; Niaz & Iqbal, 2019; Upadhye & Madan, 2012).

Education plays a significant role in the growth and development of individuals and society. Respondent's education is divided into 4 categories (No education, primary, secondary, and higher). Higher education is considered the base category. Each level of education has a significant impact on the empowerment of women. Results showed a positive relationship between women's higher education and empowerment. Results showed that more educated woman is more empowered (Baig et al., 2020; Chaudhry & Nosheen, 2009; Faridi et al., 2009; Haleem et al., 2021; Sanawar et al., 2016; Shetty & Hans, 2015; Mariam A Soharwardi & Ahmad, 2020; Upadhye & Madan, 2012; Varghese, 2011).

Like the respondent's education, the husband's education level is divided into 4 categories (No education, primary, secondary, and higher). Higher education is considered the base category. An increase in husband's education leads to the empowerment of women. Results verified that there is a positive association between husband's higher education on women



empowerment (Baig et al., 2020; Chaudhry & Nosheen, 2009; Faridi et al., 2009; Haleem et al., 2021; Sanawar et al., 2016; Shetty & Hans, 2015; Mariam A Soharwardi & Ahmad, 2020; Upadhye & Madan, 2012; Varghese, 2011).

There is a negative but significant relationship between a woman's number of living children and her empowerment. According to the results, as the number of children increases, the value of coefficient decreases, which proves its negative relationship with women's empowerment. Our results are similar to the work of some researchers (Abbas et al., 2021; Faridi et al., 2009) while contradicting some studies (Niaz & Iqbal, 2019). The gender "male" was considered the base category. In a family where the household head is a woman, then women of that family will be more empowered than women having a male as household head. Our results matched some other studies (Paul et al., 2016).

The wealth index is categorized into 5 categories (poorest, poorer, middle, richer, richest), where the "richest" category was supposed to be a reference category. Wealth status is significantly affecting the empowerment status of women. Compared to the base category (the richest), women belonging to the lower categories of wealth have less empowerment. This study's results are similar to previous studies by different researchers (Abbas et al., 2021; Haleem et al., 2021; Mariam A Soharwardi & Ahmad, 2020; Varghese, 2011).

The region has a significant impact on the empowerment of women. Among Pakistan's regions (Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, KPK, AJK, FATA, Gilgit Baltistan, ICT), FATA was taken as the base category. Compared to FATA, women of every region in Pakistan are more empowered (Mahmood, 2002; Nayak & Mahanta, 2009).

The area in which the respondent is living has a significant impact on her demographic and economic status. The urban area was taken as a reference category. Respondents living in rural areas are less empowered than the women living in urban areas. The outcomes of this study are similar to the previously done studies (Haleem et al., 2021; Kazembe, 2020; Mahmood, 2002; Nayak & Mahanta, 2009; Paul et al., 2016) while also different from some studies (Sanawar et al., 2016).

## **6. Conclusion and Policy Suggestions**

By covering a larger sample of 15068 currently married females aged 15-49 years, obtained from PDHS 2017-18, the study not only investigated women empowerment situation across the regions and districts of Pakistan but also explored the factors affecting women empowerment in the country. Women empowerment status was gauged by constructing an index (ranging from 0 to 7) that considers the five dimensions: woman's participation in decision making, awareness, employment, self-esteem, and financial inclusion status. The extent of women's empowerment is measured at national, regional, and district levels. In terms of a composite index as well as regarding each particular indicator of women empowerment, spatial differences have been recorded across the country at the regional and district levels.

At the national level, nearly 52% of women reported that decisions regarding their health care are not made independently. Likewise, nearly fifty-seven percent of women reported that they do not own a mobile phone, 87% indicated that they never used the internet, and 40% stated that they were not watching television. Similarly, about 86% of respondent women told that they were currently not working (unemployed). While asking if the beating was justified if the wife goes outside without telling the husband, slightly more than 38% of women showed a positive attitude towards wife beating. About 92% said they did not have an account in a bank or financial institution. The findings of the ordered logit regression have validated the role of a woman's age, higher education, her husband's higher education, household wealth status,

female headship of household, number of living children, and belongingness from the urban area to her empowerment status.

Education is a key to progress. It raises awareness about rights and duties. Education matters at every level, whether primary, secondary, or higher. When we discuss women empowerment, as the education level of women and their husband's increases, women's empowerment status also increases. That is why we recommend improving the female literacy rate at each level. Government should take steps to increase the enrollment of girls in schools. Wealth status is also a very important factor in determining women empowerment. Our findings proved that as the wealth status of the household improves, the probability of becoming empowered increases. Hence, the government and policymakers should improve people's living standards and increase employment opportunities to uplift them financially. Government should take economic measures to increase economic wellbeing.

Still, a huge gap exists between Pakistan's urban and rural areas. Rural areas are far behind in having all the facilities than the urban areas. Education, awareness, and health facilities provided in the rural areas of Pakistan are very low and insufficient in comparison to urban areas. Number of healthcare centers is also very minimum in rural areas, and people in rural areas have minimum access to education sectors as compared to people living in urban areas. Government should increase educational institutes, particularly for girls in rural areas. There are many disparities in Pakistan at a regional level. Due to these inequalities, they are not of the same or equal status. The empowerment status of women living in KPK and FATA is very low. Geographical targeting could be a feasible mode to allocate resources for women's empowerment. This study may help to point out areas of need, take steps on regional and sectoral priorities, and enable targeted public interventions that could be helpful for governments to allocate funds on a territorial basis properly.

#### **Authors Contribution**

Komal Urooj: literature search, data collection, drafting

Tusawar Iftikhar Ahmad: study design and concept, data interpretation, drafting

Muhammad Azhar Bhatti: literature search, data analysis, data interpretation

Altaf Hussain: critical revision, incorporation of intellectual content

#### **Conflict of Interests/Disclosures**

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest w.r.t the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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