

The factors influencing women to become teachers in Pakistan

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Mahwish Khan is a postgraduate student in CESR and lecturer in the Faculty of Business and Law; her Ph.D. thesis is a study of the feminisation of the education sector in Pakistan. The main aim of this research is to identify the reasons behind the increased participation of women in the education sector in Pakistan and to explore how feminisation impacts upon occupational segregation and the working patterns of male and female teachers. The findings are based on 70 semi-structured interviews with men and women school teachers and faculty members in higher education in Lahore. The study compares public and private sector educational institutions providing primary, secondary, and higher education.

Teaching is considered a 'female' occupation in most countries around the world and the feminisation of the teaching profession is a well-researched topic in developed countries; however, it is an emerging concept in the developing countries, particularly in Pakistan. Traditionally, in Pakistan women's participation in the labour force is lower than men's and literacy rates for women (47%) are also lower compared to men (70%) (Pakistan Economic Survey, 2012). In Pakistan women's labour force participation rate is one of the lowest amongst South Asian countries, but it is nonetheless increasing. With the changing economic situation and high rate of inflation, women are now joining the labour market (Bibi and Afzal, 2012). In Pakistan the inflation rate increased from four per cent in 2000 to nearly 11% in 2012 (Pakistan Economic Survey, 2012); women's labour force participation rate has risen from 16% in 2000 to 24% in 2012 (Labour Force Survey, 2013). Despite this slow increase in women's participation in the labour market, women's activity in the education sector has increased dramatically in Pakistan since 2001. In 1999, 38% of school teachers were women whereas in 2002 the ratio increased to 50% and since then it has been increasing each year (Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2010). This article explores the reasons behind this development.

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The change goes hand-in-hand with the introduction of Education Sector Reforms by the government of Pakistan in 2001 and subsequent expansion of the public and private education sector. These reforms promoted public-private partnership and private investment in the education sector. Consequently, there was increase in the number of schools, colleges and universities which raised the demand for teachers.

The Gendering of Teaching

The sexual division of labour and gendered production and reproduction leads to the sex-typing and gendering of work; “making things and making things happen, is masculine; caring for people, especially reproducing the next generation, is feminine” (Brush, 1999: 161). The cultural construction of masculinity and femininity play an important part in gender based occupational segregation (Crompton and Sanderson, 1990). The association of masculine and feminine traits with particular occupations label them as women’s or men’s work, with occupations associated with masculine

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traits accorded higher value compared to occupations associated with feminine traits. This research argues that cultural beliefs around masculinity and femininity play a vital role in determining the employment of men and women.

The deteriorating economic situation in Pakistan means it has been difficult to uphold the traditional gendered public and private divide and as a result women's participation in the labour market has increased. However, to maintain the traditional power structure and male dominance, occupations are classified as either ‘women’s work’ or ‘men's work’ based on traditional cultural beliefs around masculinity and femininity. A perception prevails in society that not all jobs are appropriate for women because of physical strength and cultural norms; there are limited occupational options for women due to inherent gender bias and social constraints (Sadaquat and Sheikh, 2011). As Bolton and Mozio (2008: 291) have argued: “teaching has historically been numerically dominated by women and its ethos of vocationalism, dedication and nurturance delineates it as ‘women’s work’, drawing on the stereotypical notion of the ‘caring’ female”. Similarly, in Pakistan, teaching is perceived as a ‘women’s job’ and as Hajira, a female professor at a public sector university commented:

“There is a natural preference of females for teaching because many times it is assumed that teaching is an extension of female responsibilities.”

Teaching has been often associated with women's maternal traits (Drudy *et al.*, 2005); it is argued that there is a natural link between mothering and teaching (Pinnegar *et al.*, 2005), that there are certain characteristics common to mothers and teachers and that these traits are helpful in handling children (Stokes, 1997). The interview data showed that both men and women teachers relate teaching to the reproductive role of women. Farida taught young children in a private sector school and expressed the view that children need a motherly figure to feel comfortable outside their homes. She said:

"Children come to school by leaving their mother at home, especially small children; women can understand their feelings better and can attach to them quickly compared to men. For example, although children love their fathers their mothers take care of all their needs and know better how to comfort them. Similarly in schools young children feel more protected with women and consequently there are more female teachers especially in early year teaching around the world."

It is assumed that women have a natural ability to handle children whereas men have to put in extra effort to develop and train in order to become teachers. Saad, a male Professor at a public sector university, commented:

"In my opinion, females are joining the professions which are near to their natural behaviour. It is a nature of a woman to take care and fulfil the needs of children. I think teaching is very similar to motherhood which is a natural role of a woman. [...] I also think women are capable of this challenging job of talking to kids, educating them and patiently listening to them and men don't want to do the hassle."

Bolton and Muzio (2008) argue that in teaching, particularly in the teaching of young children, significance is given to relational or soft skills over technical skills and knowledge. The soft skills are assumed to be part of a natural and fundamental aspect of being a woman. However, the connection of teaching and feminine traits has not been limited to the primary level and a similar connection is developed in the teaching of higher secondary and college level students.

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Teaching is not only regarded as women's job; at the same time, it is not considered a suitable career for men and male teachers face stereotypical attitudes as Irfan, a male teacher of O/A Level students describes:

"Teaching is considered similar to women's work at home. They are perceived as caring and have ability to communicate with children. Therefore, they are considered more suitable in this job than men. As a male school teacher, I have some personal experience, where just because I am a teacher, people assume either I am not very serious about my career or I am unable to find a better job. They can never think that I like teaching and doing it by choice."

The Seclusion of Women

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In Pakistan, culture and tradition play an important role in the choice of profession, particularly for women (Ali, 2000). The sexual division of public and private space has a significant impact on women's lives. Gazdar (2003) argues that the social division of spaces is gendered, the place for males is in the public domain and females belong to private spheres. Although there is a continuum between these two polar positions depending upon factors like age, social class and geographic location, nonetheless the gendered division exists in some form or shape. This division of society has a contradictory impact. On the one hand this discourages women's work outside the home and their productive role in society. On the other hand, there is always a demand of women in particular occupations like teaching and medicine to maintain the segregation in the society (Ali, 2000). It has a twofold impact, first, in the receipt of health and education services females only interact with those of their gender. Second, it provides limited and segregated options for women who want to participate in the labour market. Saad, a male professor at a public sector university, further elaborated that there is a need for secluded occupations.

"[...] I am not against female education. I think education is very important and according to our religion seeking knowledge is responsibility of both males and females. [...] Our society needs women doctors and teachers. For example, I would like to send my wife and daughter to female doctors than male doctors and similarly, I will be more comfortable if my daughter is educated by female teachers."

To participate in the labour market women have to venture out into the non-familial or public domain. To access the world beyond their supposed domain they have to seek permission of their family. In the case of unmarried women it is mainly the father who grants permission but for the married women the husband or his family give approval (Gazdar, 2003). Women's employment or career has not been a primary concern; rather marriage, family, and motherhood have more power in determining women's lives (Ali, 2000). In traditional Pakistani culture marriage is the foremost priority for families and they give little or no consideration to a woman's career. For married women, the major focus is on their reproductive role as mothers and taking care of their family. Therefore, the choice of career for women is a family decision and women have to seek social acceptance. The association of teaching with feminine characteristics makes it a suitable occupation for women and it is easier for women to get permission to work from families if they choose to work in segregated occupations. Soha, a female higher secondary teacher at a private school explained the choice of career for women:

"Women tend to choose professions which are more culturally accepted. By culturally accepted I mean what the society approves for them, what their parents or close relatives' advice allows them to do. The focus of the majority of parents is finding a right husband for their girls than the career. So they try to equip their daughters with the career which would be acceptable for their future husband and their families."

The social acceptance of women's work is based mainly around a segregated work environment with limited or no interaction with the opposite sex and compatibility with household duties. The gendered division of space for men and women in society has been very

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strong due to its attachment to religion. Although Islam as a religion does not restrict women to private space and there are many examples where Prophet Muhammad accorded an important place to women in public life (Mernissi, 1987), it is still considered better for women to remain at home in the private sphere or to work in a segregated environment with minimalistic interaction with males. The boundary between religion and culture is blurred and many customs are attributed to religious beliefs to maintain their credibility, even if there is no actual religious basis for them. One of the main reasons, behind teaching as a socially acceptable job for women, is

the seclusion of women within the public domain. As teachers, women have limited encounters with men and single sex schools further the prospect of work in an all-female environment.

Another dimension of the seclusion of women is their physical safety and security. Many respondents felt that segregated environments provide physical security for women. Teaching is considered as a physically safe job, yet the reason is again the limited or constrained interaction with men that it offers. Arif, a male Associate Professor in a public sector university said:

“Teaching profession is considered to be a very safe and secure career for the ladies, I think. It is generally considered that the teaching profession offers a decent environment if you get what I mean. No harassment issues and no demeaning work, with limited and respectful interaction with opposite gender.”

The Sexual Division of Household Labour

In Pakistan, traditionally the male breadwinner model has applied within a strong gender hierarchy where men have exercised more power over women due to social, cultural and religious factors (Malik and Khalid, 2008; Pardhan, 2009). The increase in women's employment has had a very limited impact on the traditional sexual division of labour and men are still seen as breadwinners and women as home-makers. Early research by Shaheed and Mumtaz (1981) showed that working women faced the problem of dual work. The study found that home-based women workers spent almost six hours working and another six to seven hours on their domestic responsibilities. Similar findings were highlighted by Khattak (2001) for women working in the urban manufacturing sector. She argued that household work remained women's responsibility. However, the study showed that if a household contains both partners working and other women not participating in the labour

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market, then the domestic work is delegated mainly to these women. Whether they participate in the labour market or not, the domestic responsibility remains with women and their employment doubles their work burden and does not alter the role of men in the household (Khan 2007).

In this context, the teaching profession in Pakistan provides an opportunity for women to maintain a balance between work and domestic responsibilities. The main factor pulling women towards teaching is its apparent compatibility with women's domestic role in Pakistani society. Formal working hours are short compared to other jobs and it is considered to be a half day job. The opening time for public and private sector schools varies between 7am and 8:30am and the closing time usually varies

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between 1pm and 2:30pm. After finishing school women thus have time to concentrate on their domestic role. This particularly benefits women with school-age children. Their working hours match their children's school time and they do not have to arrange for child care for extra hours.

A majority of women teachers interviewed highlighted the compatibility of teaching with their household responsibilities as one of the important factors influencing their entry into the profession. The teaching profession not only encourages women to participate in the labour market, but the short working hours and compatibility with domestic responsibilities also attracts women, particularly those with young children, from other occupations. Tahira, a private sector primary level teacher, who was a qualified nurse but who changed her profession following marriage, reported:

"When I started teaching I didn't face any problem of managing my household work with it. I use to come home while picking my daughter up from school and then have enough time to cook, clean and complete other stuff before my husband used to come home. [...] I think this is a big advantage of this job. Even in nursing you have to spend the whole day in hospital and sometimes they can call you at odd times which are very stressful to manage with the family life."

Additionally, women feel they are able to give better education to their children because of their teaching experience, Naghmana, an Assistant Professor, had also transferred from another career:

"I use to work in a financial institution and I was an AVP (Assistant Vice President) when I quit the job. I solely quit because of the family responsibilities. My children were at such an age where they wanted my support in education. In a financial institution, they pay you well but the

working hours are long and rigid. At that time my priority was the education of my children so I left the job."

Yet those characteristics that encourage women into teaching - flexibility and short working hours - do not motivate men to join the profession. The situation is contradictory for men; they cannot fulfil their role as breadwinners from what they earn from one teaching job. Men in teaching usually have to work extra hours compared to men in other professions in order to meet their household expenses. Multiple jobs make it harder for men to balance their work and family life. Khalil, a male public sector higher secondary school teacher reported:

"For women, teaching is a very manageable job because they come home early and look after the children and do other household work. But for men this is not the case. For example, I and many of my male colleagues do multiple jobs. [...] I get free around 9pm at night and after that you know I get so tired that I literally eat and go to bed. My wife mainly takes care of children and does the house work. I only get time on weekends to spend with my family and friends."

The male breadwinner model reinforces the domestic division of labour in the household.

Conclusion

With the changing economic scenario it is becoming harder to uphold the male breadwinner model and to support a family on one man's income. In this context women's participation in the labour market is increasing. However, they are restricted to jobs considered to be an extension of their domestic role, where they have no or limited interaction with men and in roles which are compatible with their family role. This segregation of women in certain occupations in the labour market promotes gender inequality and maintains the supremacy and control of men in both public and private spheres of life.

Teaching in Pakistan provides women with a segregated environment and compatibility with domestic responsibilities. It is perceived as 'honourable' and an accepted occupation for women because of its association with perceived feminine traits and with the role accorded to women in society. On the one hand,

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