

Challenges Facing by Non-Governmental Organizations in Implementation of Women Empowerment in District Peshawar

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to explore the significant role that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play in promoting women's empowerment in Peshawar, Pakistan. The study investigates various aspects of women empowerment, including economic, social, political and religious dimensions, through a qualitative approach. The findings highlight the challenges faced by NGOs in their women empowerment efforts, including cultural barriers, limited resources, political instability and also examined the diverse strategies employed by NGOs to empower, such as providing vocational training, education, legal aid and advocacy.

This research work also highlights cultural norms' influence on women's empowerment in Peshawar and provides approaches for overcoming these obstacles. Qualitative methods have been used in this investigation, which included focus group discussions and interviews with women, community leaders, and NGOs in Peshawar. Literature studies and media report analyses are additional data-gathering techniques used to determine the extent to which the media influences public opinion on women's concerns. The results indicate that women's empowerment is hindered by deeply entrenched cultural conventions, namely those prevalent in the 'Pashtun' community. This results in restricted opportunities for education, employment, and involvement in decision-making. The involvement of community leaders in collaborative endeavours is of utmost importance in order to introduce novel concepts and advance sustainable development for women in Peshawar. It is critical to address cultural norms in order to create a fairer environment that supports the academic, professional, and overall development of women. The media has a significant impact on public sentiment and advocates for governmental reforms that promote the empowerment of women. NGO collaborations and advocacy efforts may be

directed towards eliminating these obstacles via educational and community engagement programmes.

It is essential to adopt a gender-neutral approach to community development in order to foster an inclusive and supportive culture in which women may flourish.

Keywords: NGOs, Women Empowerment, Peshawar, *Pakhtuns*, *Pakhtunwali*, *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*

Introduction:

Non-profit organizations, also known as NGOs, fall under the category of social welfare organisations because they are established for the community's well-being. Social welfare is the act of assisting the poor and needy through a coordinated network of institutions and social services. "The purpose of NGOs is not only to remove various social evils but also to create such situations that are required to better the social lives of humans physically and mentally," is how the United Nations Organization defines NGOs (Eade & Williams, 1995; Kakakhel et al., 2015). Non-governmental organisations work in a variety of fields. They are nonprofit, non-state organisations that work for everyone's benefit. The World Bank defines NGOs as "value-based organisations that depend entirely or partially on charitable giving, donations, and volunteer activities" (World Bank, 1995). NGOs are not considered independent entities under international law. They have made significant charitable contributions, including to the political, social, and economic empowerment of 13women (Khalid, 1964).

In Pakistan, women make up 50 percent of the population. Therefore, they can significantly contribute to the socio-economic, political, and cultural growth of a society, but sadly, their struggle and work are frequently overlooked. Additionally, the society's dominantly masculine structure gives them relatively limited opportunity to enter the arenas of diverse socio-economic activities. The burden of family and domestic duties fall disproportionately on women, especially in semi-urban and rural settings. They engage in some socio-economic activity, but that is not really promising. The idea of women's empowerment is crucial for the advancement and growth of civilization. The way a country treats its women can be used to assess both its morality and its character. Without ensuring that women have their fair share of opportunities in all spheres of life, a nation cannot advance toward its objectives of social, political, economic, and moral advancement. While highlighting the importance of women, Muhammad Ali Jinnah succinctly stated, "No nation can ascend to the peak of glory unless its women are side by side with men."(Shabbir, 2009) Women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also confront numerous challenges. Because this is a traditional tribal community, men rule and

women have a small part in economic decision-making. An essential strategy for raising women's social standing in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is education. It will provide them the knowledge of their rights and the awareness that men and women are equal in many facets of life.

Some of the primary obstacles that women in Peshawar face when deciding on a career include;

1. Gender-based discrimination, unequal access to education and healthcare and limited economic opportunities that restrict their roles and responsibilities.
2. Early marriages and societal expectations may force girls to drop out of school prematurely.
3. Strict adherence to religious customs and, most of the time, incorrect religious interpretation.
4. Rather from easing women's struggles, the deeply held cultural values and social conventions in the area are making matters worse for them.

Their work is limited by the aforementioned causes. These values are derived from the '*Pakhtunwali*' Pakhtun code. This code is more useful. Women make up half of the population in Peshawar. Women are becoming more and more literate in Peshawar. They are pursuing further education as well. However, for the reasons listed above, women's professional career advancement is still lagging. (Alam 2012)

The advancement and empowerment of women face numerous challenges. The biggest barriers to women's empowerment and growth include a lack of economic independence, gender inequality, the domestic role of women, illiteracy, social stereotypes, violence against women, unequal involvement in public life, and a restrictive interpretation of religion. It is essential to recognize the importance of women in contemporary society. In order to promote inclusive social features and participation, it is crucial for the growth of society that women participate in the development process on an equal basis (Deneulin & Shahani, 2009). Islam is a religion that respects both men and women. There is a famous saying of the Holy Prophet (SAW), "Paradise is under the mother's feet." Women's empowerment automatically empowers the next generation. They will receive education, training, and security in all aspects of their lives

and decision-making. The advancement of the nation and the country depends heavily on the empowerment of women (Alam, 2007).

Literature Review:

Martens (2002) argues that NGOs are formal (professional) social organizations whose main aim is to promote common goals at the national or international level. NGOs work in many different fields, such as health, education, environment, human rights, poverty alleviation, disaster relief and many more. The primary aim of NGO is to serve the public interest and improve the lives of people in need. He also says that NGOs are public organizations whose work on community development is guided by a set of core values. Incorporating this principle into the NGO's operations not only makes them more respectable in the eyes of the public, but it also makes them more likely to respond to pressing social concerns.

Ghosh (2009) has described the functions and structures of NGOs and claimed that several charitable groups and transportation businesses were supported by non-governmental organizations. Charitable organizations that provide communities in need with necessities such as food, clothing, books, blankets, free medicines, transportation assistance, etc. Additionally, it operates in the aftermath of natural catastrophes and offers a range of services to the impacted areas, such as free medical facilities, medical camps, transitional housing, food distribution, and so forth. Because of this, these organizations don't need a lot of involvement from their beneficiaries.

Sharma & Parthasarathy (2007) investigate how global organizations like the World Bank and the UN have dealt with challenges affecting women, notably the empowerment of the most disadvantaged women in rural regions. NGOs with a focus on women's health and the reasons for social and economic marginalization during the 1980s and 1990s. The NGOs sent resources to the homes of disadvantaged women in an effort to empower them, but they did not address the underlying causes of these women's marginalization inside the home.

Coomaraswamy (2003) in his article "Rights for Working Women Campaign" is of the opinion that sexual harassment at work is one of the most extreme forms of violence against women. This is a psychological and physical attack on women that results in the instillation of fear and evil. This is one of the powerful ways to terrorize and subordinate women to work. It damages women's ability to protect themselves and work for their families and as a result leads to

depression, anxiety and insomnia. In the new global labor force, there are many shortcomings and problems with women in particular, including the lack of basic education in young women. Ali (2005) found that an empowered woman is repeatedly discouraged in a Pakistani social configuration. According to the author, this is mainly due to the fact that men in society are undecided to live on or gain from their women. Such unpleasant attitudes by men in the family have discouraged many skilled women from opting for employment opportunities.

Rowlands (1995) describes empowerment as the ability of individuals to gain social, political, economic, and psychological control through access to information, knowledge and skills, decision-making and individual self-efficacy, community participation, and perceived control. The main goal of women's empowerment is to reduce poverty, boost growth and promote better governance. Every sector of society must ensure women's equitable participation and advancement. Further, they should be paid the same amount for equivalent work. Ending early marriage is one way to give women more agency.

Shabbir, S. (2009) noted that the struggle of women's NGOs is entirely devoted to women's rights in Pakistan. A Women's NGO in Pakistan APWA was the first official organization to provide services in Pakistan. She is still active in the areas of health, education and women's incomes. In 1953, he sat for the allocation of 10% of seats in the National Assembly, provincial assemblies for women and for the approval of the Legislative Decree on the Family of 196118. In the 1970s, various women's rights organizations proliferated. In 1975, the NGO ShirkatGah (SG) was created to raise awareness of women's rights, empower women and provide legal and medical assistance to victims of abuse.

Bishoyi (2018) claimed that despite sacred certificates and criminal pronouncements, women were brutalized for most of the century. They have constantly experienced the adverse effects of inequality. Gender segregation has a harmful impact on women's lives throughout, including in their tummies, at home and at work. Many societies hold deeply ingrained cultural and social norms that perpetuate gender inequality which can be resistant to change and pose a significant challenge for women's empowerment.

Jabeen (2002) examines women's participation in various revenue-generating activities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. She discovered that the majority of rural women were actively engaged in creating a living by selling homemade goods, including crafts, sewing, animal husbandry, quilt making, homemade jams, moulds, and pickles, as well as raising chickens for

egg production. If rural areas of developing nations are going to prosper, women's involvement in income-generating activities must be encouraged and supported. Development organisations and advocates in rural areas might benefit from seeing income-generating activities as a strategic development intervention that could speed up the rural development process.

Hassan & Naz (2020) posit that unless women are economically and independently endowed, male bigotry will continue to dominate and there will be no change in the status quo. Women could only become economically independent if they were given access to improved, if not equal, educational opportunities. Throughout history, men and women have played unique but complementary responsibilities in securing the financial stability of their families. While both sexes contribute financially to their households, women in rural regions tend to prioritise food consumption and household administration, whilst men prioritise earning a wage.

Imran and Farhana (2009) assert that women who work in Punjab encounter numerous issues, primarily social and economic. Family matters, individual choices, money matters, and political judgments were the four main topic areas explored in the survey. It covers the effects of working women's access to media, social standards, and education. Patriarchy, a less supportive family environment, domestic violence and abuse, and misunderstanding of religion beliefs are the biggest barriers to empowerment.

Gondal (2012) contends that there is a lack of confidence between NGOs and the Pakistani government. NGOs are not given any legal protection; therefore, the government has failed to win their trust. It is also important to keep in mind that some NGOs use funding for personal benefit rather than contributing to society. Due to political unpredictability, the government also lacks enough control and balance over NGOs. There is concern about how foreign money enters Pakistan and how it is utilised. The irony is that the security establishment has traditionally welcomed foreign help for itself.

Akbar (2010) looks at NGOs' implementation and communication methods. He asserts that women's work is devalued in Pakistan, particularly in rural NGOs. The adverse environment forces NGOs to use a variety of techniques in order to carry out their aims. NGOs not only carry out action-oriented initiatives at the grassroots level, but they also campaign for socially relevant processes and protocols on a worldwide scale.

Hameed-ur-Rehman & Sewani (2013) look at how NGOs operate in the field of education. They contend that NGOs have been crucial in educating the most disadvantaged members of society. It was recommended that the educational field receive more focus. To help this industry flourish further, the government should also make a contribution. The government should make sure that the right amount of money is set aside for education and should also keep an eye on that money.

In conclusion, the role of NGOs in women empowerment is crucial and should be given due attention. Lack of literature, awareness and understanding of their work can hinder progress towards gender equality. Therefore, it is important to conduct research and fill the gap for educating individuals and authorities about the significance of NGOs and their role in empowering women.

Research methodology:

The study was qualitative. Data has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. Education and awareness are independent variables in this study. Since these two lead to the women empowerment, therefore women empowerment is dependent variable. The primary data collected in the form of semi-structured interviews with key informants belonging to various professional backgrounds, including the NGO's chairperson, Managing Directors, Project Directors, Legal advisors, staff members, beneficiaries, government personnel, academia, and journalists. All these respondents selected on the basis of their expertise and experiences in the field of women empowerment. Out of 43 registered NGOs 15 NGOs have been selected based on research questions and objectives of the study.

Objectives of the research:

1. To investigate the factors effecting women empowerment and their status in Peshawar district.

Research questions:

1. What are the challenges face by NGOs in implementing women empowerment initiatives in Peshawar District?

Data Analysis:

1, Challenges to Women empowerment

a. Cultural norms:

Cultural norms in Peshawar create significant challenges for women's empowerment. Limited access to education is a major hurdle. Gender disparities persist, with girls often facing societal pressure to prioritize domestic duties or marry young, leading them to drop out of school. Restricted mobility further compounds these issues. Cultural norms may dictate that women require a male companion when venturing outside, limiting their ability to travel for educational opportunities or employment. This confinement hinders their personal growth and restricts their ability to contribute meaningfully to society. Addressing these deeply entrenched cultural norms is crucial for creating a more equitable environment where women in Peshawar have the freedom to pursue their education, careers, and full potential. (Shahnawaz Khan, personal interview, 7th August 2023)

Deeply ingrained cultural norms in Peshawar, particularly among the Pashtun majority, create significant barriers to women's empowerment. These norms often perpetuate a lack of social, economic, and political awareness for women, especially in rural areas. The result is a persistent cycle where women are denied opportunities and remain largely unempowered. NGOs play a vital role in dismantling these obstacles. Through community-based projects, they reach out directly to families and engage with village elders, who hold considerable influence. By educating these communities and fostering awareness about gender equality, NGOs can create a more receptive environment for change. This approach, centered on collaboration with community leaders, increases the likelihood that these new ideas will be embraced and lead to lasting progress for women in Peshawar. (Sajjad Khan, personal interview, 8th August 2023)

The fight for women's empowerment in Peshawar faces a formidable opponent: deeply entrenched cultural norms. These traditions, particularly within the dominant Pashtun community, often restrict women's social, economic, and political awareness. This lack of awareness fuels a cycle where women are denied opportunities and remain largely unempowered, especially in rural areas. NGOs working towards gender equality understand this challenge. Their efforts focus on chipping away at these norms through community-based projects. By engaging directly with families and village elders, who hold significant influence,

NGOs can educate communities and foster awareness about the benefits of gender equality. This approach is crucial, as gaining the buy-in of community leaders increases the likelihood that new ideas about women's roles will be embraced, leading to lasting progress for women in Peshawar. (Nida Shams, personal interview, 10th August 2023)

Despite the positive impacts of economic empowerment projects, achieving gender equality in Peshawar requires a multifaceted approach that tackles deeply entrenched cultural norms. While economic independence fosters confidence and social mobility for women, these ingrained traditions can be resistant to change. Media can play a crucial role in shifting societal perceptions. Newspapers, articles, and programs can raise awareness about women's rights and the benefits of gender equality. By highlighting the challenges and successes of women in various sectors, media can influence public opinion and potentially spur policy changes that promote equal opportunities. Furthermore, media can empower women by providing them with a platform to share their experiences and advocate for change. However, it's important to acknowledge the challenges. Transforming cultural norms is a gradual process that requires sustained efforts. NGOs and advocates must design programs that prioritize the most vulnerable, particularly women in rural areas. By addressing their specific needs and challenges, these programs can create a ripple effect, empowering women throughout Peshawar and paving the way for a more equitable future. (Nazia, personal interview, 11th August 2023)

Cultural norms and deeply ingrained gender inequality create significant hurdles for women's empowerment. A key challenge lies in the lack of collaboration within families and broader societal resistance to the idea of "empowered females." This resistance can manifest in various ways, often stemming from a traditional mindset. Families may be hesitant to support girls' education or opportunities outside the home, hindering their potential. Similarly, societal attitudes may discourage women from pursuing leadership roles or advocating for their rights. NGOs working in Peshawar understand these complexities. They recognize the importance of addressing several factors that contribute to women's disempowerment. These include the underrepresentation of women in positions of power, limited access to training and participation opportunities, and a general lack of awareness about women's rights. By tackling these issues head-on through community engagement and education initiatives, NGOs can work towards dismantling these cultural barriers and fostering a more supportive environment where women in Peshawar can thrive. (Zakiya, personal interview, 16th August 2023)

b. Limited Access to Education:

In Peshawar, gender inequality leads to limited access to education and employment opportunities for women. This creates a double burden. On one hand, it restricts their choices and hinders their personal development. On the other hand, limited education can further disadvantage them in the job market, perpetuating the cycle of inequality (Nosheen Ahsan, personal interview, 18th August 2023)

A significant barrier to women's empowerment is limited access to education. This educational gap is rooted in gender-based discrimination, where societal norms and expectations often prioritize education for boys over girls. The consequence is a cycle of disadvantage. Limited education restricts a girl's choices and hinders her personal development, making it more difficult to pursue higher education or secure skilled employment. This, in turn, limits her economic opportunities and financial independence, further perpetuating the cycle of inequality. Without access to education, women are less equipped to challenge these restrictive social norms and fight for their rights, creating a complex web of challenges that must be addressed. (Saima, personal interview, 21st August 2023)

Particularly in rural areas, limited access to education for girls creates a significant hurdle to their empowerment. Deeply ingrained cultural norms and social expectations often prioritize education for boys, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage for girls. These norms can include discriminatory practices and a rigid definition of traditional gender roles, making them resistant to change and posing a significant challenge for NGOs working to promote girls' education. Furthermore, resource constraints faced by NGOs, such as limited funding, staff, and infrastructure, can hinder the effectiveness of their programs aimed at increasing girls' enrollment and completion rates. This lack of access to education restricts girls' opportunities to develop essential skills and knowledge, limiting their future choices and hindering their ability to contribute meaningfully to society. (Nida Shams, personal interview, 10th August 2023)

Limited access to education for girls acts as a root cause of many challenges they face. This lack of education restricts their opportunities in life and reinforces societal limitations placed upon them. Early marriages are often a consequence, curtailing a girl's education and personal development just as she's reaching a crucial stage. With limited education, career options become scarce, excluding women from economic participation and hindering their ability to

achieve financial independence. This economic dependence can leave them in a more vulnerable position, and the cycle continues as the cycle of poverty and limited education perpetuates itself. Furthermore, a lack of education can make women more susceptible to gender-based violence, creating a climate of fear and further inhibiting their empowerment. (Saima Munir, personal interview, 23rd August 2023)

In rural areas, limited access to education for girls presents a critical roadblock on the path to women's empowerment. This educational gap is fueled by a combination of poverty and deeply entrenched cultural norms. Poverty creates a harsh reality where families may prioritize immediate economic needs, often through child marriage, over the long-term benefits of education for girls. Additionally, cultural norms that traditionally assign specific roles to genders can discourage girls' education. These norms can be resistant to change and pose a significant challenge for those working to promote girls' education. The consequence of limited education for girls is a cycle of disadvantage. Without the knowledge and skills gained through education, girls have fewer opportunities to escape poverty, challenge restrictive social norms, or advocate for their rights. This lack of education also limits their future career choices and hinders their ability to contribute meaningfully to society and their own economic well-being. (Lubna Ali, personal interview, 25th August 2023)

Limited access to education for girls creates a fundamental barrier to their empowerment and social participation. This educational gap directly restricts their economic independence. Without the knowledge and skills gained through education, women are less equipped to secure skilled employment or pursue higher education, limiting their career options and future earning potential. Furthermore, the lack of education can perpetuate a cycle of social exclusion. Unequal treatment within families, where girls may not receive the same support or encouragement for education as boys, can further limit their aspirations and opportunities. This lack of education also makes women more vulnerable to harassment and discrimination in various settings, both within the home and in the workforce. The combined effect is a system that disadvantages women and hinders their ability to participate fully and meaningfully in society. (Musarat, personal interview, 28th August 2023)

c. Early marriages

Early marriage remains a significant barrier to women's empowerment in Peshawar. This practice not only disrupts their education, but also curtails their opportunities and limits their life choices. Gender disparities in education persist, with girls more likely to be pulled out of school due to societal pressure to marry young or prioritize domestic duties. Early marriage often restricts their mobility and confines them to the domestic sphere, hindering their personal growth and participation in society. Addressing this deeply entrenched practice is crucial for creating a brighter future for women in Peshawar. By promoting girls' education and challenging social norms that perpetuate early marriage, NGOs and advocates can empower women to reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully to their communities. (Shahnawaz Khan, personal interview, 7th August 2023)

Early marriage stands as a critical barrier to women's empowerment in Peshawar. This practice cuts short girls' education, limiting their access to knowledge and skills needed to pursue fulfilling careers. The pressure to marry young often forces them to drop out of school, hindering their intellectual and personal development. Furthermore, early marriage can restrict their mobility and confine them to domestic roles, diminishing their opportunities for participation in society and the workforce. By advocating for girls' education and challenging social norms that perpetuate early marriage, NGOs and advocates can empower young women in Peshawar to reach their full potential and pave the way for a brighter future where they can make informed choices about their lives. (Saima Munir, personal interview, 23rd August 2023)

d. Employment restrictions

Restricted mobility creates a significant barrier to women's empowerment in Peshawar. Cultural norms that limit women from moving freely in public spaces, often requiring a male companion, severely impact their opportunities. This confinement makes it difficult for them to pursue higher education as traveling to distant schools or universities might be discouraged. Employment opportunities are also restricted, as many jobs require travel or working outside the immediate area. This limited mobility hinders women's ability to achieve financial independence and participate fully in the workforce. Addressing these cultural norms and promoting safe mobility for women is crucial for creating a more equitable environment where they can reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society.

A complex web of challenges restricts women's empowerment in Peshawar. Gender inequality remains a pervasive issue, limiting women's access to education and employment opportunities. This lack of education creates a skills gap, hindering their competitiveness in the job market. Furthermore, cultural restrictions can confine women to domestic roles, limiting their mobility and discouraging them from pursuing careers outside the home. These interconnected challenges create a cycle that disadvantages women in Peshawar, making it difficult for them to achieve economic independence and contribute meaningfully to society. It's important to acknowledge that the severity of these challenges can vary depending on individual circumstances. However, addressing these systemic issues and promoting gender equality is crucial for creating a future where all women in Peshawar have the opportunity to thrive. (Nosheen Ahsan, personal interview, 18th August 2023)

Despite their efforts to contribute, women in Peshawar face limitations in both their family and professional lives. This creates a double bind that hinders their ability to achieve empowerment. Within families, traditional expectations may discourage women from pursuing careers outside the home, limiting their support systems. Furthermore, societal attitudes can be unfavorable towards working women, creating an additional barrier. These challenges extend beyond the home, as the broader environment often lacks the infrastructure and support systems that would facilitate women's employment. This might include a lack of childcare options or limited access to public transportation, making it difficult for women to balance work and family responsibilities. Strive for a gender-neutral approach to community development, fostering an environment where women can access opportunities and participate equally. This vision emphasizes good governance and decentralized decision-making, ensuring that women's voices are heard and their needs are addressed in creating a more supportive and inclusive society. (Kalsoom Usman, Personal interview, 31st August 2023)

Despite a growing number of women entering the workforce in Peshawar, both in public and private sectors, true empowerment remains elusive. Societal attitudes often portray promising careers as a male domain, creating a barrier for women seeking professional advancement. This mindset can lead to a situation where even employed women struggle for true empowerment. The root of this challenge lies in a combination of societal disapproval and a lack of familial support. Negative societal attitudes towards working women create an unsupportive environment. Furthermore, families may not provide the necessary collaboration or

"entrustment" for women to fully dedicate themselves to their careers. This lack of support within the home creates a significant hurdle for women, making it difficult for them to overcome societal biases and achieve their full professional potential. Addressing these issues, both through social awareness campaigns and fostering a more supportive family environment, is crucial for creating a future where women in Peshawar can not only be employed, but can thrive and excel in their chosen professions. (Kiran Usman, personal Interview, 8th September 2023)

e. Societal expectations:

Deeply ingrained societal expectations create significant hurdles for women's empowerment. Limited access to education is a major stumbling block. Gender disparities persist, with girls facing pressure to prioritize domestic duties or marry young, often leading them to drop out of school prematurely. These societal expectations perpetuate a cycle where women are denied educational opportunities, hindering their intellectual and professional development. Furthermore, restrictions on mobility can confine them to the domestic sphere, limiting their ability to pursue further education or employment outside the home. Addressing these entrenched societal norms is crucial for creating a more equitable environment where women in Peshawar have the freedom to pursue their education, careers, and full potential. (Shahnawaz Khan, personal interview, 7th August 2023)

A complex web of societal expectations hinders women's empowerment in Peshawar. Gender inequality remains a pervasive issue, limiting opportunities for education and employment. This lack of access to education creates a skills gap, making it difficult for women to compete in the job market. Furthermore, deeply ingrained societal norms often confine women to domestic roles. The expectation that they prioritize housework and childcare over careers restricts their mobility and discourages them from pursuing professional aspirations. These interconnected challenges create a cycle that disadvantages women in Peshawar. It's important to acknowledge that the severity of these societal constraints can vary depending on individual circumstances and social progress within different communities. However, addressing these systemic issues and dismantling these expectations is crucial for creating a future where all women in Peshawar have the opportunity to pursue their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society. (Nosheen Ahsan, personal interview, 18th August 2023)

Despite efforts, initiatives aimed at women's empowerment in Peshawar often face deeply ingrained societal expectations. These traditional norms can be a significant barrier to progress. For example, societal resistance to the idea of working women can create difficulties for NGOs and advocates. Communication becomes crucial in addressing these societal limitations. Through awareness campaigns and community engagement, they can challenge these norms and foster a more supportive environment. Budgetary limitations pose another challenge. Here, internal resourcefulness comes into play. NGOs may rely on fundraising efforts, volunteers, or innovative project design to overcome financial constraints. The ultimate goal, however, goes beyond just income generation. As the organization recognizes, women play a multifaceted role in society and the economy. True empowerment requires a holistic approach that fosters not just financial independence, but also strength, confidence, and the ability to defy societal limitations. By addressing both societal and budgetary hurdles, they can work towards a future where women in Peshawar are empowered in all aspects of their lives. (Qurat ul ain Ayaz, personal interview, 9th September 2023)

Societal expectations often act as a roadblock to women's empowerment. These deeply ingrained norms can limit a woman's aspirations and confine her to traditional roles. However, this paragraph highlights the power of individual action in overcoming these limitations. By encouraging young women to believe in themselves and pursue their passions, advocates can foster a new generation of empowered women. Education, hobbies, and mentorship all play a crucial role in building confidence and fostering self-belief. Additionally, the importance of expressing ideas is emphasized. By speaking up and advocating for themselves, young women can become agents of change, not just in their own lives, but for society as a whole. Their confidence and persistence can pave the way for a future where women in Peshawar are empowered leaders who contribute to societal progress. (Ayesha Ali, Personal interview, 12th September 2023)

Despite the prevalence of societal expectations that can limit women's roles in Peshawar, empowering women is not just about individual achievement; it strengthens society as a whole. When women are empowered, they become active participants in the economy, contributing to growth and prosperity. This economic participation can lead to better educational opportunities for their children, improved healthcare through informed decision-making, and the formation of stronger, more resilient communities. Furthermore, a society that embraces women's

potential fosters greater diversity of thought, increased creativity, and a richer overall well-being. (Saima, personal interview, 21st August 2023)

f. Gender disparities

Persistent gender disparities remain a significant obstacle to women's empowerment in Peshawar. These inequalities manifest in various ways, limiting women's access to education, employment opportunities, and a voice in decision-making processes. NGOs play a critical role in addressing these complex issues. They understand the interconnected nature of gender disparity and work on a multifaceted approach to create a more equitable society. Their efforts focus on tackling the root causes of these inequalities, empowering women through education, skills development, and advocacy campaigns. By working to dismantle these barriers, NGOs pave the way for a future where women in Peshawar can reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society. (Mahtab Sikander, personal interview, 13th September 2023)

Gender disparities create a significant roadblock to women's empowerment in Peshawar. One of the most concerning aspects of this disparity is limited access to education for girls. Compared to boys, girls often face greater challenges in enrolling and remaining in school. Early marriage and societal expectations that prioritize domestic duties over education can force them to drop out prematurely. This lack of access to education hinders their intellectual development and reduces their future opportunities. The resulting skills gap makes it difficult for them to compete in the job market and achieve financial independence. Addressing these gender disparities in education is crucial for creating a level playing field and empowering women in Peshawar to reach their full potential. (Shahnawaz Khan, personal interview, 7th August 2023)

Despite progress, a significant challenge to women's empowerment in Peshawar remains entrenched gender disparities. These inequalities permeate various aspects of life, creating a web of disadvantages for women. NGOs play a crucial role in tackling these complex issues. They recognize the interconnected nature of gender disparity, where limitations in one area, like education, can restrict opportunities in others, like employment. By addressing these root causes, NGOs work towards a more equitable society. Their efforts may involve advocating for girls' education, promoting skills development for women, and raising awareness about gender equality. Through this multifaceted approach, NGOs can dismantle the barriers that

perpetuate gender disparities in Peshawar, paving the way for a more inclusive and empowered future for all. (Muhamad Ilyas, personal interview, 14th September 2023)

Recommendations:

1. Government policies that guarantee girls' equal access to education, such as financial assistance and scholarships for families who place a high priority on girls' education, may be promoted and put into place.
2. The government may start awareness campaigns to inform communities about the value of education for girls and the drawbacks of young marriage as part of its community awareness programs.
3. NGOs may work with religious and village elders to promote gender equality and aid programs aimed at empowering women.
4. By creating safe and dependable transportation options, the government can increase women's mobility and give them more access to opportunities for education and employment.
5. Laws that safeguard women's rights, such as those prohibiting early marriage and domestic abuse, may be enforced by the government.
6. To improve women's employability and financial independence, Vocational Training and Skill Development may offer programs specifically designed for them.
7. Provide flexible working conditions and childcare options to support women in juggling their home and work obligations.
8. The government may establish mentorship programs that link young ladies to accomplished female role models across a range of industries.
9. The media platforms may be used to highlight successful stories of women breaking cultural barriers and contributing to society.
10. Improve access to healthcare services and education on reproductive rights, empowering women to make informed health decisions.
11. Economic Incentives for Families may provide that support girls' education and delay early marriages.

12. The government may strengthen the capacity of NGOs working on women's issues through funding, training, and collaborative projects.
13. Government may promote Integrate gender studies into school curricula to promote understanding and respect for gender equality from a young age.
14. Government may Establish legal aid centers to assist women in navigating legal challenges related to marriage, employment, and domestic issues.
15. For women's voices to be heard and their needs to be met, the government should support and encourage women to participate in local governance and decision-making processes.

Conclusion:

NGOs (Non-Governmental Organization) play a crucial role in promoting women's empowerment by addressing various social, economic and political factors that contribute to gender inequality. The challenges faced by NGOs in their women empowerment efforts, including cultural barriers, limited resources and political instability are also examined. Cultural norms in Peshawar create significant challenges for women's empowerment. Addressing these deeply entrenched cultural norms is crucial for creating a more equitable environment where women in Peshawar have the freedom to pursue their education, careers, and full potential. Deeply ingrained cultural norms in Peshawar, particularly among the Pashtun majority, create significant barriers to women's empowerment. These norms often perpetuate a lack of social, economic, and political awareness for women, especially in rural areas. The result is a persistent cycle where women are denied opportunities and remain largely unempowered. This approach, centered on collaboration with community leaders, increases the likelihood that these new ideas will be embraced and lead to lasting progress for women in Peshawar. These traditions, particularly within the dominant Pashtun community, often restrict women's social, economic, and political awareness.

These interconnected challenges create a cycle that disadvantages women in Peshawar, making it difficult for them to achieve economic independence and contribute meaningfully to society. These challenges extend beyond the home, as the broader environment often lacks the

infrastructure and support systems that would facilitate women's employment. This might include a lack of childcare options or limited access to public transportation, making it difficult for women to balance work and family responsibilities. Strive for a gender-neutral approach to community development, fostering an environment where women can access opportunities and participate equally.

This vision emphasizes good governance and decentralized decision-making, ensuring that women's voices are heard and their needs are addressed in creating a more supportive and inclusive society. Despite a growing number of women entering the workforce in Peshawar, both in public and private sectors, true empowerment remains elusive. Societal attitudes often portray promising careers as a male domain, creating a barrier for women seeking professional advancement. This mindset can lead to a situation where even employed women struggle for true empowerment.

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List Of Interviewees:

S #	Name	Place	Mode
1.	Shahnawaz Khan	Peshawar	Face to Face
2.	Nida Shams	Peshawar	Face to Face
3.	Nosheen Ahsan	Peshawar	Face to Face
4.	Saima	Peshawar	Face to Face
5.	Saima Munir	Peshawar	Face to Face
6.	Lubna Ali	Peshawar	Face to Face
7.	Musarat	Peshawar	Face to Face
8.	Kalsoom Usman	Peshawar	Face to Face
9.	Kiran Usman	Peshawar	Face to Face
10.	Qurat ul Ain Ayaz	Peshawar	Face to Face
11.	Ayesha Ali	Peshawar	Face to Face
12.	Mahtab Sikander	Peshawar	Face to Face
13.	Muhamad Ilyas	Peshawar	Face to Face