

## Perspective of Pakistani Women on the Defining Factors of Their Empowerment

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The study was designed to explore the perspective of women on the defining factors of their empowerment. A qualitative approach was used to analyse the data. The data were collected from 30 married women of age, ranged between 23 and 49 years via semi-structured interviews. A thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used and the analysis revealed six major themes: role of parents, husband's support, education and academic achievements, financial autonomy, social circle, and personal attributes (viz., social skill, self-efficacy, assertiveness, self-esteem, and will power) that the women believed as potential contributing factors in empowering them. The results showed that some of the sub-themes were consistent with the existing literature and few distinctive themes appeared in the data that do not exist in the literature. The study has opened new vistas for future researchers on assessing the determinants of women's empowerment.

**Keywords:** women's empowerment, qualitative approach, thematic analysis, husband's support, personal attributes

Due to the prevailing gender differences and gender gaps, it is commendable to pursue the 'empowerment approach' to women in the process of development that could prove decisive in lessening the gender gaps (Khan & Bibi, 2011). Numerous policy makers and academicians recurrently underscore the vigorous role of women's participation in economic development (e.g., Khan, 2010). Women must be believed to be integral and not the peripheral to other growth engines ("Forget China, India, and the Internet: Economic Growth is Driven by Women", 2006). Recognizing the need to bring women in the mainstream of growth process and to empower them result in several positive outcomes for society at large that justifies the space for women to be empowered.

Women's empowerment is presently a topic of substantial importance in the household domain enquiry due to the dissimilarities in the empowerment levels of women (Lee, 2009). The implications of women's empowerment can be found by looking into the developed nations' experience of the social mobilization. In order to replicate this evidence for developing economies, researchers have been motivated to undertake studies and explicate this notion of women's empowerment (Khan & Awan, 2011).

As women's empowerment results in numerous positive consequences for the whole society, the task of assessing the core defining factors of their empowerment has become crucial (Sen, 2000). The development practitioners agree that unless the determinants of empowerment are empirically assessed, one cannot never be able to devise the ways to empower women in Pakistan.

Hence assessing the underlying factors of their empowerment and the development of a valid and reliable measures related to empow-

erment is of significant importance. Due to the significance of the execution of policies to empower women, we find a growing interest of theorists and researchers in the theoretical development, determinants, and the measurement issues of women's empowerment since the last couple of decades of the 20th century (Malhotra, Schuler, & Boender, 2002).

The literature has established the significance of various socio-demographic and personal factors in women's empowerment, for example, chronological age is found to be a significant and positive determinant of women's empowerment by various researcher (e.g., Acharya, Bell, Simkhada, Teijlingen, & Regmi, 2010; Chaudhry & Nosheen, 2009; Khan & Awan, 2011; Khan & Maan, 2008; Wiklander & Thede, 2010). Older and mature women are expected to enjoy greater status, rights and duties as compared with those of younger ones. Higher level of empowerment with higher age might be due to the fact that older age carries experiences, and understandings that support women in taking wiser decisions regarding economic matters. At places of work, women might be more empowered for being in senior positions (Sheikh et al., 2015). Whereas, Haque et al., (2011), and Rahman et al., (2009) argue that it is not merely age itself, but also age at marriage that also determines the level of women's empowerment. The women who are married at a younger age are subdued by their husbands and experience little empowerment. Conjugal age is another significant determinant of women's empowerment (Khan & Maan, 2008; Parveen & Leonhauser, 2005).

As the personal qualities and life styles of women concern, Swain and Wallentin (2008) suggested that empowerment of women could be attained if women themselves challenged the prevailing customs and culture of any society to successfully improve their own well-being. The strategy for women to be empowered must make available the necessary space for women to act themselves as agents of transformation in gender relations (Siwal, 2009). The positive relationship between 'gender awareness perception' and women's empowerment is found in different studies (e.g., Chaudhary, Chani,

& Pervaiz, 2012). Women cannot attain empowerment without being aware of their legal rights. Proponents of legal empowerment recognize that only being educated is not enough unless people are aware of their legal rights (Asian Development Bank, 2009).

The positive relationship between 'legal awareness concerning the rights' and women's empowerment is also recognized by many researchers (e.g., Blumberg, 2005; Musokotwana & Siwata as cited in Khan, 2010). Khan (2010) and Nayak and Mahanta (2009) concluded that women's political participation, had statistically significant effects on women's empowerment.

Women's achievements have also been reported to play significant role in empowering them. For example, education strengthens the individuals' self-actualization (Mishra & Nayak, 2010), and empowers them in various fields (Khan & Awan, 2011; Khan & Maan, 2008; Mishra & Nayak, 2010; Pallas, 2011). Moreover, the women who are both educated and employed in paid jobs can be viewed to be fortified by awareness and resources necessary to work efficiently in the contemporary world (Chaudhry & Nosheen, 2009). Khan and Awan (2011) concluded that employment of women among other factors was a significant determining factor of women's empowerment in Pakistan. Women's employment status is a direct dynamic for their economic empowerment, as it increases the labour force participation rate (Sheikh et al., 2015). Different studies indicated that economic independence of a woman could be augmented by her possession of property, which could, in turn, reinforce her empowerment. The role of land rights and property in empowering women is supported by numerous researchers (e.g., Chaudhary et al., 2012; Wiklander & Thede, 2010).

Socio-cultural circumstances of women, such as having greater number of brothers has been found to play salient role in attaining empowerment among women. Emotional relationship of husband and wife in a democratic atmosphere supports a woman to attain empowerment (e.g., Khan & Maan, 2008). Fitzsimon and Fuller (2002) found social support as a crucial constituent in the process of empowerment. According to Malhotra et al. (2002), family support could play a crucial role in the empowerment process of women. Studies claim that social support stimulates awareness among women about the ways to be empowerment (Moradi & Funderburk, 2006). Women having children are expected to enjoy greater position, rights and responsibilities than women with no children (Ethiopian Democratic & Health Survey, 2005). Khan and Awan (2011) declared that the increasing number of children, not the sex of children, among many other factors as the determinant of growing women's empowerment in the family.

Family structure has also been observed as a significant factor in women's empowerment. Roy and Niranjana (2004) in India, found that the women living with their in-laws felt themselves bound, because their choices in life were restrained, which resulted in lowering their empowerment. In such a family set up, earnings are frequently shared by several persons. Most of the decisions are taken undemocratically by older members of the family. Women's rights to mobility, and decision making is snubbed by the elders in the in-laws (Acharya et al., 2010; Parveen & Leonhauser, 2005).

Among familial determinants of women's empowerment, husband's support is very important because a married woman's bargaining power is often related to her husband. If a husband sets cordial relationship with his wife and lets her free to express her state of mind, then she can feel herself empowered. Khalid (1991) maintained that in Pakistani culture, significant others (i.e., parents before they were married and husbands after they got married)

played very crucial role in the lives of women. In the life of a woman, marriage was a turning point after which both a woman and her husband started new path of life. Although both of the felt need of each other's societal support, it seemed that the need of a wife to take social support of her husband was more acute. Without her husband, a woman felt physically frail, emotionally starved, financially insecure, and socially secluded; she felt complete due to support of her husband. Khalid concluded that women who got higher social support of their husbands were found to have high self-esteem and vice versa. The low self-esteem resulted in their lower status. Khan and Maan (2008) concluded that dowry and property given to daughters at the wedding had statistically significant and positive effects on women to attain empowerment.

Religion can also help in empowering women. Chaudhary and Nosheen (2009) concluded that strong Islamic viewpoint (religious view) could be helpful to empower Muslim women. Haque et al. (2011) declared that non-Muslim women were more empowered in household decision making and in physical mobility but not in economic decision making in Bangladesh.

The use of mobile phone has opened new vistas for economic empowerment of women. Access of women to mobile phones considerably has added income generation prospects of women and thus gave them a sense of economic and social empowerment (Aminuzzaman, Baldersheim, & Jamil, 2003; Lee, 2009; Schuler, Islam, & Rottach, 2010) for example, the access of women to mobile phones significantly augments income earning prospects for them (Aminuzzaman et al., 2003).

Electronic media also creates awareness among women to be empowered (Parveen & Leonhauser, 2005; Schuler et al., 2010).

The studies carried out on the determinants of women's empowerment are typically quantitative in nature. Each woman is a distinctive individual and holds level of empowerment that has been shaped by her life time experiences and proficiencies (e.g., Khan, 2010; Nayak & Mahanta, 2009; Wiklander & Thede, 2010), so it is appreciable to study the perspective of women regarding their life experiences that they believe have played significant role in empowering them. To the best of our knowledge, no qualitative study has been carried out that explored women's own perspective on the defining factors of their empowerment. The present research work aimed to explore the factors that empowered women in Pakistan, and to recommend appropriate policy to enhance women's empowerment in Pakistan.

## Objective

The study was carried out to attain a deeper understanding of the experiences of Pakistani women during the course of their empowerment, and to highlight the demographic, individual, socio-cultural determinants of women's empowerment in Pakistan.

## Research Question

What is the perspective of women on the defining factors that empowered them during the course of their lifespan?

## Research Design

A qualitative approach, thematic analysis was used to explore and analyse the phenomenon of women's empowerment.

## Method

### Participants

The study included 30 participating women whose age ranged between 23 and 49 years. This age range was targeted in order to examine and highlight what influenced the empowerment of women during reproductive period of their age. All women belonged to middle socio-economic status. The women who scored 2 standard deviations above the mean on women's empowerment index in the quantitative part of study (Batool & Batool, 2018) were contacted again and those who agreed to participate in this qualitative study were approached and interviews of 30 women were included in the study.

Table 1  
*Participants' Demographics (N= 30)*

Participant #	Pseudonym	Age in Years	Education
1.	Arifa	23	B.A
2.	Saadia	26	Matric
3.	Ramsha	26	M.A
4.	Maheen	26	B.A
5.	Zara	28	M.A
6.	Sonia	28	M.A
7.	Sumra	29	F.A
8.	Amina	30	Matric
9.	Sara	32	Matric
10.	Nirma	33	F.A
11.	Najma	30	M.A
12.	Meerab	34	M.A
13.	Anaya	34	M.A
14.	Arifa	37	MPhil
15.	Amber	35	B.A
16.	Arooj	37	B.A
17.	Kubra	33	MPhil
18.	Asma	38	M.A
19.	Neyha	41	Primary
20.	Narjis	42	Middle
21.	Nusrat	42	Mphil
22.	Zobia	45	M.A
23.	Aqsa	47	MPhil
24.	Noreen	47	M.A
25.	Ayesha	48	Matric
26.	Raabia	47	F.A
27.	Seerat	49	Matric
28.	Fakhra	49	Illiterate
29.	Aleeha	49	MPhil
30.	Areej	26	B.A

### Procedure

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to collect the data. Forty women were contacted and approached for the interviews, among them five refused to take part in interview due to their personal reasons. However, only 35 women were ready to share their experiences and 30 interviews could be conducted. The

interviews were conducted during the months of August and September 2017. The places where interviews were conducted included homes of the participants, offices or any place that they preferred. It took 1 to 2 hours to conduct a single interview. In the preliminary stage of the interview, in order to guide the participants, the researcher asked a series of open ended questions to the participants. The questions were developed and guided by the existing literature on the determinants of women's empowerment. The development of the questions was reinforced by the literature as it showed that empowerment was partially a process that continues with age (e.g., Ackerly, 1995; Basu & Basu, 2003; Blumberg, 2005; Kishor, 2000)

In order to make the data available for the study, field notes were taken and all of the conducted interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. All such information was combined to have a deep insight about the participants' experiences. The recorded material was destroyed once interviews were transcribed. The questions provided an outline to conduct the interviews and the participants were encouraged to give the details of their understandings and experiences to elaborate their stories. The open-ended interview schedule was piloted before conducting the actual study.

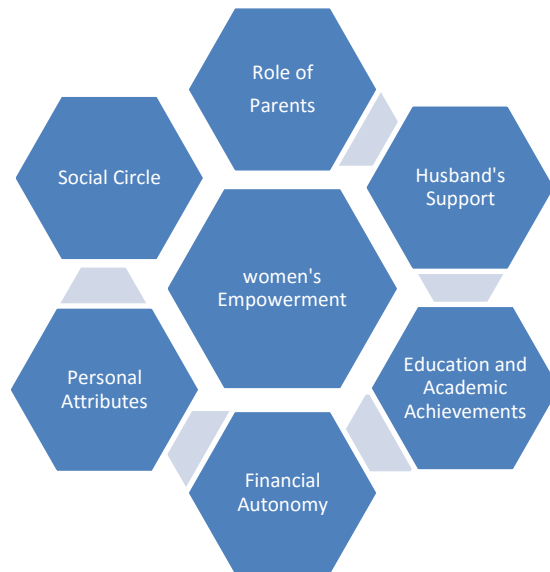
### Analysis

The analysis of the present study was based on an exploratory qualitative method so that presumptions in the findings could be avoided. It was explored how women ascribed their life stories in connection to their empowerment. After transcribing and summarizing the interviews, the data were coded to generate themes. Bottom-up thematic analysis method was used to analyze the data. In order to form major categories, similar themes were clustered together. All components of the data were examined with regard to themes and recurring features in each of the interview. The guidelines by Braun and Clarke (2006) were used to code analyse and interpret the data.

The coding involved: reading of the text, marking of remarkable passages with braces, assigning labels to the marked passages, identify and label the suggested concepts (if any), arrangement of the notions by groups and sub groups, filing of the excerpts by classifications, rereading each file, taking review of the data for themes, connections of themes to make categories, and putting the categories in order. The first and second author regularly met and discussed the emerging codes and themes during the analysis phase and content validity of the results was further maintained by discussing the codes and themes with two university teachers from Gender Studies Department.

### Results and Discussion

No qualitative work has earlier been carried out to explore the determinants of women's empowerment in Pakistan. The objective of the study was to explore the factors that determined empowerment of the sample women. The data were qualitatively analysed by using bottom up thematic analysis. A large number of themes emerged, which were clustered together into six major themes (viz., role of parents, husband's support, education and academic success, financial autonomy, personal attributes: social skill, self-efficacy, assertiveness, self-esteem, and willpower), and social circle. These categories represent the crux of familial, personal, and socio-cultural dimensions contributing in women's empowerment. The extant literature partially supports the findings of the study.

Figure 1: *The Determinants of Women's Empowerments (N=30)*

Most of the responses given by the women were in Urdu language, so the extracts given in the manuscript were translated into English language with the help of a bilingual expert.

### Role of Parents

Role of parents in the empowerment process was emphasized by the majority of women. Participants of the study believed that parenting had a significant impact on daughters' confidence and it went a long way in making them empowered in future. Almost 70% of women in our sample credited their parents for their superior status. One of the participants aged 38 credited her parents for her strong position in the in-laws. She suggested that parents should prepare their daughters for the trials of married life. Elaborating her strong position in the in-laws she reported:

*"My parents brought me up like a boy and gave me confidence. I take stand for myself in my in-laws by reasoning as I cannot say day to night if there is a night... I know where to control my emotions, and in which situation, I am safe to express. I have the courage to take decision for myself and my family and for this confidence I credit my parents as they gave me liberty for taking my decisions since early childhood"*

Another young working lady aged 32 said:

*"My strength is a gift given by my parents...their good upbringing. They supported me and gave me confidence, especially my mother's company taught me a lot. My mother informally trained me how to tackle the unfavourable situations"*

A woman of age 28 doing job in a private school said:

*"My parents trained me to face the challenges of life. I think a woman should realize that it is only she who is the homemaker, and the responsibility lies on her for biding the family together. She cannot sort out the solution to her problems in the in-laws unless she is trained in parents' house and this calls for parents' responsibility to prepare their daughters to face every sort of challenges to be confronted in the life after marriage"*

A woman of 26 year of age said:

*"My parents trained and advised me to compromise where situation demands and to resolve conflict amicably and my parents' training of conciliation has empowered me. So sacrificing quality for husband and in-laws has made my position stronger in the family of in-laws"*

A women of age 28 years said:

*"My father always encouraged my participation in household decisions and he always took me with him along with my brother for outing. He always admired my courage and I think, my father played very significant role in empowering me. He gave me courage to accept challenges"*

The extant literature is found silent on the role of parents in empowering women. However, the role of parents in the success and failures of children is well established.

### Husband's support

Husband's support was found to be a significant factor because it helps the counterpart to cope with the stress she faces, reduces it and increases the sense of security, confidence as well as satisfaction in relationship. It is apparent through the data that when husband showed sympathetic reaction and rendered support to a woman in case she was being exploited by in-laws, the woman did not report to bother, the adversities and remained confident and was better managing the situation. As one of the women, aged 26 said:

*"After marriage, it is very hard to please so many people at home in the in-laws. Thanks God my husband cooperates with me to manage the difficult situations in the in-laws. My husband's love and care makes me stronger to express my opinion the family"*

Almost all the participants pointed out that their husbands extended strong support in making them empowered in the in-laws. One of the women, aged 34- a university teacher reported:

*"As I am a working lady, my exposure and confidence scare my in-laws family. My in-laws use obnoxious words to insult me. They say "yeh tau mard maar ha" (male killer) ...in a sense, I cannot be tamed. My parents gave me education, so that I may not be slaved."*

*My husband always advises me to be patient and assures me that he respects me and appreciates my hard work and struggle- it is my husband's support that gives me confidence to tolerate my in-laws strategically by prioritizing my job responsibilities along with household chores"*

The results are in line with Batool (2017), that husband's support was significant predictor of women's overall, economic, familial, socio-cultural, and psychological empowerment. Husband's support plays a vital role in women's lives and encourages women to handle the new environment with ease, whereas, the lack of support makes it hard to effectively handle the matters. The demoralizing role of husband determines women's disempowerment as women keep on emotionally disturbed due to day to day tension with their husbands, which results in depression, dependence, and powerlessness (Khan & Maan, 2008; Tijani & Yano, 2007). So husbands' support is essential to be assessed in future quantitative studies as the determinant of women's empowerment.

In the life of a woman, marriage is a turning point after which both a woman and her husband start new path of life. They both need each other's societal support, but it seems that the need of a wife to seek social support of husband is more acute. Without her husband, a woman feels physically frail, emotionally starved, financially insecure, and socially secluded. She feels complete due to support of her husband (Khalid, 1991).

If there is a lack of marital adjustment and mutual cooperation among marital partners, it not only destroys peace of mind of both the partners but also throws them in depression, helplessness, and powerlessness. Emotional attachment of a married couple with each other also gives advantages to a wife in securing good standing in the house of her husband. In this case, Tijani and Yano (2007), in a study in Japan, showed that many women enjoyed higher empowerment because their husbands had created amiable relationship with them and gave them independence of expression.

### Education and academic achievement

Education is a tool that empowers women via self-awareness and prestigious status in the society. Women in the study believed that education empowered them economically and socially. A woman of 49 years of age said:

*"Education gave me confidence. It gave me self-respect, and self-esteem. When I was in F.A. my parents died (all brothers and sisters scattered as they were taken and brought up by different relatives). Although my maternal uncle brought me up but I financed my small personal expenditures by teaching to small kids. I did F.A, B.A, M.A, and MPhil after the death of my parents. She said "mein nokri kar rahi hoon thath kay saath (I am doing job with honour). I am a single lady doing job among all males. All of my colleagues give me respect for my qualification and work. I give this credit to my education as it has given me respectable status and taught me a lot to face the challenges of life"*

One working lady of age 42 having M.phil degree said:

*"When I tell others that I am MPhil, people get impressed. During studies, I always topped and achievements and, appreciation from family and teachers boosted my confidence and gave me confidence to understand and manage my circumstances. I think my education, and success and achievements in life empowered me financially and in the society"*

Highlighting the importance of education in empowering women, another working woman, aged 37 said:

*"No doubt, I am empowered due to my prestigious job and the money that I earn. My efforts in the academic carrier: being passionate student, working hard, and studying day and night made me stronger and confident. My teachers' role is also very important in making me a successful woman and this all infused in me good qualities. So good students can have good jobs that empower them"*

Our results are consistent with a substantial body of literature that supports the rise in education level to empower women. For example, Haque, Islam, Tareque, and Mostofa, (2011) that concluded that highly educated women in Bangladesh had the high empowerment in economic decision-making and household-decision making. Results are in line with Sheikh, Merajand and Sadaqat (2015) who reported higher level of economic empowerment among educated women in Pakistan. The value of education to empowerment is well established in the literature (e.g., Khan & Awan, 2011; Mishra & Nayak, 2010; Pallas, 2011).

### Financial autonomy

Financial autonomy either from childhood or achieved in adulthood appeared to boost women's confidence and augmented their confidence. A woman of age 28- a housewife said:

*"My father always gave me sufficient pocket money and encouraged me to manage my daily canteen expenditures and do saving to purchase my favourite things by the end of month. This not only gave me confidence and feelings of security, but also trained me to manage my finance and plan and take small decisions with my own money. This training made me a confident child and has played a great role in my present higher state of empowerment too"*

Another young woman of aged 29 years, working in a bank said:

*"I earn and can manage my finances and fulfil my own and my kids' needs. I need not to demand money from my husband, rather he respects my struggle in sharing his financial responsibilities. My in-laws do not challenge my strong position, they do not interfere in my personal matters. I think, if I did not have this financial autonomy, things would have been different"*

A middle aged non-working woman of age 46 year said:

*"I never demanded finances from my husband, I inherited property from my parents and the money that I get out of the earning from market and land not only fulfils my needs but also I give major share of it to my husband for routine expenditure and education of children. He respects me, and my financial autonomy makes me confidence and I am independent in my dealings with friends and family"*

Paid job: an important mark of financial autonomy, appeared as a significant contributory factor to women's empowerment, even if they were not highly educated. A matric pass woman aged 49 said:

*"I do not feel myself inferior to anyone anyways. I got married at the age of 16, I run my own factory, brought up my children without begging from others. I had to work hard for my five children. From morning till evening, I work for my dignity and respect. My husband is ill and he stays at home. I earn and I am independent to spend my money, so I am not afraid of anyone. I have absolute control over whatever decisions have to be made for example; about children, household purchases, saving and investing my saved money"*

The women's paid job and financial autonomy came out to be a salient determinant of women's empowerment in the current study. The findings of the study showed that having a paid job is linked with higher empowerment and the literature on quantitative studies supplement this finding (e.g., Chaudhry & Nosheen, 2009; Kishor, 2000; Khan & Awan, 2011). Educated women, who work and earn their own incomes, have been reported to be more empowered as compared with the educated women who do not do any job to earn money for themselves. For example, Gholipour, Rahimian, and Mirzamani (2010) conditioned higher education and profession as an operational tool for women's empowerment. Personal income and financial autonomy reduce women's financial dependence and increase their control over family resources that lead them to be empowered (Heaton, Huntsman, & Flake, 2005). An economically strong and financially autonomous woman, having higher income, sharing with her family, has stronger economic power (Khan & Awan, 2011). Personal income builds up the bargaining power of women within the family, thus supplement their empowerment and prospective to challenge the prevalent customs that hamper their capabilities to make choices (Khan & Awan, 2011). Income, property, and possession indicate the standard of living, which influence women's empowerment (Wiklander & Thede, 2010).

**Personal attributes: social skill, assertiveness, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and will power**

Majority of women believed that along with social and financial support, their empowerment should be attributed to their personal qualities for example, a woman aged 47 reported:

*"I got married early at the age of 17 year. My position in the in-laws was not very strong. In the beginning, they tried to suppress my preferences and control led me the way they wanted. I learnt social skills from my parents, especially from my mother... how she used to convince people, won the hearts of in-laws by helping them, assertiveness to speak for rights. This all gave me the power to overcome the unwanted situations of life after marriage. So all this made me socially stronger and empowered"*

A woman aged 37 said:

*"Caring others and peoples' trust in me have created my special place in my in-laws. I think I have controlled my surroundings with it. People give me respect and importance due to my positive relationships with them. Sometimes I become aggressive, but others tolerate my tempers and say nothing on account of my altruistic behaviour, love and care. We can subjugate others with love, care, and support"*

A 45-year-old woman reported:

*"I often think that being loving, caring, and supportive have empowered me. I am able to gather loving people around me. I never feel loneliness due to love and care I share. I think positive and remain optimistic (she gave example of half glass full). I am socially active. I arrange parties and feel happy if I look after someone, and cook food for others. When people around you are happy, it makes you happy. Making others happy empowers you socially"*

One of the woman of age 49 year believed that her caring nature and social skills played significant role in her extended social circle that has empowered her:

*"I think women should have social circle or forum where they can discuss their problems and seek positive reinforcement. This gives a woman an opportunity of making catharsis and women can seek informational, tangible, and emotional support from other*

*women in their circle and this all encourages them to take risk in life and empower them"*

Social network as a positive predictor of women's empowerment also appeared in the existing literature (e.g., Khan & Maan, 2008).

Another woman of aged 30 attributed her assertiveness and will-power in empowering her:

*"I think my quality to convince others without annoying them, helps me to win the situation. I never let others to exploit my rights. I remain persistent in perusing my goals and safeguarding my rights. I am sure if a woman desires to be empowered, she should be assertive and has a strong will-power. I can accept any challenge with confidence that I can pursue to the completion with persistence. I think assertiveness and will power help me in empowering myself in the society"*

Some of the women believed that their confidence in their abilities and their respect and regard for themselves made them empowered. As a women aged 28 years said:

*"I am always confident that I can manage to cope with adversities. I have confidence in my abilities as a daughter, wife, daughter in-law and, mother. I fulfil all my responsibilities successfully and this further enhances my confidence and self-esteem. The feeling of control over my situation gives me the sense of empowerment"*

A woman of age 48 years said:

*"Unless you are confident that you can complete your assigned work, you will not produce quality work. I graduated from a high merit university and always stood first in my class. My achievements and quality education boosted my self-esteem and am confident in whatever I plan to do in life"*

One of the women of age 49 year attributed her empowerment to her multiple skills as she said:

*"A woman is judged by the qualities she possesses. I beat drum very well and sing well. No wedding ceremony in the family and friends is complete without my singing. I can drive my car, I arrange parties at home, and I can stitch my dress. What not I can do? I think due to multifarious skills I have made myself important among my friends and in-laws family"*

There is very scarce empirical work on the personal attributes of women in their empowerment. Spreitzer (1995) emphasized on the enrichment of self-esteem to increase women's empowerment. Handy and kassam (2004) and Rawlett (2014) supported the high self-efficacy belief in boosting confidence of women and attaining empowerment. The results support the significance of assertiveness in women's empowerment that was a key theme arising from a discussion that took place at the 'Investing in the Future' (IIFMENA) conference in Sharjah on October 20, 2016 (n.d. 2018). Gopikala (2014) for the first time talked about the positive role of life skills (e.g., assertiveness, empathy, internal locus of control, self-awareness, confidence building skills, self-esteem, networking skill, and persuasion skill) in women's empowerment and recommended to enhance these life skills.

The present qualitative study was conducted to supplement the existing literature on the determinants of women's empowerment. The results in the present study partially complement the existing literature. Some of the factors appeared to contribute in women's empowerment (viz., role of parents, husband's support, intra-personal attributes: assertiveness, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and

will-power), interpersonal relationships, and financial autonomy are unique to the current study.

### Implications of the findings

Women having different skills emerged as a positive factor in empowering them, for example, if she is a good cook, good dress designer, knows the art of arranging parties at home, have the technique of handling family members, she can be respected and ultimately empowered. The measure of this factor is also needed to be developed for the future work on the determinants of women's empowerment. Importance of personal attributes suggests that the empowerment of women is not contingent upon the backing and support of the society, but it is she who can empower herself while enhancing her assertiveness, will power, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. If a woman makes herself a useful part of the society, society will acknowledge her and it will empower her too. A woman can extend her social circle with the help of her learned skills, good nature and social skill. The extended social circle will enhance her confidence and give her courage to know and learn that will empower her in and outside home. The study provides a guideline to women themselves regarding the types of strategies that may prove effective for better status in the society and ways to influence other. Further studies may be carried out to develop indigenous measures to assess these social and personal determinants on a larger sample.

It appeared that role of parents play a significant part in empowering women, as they encourage them to be confident in life. So, the role of parents need to be assessed in future quantitative studies as the determinant of women's empowerment. Two male figures: father and husband appeared important in inculcating self-confidence and making a woman empowered, so a man in these two roles should be aware of his obligation to treat a woman with dignity and provide appropriate support.

The study has implication for the government and non-government organizations to develop policies for empowering women in Pakistan. Family education program is recommended to involve family members while working on the implementation of policies of women's empowerment in Pakistan.

### Limitations and Suggestions

The study used qualitative method, so one should be cautious in interpreting the results:

Firstly, as the sample was taken from Lahore city only, therefore, in future, the data should be collected from other cities of Pakistan to generalize the findings. Secondly, the study included women scoring 2 standard deviations above the mean on women's empowerment index, so it is recommended to engage both least and moderately empowered women in future studies. Thirdly, only women residing in urban area were included in the study. However; it is proposed that in future investigation, women living in rural areas of the country should also be involved.

### Conclusion

It can be concluded from the findings that process of women's empowerment is an interplay of familial factors (e.g., role of parents and husband's support), personal attributes (assertiveness, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and will power), personal achievements, financial autonomy and social network. So a comprehensive plan at

government and institutional levels should be chalked out to develop a policy to empower women in various spheres of life. The women's empowerment program will involve government policy makers, families and training of women themselves. The factors that have been qualitatively explored need to be rigorously measured in future quantitative researches.

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