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Abstract

Research shows that female status in Pakistan is far behind that in most other nations. The vast gender inequality is gaining more attention from international actors but no success has been reported. I analyze interviews conducted with directors of local Women's Policy Machinery groups in Pakistan in 2007. In analyzing the surveys I test three hypotheses in regards to the question: will decentralization lead the government to be more responsive to women? In completing my research I have come to the conclusion that the instability of the country as well as its strong traditions will continue to hold women back. The future of the country as of right now is uncertain, but if a democratic government is able to survive, the Pakistani women may have a brighter future ahead of them.

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Daniela Stojkova

Abstract

Research shows that female status in Pakistan is far behind that in most other nations. The vast gender inequality is gaining more attention from international actors but no success has been reported. I analyze interviews conducted with directors of local Women's Policy Machinery groups in Pakistan in 2007. In analyzing the surveys I test three hypotheses in regards to the question: will decentralization lead the government to be more responsive to women? In completing my research I have come to the conclusion that the instability of the country as well as its strong traditions will continue to hold women back. The future of the country as of right now is uncertain, but if a democratic government is able to survive, the Pakistani women may have a brighter future ahead of them.

Introduction

Pakistan, officially known as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, is the sixth most populous country in the world. Since its independence, gained in 1947, the country has experienced significant changes amidst periods of military regimes and instability. The history of this country, as well as its strong traditional socialization of people, creates a unique case study that merits further research. The treatment of women in Pakistan rests upon traditional values and expectations that have been passed on for generations. These traditions, although largely followed in some provinces, seem to be on the verge of change. Due to both external and internal forces, the government is making strides in involving and increasing female participation; decentralization seems to be the first step.

Scholars define decentralization as “a transfer of authority to make policies and decisions, carry out management functions and use resources from central government authorities to local government, field administration, semi-autonomous corporations, area-wide or regional development organizations, functional authorities, sub-ordinate units of government or specialized functional authorities” (Wiley 1984). The issue of decentralization ultimately leads me to a question: will decentralization lead the government to be more responsive to women and their status in the country of Pakistan?

A case study of Pakistan will either support the idea of decentralization having a positive effect on women or it will show that decentralization is not effective in increasing female status in a male dominated country. Through further analysis of existing literature as well as a close examination of Provincial-Level Ministries of Women Development surveys, a conclusion will be reached as to the effectiveness of decentralization and whether or not it will lead the government to be more responsive to women. If decentralization is found to be a successful way of improving female status in Pakistan, the study will prove to be immensely significant in that it can then be applied to other developing countries.

Literature Review

Pakistan, a country gaining its acceptance a mere sixty years ago in 1947, is divided into four provinces, two territories, and a shared ownership of Kashmir with its neighbor, India. Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) is the region being shared, and despite many efforts to change that, the territory still remains under the combined control of Pakistan and India. This territory receives influence from both countries and many believe that due to the overwhelming amount of control, the region is in a sense confused as to what is most important for it and its people. The region is governed, by allocating responsibility for certain matters to Pakistan and likewise to India. Pakistan is responsible for defense, foreign policy, and currency, while other major factors are allotted to India. This territory is difficult to study due to the different influences it receives between the countries. It is a highly polarized region with a miniscule amount of communication among leaders and groups.

Punjab is the largest province, population-wise, and it is home to over half of the Pakistani population. This is the most stable and industrialized region within the country and it is also the one that grants women the most freedom and equality. Opposite of Punjab is the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), which is deemed the smallest province in Pakistan. It has a rather small urban population and a strong separation between the North and the South. Although this province is divided, it is working towards

increasing enrollment in higher education, which would hopefully increase the number of female students. Sindh, another Pakistani province, is highly polarized with an almost even split between urban and rural population: 48.7% urban and 51.3% rural (Pakistan: People 2007). This division between urban and rural has created a highly polarized region, which is only furthered due to the fact that most Hindus (the minority of the country) reside there. Despite the polarization that this region is dealing with, it has successfully become the major center for economic activity, while also maintaining the highest literacy rate in the country.

The final province is Balochistan, which is technically the largest geographical region. It is largely underdeveloped and it is the most conservative among the provinces. Female citizens of this province receive the strictest treatment and are even forced to wear the hijab (a type of veil). Throughout the country of Pakistan there is a quota system instilled in regards to female participation in politics. Although the other provinces have not fully accepted the proposed 33% quota, they have settled on 17%, yet Balochistan only reserves 16%, further showing the province's lack of interest in furthering female involvement in politics (Yazdani 2004).

The territory of Pakistan is a part of the pre-partitioned British India and has been settled and civilized by many different groups. The country is largely rural but social cues are being taken from Western influences. Its first leader was Mohammed Ali Jinnah, with the Muslim League as the official party. Back in 1944 when the country was going through the process of claiming its independence, Jinnah said that "no nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you; we are victims of evil customs. It is a crime against humanity that our women are shut up within the four walls of the houses as prisoners. There is no sanction anywhere for the deplorable condition in which our women have to live" (Library of Congress: Case Study). This goes to show that even prior to the independence of the country, its leader felt that the traditional customs experienced throughout the nation were simply unacceptable and would not lead the country to glory and success. Although he wanted to establish an equal country, he was not successful; the traditional customs are still followed today and the status of women within the state is not up to par with other nations.

The current status of the country was the cause for the proposed and accepted plan of decentralization. The Devolution of Power Plan became effective on August 14, 2000, and since the country was already divided into provinces and territories, it made sense for the government to push for this (Yazdani 2004). Theoretically, devolution should have allowed for important issues to be discussed at a local level by breaking down the government into three levels: union councils, tehsils, and zilla (Yazdani 2004). This division should have forced the government to be accountable to the people, and further allowed for diversity within the elected representatives of each region. There are many reasons why devolution has not yet been found to be successful in Pakistan; however, one thing is for sure: the lack of women involved in politics has only maintained gender inequality throughout the country.

As far as women's involvement in politics, with the establishment of Pakistan as a country, a positive attitude existed towards women. Women were granted suffrage in 1947 (Women Suffrage Timeline 2006) and were allowed to vote in national elections in 1956 (Encyclopedia Britannica 2007). However, with the installation of Zia-ul-haq's military regime, which lasted from 1977 to 1988, women were negatively impacted and

their opinions and lives were not as important as they used to be (Library of Congress: Case Study). The regime ended due to the leader's sudden air craft crash, which still remains unexplained today. Following his death, and the end of his military regime, Pakistan's first female Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, was appointed in 1988. She "pledged to work for a progressive and democratic Pakistan - one guided by Islamic principles of brotherhood, equality, and tolerance" (Library of Congress: Case Study). She was eager to push along the issues and concerns that Pakistani women faced, while also working for the middle and lower classes - the people who were not getting their voices heard. Prime Minister Bhutto's involvement in this cause led to the inclusion of women's status as one of the goals listed in the Pakistan 2010 Programme. The goals of the Programme are to this day still not fully accomplished, but it is rather important that women's status was one of the goals included.

Women are trying to get their voices heard but there are still many things holding them back. Basic rights and freedoms that women in the United States enjoy are distant hopes and dreams for the female Pakistani population. In a study conducted in 1997, Ayesha Khan was able to survey female residents of Punjab. She chose this province due to the fact that it is the largest and is home to over half of the Pakistani population. She conducted thirty-one personal interviews, sampling both married and single women, as well as randomly selecting women with average education and income levels typical of their region (Khan 1999). The focus of the small discussion groups was to gather a better understanding of healthcare and mobility granted to women. What she was trying to show within her study was that women are not allowed to freely move throughout the regions that they live in, nor are they granted sufficient healthcare. Both of these issues show a lack of equality among the sexes and the need for a change.

The study concluded that there was "a generally accepted set of values pertaining to women's status, family izzat (honour), and purdah (segregation of the sexes) that directly restricted women's mobility" (Khan 1999). Men believed that they have the right to dominate over women and most women did not seem to have an issue with the control that is exercised over them. Although men stressed their power over the female population, they were able to recognize and accept the fact that women are invaluable and crucial to the family.

According to Khan's study, as far as mobility is concerned, purdah practices trump all. Women are to be segregated from men; therefore, it is highly unlikely that a woman would be allowed to leave her village without an escort to prevent other men from taking an interest in her. As a result of traditional purdah practice, female mobility is highly restricted. Khan found that over two-thirds of the women surveyed required permission in order to visit family members, while an astonishing ninety percent needed permission to leave their village. She also found that mobility restrictions become more relaxed as the women aged; however, that quickly changes if the family status improves, as the family is held to higher standards and is more closely watched.

Through the use of her surveys, Khan also studied female autonomy within Pakistan. For the purposes of Khan's study, "autonomy has been defined as the ability to obtain information and to use it as the basis for making decisions about one's private concerns and those of one's intimates" (Khan 1999). Mobility leads to autonomy, and since Khan found a limited amount of mobility granted to women, she was able to conclude that women also lack autonomy. Furthermore, the topic of autonomy was also

analyzed in another survey which compared the status of women in Pakistan to the status of women in India. The data tested four dimensions of autonomy: economic decision making, mobility, freedom from threat from husband, and access to and control over economic resources. The results that were accumulated show that there is a significant difference amongst the regions surveyed. Women in Punjab tend to have less equality with their male counterparts, than comparable regions in India. Ultimately these surveys also suggest that women's autonomy is very much constrained in Pakistan. Although Punjab was the only Pakistani region surveyed, the researchers believe that their conclusions apply to the entire country, as Punjab is the most affluent, and since it is not equal to India, other less affluent and developed regions in Pakistan would experience even less equality. Autonomy is shaped by tradition, which involves purdah, and therefore women cannot be in charge of their own bodies and they must remain segregated from men.

On the topic of healthcare, in 1997 researcher, A. Green, focused his surveys on men. Ultimately, the men surveyed within the villages of Pakistan, seem to be in agreement that women's healthcare is an important issue. However, the issue is not important enough for the women to be allowed to be seen by male doctors; furthermore, since the female population is generally not very well educated, the women doctors that do exist tend to have treacherous practices. Only in rare cases are women allowed to leave the village and go to another doctor, and even in those cases, women are talked about negatively and it is assumed that they are visiting other men (Green 1997).

Research Design/Methodology

The research question addressed within this essay is whether decentralization will lead the government to be more responsive to women in Pakistan. If the Pakistani government truly decentralizes, then it is expected that the women will gain more equality and freedom. They should finally be able to venture beyond their cultural socialization and the practices of purdah and izzat (segregation of the sexes and family honor). Such practices have only created a vast amount of segregation and have helped maintain a level of inequality between men and women, as women have to ask men for permission to complete simple daily tasks. Therefore, if decentralization is successful, segregation and inequality should gradually be phased out of the lives of Pakistani women. If the devolution of government is triumphant, the government should become more responsive to women.

Defining the variables of this study is a crucial first step that must be taken. For the purposes of this case study, the dependent variable is the effectiveness of decentralization. To measure this variable, I will be placing an emphasis on survey questions derived from the "Women's Policy Agencies in Poland and Pakistan" surveys. The survey question that I will be focusing on regards the number of female oriented programs, as well as the programs' rank in importance to women. Furthermore, I will be looking at how effective these programs are within each province, based on the number of groups found in each province. Aside from the surveys conducted in Pakistan, I will also be looking at healthcare, education, and mobility as indicators of women's status. Thus, the independent variables that I will be looking at as far as their effect on the dependent variable are education, healthcare, mobility/autonomy, women's groups, and programs.

To gain a better understating of Pakistan and come to a significant conclusion, I will be testing three hypotheses, as outlined in the table below. The first hypothesis is that if a country decentralizes, then women's status indicator - measured in education, healthcare, and mobility - should improve. Secondly, I hypothesize that if provincial governments are decentralized, then they will pursue different women's programs than the national level on the basis of cultural differences. My third and final hypothesis is that if provincial governments have more women's groups, then they will pursue more programs for women. These hypotheses will be tested through the use of the Women's Policy Agencies in Poland and Pakistan surveys, as well as the surveys conducted by other researchers in regards to women's status indicators.

Hypothesis 1	If a country decentralizes, then women's status indicator should improve.
Hypothesis 2	If decentralization occurs, programs different from the national level will be pursued.
Hypothesis 3	The more women's groups, the more programs will be pursued.

There are three types of theoretical approaches in regards to doing research: structural, institutional, and cultural. For the purposes of this case study, I will be relying on the cultural approach, which entails linguistic, ethnic, racial, and religious reasons for the survey results. I feel that this approach is especially helpful when researching a country such as Pakistan, which has deep traditional socialization and people are taught to follow the rules and laws established hundreds of years ago. More specifically, the practices of purdah and izzat play a major role in the lives of the Pakistani people and that needs to be taken into account when conducting research. Such practices are still holding women back, and until they are considered as less important and un-necessary for every day life, as they currently are, women will not be able to advance.

I will also be approaching the surveys and other statistical information from a structural perspective, which is about economic and demographical information. I feel that it is important to realize where the people being surveyed are from, meaning rural versus urban areas, and the different provinces from which they come. Although it is difficult to accomplish such a task, based on the fact that each and every province is unique, I feel that it is still important to look at.

The unit of analysis in this study is the Director of a program, which is the person who represents the women's group in a particular province. For this study I will be focusing on the survey responses of five provincial women's groups' leaders. The surveys were conducted in each of the Pakistani provinces, as well in Kashmir, one of Pakistan's territories. The results are only relevant for each of the regions within Pakistan, as the surveys are conducted among Pakistani group Directors in each region.

Analysis

Hypothesis 1

My first hypothesis, in regards to women's status indicator improving after a country decentralizes, is rejected.

The first aspect of women's status indicator that I analyzed in this study was female mobility/ autonomy. I analyzed a study created by Ayesha Khan, in which she conducted 31 in-depth, personal interviews among residents of Punjab. This province was chosen because it is the most industrialized and the furthest along in level of development. It is also the most relaxed in restrictions placed upon women. Through the use of her surveys, I have found out that over two-thirds of surveyed women required permission to visit family members. Of the surveyed, 90% of women were not allowed to leave their village unattended, 43% percent could go to the nearby fields alone, and only 28% percent could go unescorted to health center, providing there is one in their town (Khan 1999). This shows that female mobility is very much restricted in Punjab, and since mobility leads to autonomy, I have been able to see that both are highly restricted.

The next women's status indicator I studied was female education. Through surveys conducted, as well as the 2003 census, I found that Pakistan's enrollment rate for ages 5-24 is a mere 36%, of which 41.2% are boys, 30.4% girls, while the remainder goes unaccounted for (Keefer 2003). Also, the census showed that in 2003, three years after the country decentralized, of those 15 years and older enrolled in school; almost 60% were boys, while only 30% were girls (statistics do not add up to 100 % based on insufficient data in some of the provinces). These numbers show that even though decentralization of the Pakistani government occurred, female status in the school system did not improve. In 2001, the government announced a universal primary education plan which is to be completed by 2011 (Keefer 2003). The problematical issue with the plan, however, is that 50% of the funds for the project are expected to come from international sources, showing that the plan is the result of a push from international actors. And even with the proposal of this plan, Balochistan is hesitant in allowing it to be executed within its borders, even though education is a constitutional right.

The final measured indicator for women's status in Pakistan is health. The country is far behind in number of physicians and hospital beds in proportion to its population. Currently, 19% of the population is malnourished and the last reported statistics (2003) show that there are 68 physicians for every 100,000 persons (Green 1997). Not only is there not a sufficient number of physicians in the country, but most of them are males and therefore women are not allowed to see them; thus the women must treat themselves or simply go untreated. The Pakistani culture does not allow for females to be seen in the company of males unless they are married or the male is a relative on the husband's side.

In totaling all of the measured indicators, it becomes clear that the status of women in Pakistan has not improved as a result of decentralization, thus rejecting my hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2

My second hypothesis, in regards to culturally different programs at the national and regional level, is accepted.

I focused on the dependent variable, represented by question number 11, which asks what programs have been addressed by the women's policy agency pertaining to women in the given province. Question 11 presents 32 options, yet the average number of programs addressed is seven. When compared to the national level survey, it becomes clear that although the national government would like 14 programs to be pursued, the provinces each decide on their own which are most important. This shows that although

there are several programs that need to be addressed, women's groups are incapable of addressing all of them and therefore they narrow down their scope of influence.

This analysis, supported by TABLE 1 shows that my hypothesis- if provincial governments are decentralized, then they will pursue different women's groups programs than the national level on the basis of cultural differences- is accepted. There are different programs being pursued among the provinces and, not only that, but when ranked among the surveyed people as far as level of importance, the programs rank differently for each and every province. For example, Punjab ranked economically empowering women as number one, while the NWFP and Sindh chose legal assistance for women as their most important program. The importance in AJK was in regards to promoting women in the labor market and for Balochistan eliminating violence for women was seen as the most vital.

What is interesting, aside from the fact that most provinces grant importance to different programs, is that what the national government considers to be most important - women entrepreneurship- is not considered to be key in any of the provinces. In fact, when ranking the programs, only two of the provinces - Punjab and Sindh - address one of the top two concerns of the national government. When comparing the national government to AJK, there are no similarities in the programs pursued; Balochistan has only one program in common with the national expectations. The difference in programs pursued reflects the decentralization the country has already undergone, pointing out the disparities among the provinces and therefore supporting my hypothesis.

TABLE 1

Province	Number of Programs
Punjab	7
NWFP	5
AJK	7
Sindh	12
Balochistan	14
National	14

*Based on "Women's Policy Agencies in Poland and Pakistan"

Hypothesis 3

My next and final hypothesis - if provincial governments have more women's groups, then they will pursue more programs for women - is rejected. According to TABLE 2, Balochistan, which has the smallest number of women's groups, has the largest number of programs pursued. This could be due to the fact that the province wants to catch up to the other provinces, since it is still largely underdeveloped. I, however, hypothesized the opposite relationship, and expected that AJK would have the most programs due to the fact that it has 252 women's groups. I believe that my hypothesis was rejected due to the differentiation among the provinces. Although AJK has the most women's groups, the region is partly governed by India, which creates cleavages and polarization. In a sense, there is too much control over that region, so less progress is

being accomplished in regards to bettering the status of women. I also believe that because the region is governed by two different countries, communication among the different groups is lacking, which therefore leads to separation and division amongst them.

To further develop this hypothesis, I would have liked to compare the provincial results with the national government statistics; however, such information is not available. The national government does not register any of the organizations because they are in relation to women - statistics in regards to women are rarely obtained in Pakistan. Due to the lack of national statistics for registered women's groups, I was unable to create a correlation with the provincial statistics.

TABLE 2

Province	Women's Groups	Number of Programs
Punjab	21	7
NWFP	31-50	5
AJK	252	7
Sindh	No Response	12
Balochistan	5-10	14

*Based on "Women's Policy Agencies in Poland and Pakistan"

Conclusions

More research and data analysis are necessary in order to be able to draw significant conclusions about decentralization's effects on women's status in Pakistan. Due to the already observed survey results and other statistical references, I believe that Pakistan could eventually forgo its gender inequality socialization. Women are beginning to get their voices heard, while changes within the government and Pakistani society could be on their way to becoming a reality. The country is rather unstable at the moment, due to the Presidential election that should be taking place, and the controversial return of Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan's first female prime minister¹. However, with the current controversial issues, it is evident that international powers are getting involved in maintaining a democracy in Pakistan. This goes to show that urbanization is not short of affecting the Pakistani people and they are ready to stand up for themselves and for the changes that they wish to bring about for their country.

My initial research question of whether decentralization will lead the government to be more responsive to women in Pakistan as of now still stands to be answered negatively. Until major changes occur within the federal government, the country will not allow decentralization to fully affect it, as it has for many other countries. Not only do the Pakistani people have to be ready for the change and embrace it, but the leaders also need to accept forgoing some of their powers, such as the Eighth Amendment. This controversial amendment gives the president the power to appoint and dismiss the prime minister, the provincial governors, and the national and provincial assemblies, while forbidding political parties' participation in the elections. The president is free to invoke

¹ This paper was written prior to Benazir Bhutto's assassination.

the powers of this amendment at any point and thus declare a state of military regime. With the president's ability to call upon such powers, the people are left feeling helpless in the midst of an extremely unstable country.

With that said, I do feel that the Pakistani society is beginning to realize that the government is behind in their treatment of people in comparison to other countries. Things such as the long-awaited return of Benazir Bhutto show the eagerness of the people for a change. They have been waiting for her to return from self-proclaimed exile so that her party, the Pakistan People's Party Parliamentary, can become the party in control of the government and the country can therefore become more stabilized. Upon her current return, it is becoming interestingly obvious that Bhutto is debating on joining forces with the current president, Pervez Musharraf. This potential coalition would be an interesting mixture of power, as the effects of Musharraf's military regime will be lessened and a greater voice will be given to the middle class.

Pakistan is currently amidst monumental changes. Women's groups are fighting for more funding and support for their programs. Outside countries are getting involved in the fight for equality and a Gender Reform Action Plan (GRAP 2007) is currently being instituted, after being approved within some of the provinces. The suggested GRAP consists of "major administrative, political, and fiscal reforms that will mainstream gender concerns at all levels of government: federal, provincial, and local" (*Pakistan Times* 2004). Furthermore, the GRAP will "aim to reform the core policies and practices within the executive arm of the state and bring the women's empowerment agenda to the center of governance" (*Pakistan Times* 2004). The GRAP is mainly a push from international actors with a price tag of close to \$1 billion U.S. dollars. This is the first time that such a sizable amount of money is being allocated for implementation of gender reforms.

Aside from the GRAP, Loan 1938-PAK is another positive effect of decentralization. This loan is aimed at making a smoother transition towards decentralization and it was designed with gender reform and social development themes. The loan will provide funding for devolution, as long as two conditions are met: 33% of seats are reserved for women and performance-based grants are established for gender and local revenue mobilization (Asian Development Bank).

Although I feel as though my hypotheses were supported with the conducted research, there is room for change. The government is currently changing and it is too soon to tell what the effects of those changes will be. I predict that Bhutto's return will halt the military regime and she will be able to lead her party and establish equality, while denying the rights of practices that continue to hold women back². More concrete conclusions can be drawn after the election and the outcomes of the new party chosen to lead the country.

Therefore, there is plenty of room for future research. I feel that it will be important to see how rural groups feel about the changes, versus more urban areas. It will be important to see how the new political party in power will treat the GRAP, as well as Loan 1938-PAK. The effects of these plans, as well as the many other groups and programs dedicated to furthering women's policy machinery, will be able to display the true effects of decentralization of this case study. This is the time to explore Pakistan and gain a better understanding of its culture and how decentralization will affect it.

² Benazir Bhutto's death inevitably changes the situation, but implications of her death were not studied in this paper.

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