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A Phenomenological Exploration of Empowerment Dynamics in Women Lecturers Employed in Colleges in District Bhakkar

Name: Beenish Fatima
Roll Number: 243974650
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Thesis Supervisor: Dr Shamaila Athar

Department of Sociology
Forman Christian College (A Chartered University)

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ABSTRACT

This study is aimed at filling a significant gap by conducting primary research and utilizing qualitative methods to give special attention to the empowerment status of women who teach at the college level. The research objectives include: (1) navigating the experiences and perspectives of women employed in college-level teaching positions in the pursuit of their empowerment, and (2) exploring the challenges faced by the female participants. A qualitative phenomenological approach was utilized as the guiding methodology. A purposive sampling technique was used to approach a total of 12 female lecturers from two colleges in the district of Bhakkar, Punjab. Data was collected using in-depth interviews, keeping in view the research ethics. The data has been analyzed using the thematic analysis approach introduced by Braun and Clarke. The main findings involve: 1) Employed women feel empowered within household because of their economic independence and venerable job status, 2) Unmarried participants feel more empowered as compared to married women, 3)The employment status has increased the self-esteem and confidence level of the participants, 4) Challenges faced by the participants include: maintaining work-life balance; conveyance hurdles; some people in the surroundings of the participants fear that empowerment dynamics might disrupt traditional norms in the community, 5) Enablers of empowerment include: personal attributes such as resilience and hard work, family support, higher education, and employment status. The findings of this research are aimed at expanding knowledge on women's empowerment in Pakistan by focusing especially on women employed in the colleges. It can also contribute to policymakers, organizations, and stakeholders in designing gender-responsive policies and interventions. Additionally, the study aligns with the Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which pertains to the promotion of gender equality.

Keywords: women's empowerment, women's employment, gender equality, SDGs

Chapter 1 Introduction

Pakistan is a strictly patriarchal society, and as Johannsdottir (2009) mentioned, patriarchy has deep connections with the subordination of women. Women are subjected to subjugation and face challenging circumstances in this society. The World Economic Forum in its *Global Gender Gap Report* (2023) showed that in terms of the Global Gender Gap Index, Pakistan ranked 142 out of 146 countries. The literacy gender gap is on the rise, there is a concerning prevalence of violence against women, and the rate of women's participation in the workforce is currently at a low level in comparison to countries with similar GDP per capita (Klasen & Wink, 2003). Given this, the phenomenon of women's empowerment holds immense importance. The objective of women's empowerment is integral to the feminist vision for inclusive and sustainable development, as articulated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that have been informed by the insights gained from political and historical experiences that have demonstrated effective moves towards achieving gender equality (Htun & Weldon, 2010). Studying women's empowerment in the context of their employment is crucial because improved economic status is an important determinant of empowerment. Against this backdrop, this study is aimed at employing an exploratory approach to discuss the experiences of women employed in college-level teaching positions in the pursuit of their empowerm

1.1 Statement of the problem

This study is intended to explore the complex interplay between the employment status of women and the dynamics of empowerment, contributing to the existing knowledge and understanding of gender dynamics and women's empowerment in Pakistan. This study is also aimed at filling a significant gap by conducting primary research and utilizing qualitative methods to give special attention to women who teach at the college level. Different quantitative studies

in the context of Pakistan revealed that women who earn income are more likely to be empowered (Abbas *et al*., 2021; Batool & Batool, 2018; Bushra & Wajiha, 2014; Chaudhary *et al*, 2012; Habib *et al*., 2019; Muhammad *et al*., 2012). However, an in-depth exploration of the relationship between academic employment status and the empowerment of women has not been conducted yet.

This study employs an exploratory approach to examine the experiences, challenges, perspectives, and implications of women's empowerment among women who teach at colleges. The concept of women's empowerment in regard to its indicators is explored across three dimensions of empowerment: familial/interpersonal, socio-cultural, and economic. The research focuses on employed women in college-level teaching positions as the sample.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To explore the experiences and perspectives of women employed in colleges in the district of Bhakkar, Punjab, regarding their empowerment. This objective aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how employment status influences the empowerment dynamics of women in the household.
2. To identify the challenges faced by women in empowering themselves. The obstacles involve societal stereotypes, role balancing, and workplace issues that might impede their empowerment journey.
3. To identify factors that facilitate women in their empowerment (such as education, employment etc.)

Furthermore, this study seeks to explore women's empowerment through certain indicators across three dimensions: socio-cultural, economic, and familial/interpersonal. The

indicators include decision-making power within the household which comes under the domain of familial empowerment; freedom of movement which is counted under the umbrella of social empowerment; and control over income and management of family resources in the household which fall under the economic dimension. These dimensions are examined at the household level of empowerment to understand how increased earnings influence women's decision-making power and their agency.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study adds to the existing body of literature on women's empowerment and labor economics. Previous studies about women's empowerment in Pakistan rely mostly on secondary data and assess the association between empowerment and some other socio-demographic characteristics. There is a paucity of qualitative studies which explore the factors that lead to women's empowerment in Pakistan. This study deploys an exploratory approach to find out the empowerment dynamics of those women who are employed.

By examining the specific context of women's employment and its implications for their empowerment, the study expands the understanding of how employment opportunities along with handsome salaries intersect with gender dynamics and contribute to women's overall well-being. Furthermore, the results of this research can inform policymakers, organizations, and stakeholders in designing and implementing gender-responsive policies and interventions to ensure women's participation in the labor market as a means to their empowerment. Understanding how women's earnings influence their empowerment can contribute to developing strategies that promote inclusive economic growth and gender equality in the country. By exploring the implications of women's earnings and their bargaining power, the study contributes to efforts aimed at reducing gender disparities in various social, economic, and political spheres.

Furthermore, this study is also important in terms of fulfilling the goal to gender equality as enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Pakistan opted for SDGs and these goals address the issue of gender discrimination to varying extents, with several goals specifically highlighting the importance of gender equality and empowerment. Goal 5 places special emphasis on attaining gender equality and enabling the empowerment of women. In order to fulfill Goal five, the country must work on policies that ensure women's participation in different sectors. One important niche in this regard is the economic participation of women.

1.4 Research questions

The research questions involve:

1. What are the experiences and perspectives of college-level female teachers regarding their empowerment? (This is explored using three indicators: decision-making power within the household, control over resources, and freedom of movement, across three dimensions: familial/interpersonal, economic, and social)

2. What challenges do women face in their journey toward empowerment? (These challenges may include patriarchal power imbalance, work-life balance, workplace challenges)

3. What are the enablers/facilitators of women's empowerment?

1.5 Definitions

1.5.1 Empowerment

Empowerment is a multifaceted concept that involves various dimensions, including the individual, interpersonal dynamics, as well as collective efforts through mobilization or group action (Batliwala, 2007). The term empowerment can be interpreted in two ways (Tengland,

2008). Firstly, it can be viewed as a desired outcome, wherein individuals have the power to exercise control over the factors that influence their overall well-being and quality of life. Secondly, empowerment can also be interpreted as a dynamic process or approach, where individuals or communities actively participate in decision-making and take charge of the change process. Through this process, they determine not only the goals or outcomes to be achieved but also the methods and strategies to be used in pursuing those goals. Narayan (2000) notes that empowerment is a concept that involves various concepts such as autonomy, agency, liberation, self-determination, self-direction, mobilization, participation, and self-assurance. In this study, empowerment will be specifically explored in terms of women's decision-making power and autonomy.

1.5.2 Women's empowerment

Kabeer (1999) conceptualizes empowerment as a process through which individuals, who have previously been denied the ability to exercise various forms of agency and influence in their lives as well as in the community, gain the power to exercise the choice. It has to do with the resources via which these individuals enhance their agency to achieve meaningful changes.

According to a study by the United Nations (2001), empowerment has been described as the process in which women assert ownership and control over their lives by expanding their choices and opportunities. There are two identified procedures for empowering women: one involves equipping impoverished women with self-confidence and essential skills to overcome challenges in male-dominated societies, while the other focuses on providing economic stability for impoverished women (UNDP, 1997).

1.5.3 Autonomy

Different concepts are used to interpret women's status vis-à-vis their decision-making power. These terms include empowerment, autonomy, agency, and bargaining power. Some scholars use these terms interchangeably. For instance, Jejeebhoy (2000) views autonomy and empowerment as essentially synonymous and defines them as women taking charge of their own lives in relation to their family, community, society, and economic markets. Carlson *et alet al*., (2015) define women's autonomy as the capacity of women to exercise authority that impacts both themselves and their families in their unique circumstances.

On the contrary, some writers have specifically made the case that autonomy should not be seen as the same thing as empowerment. They emphasize that autonomy implies self-reliance and independence, whereas empowerment can be attained through interdependence (Kabeer, 1998; Malhotra & Mather, 1997).

1.5.4 Women's status

The status of women refers to the current level of power and opportunities that women possess within society (Haque *et alet al*., 2011). According to Haddad (1999), factors such as the proportion of male to female adult literacy rates, the proportion of male to female life expectancy at birth, and the share of earned income contribute to determining the status of women.

1.5.5 Women's power

Dixon (2013) introduced a differentiation between women's status and women's power. Dixon's definition of status focuses on the overall position of women within society, while power relates to their capability to exercise authority and have an impact on interpersonal interactions. Consequently, women's power can be understood as their capacity to affect the actions of both

men and women and their ability to shape specific occurrences in their lives (Haque *et alet al.*, 2011).

Chapter 2 Literature review

A review of the literature provides various indicators to measure the concept of empowerment. Most commonly identified indicators include participation in decision-making, economic independence or control over resources, and freedom in terms of mobility (Mahmud *et al*., 2012). In addition, empowerment is a multidimensional concept. Malhotra and Mather (1997) pointed out that women might be empowered in one dimension of life but not in others. Hanmer and Klugman (2016) contend that agency can be exercised in different ways in various domains of life and several indicators are required to catch sight of these different dimensions. In other words, indicators are to be measured across different dimensions of empowerment. This also implies that dimensions can be interlinked, for instance, having control over financial resources is an indicator of economic empowerment and it can lead to a greater say in household decision-making which falls under the familial dimension of empowerment.

2.1 Indicators of Women's Empowerment

2.1.1 Household decision-making

Women's empowerment can lead to improved health status as well as greater decision-making power in the household (Kabeer, 1997). Malhotra and Mather (1997) found that employment and education are significant determinants of women's decision-making in regard to economic matters at home. Empowerment is seen as the power to make decisions that affect life, move freely beyond the home, and to exercise control over resources.

2.1.2 Control over resources

Blumeberg (2005) maintains that women's control over salary or other economic resources is a significant milestone in achieving development, gender equality, and empowerment.

By increasing women's economic power in the form of giving them the freedom to exert control over resources, women's empowerment and influence can be enhanced (Blumeberg, 2005). This can further be elaborated by connecting employment with empowerment and acknowledging that only earning money is not enough rather the *control* over resources is one of the important determining factors of empowerment (Blumeberg, 2005; Kabeer, 1997).

2.1.3 Freedom of Mobility

A study by Dutta (2000) reveals that paid work empowers women and women who work outside the home in order to earn money, are more likely to have greater freedom in terms of mobility, decision-making power at home, and secure their wellbeing. Kantor (2002) mentions that mobility concerning working outside the home is significant to the empowerment of women.

2.2 Multidimensionality of women's empowerment

Malhotra and Schuler (2005) and Kabeer (2005) have categorized women's empowerment into various dimensions: including familial/interpersonal, socio-cultural, political, economic, psychological, and legal empowerment. This study will focus mainly on three domains of women's empowerment.

2.2.1 Familial/interpersonal empowerment

Malhotra and Schuler (2005) define this concept at the household level, community level, and also the broader arenas of the term. Women's familial/interpersonal empowerment within households encompasses their active participation in household decision-making, their ability to make independent childbearing decisions, access contraception, and seek abortion if needed, and their freedom from domestic violence. In terms of the community, women's empowerment is evident in shifts within kinship systems and marriage, reflecting an increased value and autonomy for women. These shifts may include later marriages, the ability to self-select spouses, a reduction

in dowry practices, and greater acceptability of divorce. Moreover, women lead local campaigns against domestic violence, promoting safer and more equitable environments. At the broader level, women's interpersonal empowerment pertains to regional trends with regard to the timing of marriage as well as options for divorce; political, religious, and legal support for such decisions; and provision of reproductive health services.

2.2.2 Socio-cultural empowerment

Individual social empowerment necessitates access to knowledge, information, and a sense of self-awareness through self-inquiry, alongside the strengthening of skills and capabilities to effectively engage with the external world (Siwal, 2009). This empowerment can manifest at both the individual and collective levels.

Malhotra and Schuler (2005) define this concept by dividing it into further subcategories. Women's socio-cultural empowerment in terms of households includes enhancing women's freedom of movement, fostering a commitment to educating daughters, and eradicating discrimination against daughters. In terms of the community, it involves promoting women's visibility as well as their access to social spaces, encouraging participation in social networks and extra-familial groups, facilitating access to modern transportation, challenging patriarchal norms like son preference, and redefining the symbolic representation of females in mythology and ritual. In terms of broader arenas, the researchers define socio-cultural empowerment in terms of women's education and access to literacy options and their positive representation in media.

2.2.3 Economic empowerment

Women's economic empowerment refers to their active engagement in economic activities and decision-making, as well as their ability to exercise control over economic resources (Reshi & Sudha, 2023). This encompasses aspects such as accessing decent jobs, utilizing financial

services, possessing property rights, and exploring business opportunities. Malhotra and Schuler (2005) further divide women's economic empowerment into sub-domains. The first aspect pertains to decision-making in household affairs including contributions to family support, control over income, and management of family resources in the household. At the community level, women's economic empowerment involves access to employment, credit accessibility, ownership of land and assets, participation in local trade associations, and access to the market. In terms of broader area, the concept relates to women's representation in high-paying jobs, along with their representation in macro-level economic policies.

Women's economic empowerment not only benefits their personal growth but also positively impacts their family's well-being and contributes to societal progress. It can foster economic growth, enhance education and health outcomes for women and their families, and promote gender equality by challenging conventional gender norms and stereotypes (Reshi & Sudha, 2023). Research by Kabeer (2012) suggests that economic empowerment of women can be instrumental in reducing poverty levels, especially in developing regions.

2.3 Perspectives of women about their empowerment in Pakistan

An exploratory study was conducted by Batool and Batool (2019) to investigate the perspectives of Pakistani women with regard to the determinants of their empowerment. The participants mentioned that education and academic achievements, economic autonomy, personal characteristics (for instance social skills, self-esteem, and will power), husband's support, role of parents, and social circle are important determinants of their empowerment. Ahmed (2020) worked on the dynamics of the agency of rural women in South Punjab. The study focused on two groups of women: community health workers and home-based workers. The paper suggested that these women demonstrate agency based on their position and available resources. Mahsud

and Ali (2022), by interviewing journalists, parliamentarians, deans, and vice-chancellors, pointed out that although women generally remain subjugated in Pakistan but in recent times, employment opportunities and higher education have acted to empower women to an extent. It was found that the economic empowerment of women leads them to take control of financial resources, have a greater say in household decisions, and a better sense of self-reliance. All of these ultimately help women to become leaders and agents of change in the community (Mahsud& Ali, 2022).

2.4 Challenges to women's empowerment in Pakistan

The pathway to empowerment is not an easy task for women in Pakistan, owing to the patriarchal structure and strict gender roles.

2.4.1 Patriarchy and traditional gender roles

Pakistani society consists of a patriarchal structure. Patriarchy involves the construction of gender norms and structures that are taken for granted (Pateman, 2016). Gender norms are important determinants of gender roles. These gender norms, together with gender roles, decide individuals' experiences and life-choices. In Arab and Muslim societies, women are predominantly perceived as wives and mothers, with customary and sometimes legally mandated gender segregation, and they are expected to marry and reproduce to achieve social status, while men are responsible for economic provision (Jabareen, 2015).

In Pakistan, as in many patriarchal societies, decision-making power typically rests with male leaders (Farooq & Kayani, 2014). Classic patriarchy refers to the patrilineal system with the male as a breadwinner and the female as a homemaker (Kandiyoti, 1988). The patrilineal household structure is commonly associated with patrilocality, which implies that elder men are traditionally regarded as the household heads (Gimduz-Hosgor & Smits, 2008). In such

households, family status is predominantly determined along the male lineage, and women often reside in their husbands' households. Additionally, a preference for sons over daughters is prevalent, and women generally occupy subordinate positions relative to male members of the household (Kandiyoti, 1988). In society at large, this translates to the perception that men are deemed more fitting for positions of authority and influence (Spierings, 2014). In the same sense, the responsibility of earning an income in households has been assigned to adult men, while women have typically been assigned the primary roles of raising children, taking care of other household members, and managing household chores (Spierings, 2014). According to Ali *et al.* (2010), the patriarchal structure in Pakistan operates in a way that systematically puts women in a disadvantaged position compared to men, emphasizing the dominance of male authority across various aspects of life.

2.4.2 Work-life balance

The maintenance of balance between work responsibilities and household duties is a real challenge for people of different professions (Fatima & Sahibzada, 2012). In this regard, women face more pressure because they are considered to be the primary care-givers as per the patriarchal structure. Ross and Mirowsky (1988) mentioned that employed mothers suffered from high depression because of issues regarding child-care arrangements. In Pakistani society, women are usually expected to take care of their homes, husbands, and children. However, a gradual shift in gender roles is also being observed. The rise of women's involvement in the workforce, which was traditionally seen as a domain dominated by men, has also been driven by shifting perceptions of gender roles (Nadeem & Khalid, 2018). Yet, women are faced with work-life conflict.

2.5 Shift in household dynamics

Exposure to mass media has impacted conservative perspectives on gender roles, leading to an anticipated change in the customary positions occupied by women due to shifts in cultural values and economic circumstances (Farooq & Kayani, 2014). Changing perceptions of gender roles are being influenced by increased awareness facilitated by educational initiatives and media exposure, as also suggested by Brewster and Padavic (2000). Furthermore, examining evolving patterns in women's education throughout the years is of utmost importance (Farooq & Kayani, 2014). The educational advancements of women also have consequences for other institutions (Siddiqui, 2005). Education further impacts women's employment and then makes them autonomous as a result of being employed (Abbas *et al*., 2021; Batool & Batool, 2018; Mahsud & Ali, 2022).

There is also a growing trend of encouraging women to engage in different formal sector jobs to earn money. This indicates a shift in gender roles, although the changes in men's roles are not as widely recognized. It also highlights the fact that even though women are now actively participating in the market economy, they still tend to maintain their traditional responsibilities in domestic chores (Farooq & Kayani, 2014). The rise of women's involvement in the workforce, which was traditionally seen as a domain dominated by men, has primarily been driven by shifting perceptions of gender roles (Nadeem & Khalid, 2018).

However, according to Gutek (1998), there is a clear division of occupations based on gender, with certain jobs being seen as suitable for men and others for women. Especially in countries like Pakistan, women tend to choose occupations that are traditionally associated with their gender rather than pursuing positions that are traditionally dominated by men. This choice is driven by a fear of being viewed as deviating from societal gender norms, as patriarchal

societies tend to stigmatize women who enter male-dominated fields. Therefore, women consciously opt for gender-stereotyped occupations to avoid displaying behavior that goes against established gender roles (Nadeem & Khalid, 2018).

2.6 Enablers of women's empowerment in Pakistan

Abbas *et al*., (2021) reported that women with higher education, have access to information, and living in urban areas, as well as those who are older, engaged in paid work, earn more than their husbands, head of household, belong to the affluent class, and have children, are more likely to be empowered. Batool and Batool (2018) identified different contextual factors that can lead to women's empowerment. The researchers found out that paid job, own property, personal income, legal awareness, gender awareness, self-esteem, conjugal age, husband's support, family head, and use of mobile phone are important predictors of women's empowerment domestically. Muhammad *et al*. (2012) found that microfinance makes women engaged in economic and trade activities by self-business and hence, leads to women's empowerment. Khan (2010) presented that education, paid jobs, increased conjugal age, cooperation of husbands, and political participation are important determinants of women's empowerment in the Punjab province. Shoaib *et al*. (2012) proved a positive correlation between women's education and their empowerment at the household level. Bushra and Wajiha (2014) revealed that the economic participation of women, the content of education, and having a bank account increase women's empowerment. Wais *et al*. (2016) found that married working women with high pay and good education are empowered as compared to non-working married women.

2.6 Increased economic independence and women's empowerment

The financial independence of women can have several benefits for them to excel in society. Multiple studies have indicated that there is a positive correlation between having a paid

job and experiencing empowerment (Heaton *et al*. 2005; Khan & Maan, 2008). Engaging in economic activities strengthens women's bargaining power within their households, leading to increased empowerment and a greater likelihood of challenging traditional norms that limit their choices and capabilities (Khan & Awan, 2011). According to Sen (2001) and Agarwal (2002), women's economic position is enhanced and their status within the family and society is strengthened through employment, as it enables them to engage in various income-generating activities and events.

 Numerous studies support the notion that granting women rights related to land and property plays a significant role in empowering them (Khan & Maan, 2008; Leonhäuser & Parveen, 2004). However, achieving financial independence and earning income through one's efforts may hold greater significance in empowering women compared to relying on unearned income derived from family labor, as established in the context of Bangladesh (Anderson & Eswaran, 2009). But, simply increasing women's salary and labor force participation may not necessarily result in their empowerment, as they often tend to work in more exploitative and oppressive environments; thus, it is crucial to consider not only if women work, but also where they work (Shahzad, 2021).

However, Pakistan exhibits significant gender disparity across various domains including decision-making, political participation, control of resources, education, job opportunities, and employment (Kakar *et al.*, 2011). A persistent issue is the limitation of women's freedom of movement due to societal norms that hinder their involvement in education and employment, resulting in women facing barriers, feeling isolated, and lacking power both in political and social spheres (Mahmood, 2002). The primary factors hindering women's participation in Pakistan's labor force are the presence of traditional family values, high rates of female unemployment in

informal sectors, and insufficient legal protection against sexual harassment, as stated by Raza (2007).

Chapter 3 Theoretical framework

This study employs Kabeer's (1999) framework of resource, agency, and achievement, as a guiding principle. Kabeer defines these three broad categories of women's empowerment as: 1. Agency, which pertains to the decision-making ability irrespective of the power relation; 2. Resources, which encompass physical assets and health education and which facilitate the execution of agency; and 3. Achievements, are seen as the outcome of agency and encompass improved sociopolitical standing and economic opportunities.

3.1   Resources

Resources involve social, material, and physical means to achieve empowerment, as well as the claims that an individual can make on others (Tandon, 2016). When the concept of empowerment is discussed, Kabeer (1999) mentions that the ways via which people gain access to resources are equally important as the resources themselves are. Access to resources is based on decision-making in regards to household expenses and freedom to purchase certain things, whereas, control over resources is about who has the power to keep household earnings and influence household spending decisions (Kabeer, 1999). Jejeebhoy (1997) uses the terms "control", "access", and "decision-making" in relation to resources.

3.2 Agency

Kabeer (1999) links agency to decision-making. She further states that in South Asia, women's power to make decisions within the family is concerned with matters relating to the purchase of household items and with children's health. Moreover, there is a hierarchy in terms of decision-making roles in these societies. Certain important areas are kept for men as household

heads when it comes to decision-making, while women are assigned the remaining ones in their capacity as wives, daughters, and mothers (Kabeer, 1999).

3.3 Achievement

Achievement, as defined by Kabeer (1999), refers to specific outcomes related to women's abilities to exercise agency and make choices. These achievements can include various aspects such as child survival rates, child immunization, contraceptive use, and prenatal health care. Achievements are used as indicators to assess the impact of women's empowerment, and their measurement helps determine the extent to which women can effectively exercise their agency within prescribed gender roles or bring about transformative changes in gender relations. In simple words, achievements refer to overall well-being outcomes, as Kabeer (1999) puts it.

Chapter 4 Research Methodology

4.1 Nature of the Study

The present study employed a qualitative research design to explore the impact of college lecturer employment on women's empowerment. The Phenomenological approach was utilized as the guiding methodology in which the researcher interprets and explains the lived experiences of the participants about a certain phenomenon in the way participants describe it (Creswell, 2014). This approach enables us to understand the experiences of participants concerning their empowerment.

The phenomenological approach involves different dimensions. This study employed descriptive phenomenology which is about the interpretation of the experiences of participants and about the ways things are understood by the people who live through these experiences (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Husserl is considered to be the founder of phenomenology and his approach is closely linked to the idea that the meaning of the lived experiences can only be revealed through one-to-one interaction between the researcher and the participants (Husserl, 1970).

4.2 Research Ethics

Before collecting the data, informed consent was obtained from all participants by ensuring that they understood the study's purpose, potential risks and benefits, and the confidentiality and anonymity measures. The participants were provided with the consent form and their signatures were taken on the form before starting the interview. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and the participants were assured first that their decision to participate or

withdraw will not have any negative consequences for them. They were also informed of their right to refuse or skip any questions they were uncomfortable with during the interviews.

Participants' identities and personal information were treated with confidentiality. The audios were recorded on the researcher's mobile and were protected with a password. All data was kept anonymous, and the names of places shared by the participants were replaced with pseudonyms to ensure the confidentiality of the participants.

The research study received ethical approval from the institutional review board of Forman Christian College, Lahore. This approval ensures that the study adheres to the ethical standards and guidelines for research involving human participants, ensuring the protection of their rights and overall well-being during the research procedure.

4.3 Sampling Design

4.3.1 Selection criteria

The study population consisted of women who are employed in college-level teaching positions. Participants for this study were selected based on specific criteria designed to align with the research objectives and questions. The participants included women currently employed as college-level teachers in the district of Bhakkar, Punjab, Pakistan. Those women were included in the research who hold full-time teaching positions in colleges, as their experiences as teachers are central to the research goals.

4.3.2 Sampling technique

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who possessed characteristics and experiences relevant to the research objectives. This technique is also called judgment sampling and is linked with the deliberate choice of the participants based on their

specific qualities. It is a non-random form sampling and does not require an already set number of participants or underlying theories (Etikan *et alet al*., 2016).

4.3.3 Sample

The sample size was determined based on the principles of data saturation. Saturation is defined as that stage of data collection where no new or relevant data is being offered (Dworkin, 2012). Before conducting the main study, one pilot interview was conducted to assess the research instrument and data collection procedures for any necessary changes. The pilot interview was conducted with the participant who also acted as a gatekeeper to reach out to other lecturers. The pilot interview went well and it was decided that no change needs to be made to the research instrument.

Table 1

Socio-demographic characteristics of participants

Participant	Education	Age	Marital status	No. of children (if married)	Type of family	Residence area	No. of years in teaching	Rank/ grade
P1	MSc in Sociology	36	Married	3	Nuclear	Rural	12 years	18
P2	MPhil	39	Married	2	Joint	Urban	15 years	17
P3	MSc in Health and physical education	29	Married	1	Nuclear	Rural	10 months	17
P4	BS English	27	Married	-	Joint	Urban	4 years	17
P5	MA in Pakistan studies	30	Unmarried	-	Joint	Rural	8 years	17
P6	BS English	23	Unmarried	-	Joint	Rural	1 year	17
P7	MPhil in IR	39	Married	3	Nuclear	Urban	7 years	17
P8	MA in Urdu Literature	45	Married	3	Joint	Urban	20 years	18
P9	MA in Mathematics	27	Married	_	Nuclear	Urban	3 years	17
P10	MA in Physical education	31	Unmarried	_	Joint	Rural	11 years	17
P11	MPhil in Botany	27	Unmarried	_	Nuclear	Urban	3 years	17
P12	MPhil	23	Unmarried	_	Nuclear	Rural	2 years	17

Table 1 represents the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants. A total of 12 participants were interviewed. Their ages ranged from 23 years to 45 years. 7 participants were married and 5 were unmarried. 6 participants reported living in a nuclear family system while 6 lived in joint families. Likewise, 6 participants belonged to urban areas and 6 belonged to rural

areas. The teaching period of the participants ranged from 1 year to 20 years. Two of the participants reported to be in grade 18th of their employment while 10 were in 17th grade.

4.4 Study Questionnaire

A semi-structured interview guide was used to facilitate data collection. The interview guide included open-ended questions that were formed after consulting the relevant literature. The instrument was divided into two parts. The first part contained questions about the socio-demographic details of the participants. The second portion consisted of questions pertaining to the challenges, experiences, and perspectives of the study participants in the pursuit of their journey to empowerment.

4.5 Data Collection

The data was collected in two weeks in December 2023. On the first day, one in-depth interview was conducted with one participant that lasted 50 minutes. She was the principal of a government college in the Bhakkar district. She acted as a gatekeeper and helped the researcher to reach out to other lecturers who taught at that college. On days two and three, three female lecturers were interviewed each day from the same college. The duration of these interviews ranged from 22 to 35 minutes. All interviews took place at the college. Next, the researcher visited another government college with the help of the gatekeeper and interviewed five female lecturers on two days. These interviews lasted for 25 to 55 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Urdu as well as in English, depending on the choice of the participants. The queries of the participants regarding the research were addressed before they signed the consent forms, which preceded the interviews. The interviews were audio-recorded after taking participants' approval.

4.6 Data Analysis

The data was recorded in audio form on the researcher's mobile. The researcher listened to the audio and kept translating the data into English language and writing it on a laptop. Once the researcher was done with the transcription, she turned to data analysis. The data was analyzed manually using the thematic analysis approach. Quotations extracted from participants' responses were employed to provide contextual information to the study's findings. The data was systematically arranged and assessed through the thematic analysis method introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first step involves becoming familiar with the data. Extensive reading and re-reading of the data was done after the transcription phase. After this, initial codes were extracted from the transcripts. These codes were further amalgamated into themes, and all data related to a particular theme was organized systematically. In the next step, themes were analyzed further to ensure their alignment with the coded excerpts, preceded by defining and labeling the themes by creating precise definitions. In the final stage, all the analyzed data was related to the research questions, objectives, and existing literature, preceded by generating a comprehensive final analysis report.

Chapter 5: Findings

The data analysis resulted in 8 themes with 3 to 7 codes for each theme. The data was analyzed manually by using Microsoft Excel and Word. The main categories and sub-categories of the data are given below.

Table 2 *Categories and sub-categories of empowerment dynamics in female, college lecturers*

Category	Sub-category
Perspectives of participants regarding empowerment	1) Participants define empowerment as autonomy 2) Financial independence, education and employment empower women 3) Working women are more empowered because of financial independence 4) Contrasting perspectives on empowerment of working vs. non-working women 5) Socio-cultural dynamics and their impact on women's empowerment
Experiences of empowerment	1) Dual empowerment: within and outside home 2) Influence of personal and marital factors on empowerment 3) Household decision-making autonomy 4) Financial autonomy 5) Mutual control and accountability over resources 6) Limited mobility due to societal and cultural norms 7) Self-reliance and freedom of movement
Employment and empowerment driving personal development	1) Improvement in personal grooming 2) Confidence boost 3) Improved self-worth 4) Empowered women as role models
Challenges faced by employed lecturers during the course of their empowerment journey	1) challenges in work-life balance 2) Socio-cultural and marital constraints 3) Long commutes and busy schedules
Coping strategies for work-life balance pressure, and support	1) Support networks for work-life balance 2) Self-care and relaxation through reading 3) Adaptation and growth 4) Spiritual coping
Workplace experiences	1) Female tendencies towards jealousy, and senior-junior interactions 2) Gender-based challenges at workplace 3) Safe college environment
Social perceptions and reactions towards employed and empowered women	1) Patriarchal societal challenges 2) Envy and inspiration 3) Positive behavior of people in the community after getting employed 4) Men's acceptance of women's empowerment due to financial stability 5) Observance of traditional family dynamics by employed women help avoid patriarchal power imbalance at home
Enablers of empowerment	1) Education and employment 2) Employment scales 3) Family support 4) Husband's support 5) Personal characteristics

5.1 Perspectives of participants regarding empowerment

The first theme pertains to the perspectives of the college-level, female lecturers as to how they define the notion of women's empowerment. Six sub-categories emerged under this category and most of the participants defined empowerment as autonomy to make decisions. Furthermore, they opined that financial independence, education, and employment help to empower women. They also mentioned that socio-cultural dynamics have a significant impact on women's empowerment. They also gave their opinions on the empowerment levels of working women as against non-working women.

5.1.1 Participants define empowerment as autonomy

All of the participants linked women's empowerment to their autonomy, with different interpretations. Out of twelve participants, 9 mentioned clearly that empowered women are autonomous, independent, and have the power in decision-making for the family. According to them, empowerment means how much confident and independent a woman is in decision-making with regard to the matters that concern her as well as her family, and that she is not dependent on someone else. Participant 2 defined it as:

'According to me, being empowered means how much confident and independent you are; independent in terms of financial and mental aspects.

Participant 3 defined it as having autonomous decision-making for the family:

If she is empowered, then she will have the power to make decisions for herself as well as for her children and family. An empowered woman can make autonomous decisions for the schooling of her children and other things for that matter.'

In the words of participant 11:

> 'According to me, a woman's empowerment is all about her independence. She has the power to make her own decisions, and support herself as well as her family.'

According to Participant 4, it is crucial to have financial strength to be empowered as a woman:

> 'Considering the present dynamics, I would define empowerment in terms of financial stability. If you are financially strong, then you are empowered. It is important for a woman to not depend on anyone financially because financial dependence puts you in a position of subordination. We live in a patriarchal society, as you know. Even if you are doing a job, you will still find yourself in a situation where some male dominates you. That male can be your father, brother, or husband, but you will witness their supremacy in some way. But if you are financially strong, then you will have some form of power and at least you can spend your money on yourself and fulfill your needs without having to depend on someone else.'

However, as per Participant 6, empowerment is all about gender equality:

> 'I think empowerment is the name of equality for both genders in all fields of life in the society.'

Participant 8 defined women's empowerment based on Islamic perspectives of educational empowerment for women and the importance of honoring daughters in Islam:

> 'I define women's empowerment according to Islamic principles, what has been ordained through Quran and Hadith. I acknowledge that system of beliefs. I believe that a woman should be provided with all of those rights that Islam has

given her. The first one is regarding the education of a female child and Islam grants her this right. When Prophet PBUH said to acquire education even if you have to go to China for this purpose, he did not say this specifically about men. This Hadith says a lot about the importance of getting education for both males as well as females. Secondly, Islam ordains to give respect and love to daughters. For instance, Prophet Muhammad PBUH used to stand up for her daughter Fatima as a symbol of reverence and love.'

5.1.2 Financial independence, education, and employment empower women

When the participants were asked to compare their empowerment level with that if they were unemployed, all of them mentioned that financial independence, education, and employment are crucial for empowerment and that their current empowerment level largely depends on these factors. In the words of Participant 1, she felt empowered at home but outside home, she got this feeling of being empowered only after completing her education and getting the status of a lecturer:

> 'My empowerment level would be lesser than the present one if I weren't educated and employed. I always felt empowered because of my family but outside world does not let you feel this way unless you have a job and earn money. Being just educated does not earn you empowerment at societal level. Common people think that these educated individuals are just like us and there is nothing special about them. People judge you from your status: the money you earn and the grades you have achieved. They make judgments based on hierarchy of grades. For instance, if you have a high grade/scale, then you'll be respected more.'

According to participant 2, who is married into a landlord family, her empowerment level would be zero if she did not have this employment status:

> 'If I were not employed, my empowerment level would certainly be zero. I would have been a typical woman as per the culture of Punjab. I belong to a family of landlords and no importance would have been given to my views if I were a housewife. Ours is a male-dominant society, and this is the fate of women in such environments. But now as I am employed, people give value to my opinions because they think that as I go outside home and interact with various people, so I have greater insights about different matters.'

Participant 6 mentioned that women are not generally given a say in their decision-making skills because they are not considered that much worthy, but she got this privilege because of her employment status. According to her, her employment status led to the acknowledgment of her decision-making skills:

> 'I feel that my employment status has made me empowered and now I can take my own decisions. My family members acknowledge this because they think that I am educated enough to make the right choice. If I relate my status to that of other women around me, I have noticed that women are not generally considered to have good decision-making skills. Men think that they are more intelligent, and their decisions are always right and this is why they don't involve their women while making decisions, except when their women are employed.'

According to Participant 8, who is also married into a feudal family, her financial autonomy enabled educational opportunities for children because her husband was not willing to contribute financially towards the education of their children:

'My empowerment level would have been significantly different if I had married into this family (the current one) without having employment. Perhaps my children would not have been at the current status that they are because of my job. My son is currently studying at X University (a private-sector university). He wanted to study at Y University (a private sector university that is very costly) but when I talked to my husband about this so that he could invest in our son's education; he said that we should rather get him admitted to Z (a public sector) University because that would not cost us much. But it was my wish to fulfill my son's dream knowing that we could afford to send him to Y University. So, I decided to do what was in my control and got him admitted to X University by spending money out of my salary. If I did not have this job, then this would not be possible.'

According to Participant 10, she got the opportunity to get her marriage delayed because of being employed. If she were not employed, then she would not have been given this autonomy to have her say regarding the age of her marriage.

'If I did not have a job then my family would have me married by now because in our community a girl is married as she reaches adulthood. I belong to a rural area and these are norms prevailing over there. My father was the first person in the area to get his daughters educated. If my father had not allowed me to continue my education, I would have been married after completing matriculation. By now, I might have had my own children reaching adolescence, and I would probably be facing a tough time with my in-laws. I am saying this because those cousins of mine who are my age fellows have got married for so long and are now marrying off their children.'

5.1.3 Working women are more empowered because of financial independence

Out of twelve participants, eleven were of the view that working women are more empowered because of their financial independence as against non-working women whose empowerment is curtailed by their economic dependency on their male counterparts. According to them, earning a handsome amount of money is important to feel empowered.

Participant 2 defined it as:

> 'As compared to a working woman, a non-working woman would not be empowered at all, I believe. If I talk about my own home, housewives are not given that much importance. I believe the biggest power in the world is money. The one who has money is considered worthy of everything; one's persona as well as words is given enough importance. This is why I think that a non-working woman is not empowered because she does not earn money.'

According to Participant 8, working women have more autonomy and awareness of rights due to financial stability:

> 'This is evident that a woman who has a job has more autonomy to decide because she has her own money and her personality is more polished. Furthermore, she has the awareness of her rights and does not tolerate any unfair treatment by others because she knows certain laws protect her, enabling her to stand up for herself. On the other side, a non-working woman does not have this power as compared to a woman who earns money.'

In the words of Participant 11, non-working women are not empowered because of their financial dependency; on the other hand, working women are empowered because of their Economic Independence:

'Based on my observation after visiting several families, I realized that those women who are not employed, face maltreatment from their husbands. Their husbands taunt them by saying that they (the husband) are earning money, and this is why they don't give money to their wives for health expenses or other matters. They say things such as, "You don't do anything, why don't you go to other people's houses and offer them house-help to earn money?" However, it is not the same for the working women I have seen in my life. They get the respect according to their jobs. Their husbands know that they are earning money for home. Their decisions are also acknowledged. This is why I think that working women are more empowered as compared to non-working women.'

Participant 1 described the empowerment level of working women with that of non-working women by comparing her empowerment level with two other women in her family who are housewives and whose opinions are not given any importance because they do not earn money:

' If I compare the empowerment level of working women with that of non-working women, I think of my two sisters-in-law in the husband's family who do not have a job and they must look after household chores and they don't have any freedom to buy something for themselves or do something as per their will. They are required to follow the cultural values completely. I am not bound to follow those practices as compared to them and I feel that I have this edge because of my empowerment as a result of my job. They are not empowered because they do not earn money.'

5.1.4 Contrasting perspectives on empowerment of working vs. non-working women

Eleven participants were of the view that working women are more empowered. However, participant 4, while acknowledging this idea, also stated that non-working women are sometimes more empowered when it comes to household management because they are aware of household duties very well.

> 'It is an evident thing that if I have a job and earn money then I can spend my salary without having to ask someone else to satisfy my basic monetary needs. This is why a working woman is more empowered… A non-working woman can also be empowered. For instance, if I give you an example from my own family, I am here in the college now, doing my job. I don't know what is happening back at home. My sister-in-law and mother-in-law would know everything about household matters and have the skills to manage those situations. So, this is how they are also empowered I believe.'

According to Participant 10, a housewife is more empowered as compared to a working woman because of being more obedient to her husband:

> 'I have observed that working women around me negatively use their empowerment. They want their family to accept their unfair demands. I have also seen that non-working women, for instance, my female cousins, have a special status because they give their hundred percent energy and time to their children and husbands. This is why their opinions are given significant importance by the family members. It depends on the idea as to where a woman wants to be empowered. For instance, working women assert that as they are employed so no one should expect anything else from them whether it is about giving time to their

children or maintaining the home. They don't give value to their husband because they say that they earn their own money and cannot follow someone else's instructions. This is why their empowerment level is of little avail to them and thIs is also increasing the divorce rate in our society. I believe that non-working women are better in this regard because they are obedient to their husbands and this helps them get empowered.'

5.1.5 Socio-cultural dynamics and their impact on wome''s empowerment

Because of the influence of socio-cultural patterns in a city like Bhakkar, most of the women find it difficult to travel alone. Elaborating on this difficulty, Participant 6 mentioned that women can be empowered only in some dimensions but are dependent on men in others:

'I think that when we are empowered, although we have a lot of freedom, but still we find ourselves dependent on men for conveyance matters. We cannot travel alone. We are free in some dimensions but are restricted in others.'

According to Participant 7, the overall empowerment level of a woman is influenced by her personal characteristics and family background:

'The overall empowerment level depends upon the family background and personal characteristics of a woman. Some employed women don't feel empowered and I think this is probably because of their personality and their determination as to how they can struggle against different odds.'

5.2 Experiences of Empowerment

The participants shared their experiences of empowerment by highlighting the impact of their characteristics on their empowerment level, and also of marital factors in the case of married participants. Most of them have a greater say in household decision-making and also have

financial autonomy, yet some are also held accountable by their family members as to where they spend their salary. Most of the participants shared that they have limited freedom of movement due to societal and cultural norms. Those who do not have issues in this regard are self-reliant when it comes to mobility.

5.2.1 Dual Empowerment: Within and Outside Home

The participants shared their experiences of empowerment at home as well as outside the home. Some of them mentioned that they feel empowered at home because their families acknowledge their decisions, but they do not feel empowered outside the home as other people do not value their opinions. According to Participant 1:

'Regarding my empowerment status, I feel like I am empowered at some points and not at others. For instance, I feel empowered at home but when it comes to the outside then I don't feel the same. While having interactions with the people outside the home, especially with relatives, I feel like others try to judge me and do not value my opinion despite my high education level.'

The participant 3 shared:

'I feel that I am empowered. I live my life according to my ideas and make decisions for my family in an empowered manner. This is because I am educated and financially independent. My family accepts my decisions most of the time but sometimes they don't.'

However, Participant 3 shared that she feels empowered within as well as outside home:

'I feel like I am empowered within the home and outside as well. All the household responsibilities are my burden. My husband is a landlord and also works in a

medicine company. But all the decisions for my children's life are made by me. My husband acknowledges my stance.'

5.2.2 Influence of Personal and Marital Factors on Empowerment

Some participants reflected on the impact of personal and marital factors on their empowerment level. For instance, participant 4 expressed her dependence on her husband for matters related to job transfers and also a limited say in decision-making matters after getting married. According to her, she felt more empowered before getting married but after her marriage, she has to get her husband's approval for her decisions.

'I have been planning to get transferred from this college to some other one in a different city. But I depend upon my husband for posting related matters. My husband does not allow me to go to other offices and talk to some male officials about this issue. He does not like that I interact with other males for this matter. So, I have to depend on him regarding this. The only point where I feel financial independence is that I can support myself… If I tell you about my empowerment level in percentage, then I feel like I am only 30 percent empowered, and that too because of my job. If I divide my life into two phases, that of the unmarried period and the current married phase, I would say that I felt more independent as a bachelorette. I had the freedom to make my own decisions for me. However, after marriage, I discuss everything with my husband and can only act upon decisions with his approval.'

Participant 8 also shared that she had a greatly empowered status before her marriage and her parents used to give immense importance to her decisions even when she did not have the job, but after getting married, her empowerment status also lowered.

'I feel empowered in some respects and not in others. I think every matter has many sides. At many points, I had to bear some negative consequences because of my empowerment. In many other instances, I experienced advantages because of this status. I was sent to Lahore in 1999 to pursue my Master's degree. That was a time when girls were not even allowed to complete a BA from Bhakkar. My father was a broad-minded man and was supportive. My mother was no longer in this world. When I was studying there, I felt that I started getting much importance whenever household decisions were made. My opinions were taken for my sisters' marriage decisions and for some other matters as well. My views were given more importance as compared to other people. My area of influence also increased among relatives because our financial status improved a lot when I got employed and then we started offering material assistance to the needy members among our relatives.'

'But things took a different turn after my marriage. I think this depends a lot on the type of family a girl marries into; whether her in-laws are broad-minded, and whether her husband is supportive or not. This varies from person to person because everyone has different experiences. In my case, my opinions were given value in some matters but not in others.'

According to Participant 10, she experiences an enhanced empowerment level as an unmarried individual. Along with her employment status and her skillful decision-making skills, she has a significant role in her family's decision-making.

'I feel that I am really empowered because I am unmarried and I can say that I can make my family understand and accept my views. Even sometimes, my mother

and other siblings take my suggestions in different matters because I have more experience and exposure as a result of interacting with different people. I had many responsibilities even before I got employed but now my employment status has made me more empowered. At some points, even my brothers feel hesitant to decide so they ask me to do this.'

5.2.3 Household Decision-Making Autonomy

Most of the participants mentioned that they have a major say in their household decision-making patterns. Married participants expressed that they take decisions regarding the schooling of their children, daily household matters, and matters that concern them. But some of the married participants mentioned that they can give their suggestions to their husbands on certain matters but the final decision is made by the husband. On the other hand, unmarried females showed that they have greater autonomy in household decisions.

Participant 3, who is a married woman, shared:

'I have complete autonomy with regard to decision-making power within the household, schooling of children, and household purchases. I discuss these things with my husband. For example, we have been thinking about the schooling of my daughter who is about to reach school-going age, but my husband gives me the freedom to have the final say. There are other occasions, such as attending weddings or funerals or buying gifts for relatives then I decide these things on my own and inform my husband about my decision.'

Participant 4 mentioned that she needs to get her husband's approval before implementing her decision:

'When it comes to decision-making power within the household, then I have 50 percent power and the rest is up to my husband. If I have to plan for some change in the household conditions, first of all, I have to discuss that with my husband. While I can discuss these matters with my husband, final decisions require his approval for implementation.'

Participant 8 is also a married lecturer, and she shared her experience regarding household-decision making as:

'I autonomously made decisions regarding the schooling of my children, and I think one of the reasons would be that my husband is less educated as compared to me and he did not know what is good for our children. But there were moments when I felt they would not allow me to make decisions for my children. In response, I took a firm stance that I would not compromise on my children's education.'

Participant 5 is an unmarried woman lecturer and she shared that she has complete autonomy at home:

'At home, I make decisions regarding the educational journey of my siblings, the choice of their discipline and educational institution. I am even the one to decide what is going to be cooked for a meal. In addition to this, I go shopping for my siblings. I have a major role with regards to decision-making at the household level.'

Participant 1 shared:

'I feel that I have 98 percent freedom in terms of my decision-making power within the household. I have the autonomy to choose my children's school, and make

decisions about my diet, clothing, and other personal aspects. I decide about the ways I decorate my house, or whomever I can invite to my home. I don't have any kind of restriction from anywhere in all these matters.'

5.2.4 Financial Autonomy

Out of the total of 12 participants, 9 shared that they have financial autonomy as they have control over their salary and personal investments. They feel economically independent because they earn their own money and can spend it the way they wish to. Some of them expressed that they did not have this autonomy before getting employed because they did not have their own money.

Participant 12 mentioned:

'I also have full control over resources at home. I have the autonomy to buy presents for my married sisters or friends or other relatives. I buy these things with my salary. Before having this job, I used to be asked about these things, but I didn't have the freedom to make these decisions on my own.'

Participant 2 mentioned:

'In terms of control over resources, I keep my salary to myself and I have the liberty to invest it wherever I want to. I have the freedom to spend that money on my children or on myself.'

According to participant 10:

'I have total control over my salary, and I spend it as per my wish. Sometimes I buy something for someone, or pay fees for siblings' education, or buy something for my parents or for myself; and my family never questioned me about where I spent my money. They never asked me as to where my pay went. I have never

been asked to give a certain amount of my salary to someone. There is not any check-and-balance sort of system on my salary.'

5.2.5 Mutual Control and Accountability over Resources

Three of the participants, who are married, shared that they decide to spend their salary after mutual collaboration with the husband and some of them are even held accountable by their husbands as to where they spent their own salary. Regarding mutual control over resources and salary, participant 7 mentioned:

'My husband and I decide everything with collaboration. Regarding investment of our salaries in different things, my views also matter because I am also equally contributing financially.'

Participant 9 also shared the same story:

'My husband and I have mutual control over resources and we decide to invest in certain things after 100 percent agreement with each other. We buy things of minor value on our own. But when it comes to big investments then we take each other's views into consideration before taking the final step.'

Participant 8 shared that she has spending autonomy but is also faced with accountability in expenditure:

'I spend my salary as per my own will but I would also not like to hide that there are still some issues in this regard. My husband holds me accountable regarding my salary investments. I noticed that most of the working women face this very problem. Whoever I have talked to, has said the same that she is answerable to her husband for her expenditures. This happens in my family too. For instance, when I ask my husband to give me money for children's expenses, he asks me that what

about your own salary and where did you spend that. I buy all the things for
children's needs with my own money.'

5.2.6 Limited Mobility Due to Societal and Cultural Norms

Ten participants expressed that they have limited freedom of movement because of
restrictive family background, conservative socio-cultural norms, and security concerns when
traveling alone. Consequently, they require approval from their family members to leave home
and must be accompanied by someone, rather than being able to travel alone. Furthermore,
individuals in the vicinity also make comments if females travel alone, which is why the
participants, despite being employed and having financial autonomy, still prefer to travel with
someone else.

According to Participant 1:

> 'In terms of freedom of mobility, my family is really supportive and they do not
> restrict me. I am allowed to go out alone but I prefer to be accompanied by some
> family member especially my father or brother, because in Bhakkar, people are
> not as broad-minded as in Lahore or Islamabad, and people judge women for going
> out alone. I am the first woman from my village to have reached this status. So,
> people in my vicinity are not accepting of this notion of travelling alone (for a
> woman).'

Participant 3 mentioned the pathetic transport system as one of the reasons that she is not allowed
to travel alone:

> 'I face problems from my family members when they do not allow me to travel
> alone or when they suggest certain times as unsuitable for leaving home. In terms
> of freedom of movement, I have a mixed response. In our area, we have serious

issues with regards to travelling. When my child gets sick or there is some emergency, then I am allowed to go out with some other family members. But I have no liberty to travel alone. This is because we have a pathetic local travelling system in our area and people are so ignorant of the importance of females' education.'

Participant 4 mentioned:

'I have freedom of movement to some extent, but again I would say that I have to inform my husband beforehand that I am going to a particular place and he allows me to go there. I am not permitted to go out alone; instead, I need to be accompanied by a male or female family member. For instance, my mother-in-law or sister-in-law accompanies me outside home.'

Participant 11 mentioned that she has selective autonomy in movement because of her parents' concern for safety. But when it comes to moving to other, bigger cities, then her parents do not restrict her. But she has to take the approval of her family before moving out.

'I do have some restrictions in freedom of movement. When I have to go to some other city for work-related matters, then my parents don't restrict me. But leaving home without informing them and coming home late is not allowed. In addition to this, my brother accompanies me when I have to visit a friend. When my parents find that some place is not suitable for me to visit, then they don't let me go there…. My family has also given me the freedom to go out alone. For instance, I recently went to Sargodha city with my college students. And I once went to Lahore with only one student on a bus. My family allowed me to go there because they know that I have been in this field for so long and it will not be a problem for

me. Prior to this venture, I went to Lahore with my sister to leave her in the hostel and came back alone. I felt like I as acting as a male guardian on her journey to another city. Even now my father sends me with some other sister in place of brother.'

5.2.7 Self-Reliance and Freedom of Movement

Only two participants mentioned that they can travel alone because of certain reasons. Both of them are in grade 18 of their employment. According to participant 8, her in-laws have allowed her freedom of movement for economic reasons. They do not want her to be accompanied by her husband and this is why she learnt to drive to overcome mobility challenges. In her words:

'My husband is his parents' only child and my in-laws don't find it okay to let him accompany me to work-related visits. He is beloved to his parents and they don't want him to meet some accident or injury in case he goes out. However, I have to fulfill my employment-related responsibilities and for that, I said to my family that I am going to go out alone if he cannot come with me. This made me take a certain step when I decided to learn to drive car and I was among very few women in this area to drive a vehicle. After this, I fulfilled all of my mobility-related needs by myself.'

'I must go to work-related places on my own; my parents-in-law do not want my husband to accompany me. They also know that at the end of the day whatever I earn will be spent at home. Perhaps this is why they allow me to go outside home alone because this is to their benefit. If they did not have their own monetary sakes, then they would not have given me freedom of movement.'

Participant 1 shared that she has complete freedom of movement because of self-reliance:

'I don't think I have any obstacle in my freedom of movement. This is because my husband does not have much interest in these things and even in the family. He knows that these are my values and I know how to take care of myself in case I go out.'

5.3 Employment and empowerment driving personal development

The participants shared that employment and a sense of empowerment as a result of being employed, have impacted their personality to a great extent. They felt an improvement in their grooming and their interactions with other people. They also experienced that their confidence level boosted because of greater exposure and because they earn their own money now. In addition to this, they witnessed an improvement in their self-worth as the people in the surroundings also started valuing them more. They were happy to share that several people started sending their daughters to pursue higher education and employment because of being inspired by these empowered women.

5.3.1 Improvement in personal grooming

Some of the participants shared that they experienced a positive development in their personal grooming as a result of being employed and a feeling of empowerment. They get to interact with various people and because of the increased exposure, they feel that they have become humbler and polite. Participant 12shared:

'Because of being employed and empowered, I felt improvement in regards to my interactions with others and also betterment in my personal grooming. I believe that I have become humbler after getting this job. I don't have those arrogant feelings that because I am the only employed woman from my village so I should behave reluctantly. I feel like if I behave nicely towards others then they'll get this

inspiration that we can also become like her. I think if you treat people at distance then people judge you and say that this is how you become when you get high education and employment. But if I stay humble towards them then they will also feel encouraged to send their daughters to pursue high education.'

According to participant 9:

'I got to interact with various people and it impacted my personality to a great extent. I deal with situations in a polite manner and not aggressively.'

5.3.2 Confidence boost

All of the participants shared that they experienced a boost in the confidence level after being employed and empowered because they feel confident to make decisions as they are not financially dependent on someone else. This heightened level of confidence helped them take certain steps for themselves and their wellbeing that would otherwise not have been possible. They also feel more confident now because people in the community respect them more as compare to when they were not employed.

According to participant 5, her employment status and empowerment led to respect and confidence-boost:

'Employment along with empowerment leads to being respected by people in the society. This serves to increase confidence level. In addition to employment, the grade which one holds also matters a lot. For instance, I am on 17th scale and this makes people revere me, if someone is on grade 19th then he/she will be respected more. This also makes one's family proud. As I am on 17th scale and people around say to my family that she has made a great achievement. This automatically boosts my confidence level.'

Participant 6 shared that now she has increased self-esteem and confidence level. She also shared an incident when she had to travel a long distance for a work-related purpose and she was able to do this only because of her increased confidence level as a result of employment and empowerment:

'When I was studying, I had good self-esteem and good confidence level but some events made me feel down. But feeling empowered after getting employed, has further improved these traits of mine. I have been doing this job for a year and when I was posted here, the principal told me that you have to go to Sargodha for a meeting. At that very moment, I was pretty nervous that how I am going to do this. I had to go there in few hours and I thought that if I were a boy then I could get on a train or something to reach on time. I needed someone else to accompany me. I contacted my brother and asked him to go there with me. I think we as females cannot travel alone for long distances. This was a challenge for me. But I thought that I have got my own money and I can arrange some private vehicle to get this done. I went there because I thought this is part of my job and I have to do this. This would be difficult for me if I were not employed and empowered. I was able to do this because I had my educational strength as well as a good employment status with me and this boosted my confidence level.'

In the words of participant 7:

'This feeling of empowerment has also boosted my confidence level and I feel like I can accomplish a lot of things.'

Participant 1, who is currently at 18th scale of her job, shared an incident when she took an important decision for herself with no support from family. She felt that she had the courage to take decision autonomously:

> 'Previously, I worked as a lecturer of 17th scale at a college. But I faced several challenges while working over there in regards to balancing work and home…That was the time when I decided to apply for the post of a principal in the college that was located in a rural area. I had almost zero support from my family for this decision because they thought that moving to a village will be of no use to me. But I had made my mind and decided to go with my choice of joining that college. That was the time when I looked in the hindsight and analyzed that I am the one who is taking care of home, children, and financial aspects and I have the courage to face challenges. This made me think that I can take decisions autonomously.'

5.3.3 Improved self-worth

The participants shared that their self-worth increased a lot after being employed because now they are valued more by their family and people in the surrounding. They also experienced that now they are at a better position which helped them have an improved self-worth. In the words of participant 5:

> 'I think that this job has increased my self-worth to me and also to my family. My self-worth has increased because my father, brothers and sisters feel proud of me and tell everyone that their sister is on a high grade. When I hear such comments from family members, relatives and the people in my neighborhood, it automatically increases my self-confidence and self-worth. My family members

take my suggestions for everything because they think that I am mature enough to give useful suggestion.'

According to participant 6, society usually does not consider women much worthy but she feels that her worth has increased because of the current employment status:

'My self-worth has increased because now I feel empowered and financially independent. I also have this high sense of responsibility because of the current post. This increased self-worth has also raised my status in the society. People give me enough importance now. I have noticed that all the women consider themselves worthy but the people around them don't think the same about them. But when you are employed and empowered then society also gives you worth.'

Participant 7 also feels enhanced self-worth and a satisfaction with her personal growth:

'When you learn new things with the passage of time, it improves the self-worth. I have this habit that I compare my current personality with how I was in the past years and I feel really happy that I have improved a great deal and controlled many weaknesses. All the things are positive and I feel satisfied with this change.'

5.3.4 Empowered women as role models

Most of the participants shared that they are being celebrated as role models in the community because of their current status. People in the community often take suggestions from these women because of their increased respect. People also started to change their views regarding women's empowerment when they saw these women empowering themselves and helping their families in various ways. According to participant 2:

'The parents of girls in my family and even in my vicinity take my advice regarding the education and jobs for their daughters. I am the first woman from

my family to get this much education and be employed. Before this, girls in our family were denied the right to education because people would say that this will negatively affect the honor of the families. But after my job, norms started changing. Now girls are sent to get education as well as job. I feel like I am a trend-setter; this change started with me. I was also not sent to college after intermediate; instead I studied through distance-education. But I worked hard and topped the university exam and then I got this job. People around me were really amazed at this and they used to appreciate my father for my achievement. This made my father really happy and this is how his mindset towards girls' education changed. Others also followed the suit and now people do not want to restrict their girls to the four walls of home. They have started sending their daughters to universities.'

Participant 8 shared that she has inspired women in the district to drive vehicles themselves and achieve mobility independence:

'Many people have told me that I am a trendsetter in Bhakkar because I inspired many other women to drive their vehicles instead of relying on buses or waiting for the men in their family to drive them… People in my surroundings somehow idealize my status and this is one of the reasons that because of my decent demeanor, three females from my family have become lecturers. Furthermore, every family sent their daughters to university whether they could afford it or not. It has become their passion to get their daughters educated. They are impressed by my job and autonomous status that housewives are often denied.'

According to participant 10, people in her vicinity were initially not accepting of her going to pursue higher education and get a job, but now the same people are inspired by her:

'….My sisters and I made those people realize that we know how to protect our honor. However, people gradually learnt that every girl who goes out of home is not necessarily bad. Now the same people are opting to send their daughters to educational institutions and for jobs as well. Their perspectives changed over time because we proved them wrong with our actions. Now our village is the area in this district with highest literacy rate. The villagers say to my father that they were wrong and that he succeeded in the upbringing of all his six daughters.'

Participant 1 shared an incident regarding her family pride as:

'My father feels elated when someone tells him about me. For instance, once, father of one of my students approached my father and expressed how his daughter was genuinely inspired by me. He praised my father for the way he raised me.'

5.4 Challenges faced by employed lecturers during the course of their empowerment journey

All of the participants shared that although they feel a lot more empowered than before because of their employment status but they also face many challenges on this journey. They face pressure in maintaining work-life balance which impacts their physical and mental health as well. Some of them are faced with the issue of long commutes and busy schedules and find little time to take care of themselves. In addition to this, married participants revealed that they face double burden as a result of marital constraints and socio-cultural challenges.

5.4.1 Challenges in work-life balance

Most of the participants shared that they face immense challenges in balancing their work life and household duties. This leaves them with limited time for themselves. They get exhausted

in the process and especially married participants face more issues in this regard with no support from the husband's family.

Participant 2 mentioned this experience while highlighting the pressure to balance multiple roles and according to her, housewives are in a better position that they don't have to juggle between different tasks:

'My work-life balance is totally out of place. I go home being so exhausted and tired and then I find it difficult to manage home and take care of my children. I clean my home after like a week.

I see housewives managing the home so well and also taking a good care of themselves, but we find ourselves jangling all the roles. At times my children are ignored at the expense of setting home and at other times my home is neglected while taking care of kids. I feel myself so much under pressure and think to myself that homemaker women are in a better position than me.'

Participant 4 shared that her household tensions affect her work-related tasks and vice versa. According to her, she is left with limited time for self-grooming:

'Tensions related to household matters affect my job, and conversely, job-related stress impacts my household duties. The work-life balance becomes a huge challenge. This also impacts my personality and mental health.

I keep thinking about the household problems at workplace. I think these problems are difficult to cope with but I still try to create some balance. I find myself stuck between work problems and family issues. This also impacts my self-grooming as I don't find time for my own self.'

Participant 8 shared that she could not complete her post-graduation because it was difficult for her to balance education, work, and children with no support:

'I was doing my MPhil alongside job and with children. I had my daughter in 2016 and could not complete my degree as I could not get my final thesis composed and faced various challenges. It also disappoints you when you do not get help at such vulnerable moments.'

5.4.2 Socio-cultural and marital constraints

The married participants mentioned that they face many challenges in maintaining work-life balance and in other matters as well because of the concerns raised by the in-laws about household duties in case of living in a join family system. They are expected to be adept at finishing the work-related tasks and then completing the household chores along with giving time to family. People in the surroundings also expect more from them. This also impacts their mental health.

According to participant 3:

'I face some issues because of living in a joint family system but I try to avoid negative things. Sometimes when I go back home from college, my in-laws say that she is being arrogant and rude although I just feel really tired after teaching many classes, but they don't understand this. These things sometimes disturb me but I usually choose to ignore them.'

According to participant 4, her in-laws express concerns about neglecting household duties:

'I think I am still facing a lot of challenges. I am sharing this with regards to my married life. For instance, when I move out of home then the household conditions are obviously affected negatively. No matter how much we say that we can manage this, it still does not happen. I can neither take care of home efficiently nor can do my job properly.... But when it comes to household dealings, then obviously a

disturbance is created where I am here at the workplace and my household duties are ignored and my in-laws are left to manage those affairs. My family expresses concern, feeling that I should manage both home and work responsibilities by myself.'

Participant 9 mentioned that managing tasks got difficult after marriage:

'Before marriage, my mother used to manage household chores and had the meal ready when I arrived home. However, things have changed since then.'

Participant 6, who is an unmarried woman, shared that she does not face much difficulty as compared to her married colleagues:

'However, I don't face much problems regarding time-management and get the time for my personal grooming. I think I have this privilege as compared to my married colleagues who find it difficult to balance work and domestic affairs because females do not only have professional responsibilities but they are also supposed to take care of their children and husband. I am not facing such challenges currently but I think I will also have to tackle all this after getting married.''

Participant 8 shared about her experience while talking about pressures and expectations on working mothers:

This problem exists in many households that working women have been put under so much burden. These women are spending financially on their children because a mother does not want her kids to be left behind. They also have the responsibility of bringing up their children well because people expect more from such women and do not spare a chance to criticize them if their children are naughty or lack

good manners. They say that this child's mother is a bank officer or is on some other high rank but the child is so disobedient. A housewife, on the other hand, is not treated like this. She stays at home, gets the money from the husband, and can efficiently take care of home. However, even when a working woman has a maid at home, she is handed over with her children when she gets back home tired from the job. She goes straight to the kitchen to cook for her family. Although, when a man goes back home after he gets off from work, he is supposed to be served with fresh meal and whatnot. This is why I say that a working woman has received so many benefits because of her job but has also been pressurized with many other things.'

Participant 1 shared that her husband never cooperated with her and even exploited her financially:

'My husband belongs to a feudal background and is less educated than me. I felt that there was huge difference between the understanding level of my husband and me. I had to survive in that system....the economic burdens became a continuous part of my life. My husband said to me that he faced some business losses; and I even supported him financially during that time. I started fulfilling household expenses out of my own salary hoping that things will get better one day. However, things became more complicated, and these problems persisted. I always paid for my children's as well as my own expenses; even the childbirth delivery fee was also paid by me out of my salary. My husband would only send us money occasionally.'

5.4.3 Long commutes and busy schedules

Some of the participants shared that they face various difficulties and mental strain because of long commute to the workplace and also because of their busy schedules. They suffer from fatigue because of this busy routine. Participant 5 shared this experience as:

'Being employed and doing a job is a challenge in itself. It becomes really difficult to travel for one hour to get to the college, teach there for six hours, then travel again for an hour to get back home and then give time to the family or attend guests if there are any; this whole routine becomes really tiresome.'

Participant 10 shared the fatigue and health consequences that she had to suffer from because of her dedication towards her job:

'I have a really busy schedule because of my job. I believe that if you perform your duties honestly, then you get tired and don't find enough time for yourself. I go home tired but don't show this to my family and give proper time to household chores. I go to sleep dead tired. I cannot take care of my health because of hectic routine. I suffered from severe dehydration, which resulted in bleeding from my kidneys. This is because I give so much value to my work and sometimes even forget to eat well or drink water to stay hydrated. My discipline is Physical Education and most of my work involves physical exercises and whatnot. At times, my legs become stiff due to prolonged periods of standing.'

According to participant 11:

'My primary challenge since taking this job has been the daily two-hour commute. I never spent this much time traveling before, and it exhausts me.

I am on the post of executive and even when I am around my children; my mind is occupied with work related matters including the management of finances, employees, maintenance of the college and so on.'

5.5 Coping strategies for work-life balance pressure, and support

To deal with the challenges of work-life balance, some participants rely on support networks such as family or house help. Some of the participants shared that they have opted for certain coping strategies to relieve their minds. They have adopted either spiritual coping mechanisms, adaptation patters, or other methods of self-care and relaxation.

5.5.1 Support networks for work-life balance

To manage the challenge of work-life balance, some of the participants rely on support from family, neighbors' assistance, or domestic help. Referring to challenges regarding work-life balance, participant 12 mentioned:

'…But this has become a bit easy because of my family's support.'

Participant 8 shared that neighborly assistance in childcare facilitated her work-life balance:

'Maintaining work-life balance has not been a major problem for me. The family in my neighborhood took care of my children when they were little. This is also a give-and-take relationship; I used to buy them different things as per their needs for taking care of my children.'

Participant 1 talked about her reliance on domestic help and also shared that giving time to her children is her priority:

'I have a really nice maid who takes care of all the household chores. Regarding my children, I manage their affairs myself and give them time because they are

my first priority. I try to give full attention to their studies, eating habits, and other matters. However, certain gaps remain there anyway.'

5.5.2 Self-care and relaxation through reading

Some of the participants shared that in order to cope with the hectic lifestyle, they take rest in free time and read books, and also get the satisfaction from the experience that they are empowered anyway.

According to participant 3:

'…I try to take rest and relieve myself by reading books or watching TV dramas.'

Participant 5 shared that her tiresome routine is balanced by her empowerment satisfaction:

'But I don't feel bad for this because I feel that at this stage_ when I have a good job, a supportive family, and peaceful working place_ these little things do not bother me much. Despite these challenges, the feeling of empowerment really makes me happy. I think feeling exhausted and other minor nuisances are not that much big as compared to the satisfaction I feel because of being empowered.'

5.5.3 Adaptation and growth

Some participants also shared that they have learned to adapt to busy schedules, manage stress by staying busy, and develop other coping strategies to compensate for time spent in work experience.

Participant 9 mentioned:

'Despite this, I believe that facing these minor challenges has improved my ability to handle situations. I am now more adept at seeking solutions rather than

panicking. This job has also made me more active as I believe that time management requires agility. Failing to be active leads to self-neglect. I strive to adopt this mindset, and I believe I have succeeded to a great extent.'

According to participant 11:

To manage stress, I try to keep myself occupied.

According to participant 1:

I manage to take some time for myself as well as for my children. For instance, when I get home late someday, then I say to my children that we will spend time together and go to sleep late at night; or sometimes I ask them to take off from school and then teach them at home for that day's loss.

5.5.4   Spiritual coping

Participant 10 shared that she copes with her challenges by opting for spiritual means:

I cope with these challenges in a spiritual manner. I believe that God only tests you according to your strength. When some difficulty approaches me, I say to myself that God will help me get through this. I leave every challenge to Him and this helps me to stay satisfied with everything. I keep remembering Allah in whatever I do. I believe that this also affects our mental state.

5.6 Workplace experiences

While sharing their workplace (college) experiences, most of the participants reported that they never encountered anything uncomfortable and the college environment is safe and secure. Some of them mentioned that they faced jealous attitude from their colleagues and the senior lecturers also display a reticent behavior towards those lecturers who joined the college recently.

It was also shared that there exist some gender based challenges at the workplace as well when the clerks show arrogant behaviors.

5.6.1 Female tendencies towards jealousy, and senior-junior interactions

Some of the participants shared that they experienced other female lecturers' tendencies towards jealousy at the college as well as reluctant behavior of senior lecturers towards junior lecturers.

According to participant 1:

With regards to challenges faced at the workplace, Females have some tendencies towards jealousy and this makes me sad because I believe that we need to be protective towards one another. I avoid such people.

According to participant 10:

I noticed that sometimes our senior lecturers tend to sit separately from us, the juniors. But when we talk to them, they don't respond in a degrading manner. However, in all the other institutes where I worked prior to this, all the staff members treated one other on equality basis.

5.6.2 Gender-based challenges at workplace

Some participants shared that they face arrogant behavior from clerical staff because of their being females and men's tendency to think that housewives are more respectable as compared to working women. It was also shared that the senior officers show gender-based favoritism towards women lecturers.

According to participant 7:

At the workplace, I faced gender disparity to some extent. If I talk about Pakistan, I feel like this is a tradition that the clerical staff does things on another level. I

mean, we are dependent on them despite being on 17th or 18th grade and they

show you arrogant attitude. They do this probably because of our being women as

many men in our society think that a housewife is more respectable as compared

to a working woman, and that these working women just want to go out home for

the sake of having fun. I have faced these things. This is my personal wish that

there should be a check-and-balance system for the men in the administration so

that they work within their own limits and not create problems for others.

Participant 1, who is acting as the principal of a college and is on 18th scale, shared that she felt

that senior officers give favors to women on the basis of gender and good-looks:

I felt that some officers who come here from other major cities give us some favors

because of our being females and having good looks. For instance, I have

experienced that some of the compliments and amenities which I deserve to be

given because of my talent and hard work, are given to me because of my looks,

and my work is not appreciated that much.

5.6.3 Safe college environment

Most of the participants mentioned that the college environment is safe, friendly, and

supportive and they have never experienced any greater challenge at the college where they teach.

According to participant 1:

I feel completely secure at college and did not face harassment or maltreatment

from male members in the administration.

According to participant 7:

We have a friendly environment at the college. My colleagues are really nice. It

has been a year since I am here and this time has passed so fast and this is because

I had quality time at this place. All this has improved my performance. The head

of this institution has confided in me and has given me the confidence that I can

do different tasks efficiently.

According to Participant 9:

I have not faced challenges specific to the workplace. Everything is going smoothly.

In the words of participant 10:

Luckily, I have never faced any gender-based disparity from the clerical staff or

other males at the workplace. I have always been nice to them, and they also

respect me. They have never dared to harass or mistreat us because they know

that our rank is greater than that of theirs.

5.7 Social perceptions and reactions towards employed and empowered women

The participants shared that they face patriarchal challenges when either their family

members do not allow them to interact with males for work-related tasks or their husbands do not

support them financially or emotionally. Some of the participants felt that their husbands accepted

their status because of financial stability. Some people perceive that empowered women are a

threat to the patriarchal setup, as experienced by the participants. Some of the participants also

experienced envy from their cousins and relatives because of their current status. However, a

number of people are inspired by these women because of their employment status. Some

participants continue to observe traditional family dynamics which helps avoid power imbalance

at home.

5.7.1 Patriarchal societal challenges

While talking about the overall challenges, the participants shared that they faced issues

because of patriarchal setup. They faced mean comments from people for their choices and their

families were targeted for female employment. Some of them did not get the required help from family or husband to cope with different challenges. Even supportive husbands are also stigmatized by the society for helping their wives. The perception of working women as domineering in marital relationships was also shared by the participants.

Participant 3, while talking about people's mean comments, said:

> Sometimes people pass mean comments and say that she earns money and spends it according to her own wishes. I think this is something which can be expected from the people of my area and it does not surprise me.

According to Participant 6, she is not allowed by her family to interact with males for work:

> I face different challenges because we live in this patriarchal society. For instance, my family does not allow me to go to accountant's office or interact with other male clerical staff. We interact with different kinds of men at work and some of them are not easy to interact with.

Participant 6 further shared that she men in her neighborhood consider it a threat that a woman is getting empowered:

> I come from an area where the people in my neighborhood have narrow mindset. They don't support women and they think that a woman cannot be empowered… As this is a patriarchal society, so it happens here that when a woman reaches a status equal to that of men, they find it threatening. I heard some comments passed by the people around me. They say negative things about my dressing sense that now she thinks she is empowered and can dress however she likes and does not care about the cultural norms. These remarks are made by the men in my neighborhood. They think that she wants to change the norms and values of our

culture because now she is on a high post and is going to make our daughters betray us. I believe that the reason behind this mindset is the patriarchal structure and beliefs that the system will be toppled if we reach gender equality.

Participant 8 shared the nuisances of living in a joint family and also lack of financial support from husband for children's education:

Working women face many societal barriers. For instance, in a joint family system when the husband of a working-woman carries the child or helps her with household chores, he is called as zan-mureed (English meaning: henpecked). I faced this kind of issues a lot. Still, I would say that I did not get much financial support from husband for my children's education.

Participant 8 also talked about the perception of working women as domineering in marital relationships:

But people around us make mean comments and say that she earns her own money and she would not care for her husband's views. They think that a working woman would be self-centered or authoritarian.

Participant 10 shared about the stigmatization of her family because of her education and employment:

In the beginning of my job, my father had to face a lot of critique from people in the vicinity. That was the time when even males were not sent to pursue education and my father took a totally different turn when he decided to get his daughters educated. Firstly, the people in our Biradari said that this is not right to get girls educated. Other people in the village also started saying that these girls go out of home into academy or other institutes and this is against the norms. But my father

used to say that he trusts his daughters. When I got the job, they said about my family that they eat out of their daughters' earning; these girls' brothers are shameless and so on. They also wanted us to get married early because they perceived that if we go out of city then we will surely get detracted.

5.7.2 *Envy and inspiration*

Some of the participants shared that they experienced envious attitude from their relatives and peers because of their job. They felt social isolation as a result of peers' jealousy. On the other hand, some of the participants reported that their relatives are inspired by their employment and empowerment and that they got respect from neighbors and outsiders. While talking about envy, participant 12 shared:

But my cousins and other relatives sometimes make me feel as if they have been left behind. They think that this girl is younger than us in age but has progressed more than us. I don't know whether this is jealousy or what.

Participant 11 shared about envy from peers towards her job:

Some show jealousy toward me due to my job. This could be because they don't have this job status. These are individuals whose children aren't pursuing education and engage in less productive activities.

Participant 1 talked about jealousy of her cousins and also some males who had less prestigious jobs than her:

My cousins and other age-fellows among the relatives felt insecure because of my job. They made me feel alone at gatherings or family functions and did not interact happily with me. I wanted to maintain good terms with them but their behavior

was indifferent towards me. Secondly, some males also envied me because they

had less prestigious jobs and earned less than me.

Participant 2 shared that her relatives and neighbors are inspired by her employment and empowerment:

The attitude of my relatives and neighbors is positive towards me. They find it

inspirational and want their daughters to be employed and empowered. People

these days look for empowered women.

Participant 4 also shared that she received respect from neighbors and outsiders because of her status:

As for other people, such as neighbors and outsiders, I am respected because they

say that she is on 17th grade and is a lecturer. So they appreciate me.

Participant 5 mentioned that the guidance sought from her by her neighbors for their children's education enhances her confidence

If I talk about the attitude of my neighbors towards my job, they are really

appreciative and this enhances my confidence level. They send their children to

me to seek guidance regarding subject-selection or the choice of educational

institution

5.7.3 Positive behavior of people in the community after getting employed

Some of the participants shared that other people's behavior towards them changed in a positive manner when they got employed. People in the community started respecting them more because of their improved status. The tendencies of jealousy from relatives aside, but others exhibited a positive stance towards the participants. Regarding this, participant 9 mentioned:

I think employment status matters a lot and it changes other people's attitude towards you. I am not just referring to close family members; other people's behavior also matters. People behave to someone according to the financial status of that individual. Their attitude is different towards those who do a job as compared to those who do not. The same thing has been experienced by me that people treated me differently when I did not have this job and now the same people respect me a lot.

The similar kind of experience was shared by participant 11:

I have experienced a shift in the way people started treating me because of my employment status. For instance, if I talk about the people in my vicinity, the people who used to taunt me by saying that she has completed her education but still does not have any job now treat me with respect and reverence. These are the changes I noticed in the behavior of people around me because of my current status.

Participant 1 shared that she received positive response from people around because teaching is considered as a venerable job for women in our society:

I never faced any negative remarks from people for my job because they consider teaching as a venerable profession. In our community, a woman is respected a lot if she opts for teaching. I also had a positive response from people in this regard.

5.7.4 Men's acceptance of women's empowerment due to financial stability

Few of the married participants mentioned that their husbands are accepting their empowered status because they are also the beneficiaries of financial stability, but men are also exploiting their women economically. Participant 2 shared:

I think the men these days feel really good that their wives are earning money and this leads them to accept the empowerment level of women. Obviously they will acknowledge this because they are being helped financially and this is to their benefit. So, they are not affected by patriarchal power imbalance as a result of women's financial stability.

Participant 1 also expressed this notion in the following words:

I feel that the earning dynamics are changing these days. Men prefer their women to earn money. I often have discussions with my colleagues and other lecturers and we realize that the men in our homes are really greedy and their eyes are on the money which we earn.

5.7.5 Observance of traditional family dynamics by employed women help avoid patriarchal power imbalance at home

Some of the participants shared that they continue to hold traditional gender roles and accept male members' major decisions at home despite being employed. They do this to prevent power imbalances at home and to maintain the husband as the dominant figure. Participant 4 shared that she accepts her husband's decisions:

Even though I am earning money, but still my husband is the dominant figure at home and he takes the major decisions. I have to accept his decisions being his wife. If I start complaining that I am also earning money then it will be of no use because what I earn is not enough even for me. We also need to look at the reality. Some of my expenses are fulfilled by my husband.

Participant 8 shared that she upholds traditional gender roles despite personal empowerment:

I view things with Islamic perspective and I believe that males have a certain right and I do not allow myself to deny that. I try my best to give my husband the right he deserves. For instance, I would always consult my husband while making decisions for children. He would further discuss that with this father; that is another point, but I did not deprive him of his right to have certain power. I believe that whatever is under his decision-making power should be accorded to him and vice versa for me.

Participant 10 shared that she gives her father the right to make important decisions for her:

People made comments in the beginning of my job that now a girl is going to earn money for her family. But later I gave them no chance to stick to their earlier stance because my sisters and I, despite having our own jobs, always gave our father the right to make important decisions for us. He implements them after our consent but we do not take this into our own hands or say that we are going to do something unilaterally without involving family. I believe that this is the reason as to why we did not face any sort of patriarchal power imbalance within our family.

5.8 Enablers of empowerment

The participants mentioned that there are certain enablers of their empowerment which helped them reach the current status of being empowered. These enablers include the support of family, their education and employment, employment scale, husband's support (in cases of married participants), and participants' personal characteristics of determination, perseverance and hard work.

5.8.1 Education and employment

Some of participants shared that their education level and employment status are significant contributors towards their empowerment especially outside home. Participant 6 mentioned:

When I was not employed, I felt that people did not value my views and had the courage to point fingers at me. But after my job, they give importance to my opinions. They believe that she is someone who is educated and is on 17th scale then she must be right. This is what I experienced that if you have education but are not employed then people consider you wrong. I also felt that now I have more power to take decisions for myself and my life, and I can spend my money as per my will. When you are empowered, you have a job, then people consider you worthy.

Participant 4 highlighted the importance of education in her empowerment:

If I talk about enablers for my empowerment, I believe the primary credit goes to my education.

Participant 5 mentioned that she feels empowered outside home because of her education and employment:

Education and employment status have helped me to feel empowered outside home, but otherwise my family's role has been really important.

Participant 9 shared:

I believe that the foremost enabler for my empowerment has been my education. An educated person has a different attitude and outlook on life.

5.8.2 Employment scale

Some participants perceive that employment scale also plays an important role in making a woman empowered in the society. Participant 2 shared her experience as:

In addition to this, my employment scale also acted as an enabler for my empowerment. I started this teaching journey with 7th scale and now I am on grade 17th and I felt that my empowerment status improved with increasing scales.

Participant 11 shared:

There would definitely be a difference in my empowerment level if I were not employed compared to the current level when I have this job. If I talk about my family members, their behavior is just the way it was when I was not employed. But if I talk about society, then I can say that I have noticed changes. Now they respect me because they think that I am a lecturer on 17th grade and they should treat me well.

5.8.3 Family support

Most of the participants shared that they feel empowered because they had their family's support with them throughout their journey. Participant 2 shared:

I believe my family is the major factor behind my current autonomous status. Especially my father struggled a lot for me. He was a tube-well operator in agro department and this is a really humble job. But despite this, he worked hard for us and encouraged me to apply for different jobs. His attitude changed after I got my first job. He also motivated me to pursue post-graduation.

Participant 5 mentioned:

The most important factor which helped me to become empowered is the role of family which has been really encouraging. My family members have confided in me and send me to this college where there are also males in the administration. Yet they are not bothered by it because they trust me. I believe that this is a huge gesture from my brothers and father to allow me to work alongside men.

Participant 8 mentioned how her brothers and father always supported her but she did not experience such warm gestures from her in-laws:

My family, especially my father and brothers, have been really supportive. They accepted and respected my autonomy at home and my job status as well. However, it was not the same when I talk about my in-laws. If I had to travel to faraway places, my brothers or father accompanied me. They never left me alone or went against my decisions. Family's trust has empowered me a lot. I believe if your family does not support you, then no matter what high-level job you have, you will still be empty from inside.

Participant 8 shared:

My family is also important in this regard because I was brought up in an environment that was conducive and this increased my confidence level. I was given the freedom to make certain decisions.

5.8.4 Husband's support

Few of the married participants shared that they felt empowered at home because of their husbands' support, who helped them to continue education after marriage and also to secure the job.

Participant 3 shared:

To get the current permanent job of lecturer, my husband has been really supportive and he encouraged me and boosted my confidence level.

According to participant 7:

My empowerment level at home would not be much different if I were a non-working woman. This is because I have a good level of understanding with my husband. If I talk about myself, I feel that today if I am empowered, this is because my husband played a crucial role in this. I have completed my education after my marriage, and I started doing this job after having two kids. My husband is the man who was and still is the big support behind me… I probably got lucky that I got such a supportive husband. I completed my education and got employment after marriage. My husband has his business in X city but he let me stay here because of my job. He keeps visiting us on and off. If he did not want to me to stay here, then I would probably not be working at this place.

5.8.5 Personal characteristics

All of the participants shared that their personal attributes helped them fight against all the odds during the course of their education and employment, and today when they feel empowered, this is mostly because of their own struggles. They mentioned their attributes such as hardwork, determination in decision-making, self-worth, willpower, perseverance, resilience, and positive coping. According to participant 3:

After my B.Ed degree, my father could not invest for my studies because he did not earn much and also because he had to take care of the rest of the family. So, I did the job as a visiting lecturer and completed my education with the salary which I earned from that job. I also assisted my parents financially for fulfilling my

wedding expenses… I am firm in making my decisions and I believe that this trait of determination helped me to materialize my goals. Even though my relatives used to discourage my parents for my education, but I stuck by my dreams.

According to participant 6:

I achieved this current status because of dreams, willpower, and determination. I did graduation from a university in Bhakkar and I sensed that a lot needs to be changed here. It increased my spirits and I decided to serve in the educational field to polish the opinions of students.

Participant 10 talked about her personal dedication and hard work:

My own dedication and hard work is also important in this regard. I also made many sacrifices for my studies and did not demand anything else in case it impacts my educational journey negatively. I also tolerated the negative comments of people in my vicinity. I believe these personality traits are also significant contributors to my empowerment.

Participant 11 shared about her resilience and positive coping:

My family wanted me to get married when I was doing Masters. This stressed me because I wanted to do something for myself first. But I channeled that stress positively, and focused on my career rather than letting it overwhelm me. I think this trait helped me attain my current status.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Discussion

This study explored that women lecturers are of the view that their job and status have made them empowered at home and now their decisions are given more importance than before when they were not employed. This is consistent with Kabeer's (1997) conclusion that women's financial contribution to the family has an impact on their empowerment giving them enhanced negotiating power and also improving the chances for their children's wellbeing.

This study also revealed that financial autonomy leads to women's control over their income and resources which is one of the important determinants of empowerment. This aligns with the findings of Heaton *et alet al* (2005) and Blumberg (2005) who found that women's personal income reduces their dependence on men and increases their control over resources in the household which finally leads to their empowerment. According to Blumberg (2005), women's control over their income and other resources is crucial for gender equality, confidence in women, and development of society.

This study found that the employment status leads to an increased decision-making power of women in the household. According to the participants, they feel more empowered as compared to non-working women around them. This aligns with previous studies (Heaton *et alet al*., 2005; Jones *et alet al*., 2006) which found that employment helps in reducing financial dependency of women which further leads to an enhanced decision-making power within households. The study of Anwar *et alet al* (2013) also found that there is positive and significant association between women's agency and household decision making. The study of Wais *et alet al* (2016) also found significant effect of women education and employment on their financial activities and domestic decision making.

This study also explored the positive impacts of empowerment the on personal development of women lecturers. Employment and empowerment lead to improvement in personal grooming, confidence boost, and improved self-worth of women lecturers. Parveen and Leonhauser (2005) mention that increased decision-making power in household enables women to increase their bargaining power, self-esteem, control over resources, and autonomy.

The findings of this study are also consistent with those of Khan and Awan (2011), according to which, women's participation in economic activities increases their bargaining power in the households, which leads to their enhanced empowerment and greater chances of challenging the gender norms that limit their freedom and choices. They found that it has a positive and significant impact on women's empowerment in all the three dimensions: financial decision making, household decision making, and mobility.

A study by Dutta (2000) revealed that paid work empowers women and women who work outside home in order to earn money, are more likely to have greater freedom in terms of mobility. Gupta and Yesudian (2006) also found that women who earn money have high freedom of movement. However, this study explored that employed women, despite being empowered in other dimensions, are not really free with regards to their mobility. They do not have much freedom of movement which can be linked to the socio-cultural norms of Bhakkar.

This study explored that in order to cope with the challenges of work-life balance, employed women opt for different mechanisms. They resort to spiritual coping mechanisms, reading, and relaxation to divert their attention from stress and feel relieved. They also rely on support networks in the form of domestic help and neighbors. This finding is consistent with the results of the study conducted by Kibriya and Koussr (2021). They found that working women

use coping strategies such as time and stress management, support systems, fixing priorities, and relying of faith in God.

Previous studies found that unmarried women are less empowered as compared to married women and married women have better say in household decisions and freedom of movement (Hussain & Jullandhry, 2020; Ahmad *et al*. 2016). However, this study explored that unmarried women tend to feel more empowered, whereas married women reported that their decisions are not given as much importance by their husbands or in-laws as they were by their parents. It was also discovered that married women are held accountable to their husbands as to where they spent their own salary.

The findings of this study corroborate Debnath's (2015) research, which found that, in the case of married women, their status within the household depends not only on their husbands but on their husbands' parents as well. Residence with in-laws affects women's status in the household and decreases their bargaining power.

This study also explored that women living in joint families faced more challenges with regards to their empowerment as compared to those living in nuclear families. The ones living in joint families reported to have been stereotyped and stigmatized by the family members for not being able to balance work and family life. This finding is consistent with some of the previous studies (Kabeer, 2011; Roy & Niranjan, 2004) which found that women living in extended families are less empowered as compared to women in nuclear families.

Regarding social perceptions and reactions of people towards employed and empowered women, this study explored that these women are supported by their families despite the negative comments from people in the neighborhood. This finding is opposed to the results of the study conducted by Ali *et al*. (2011) who found that employed woman's father or husband feel

undignified with regards to living on the earnings of their daughter or wife. This study revealed that women are supported by their parents, and their husbands also do not object their employment because of economic benefits. However, regarding the attitude of other males towards the empowerment status of women, the results of this study are consistent with the previous studies (Chaudhry *et al*., 2012; Qureshi and Shaikh, 2007) that men's perceptions are negative towards this idea. This is mainly because of the socio-cultural norms which have a negative impact on women's empowerment as has been discovered by Parveen and Leonhauser (2005) that traditional norms and customs significantly impact women especially in extremely patriarchal societies.

This study found that education, employment, employment scales, family support, husband's support, and personal characteristics such as self-determination, perseverance, resilience, and strong willpower are the determinants of women's empowerment. These findings are consistent with previous studies. Batool and Batool (2019) explored that academic achievements, economic autonomy, personal characteristics, husband's support, and role of parents are significant enablers of empowerment. Education gives women awareness of their rights which helps improve their empowerment (Ahmad & Sultan, 2004; Chaudhry & Nosheen, 2009). Regarding the personal characteristics of women to achieve empowerment, Swain and Wallentin (2009) mention that empowerment can be achieved if women themselves have the courage to defy cultural norms for their welfare.

6.2 Conclusion and implications

A qualitative approach was utilized to explore the empowerment experiences of women employed as college lecturers in the district Bhakkar. It was found out that women lecturers feel a lot more empowered as compared to non-working women around them, but they also shared

different challenges faced by them because of their employment status. Although earning their own money has given more autonomy to these women but they are not given much freedom with regards to their mobility owing to the conservative socio-cultural norms of the area. Furthermore, unmarried women feel more empowered as compared to married women because they receive more support and appreciation from their family. The married women, on the other hand, experience stigmatization for not being able to maintain work-life balance and their husbands are also made fun of when they try to help with taking care of children or household chores.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, it was the first qualitative study to have been conducted on women's empowerment among college lecturers. Furthermore, the findings of this study are significant because women's empowerment is need of the time as they make half the population of Pakistan. Their contribution to economic activities is important not just to them but also to the society. It is also an important step to gender equality. The policy-makers need to take into account the challenges of work-life balance and social stigmatization faced by working women. There is a need to create day-care centers for the little children of working women. It is also needed to raise awareness among masses regarding the need of women's involvement in economic arena and make them realize that this is aimed at making the society better.

6.3 Limitations

The study is limited to the urban area of district Bhakkar only. The dynamics of gender roles and women's status vary across different socio-cultural and geographical settings and hence, this study may not fully capture the diversity of experiences of women's empowerment in Pakistan. Similar studies can be conducted to explore the experiences of women from other socio-economic backgrounds. This study, however, is a part of the broader effort to carry out research on women's empowerment with certain demographic characteristics.

Additionally, only government colleges were selected to include participants in the study. The data was not collected from private colleges, and it is also a limitation as the lecturers employed in private colleges might have different experiences with regards to empowerment.

Furthermore, the concept of empowerment is a broader idea and is a multidimensional concept, while this study focuses only on certain socio-cultural, economic, and interpersonal aspects of women's empowerment and does not cover all the dimensions of empowerment. Additionally, the study covers these domains of empowerment in the context of the household only, leaving aside the community or society-level aspects of the concept.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Participant (pseudonym):

Education:

Age:

Marital status:

No of children:

Type of family:

No of dependents:

Residence area:

No. of years in teaching:

Discipline:

Rank/ grade:

1. To what extent do you participate in decision-making about the following domestic matters?

    schooling of children;

    major household purchases

    Maintaining relationship with relatives

    Planning for better household conditions

2. To what extent do you hold control on the following domestic economic matters?

    Purchasing of items of everyday use (e.g., grocery, vegetable etc.)

    Purchasing of durable goods (e.g., refrigerator, TV, vacuum cleaner, car etc.)

    Increasing family's sources of income /saving

    Purchasing of gifts for friends/relatives (on events of weddings and birthdays etc.)

    Purchasing of dresses /clothes (your own/children)

3. How would you describe your freedom of movement within your community and outside your home? (For instance, to Local market for purchase of household goods,

Hospital to visit friends/relatives (hospitalized), Parent's house to meet them, Places of religious gatherings, Neighbors' /relatives'/ friends' houses)

4. What kind of difficulties do you face while ensuring work-life balance? (*Prompts:* managing the house, going for job, visiting relatives, spending time with children)

5. What kind of challenges do you experience at workplace?

6. Can you share any experience where you have felt the impact of patriarchal power imbalance within your family, and how have you responded to that? (for instance, men are considered to be the breadwinners, so how did your employment status affect that power relationship with male members in the family?)

7. How has your employment status impacted your self-esteem, confidence level, and self-worth at home and outside? (can you share some incident in this regard)

8. What is the attitude of your family, relatives, or neighbors towards your employment status?

9. What are your views on the role of financial independence in fostering a sense of agency and empowerment for women in your community?

10. What enablers, do you think, have helped you to be empowered?(e.g. education, job)

Appendix 2: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

This informed consent form is for college-level female lecturers in the district Bhakkar, who are being invited to participate in the study titled "A Phenomenological Exploration of Empowerment Dynamics among Women Employed in Colleges"

Name of Principle Investigator: Beenish Fatima

Name of university: FCCU

Part I: Information Sheet

Introduction

I am Beenish Fatima, student of MPhil Sociology at Forman Christian College (A Chartered University), Lahore. I am doing research to explore the dynamics of women's empowerment in the district of Bhakkar. I am going to provide you the information and invite you to be a part of this study. You do not have to decide today about participating in the research. Before you make a decision, you can talk to anyone about the research. You might not understand some words in the consent form. You can ask me to stop as we go through the information contained in the form and I explain that query to you.

Purpose of the research

The issue of gender inequality and women's subjugation is quite rampant in the society. We want to find ways to stop this from happening. We believe that you can help us by telling us about the ways your employment status has helped you to defy traditional gender norms and achieve empowerment.

Type of Research Intervention

This study will include your participation in an in-depth interview that will take about one hour.

Participant Selection

You are being invited to participate in this study because your experience as a college-level lecturer can contribute much to our understanding and knowledge of women's empowerment.

Voluntary Participation

Your decision to take part in this research is completely voluntary. The choice that you make will have no consequences_ positive or negative_ on your job. You may stop participating in case you change your mind later; even if you agreed earlier.

Procedures

You are requested to participate in an interview with me. During the interview, I will sit down with you in a comfortable place at the college. If you do not want to answer any of the questions asked during the interview, you may say so and I will move on to the next question. No one else but I will be present at the interview spot. The information recorded will be kept confidential, and no one else except [me and my supervisor, Dr. Shamaila Athar] will have access to the information recorded during this interview. The entire interview will be tape-recorded, but you will not be identified by your name on the tape. The tapes will be destroyed after the analysis of data.

Risks and benefits

There are no risks or benefits associated with regards to taking part in the research. Your participation, however, is likely to help us explore the relationship between employment and women's empowerment.

Part II: Certificate of Consent

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print Name of Participant_____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Statement by the researcher/person taking consent

 I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands about the objectives of the study. I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Name of Researcher/person taking the consent_____

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent_____

Date _____