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The Effects of Cultural and Religious Beliefs on Women's Quality Of Life: A Case Study of Federally Administered Tribal Area, Kurram Agency

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Abstract: The current study was formulated to probe cultural and religious belief systems that affect the female quality of life in the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA). The Data for the study was collected through an interview schedule from 279 sample respondents belonging to four villages of Kurram Agency. The statistical test, i.e., Chi-square, was used to find out the association between the dependent and independent variables. The results of religious and cultural beliefs show a significant association between females were not allowed to move outside the home and strictly observing seclusion ($P=0.002$), female participation in a job is considered a violation of Pakhtun ethics ($P=0.000$), females not dare to demand their share in the family inheritance ($P=0.004$), cultural values of Pashtun society consider female as a symbol of honor ($P=0.000$) with female quality of life. The study recommends the female quality of life in FATA can be improved through the merger of FATA into the mainstream of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, replacing FCR with constitutional rights, providing all the basic facilities, and discouraging all norms and practices developed on the basis of patriarchy, misinterpretation of religion and culture by using clergyman, NGOs and other government functionaries.

Key Words: Religious Belief, Cultural Value, Tribal Tradition, Quality of Life

Introduction

Quality of life is one of the emerging concepts in the world. It consists of new ideas about the state of the environment, happiness, housing, work, material satisfaction, and total well-being of the population living in the area (Gotay, 1992). It is an indicator of good housing and the economic conditions of the human population. The most important development factors that influence the quality of life include education, health, income, employment, and environment. The term high quality of life refers to a high standard of living where people avail themselves of all the basic facilities of life in the form of education, health, and a peaceful environment. It is sustainable when they have a high standard of living, a state or condition in a society having no need of other help, and capable of fulfilling the needs of the poor (Bernes, 2011).

Furthermore, Seligman (2011) argued that a good quality of life enables people to perform the daily activities of life and attend to physical, psychological, and social well-being. It is the capacity to perform different tasks in connection with a person his/her role in the society. The Physical environment includes quality accommodation and access to public services, whereas the social environment contains social networks and level of social support from family members. Further, the socio-economic factors are the standard of living, means, and size of wealth. At the same time, cultural and health factors include age, gender, class, religious tendencies, general health, and physical mobility of a person. The world population of women depends directly or indirectly on men, and their quality of life is less compared to men. They avail fewer opportunities in all fields of life, such as education, land property, credit, health, and paid jobs,

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due to their low status in the world. Around two billion people in the world are considered poor, and two-thirds of this population are women. Women have more work hours as compared to men but earn less because 60% of this is unpaid. Only 1% of total world assets are in women's names (Israr et al., [2013](#)).

Additionally, Women are also far behind men in the field of education. Approximately ten million girls are out of school compared to boys. Two-thirds of the world's women are illiterate. Due to poor economic status, less education and ignorance made women the victims of severe health hazards. Half a million women die during pregnancy and related diseases. Early marriages further lower their life quality in terms of income, education, and awareness. Violent behavior is the other big social problem for women as they face physical, sexual, and domestic violence. Gender representation is low in almost all fields of life, especially in political institutions. It has further restricted women from making required legislation for women's protection, equality, and better socio-economic status. All these made it extremely difficult for women to excel in the male status and improve the environment for a healthy life (Leone, [2006](#)).

Moreover, the situation of quality of life in the context of health in tribal women has again been affected due to the lack of access to basic health facilities. There are few professional doctors and lady health workers, which is insufficient for the rest of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Due to the extreme level of discrimination against women in tribal society, the health facilities are not being accessed and fulfilled properly. Women cannot make decisions without the consent of men. Many times, the quality of female life is compromised due to a lack of basic health awareness. The burden of female household duties combined with reproductive one results in both physical health problems and acute physical problems. They also face cultural taboos in the case of consulting doctors. They are based on false traditions and religious beliefs. Consequently, high mantle anxiety prevailed in Pakistan, especially among women, mainly due to bad economic conditions and lack of social support. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization reported that women have low calories and protein in the border area of Pakistan with Afghanistan. 56% of the population has food insecurity and health threats (Nazali et al., [1999](#)). According to the Government of Pakistan Housing Census ([1998](#)), Federally Administered Tribal Areas face worse hygienic conditions. Only 10% of the population has adequate access to sanitation in the shape of toilets, solid waste disposal, and drainage. Livestock and Agriculture are the main income sources of livelihood in tribal areas of Pakistan. Women's involvement in both sectors is more than men's, but they always depend upon the male members while doing so. Women have to do a lot of work both at home and in the fields. However, this is unpaid and unrecognized. They have the capacity to sell milk, eggs, homemade products, preserved vegetables, and fruits in the market but could not do so due to purdah and cultural values.

Furthermore, Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) are dominating society. The majority of women have been victims of patriarchy and feudalism. A female child often grows up with learning to obey and serve the males. The unequal gender distribution of relations hinders the process of development in FATA. In fact, the social structure and institutions, along with different norms and values systems, compel women to follow patriarchy. Women are not allowed to make decisions regarding their basic amenities of life, such as education, marriage, health, and other basic rights. Women are totally excluded from Jirga and don't participate in decision-making. Males, on the other hand, avail all the facilities in Jirga (Orbala, [2011](#)). Women in FATA are in worse conditions than the average Pakistani female. One main problem which is common for women in FATA is the security and political situation. In fact, women in tribal areas have become the victims of double discrimination since the beginning of the colonial era of British rule to successive governments after the creation of Pakistan in 1947. Under the Frontier Crime Regulation (FCR), women suffered both from a patriarchy-based social system and a law and order situation, which made FATA a safe haven for insurgents and criminals. Women's mobility and basic human rights have been further restricted due to deteriorated law and order situation (Khan, [2012](#)). All decisions in FATA are made by the older family members in the joint family system. They look after all the affairs of human life, including the income sources that are jointly distributed. The joint family system, on the other hand, made restrictions on young women in all the important daily affairs, which proved to be a disaster for their mobility, control over income, and participation in decision-making (Saigol, [2011](#)).

Moreover, the majority of tribal people were of the opinion that they were in favor of women's education and access to better health services. However, in practice, they are found against women's

participation in the force. The cultural and religious beliefs are extremely strong for women in FATA. They are considered to be the center of honor, which ultimately affects women's mobility, human rights, and quality of life (Shinwari, 2012). The women in tribal areas want immediate actions to change the fate of their lives. They want constitutional rights that have already been given by the Pakistan government to the rest of the country's women. The honor and rights of FATA women cannot be improved under the strict FCR and Jirga system. Women in FATA not only suffer from a lack of protection under the law but also the victims of militancy and security operations. Forced marriages, honor killing, and the exchange of women between tribes and marriages have made women dependent on men. Many studies reported these as the worst for women in the whole region (Sajid & Islam, 2012).

Research Question

1. Does the unavailability of a strict culture system deteriorate the female quality of life?
2. Does the amalgamation of religious systems with culture affect the female quality of life?

Methodology

Universe of Study

Kurram Agency was the universe of the study. It had three administrative divisions, namely Lower Kurram, Central Kurram, and Upper Kurram. The major tribes living in the Kurram agency were Turi, Bangash, Mangel, Maqbal, Ghiligi, Maso Zai, and Ali Shirzai. The Agency covered a total number of 3,380 sq. km with total population and household of 448,310 and 39435 respectively (Census Report, 1998). It was the third largest Agency of FATA. Due to the size of the area and population, it was not possible to collect data from the entire Agency. So, the data for the present study were collected from the tribe of Ali Shirzai. According to the 1998 Population Census Report, the total households of the Ali Shirzai tribe were 4495 households. However, for the present study, data was collected from 4 randomly selected villages, namely Tindo, Wrasta, Mirbagh, and Tandoori. The selected villages in Kurram Agency not only represented the pure Pashtun culture but also had been the victim of insurgency in FATA, which ultimately affected the quality of female life particularly.

Sampling Procedure and Sample size

All the households belonging to the Ali Shirzai tribe were the potential respondents of the study. According to the Tribal Areas 1998 Population Census Report, there were 4495 households in the selected villages. Though a large family size gives better results due to time, financial constraints, and human resources constraints, data were collected from 279 households. The sample size was drawn by keeping in the view table designed by Sekaran (2003). A proportionate sampling procedure was used to select the sample size from each of the selected villages, while a lottery method of simple random sampling method was used to pick the samples from each of the selected villages (For more details, see table)

Table 1

S. No	Names of villages and their population	Total Households	Sample Size
1.	Tindo	390	108
2.	Wrasta	165	46
3.	Mirbagh	175	48
4	Tandoori	277	77
	Total	1007	279

Sources: Preliminary Survey and 1998 Population Census Report.

Methods of Data Collection

An interview schedule was designed in the light of the objectives of the study. It was pre-tested in the study area, and necessary changes were made to the interview schedule in light of the pilot survey. For the collection of information from the potential respondents, three females were trained and approached directly respondents of the study) in order to make it possible to collect data from them while keeping all ethical considerations in the prior view of the tribe.

**Table 2**

Conceptual frame work

S.No	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable
1.	Cultural and Religious beliefs	Quality of life

Result and Discussion

Univariate Analysis

Culture is a manmade part of the environment. Pakistan is a dominant society, and all the powers are in the hands of males. Most of the tribal people believe in tribal traditions, and they consider their tribal culture superior to religion. The wrong interpretation of religion and the mixture of culture into religion had a strong effect on women's quality of life.

The Table shows that 52.0% of the respondents were in favor of the statement that women have no access to doctors due to restrictions imposed by tribal traditions, while 42.7% negated the statement. The remaining 5.0% were uncertain about the statement. Similarly, 69.9% of the respondents disagreed with this statement that male family members feel shy to visit doctors with women, while 30.1% of respondents were in favor of the statement that male family members feel shy to visit doctors with women. For the outside movement, 60.2% of the respondents responded that it is not fear that women in their family never travel beyond 25 square kilometers from outside the home for treatment purposes, while 39.4% of the respondents were in favor of the above statement. 68.5% of the respondents stated that their family wants to observe purdah, whereas 28.8% of the respondents disagreed with the statement.

Additionally, 68.1% of the respondents further reported that women are considered a symbol of honor in the family, while 19.7 and 12.2% of the respondents disagreed or were uncertain about the above-mentioned statement. Regarding the participation of women in jobs, 70.3% of the respondents reported that it is against basic Pashtun ethics, while 28.3% were in favor of women's participation in jobs. 49.1% of the respondents were again of the opinion that religion in tribal society is interpreted through the eyes of Pashtun culture, whereas 36.9% of the respondents disagreed, and 14.0% of respondents had no information about that statement. 47.7% of the respondents further responded that the mixture of Pashtun and religious culture is no threat to women's basic rights, while 47.7% of the respondents reported that it is a threat to women's basic rights whereas 9.3% of respondents were not sure about the above statement. As far as the share of women in family inheritance is concerned, 67.4% of the respondents reported that women could not dare to demand their share in the family inheritance, whereas 19.7% of the respondents agreed with the statement whereas 12.9% of the respondents were uncertain about the family inheritance.

Moreover, 49.8% of the respondents were against the statement that tribal culture has nothing to do with religion, while 40.9% of the respondents were in favor of the statement. The remaining 9.3% of the respondents were uncertain about the statement. Similarly, 45.9% of the respondents were against the statement that more inclination toward culture made Islam partial towards female basic human rights, while 40.1% of the respondents were in favor of the statement and 14.0% of the respondents were uncertain. 66.7% of the respondents reported that they are not allowed to enjoy legal rights, while 29.4% of respondents agreed with the statement, while 3.9% of respondents had no information about the legal rights of women.

Furthermore, the Table as a whole reveals that culture and religion played an important role in the improvement of female quality of life. These two were interrelated concepts, and the wrong interpretation of religion and the mixture of culture into religion had made women deprived of their basic human rights. There was a dire need to raise voices for the improvement of quality of life and challenge all cultural barriers in the way of women's development. Similarly, Ibrahim & Farina (2005) stated that our culture is intermixed with our religion, and their combination does not permit women to enjoy any legal right given by our Islam and the constitution. Pakistan is an Islamic country, but the different interpretation of Islamic law by our culture has deprived women of the basic rights of human life. This ultimately affects the female's quality of life. The cultural and religious beliefs are extremely strong for women in FATA. Shinwari (2008) reported that they are considered to be the center of honor, which ultimately affects women's mobility, human rights, and quality of life. Muhammad et al. (2000) reported that they also face cultural

taboos in the case of consulting doctors. They are based on false traditions and religious beliefs. Consequently, high mental anxiety prevailed in Pakistan, especially among women, mainly due to bad economic conditions and lack of social support.

Table 3

Univariate analysis of cultural and religious beliefs

S. No	Statement	Yes	No	Uncertain	Total
1	Women can access doctors due to restrictions imposed by tribal traditions	145(52.0)	119(42.7)	15(5.4)	279(100)
2	Male family members fell shy to visit doctors with women	84(30.1)	195(69.9)	0(0.00)	279(100)
3	Most women in your family never travel beyond 25 square kilometers from outside the home for treatment purposes	110(39.4)	168(60.2)	1(.4)	279(100)
4	For the outside movement, your family wants to observe purdah	191(68.5)	80(28.7)	8(2.9)	279(100)
5	Women are a symbol of honor in the family	190(68.1)	55(19.7)	34(12.2)	279(100)
6	Women's participation in the job you feel is a deviation from basic Pashtun ethics	196(70.3)	79(28.3)	4(1.4)	279(100)
7	Religion in tribal society is interpreted through the goggles of Pashtun culture	137(49.1)	103(36.9)	39(14.0)	279(100)
8	The mixture of Pashtun and religious culture is a threat to women's basic rights	120(43.0)	133(47.7)	26(9.3)	279(100)
9	Tribal women cannot dare to demand their share in the family inheritance	188(67.4)	55(19.7)	36(12.9)	279(100)
10	Tribal culture has nothing to do with religion	114(40.9)	139(49.8)	26(9.3)	279(100)
11	More inclination towards culture made Islam partial towards female basic human rights	112(40.1)	128(45.9)	39(14.0)	279(100)
12	Women are not allowed to enjoy the legal right	186(66.7)	82(29.4)	11(3.9)	279(100)

Bivariate Analysis

Association between Cultural and Religious Beliefs and Quality of Life

The Table reports that in connection with the association between the quality of life and cultural and religious beliefs, a significant association was found with the statements calling religion in tribal society is interpreted through the eyes of Pashtun culture ($P=0.000$), women are a symbol of honor in the family ($P=0.000$), it is extremely difficult for women to do a job ($P=0.000$), it is not easy for women in the tribal area to enjoy legal right ($P=0.000$), for the outside movement women want to observe purdah ($P=0.002$) and tribal women cannot dare to demand their share in the family inheritance ($P=0.004$). The statements found non-significant included the mixture of Pashtun and religious culture as a threat to women's basic rights ($P=0.053$), women not accessing doctors due to restrictions imposed by tribal tradition ($P=0.109$), male family members falling shyness to visit doctors with women ($P=0.131$), most of the women in the family never traveled beyond 25 square kilometers from outside home for treatment purposes ($P=0.519$), tribal culture has nothing to do with religion ($P=0.364$) and more inclination towards culture made Islam partial towards female basic human right ($P=0.262$).

The Table as a whole reveals a strong domination of Pashtun culture and religion. In fact, religion seems to be through the goggles of culture. Women in the study area were the symbol of honor and observed purdah; participation in the workforce is a deviation from basic Pashtun ethics, no share in family inheritance, and no legal rights. All these affected female quality of life in one way or another way. Ibrahim (2011), in this regard, states that the mixture of culture into religion in tribal areas does not permit women to enjoy legal rights which is given by Islam and the constitution of Pakistan. The wrong interpretation of Islamic law has also deprived women of their basic rights to human life. This ultimately affects the female's



quality of life severely in tribal areas. Most of the tribal people believe that strong cultural and religious belief systems prevail in tribal areas. Similarly, Shinwari (2008) reported that they are considered to be the center of honor, which ultimately affects women's mobility, human rights, and quality of life.

Table 4

Association between cultural and religious beliefs and quality of life

S. No	Statement	Quality of life			Chi-square
		Yes	No	Uncertain	
1	Women can access doctors due to restrictions imposed by tribal traditions				
	Yes	72(25.8)	64(22.9)	9(3.2)	χ ² - 7.571 (P=0.109)
	No	46 (16.5)	59 (21.1)	14 (5.0)	
	Uncertain	5 (1.8)	10 (3.6)	0 (0.0)	
2	Male family members feel shy to visit doctors with women				
	Yes	33(11.8)	40(14.3)	11(3.9)	χ ² - 4.060 (P=0.131)
	No	90(32.3)	93(33.3)	12(4.3)	
	Uncertain	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	
3	Most women in your family never traveled beyond 25 square kilometers from outside the home for treatment purposes				
	Yes	52(18.6)	52(18.6)	6(2.2)	χ ² - 3.236 (P=0.519)
	No	71(25.4)	80(28.7)	17(6.1)	
	Uncertain	0(0.0)	1(0.4)	0(0.0)	
4	For the outside movement, your family wants to observe purdah				
	Yes	100(35.8)	77(27.6)	14(5.0)	χ ² - 16.942 (P=0.002)
	No	21(7.5)	51(18.3)	8(2.9)	
	Uncertain	2 (0.7)	5 (1.8)	1 (0.4)	
5	Women are a symbol of honor in the family				
	Yes	101(36.2)	78(28.0)	11(3.9)	χ ² - 28.405 (P=0.000)
	No	16(5.7)	35(12.5)	4(1.4)	
	Uncertain	6 (2.2)	20 (7.2)	8 (2.9)	
6	Women's participation in the job you feel is a deviation from basic Pashtun ethics				
	Yes	104(37.3)	74(26.5)	18(6.5)	χ ² - 28.564 (P=0.000)
	No	18(6.5)	57(20.4)	4(1.4)	
	Uncertain	1 (0.4)	2 (0.7)	1 (0.4)	
7	Religion in tribal society is interpreted through the goggles of Pashtun culture				
	Yes	85(30.5)	43(15.4)	9(3.2)	χ ² - 45.639 (P=0.000)
	No	35(12.5)	61(21.9)	7(2.5)	
	Uncertain	3(1.1)	29(10.4)	7(2.5)	
8	The mixture of Pashtun and religious culture is a threat to women's basic rights				
	Yes	64(22.9)	47(16.8)	9(3.2)	χ ² - 9.336 (P=0.053)
	No	51(18.3)	72(25.8)	10(3.6)	
	Uncertain	8(2.9)	14(5.0)	4(1.4)	
9	Tribal women cannot dare to demand their share in the family inheritance				
	Yes	95(34.1)	80(28.7)	13(4.7)	χ ² - 15.539 (P=0.004)
	No	19(6.8)	33(11.8)	3(1.1)	
	Uncertain	9(3.2)	20(7.2)	7(2.5)	
10	Tribal culture has nothing to do with religion				
	Yes	37(20.4)	51(18.3)	6(2.2)	χ ² - 4.326 (P=0.364)
	No	57 (20.4)	68 (24.4)	14 (5.0)	
	Uncertain	9 (3.2)	14 (5.0)	3 (1.1)	
11	More inclination towards culture made Islam partial towards female basic human rights				
	Yes	55(19.7)	49(17.6)	8(2.9)	χ ² - 5.256 (P=0.262)
	No	49(17.6)	65(23.3)	14(5.0)	
	Uncertain	19 (6.8)	19 (6.8)	1 (0.4)	

12	Women are not allowed to enjoy the legal right.				
Yes	95(34.1)	83(29.7)	8(2.9)	23.559 (P=0.000)	
No	21(7.5)	47(16.8)	14(5.0)		
Uncertain	7(2.5)	3(1.1)	1(0.4)		

Conclusion

Quality of life is one of the emerging concepts in the world. A number of incentives and gender-based policies have been made to improve female quality of life in Pakistan. However, the study reveals that low female literacy, strong seclusion (Purdah) system, a dominant society, and deteriorated law and order situations of tribal people were the major causes of low female quality of life in FATA. Most of the tribal people strongly believed in cultural and religious belief systems. Further, the misinterpretation of culture and amalgamation of cultural traits into religion, consider of women as a symbol of honor, not being allowed to participate in jobs, strong purdah system, and share in family inheritance are another major factors that further affected the female quality of life in Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA).

Recommendations

The study suggests following recommendations on the basis of the findings of the study.

1. Education is the key agent of promoting awareness and sensitization of local people's lifestyles. A quality life could be ensured in the selected area by providing them with adequate education. The government, in this regard, emphasized the promotion of female education.
2. Community organizations can strengthen the voice of women; as a result, women being organized can initiate an advocacy and lobbying campaign to discourage those socio-cultural practices and beliefs that might condense the role of women, which ultimately leads to their poor quality of life.
3. Patriarchal social structure in the selected area is the prominent hurdles in the way of promoting women's quality of life. So, effective programs and policy interventions should be initiated to provide space for women's better lifestyles.
4. Health facilitation for the citizens is the prime responsibility of every welfare state; therefore, the government of Pakistan should give special attention to maternal health issues in the selected area of the study.

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