

Women behind the veil: The mediating role of Empowerment on the relationship between Social System and Performance of rural women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the social system and performance of Pakistani women who work behind the veil in the rural areas. The mediating role of women's empowerment on the relationship between social system and performance is also investigated in Pakistan's socio-cultural context.

Methodology: Data was collected from 253 self-employed home bound women who observe veil and belong from the seven districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa using a multi-stage cluster sampling. A self-administered questionnaire was used for this purpose. The data was analyzed with the hierarchical multiple regression.

Results: There is a significant association between social system, empowerment and performance. The two dimensions of social systems namely family support and socio-cultural factors have a significant impact on empowerment and performance. Moreover, empowerment mediates the relationship between the social system and performance.

Research limitations: The population is restricted to districts of only one province of Pakistan. Women working in other provinces of Pakistan have not been considered as the target population due to time and cost constraints.

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Practical implications: This study focuses on the importance of the social system to empowerment and the performance of Pardah observers in a socially restricted environment where stepping out of home is considered as a matter of family's reputation and honor. In this backdrop, the policy makers must initiate assistance programs specifically targeted at women working behind the veil in order to empower them. Media must highlight the success stories of Pardah observers in order to create an environment where such women are accepted by society as role models and get social recognition of their work.

Keywords: Women, Veil, Empowerment, Family support, Socio- Cultural Factors, Mediator, Performance

Introduction

Women entrepreneurs who are known to be as a backbone of the economies are considered in few parts of the world as a gender who looks down upon by the society even if they step out of their homes. Pakistan is one of those countries where this situation is prevailing. In a country like Pakistan where women hold nearly 50% of the population (Pakistan's Census Report 2017), they face major challenges from the society. Even the strongest women are heard saying:

Mariam Adil, (Founder GRID) "As a Pakistani Muslim woman at the helm of a tech venture, I have faced my fair share of skeptics, critics, and plain old sexists..... I have heard comments that would never be leveled at a man."

Parveen Shahid (Founder Roop Boutique) "The Pakistan's society has a tunnel vision and very conservative attitudes towards women doing business"

Benazir Bhutto(Former Pakistani President) "Clearly it's not easy for women. We still have to go the extra mile to prove that we are equal to men. We have to work longer hours and make more sacrifices. And we must emotionally protect ourselves from unfair, often vicious attacks made on us via the male members of our family." (Source: *Daughter of Destiny: An Autobiography*)

Uzma Gul (Founder Varan Tours) "I have also that it is a male-oriented society out there, and a woman cannot perform well if the male members of her family do not create a right kind of environment for her."

Asma Mehmood (Founder Multani Dresses) "Travelling alone is not safe for women, and you cannot get a secure place to stay overnight in other cities to grow your business"

Farah Yousuf (Founder Comeily Collection) "Doing business is the responsibility of men. Why are women doing it?" This is how Farah thinks Pakistani society responds to women doing business.

Pakistan's society is very challenging for working women and it is more challenging for women entrepreneurs as they have to look after everything from initial start-up to proper running of the enterprise. The societal disapproval of women makes them vulnerable to certain

hurdles which discourage them to perform well and compete in the entrepreneurial world. Pakistan is considered as a third most dangerous place for women in the world (Jali& Islam, 2017). The situation is very alarming for this gender which is indicated by several reports. As per the Gender Gap Report (2018), in terms of gender parity, Pakistan ranks at 148th position out of 149 countries. It indicates that it is the 2nd worst country in respect of gender parity. The report by GEM (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor) in 2011 revealed that Bangladesh, Iran and Pakistan are the countries where the participation level of women is the lowest in factor driven economies.

Where on one hand, women across the globe are searching for jobs and becoming entrepreneurs to get empowered, become independent, achieve social position like men (Ferdoos, 2005) and contribute in several ways like job creation and economic development (Allen & Truman, 2016; Raani&Natarajan, 2020), the situation is totally different in Pakistan where women are barred from taking entrepreneurship and carrying out business activities due to several reasons like early marriages, cultural restrictions and gender disparity. They face economic and social discrimination (Agnes, 1996; Iqbal, Afzal&Inayat, 2012) because in a patriarchal society of Pakistan, men are socially and economically independent in comparison to women. They are restricted to staying at homes and look after their families which is considered to be a social duty. According to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2018 women in Pakistan represent 49.18% of the total population out of which 17.71 % live in urban areas whereas a large number of women i.e., 31.47% reside in rural areas of Pakistan. The prior work by the prominent scholars have not focused on this 64% of women residing in rural areas of Pakistan.

Where factors like social disapproval of the working women (Kamal, 1997) and their reproductive ability curbs their movement (Ahmad &Naimat, 2011) there is also an extremely important factor which is Pardah (veil) which restricts her to staying at home (Roomi& Parrott, 2008).Veil is a movable boundary that conceals the extramural activities of women (Papnek, 1982) due to which competent women don't enter into the entrepreneurial world and hence they don't enjoy the prospects like other women who are allowed to carry out the entrepreneurial activities. They are not empowered to make any decisions of their lives, households and kids. Empowering such women is pivotal to make them successful in their personal and business lives. Plethora of research has been conducted on Pakistani women entrepreneurs which mainly revolves around challenges faced by urban women entrepreneurs in the business world who are registered with some institutes. Nevertheless, academic understanding of the women working in socially constricting societies and observing veil is far from complete in theoretical as well as empirical research as such women are inaccessible to the researchers. So far there is only one study which focuses on women behind the veil in Pakistan but that is limited to the training programs (Roomi& Harrison, 2010). How women working in the backward areas and villages of Pakistan in complete seclusion is an area which has not even touched upon before and some fundamental pieces related to their performance are missing. Why big names still find the Pakistan's society as unsafe for women working in rural

areas is a matter of interest in the present study. Keeping in view the prevailing environment and different influential reports like Gender Gap Report and Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report which presents an alarming situation for women of Pakistan indigenous study on the factors investigating the performance of women behind the veil is needed so as to get valuable insight into the kind of work such women are doing at their homes and how their performance can be enhanced in a social system where non-supportive families and socio-cultural barriers are observed. Such women can be empowered only when factors affecting their performance are known. This study is an attempt to analyze the role of empowerment as a mediator on the social system and performance of rural women of Pakistan. In this way the study will fill the gap in the existing body of literature and give more insights into how a woman observing complete veil in a strict socio-cultural environment can earn bread and butter for her family and get empowered.

Research Objectives:

1. To investigate the impact of the social system on the performance of women working behind the veil in Pakistan.
2. To analyse the impact of empowerment on the performance of women Pardah Observance of Pakistan.
3. To examine the mediating impact of empowerment on the relationship between the social system and performance of the women working behind the veil in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Veil

Self-employment initiatives by women have grown in the past few years in the informal sector in the developing countries (Ramani, 2013). Yet most of the women in the Muslim countries can't work independently without patronage and permission of their male family members because of the socio-economic and cultural barriers. Among other factors that limit the mobility of such women, *veil* or *Pardah* is one of them which are the instrument of seclusion that affects the lives of women (Papanek, 1971). The literal meaning of *Pardah* is curtain and it represents or describes the women's seclusion in the society along with the general enforcement of standards of female modesty (Roomi & Parrott, 2008). There are two instruments of seclusion for women. The first one limits the women's activities to the domestic arena and confining them in living spaces set aside for them and enclosing public spaces for them to make them private whereas the second division represents the veil or the concealing cloak which is known as *burqa* worn by the women when they go outside of their homes when the necessity arises. Hence it is a portable means of seclusion for women (Papanek & Minault,

1982). Burqah can take forms like women may totally cover themselves from head to ankle or wrap themselves with shawls or scarves. In the broadest terms, the Pardah system relates to the social distance, division of labor, status and interpersonal dependency. It is a symbolic shelter which considers women as being important in the family unit and vulnerable when they step out of their homes (Papnek, 1971). Among Muslims, the seclusion is not observed for a woman's father, husband, brother, cousin, nephews and father-in-laws. Women in a Pardah society don't work with men rather; they work with other women around or in the home to earn their bread and butter.

Theoretical basis of the research

Several theories highlight the social context and environment of start-ups and entrepreneurship (Roomi & Harrison, 2010). Esoteric theory in recent times is exploring the entrepreneurs working in resource-constrained and socially constricting and environments having social structuration (Chiason & Saunders, 2005) and embeddedness (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003). The theory of embeddedness considers the entrepreneur's role in the society and the society's formal institutes such as gender and family. According to Aldrich and Cliff (2003), new business opportunities emerge when there are transformations in the institutes of the family. Hence family is a social structure into which the activity of an entrepreneur is embedded. Jack and Anderson (2002) combined social structure and embeddedness and found that being embedded in the social structure leads to the creation of opportunities which in turn improves the performance. This suggests that Pakistani women entrepreneurs are also embedded with their social structurations and should act accordingly (Giddens, 1984). These theories are relevant to Pakistani women entrepreneurs as they are underpinned by the specific needs as entrepreneurs. Their access to networks of social capital and recognition in the society as self-employed persons and socio-cultural barriers is very much affected by 'Pardah and Izzat' across all the social strata (Roomi & Harrison, 2010). Another underpinning theory related to this study is the theory of Feminism given by Betty Friedan (1974) which focuses on empowering women in a patriarchal society having socio-cultural barriers. This theory considers the roles of women and men in variety of fields and focuses that both genders should be treated equally otherwise it represents discrimination in the society. Hence the main focus of the theory is on gender inequality and stereotyping and patriarchy.

Social system

1. Family support

The support of immediate family members primarily a parent or husband is of utmost importance when it comes to supporting women morally and financially (Cosh and Hughes, 2000). Family is considered as the number one element which women look up for support (Khan, 2014). Women face several challenges while entering the business world and the main variables affecting the success of employed women are internal motivation, social ties and family support (Alam, Jani & Omar, 2011). The literature review has found that in terms of support received by women entrepreneurs from their families, there are two opposite views. In a few cases, the families of women are very supportive and they give them moral, emotional and

financial support along with advising on business ideas (Halkias et al, 2011; Jamali, 2009). Hence a supportive family environment can be observed. On the other hand, predominantly in conservative societies, women are not appreciated for their work and discouraged by their families (Itani, Sidani & Baalbaki, 2011). Even women in such societies sometimes face disapproving remarks from their families and husbands because of either the strictness of observing veil or considering it as a gesture of the inability of the male partner in supporting the household (Jamali, 2009). According to Welsh, Memili & Kaciak (2016), family support affects a woman in two ways; one by increasing hurdles for her as the members of the family interfere in business's affairs and second by recognizing her of the insufficient skills required to run the business.

a. Family support and Empowerment

Women's empowerment and its crucial role in sustainable development is one of the issues that is considered both in theory and practice. A plethora of prior work emphasizes on the importance of family as an institute responsible for empowering society and individuals both economically and socially (Mokomane, 2012). The immediate family support positively correlates with women's empowerment and results in the success of their businesses (Halkias et al, 2011), hence a positive family support has been identified as an empowering resource for women. Although a number of studies have found that there is an association of family support and the women empowerment and that the empowerment increases with gaining more family support (Alireza, Parvaneh, 2012; Bandrez, Niknami, 2013; Kiani, Aghamohammadi & Zafari, 2018) but such studies have not been validated in Pakistan because of its unique context and conservative society. Hence this research analyses the association of family support on the women's empowerment of those women who observe veil.

H1: Family support is positively related to the women's empowerment.

b. Family support and Performance

Women owned enterprises are largely affected by the wishes and decisions of their family members. In a patriarchal society of Pakistan where a woman doesn't get support from her family when she decides to be self-employed (Khurshid, 2018), the need is to assess how her performance gets affected. Several studies have concluded that family's support is of utmost importance in terms of maintaining healthy marital relations while women have to look after their work as family support helps women to perform well in the business (Chay, 1993; Hisrich and Brush, 1987; Neneh, 2017; Ondiba & Matsui, 2019; Rajani & Sarada, 2008; Siddiqui, 2012) but these studies are confined to urban women whose families are liberal and supportive. Roomi (2013) investigated that the factors responsible for women's growth in Pakistan are traditions of the family, independent mobility, allowing women to contact men for business work and moral support by the family but this study ignored the women who reside in rural areas and strictly follow the pardah. Therefore, the underlying hypothesis is as follows:

H2: Family support is positively related to the performance.

2. *Socio-cultural Factors*

Women want the feeling of belongingness and acceptance in the society where they operate their businesses. The self-employed women in conservative and restrictive societies come across different hurdles. One of such hurdles includes the socio-cultural barriers which confine them to staying at home and not to enter the entrepreneurial world. They are protected from engaging in any business activity and discouraged to perform any activity (Azam, Roomi & Harrison, 2010). They continuously require encouragement and support from their societies but because of socio-cultural barriers they are not able to do so. Among socio-cultural factors, lack of societal acceptability and networks, conflicting gender roles, males' domination in the society and cultural influence are the hindrances faced by women entrepreneurs (Wube, 2010; Yasmeen, 2005). In an Islamic country like Pakistan factors like *Pardah* and *Izzat* affect the occupational roles of women because of which the society doesn't welcome working women (Roomi & Parrott, 2008) as the mobility of women is considered as a matter of family's honor and reputation (Goheer & Penska, 2007).

a. Socio-Cultural Factors and Empowerment

Culturally based restrictions have implications on women's mobility and are associated with their empowerment. These restrictions hinder their access to the labor market, school and healthcare. Also a customary aspect of sex-segregation and *Pardah* limits the women's access to employment where she is not allowed to take an active part in the labor force. Hence, this labor participation is very low for empowering her in the society (Choudhry, Mutalib & Ismail, 2019). Women need cooperation and encouragement from their homes and societies to get empowered. The socio-cultural factors act as significant predictors of women's empowerment (Batoool & Batoool, 2018). In Pakistan gender discrimination is deeply rooted. A number of studies are conducted in Pakistan (Akhunzada, Khattak & Ashraf, 2015; Bushra & Wajaha, 2013; Choudhry, Mutalib & Ismail, 2019; Khan, 2010; Khan & Maan, 2008) and other developing countries (Khan, M., Mazhar, 2017; Kumar, 2014; Masiaga, M. M., Namusong, 2016; Swain & Wallentin, 2008) regarding the impact of socio-cultural factors on women's empowerment and found that the impact of such factors is significant on empowering women but none of these studies targeted women entrepreneurs of rural areas who observe strict *Pardah*. Only a study by Khan and Maan (2008) highlighted the impact of socio-cultural factors on women's empowerment on rural women but this study was confined to District Faisalabad.

H3: Socio-cultural factors have a significant impact on women's empowerment.

a. Socio-Cultural Factors and Performance.

Where socio-cultural factors affect the empowerment of women, they also affect their performance. In the last couple of years, the area of socio-cultural factors and the women entrepreneurial performance has been an area of interest for academic researchers and policy makers. Factors like class bias, having limited networks, lack of social acceptability and looking down upon by society limit the women entrepreneurial performance (Wube, 2010).

Women's performance is influenced by the normative patterns of behavior persistent in the society (Papalia & Olds, 1981). Hence socio-cultural barriers affects the women's performance (Giwa & Babakatun, 2019; Khan, 2014; Maziku & Mashenene, 2014; Mbiti, Mukulu & Kyallo, 2015; Noguera, Alvarez & Urbano, 2013; Wube, 2010). How these factors affect the self-employed women of rural areas where stepping out of home is not easy in order to operate their businesses, is an area still needed to be explored.

H4: Socio-cultural factors have a significant impact on the women's performance.

Empowerment and Performance

Empowerment is associated with removing unjust inequalities from society in order to make choices and by empowering it is meant to disrupt the prevailing status quo and move from a position of being unable to exercise a choice to being able to that (Haugh & Talwar, 2016). Women's empowerment is necessary in today's world in order to cope with several hurdles that come their way. Women's empowerment has several dimensions like economic empowerment which means giving her access to income, social empowerment which results in raising her status in the community and decision making in spending money on her and her children (Mayoux 2000). In this study, "women's empowerment "is defined as "a woman's sense of self-worth, her right of having access to resources and choices and her right of having the power to control her life within and outside her home" (Kawaguchi et al., 2014). The process of women's empowerment is observed slow globally in both low income and advanced countries (Choudhry et al., 2019). In South Asia, the conditions of women are alarming where despite contributing everyday to their society and household; they face workplace harassment and violence. South Asia is the second lowest scoring region with a gender gap of 34.2% in 2018, whilst Pakistan is the lowest-ranked country with 55% of its overall gender gap, within the region of South Asia (Global Gender Gap Report, 2018). Empowering women is pivotal to attain development goals like increased productivity and efficiency, reduced unemployment and poverty leading to economic growth and self-confidence. Empowered women avail the opportunities equally like men, achieve their targets and exercise more power for shaping their lives (Choudhry et al., 2019; Mosedale, 2005; Murshid, & Critelli, 2020; Womne, 2015) but women don't really understand what impact empowerment has on their performance (bin Kimpah & Raudeliūnienė, 2014). While little work has been done on the relationship between women's empowerment and performance by the prior researchers concluding that women's empowerment has a significant impact on performance (Bamiatzi, Jones, Mitchelmore & Nikolopoulos, 2015; bin Kimpah & Raudeliūnienė, 2014; Digan, Sahi, Mantok & Patel, 2019) but these studies were related to women entrepreneurs permitted to work outside their homes. None of the studies took into consideration the role of Pardah observance women. Moreover, how empowering women of rural areas mediates the relationship between social system and performance has not yet been examined to get valuable

insights into women working behind the veil. On the basis of the prior studies we hypothesize the following:

H5: Empowerment has a significant impact on the performance of self-employed women behind the veil.

H5a: Empowerment mediates the relationship between family support and the performance.

H5b: Empowerment mediates the relationship between socio-cultural factors and the performance.

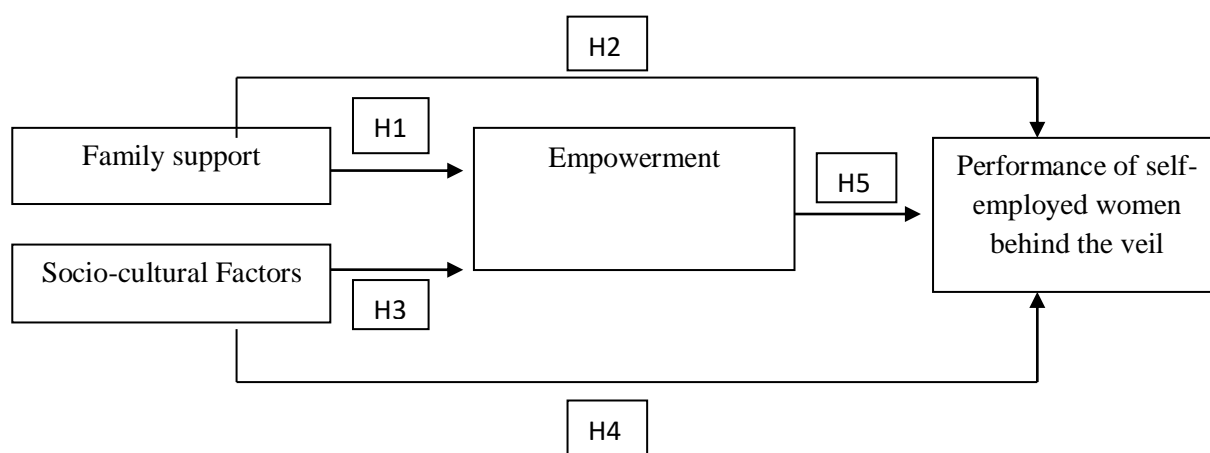


Fig. 1.Schema of the research model.

Methodology

Nature of the study

This study is quantitative in nature where data is collected from the respondents in a quantified manner and subjected to statistical techniques in order to get the results. The study falls under the positivist philosophy which uses a deductive approach where hypotheses are deduced from the theory, operationalized and then tested. The data was analyzed using SPSS Version 20 for finding the relationship between dependent and independent variables using multiple regression analysis.

Research Population and Sample

The population of the study consists of rural home bound women who observe complete veil and work at their homes on a micro level. Data for the study was collected from villages of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (a province of Pakistan) using a multi-stage cluster sampling. There are a total seven divisions of KPK (Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, Hazara, Kohat, Malakand,

Mardan, and Peshawar). Out of these seven divisions, three were taken into account for this study because of having the same economic and geographical conditions and infrastructure. They were Peshawar Division, Mardan Division and Dera Ismail Khan Division. The sampling was done in five stages.

1. In the 1st stage, one district was selected randomly from every division namely; Nowshera District from Peshawar Division; Mardan District from Mardan Division and D.I Khan District was selected from the Dera Ismail Khan Division.
2. In the 2nd stage, two Tehsils (Cities) were selected randomly from each District. From Nowshera District, Pabbi and Jahangira were selected; from Mardan District, Katlang and Takht-e-Bhai were selected whereas Kulachi and Daraban were selected from the D.I. Khan District.
3. In the 3rd stage, two Union Councils from every Tehsil (City) were selected.
4. In the 4th stage, two villages from each Union Council were selected.
5. In the 5th and final stage, the sample was selected from the targeted population of each village.

The sample frame consists of the lists provided by the union councils of the respective cities.

Sample Size Determination

The data for the study was collected from the sixteen villages of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where women are restricted to go out of their homes because they observe Pardah and work from their homes. A household survey of the villages was conducted and found that there are a total of 689 houses where women work behind the veil. The sample size was determined by the Yamane's formula for a finite population which was 253.

The data was collected from the respondents i.e., Pardah observers by taking permission from the household's head using a questionnaire. All the questions were generated using a Likert Scale. Women were asked the questions related to the variables under study and where required, questions were explained to them in their respective languages.

Instrument and measurement

Data was collected for the respondents through a self-administered questionnaire where the Likert scale was used to generate the responses which indicated the level of disagreement or agreement of the respondents. Scale for Social system and Empowerment was made according to the socio-cultural context of Pakistan whereas the scale of Brush & Vaanderwerf (1992) was used in order to measure performance that includes growth in profit, number of products/services, growth in sales/revenue, number of customers/client base and number of employees for the last two years.

Data Analyses

In order to analyze the data, the regression analysis was employed which included entering the mediator and predicting variables at different stages to measure the increase in R^2 by inserting the predictor variables. The method of Baron and Kenny (1986) was used to assess the mediating impact of Empowerment.

Results of the Study

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the variables; family support, socio-cultural factors and Empowerment indicating the respondents' response closer to agreement as the values of the mean score are less than 4. Furthermore, the results of Performance show that respondents have a certain level of success in their work.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Family support	253	1.00	5.00	3.9539	1.29409
Socio-Cultural Factors	253	1.00	5.00	3.5573	1.10562
Empowerment	253	1.00	5.00	3.7213	1.39262
Performance	253	1.10	4.20	2.5061	.48363

Factor and Reliability analyses

Factor analysis was performed in order to determine which items are to be included or excluded for further analyses which are presented in Table 2. Before factor analysis, the following assumptions of factor analysis were met.

- Sample adequacy was checked using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Test. The values greater than 0.6 were accepted according to Pallant (2011).
- For testing the correlation matrix (observed) with the identity matrix, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was used. It was significant and showed the suitability of factor analysis.

The results show that 20 items were loaded on four factors with a total variance of 72.43%. The factor loadings were derived from a parsimonious set of variables according to Hair et al., (1998) which is based on acceptance of factor loadings equal to or greater than .50. Table 2 presents all the communalities values of the variables are high that means that the validity of the constructs is established and therefore the study's concept is defined well.

Table 2 further presents that the reliability of the instrument which was checked using Cronbach's Alpha representing all the constructs had a value of over 0.70 indicating that a good reliability was accomplished according to Nunnally (1978).

Table 2: Factor loadings and reliability estimates

Key dimensions and items	Loadings	Communalities	Cronbach's Alpha
<i>Family support (eigen value=5.081; variance=25.406%)</i>			.905
FS1- My family's attitude is positive towards my business and I receive support from them.	.891	.872	
FS2 - My family allows me to meet even with men for my business.	.919	.866	
FS3- My family life is affected positively due to my work.	.877	.788	

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<i>Socio-Cultural Factors (eigenvalue=5.081; variance=25.406%)</i>			.912
SCF1- My society looks down upon me as I am a woman running my own business	.705	.552	
SCF2- I am not affected by gender inequalities.	.711	.535	
SCF3- I have no prejudice or class biases.	.798	.659	
SCF4- I have better contact(network) with outsiders	.828	.685	
SCF5- There is no cultural influence	.819	.711	
SCF6- I receive social acceptability.	.877	.777	
SCF7- The attitude of my society is positive towards my products and services.	.782	.635	
SCF8- I have a positive social image in my society because of my business.	.756	.593	
<i>Empowerment (eigen value=3.782; variance=18.912%)</i>			.978
EMP1- I can spend the money freely which I earn from my work.	.925	.905	
EMP2- The physical support by my family is available in household chores.	.954	.968	
EMP3- I make a decision in buying things for my family, what to cook and my child's schooling.	.921	.903	
EMP4- I am aware of and participate in my community activities.	.961	.965	
<i>Performance (eigen value=3.036; variance=15.181%)</i>			.818
EP1- Growth in profit has increased in the last three years.	.644	.509	
EP2- Number of products orservices has increased in the last three years.	.887	.819	
EP3- Market Expansion has increased in the last three years.	.608	.401	
EP4- Number of customers has increased in the last three years.	.890	.812	
EP5-Availability of the raw material has increased in the last three years.	.687	.532	
Total variance= 72.432%, KMO=.777			
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Approx. $\chi^2= 4729.117$			
df=190			
sig=.000			

Tests for association

Direct relationships: Predicting Empowerment

1. Relationship of Family support and Socio-Cultural Factors with Performance

The results of regression analysis of Social system and Performance are given in Table 3. The results show that Family support and Socio-Cultural factors have significant impact on the

women's performance in rural areas ($F=7.782$; $p=.001$). 5.9% change in the Performance is explained by the Social system. The results further show that:

- The coefficient of Family support is insignificant ($t=2.816$, $p<.05$). H2 is accepted.
- The coefficient of socio-cultural factors is significant ($t= 2.78$, $p<.05$). H4 is accepted.

Table 3 Social system as predictor of Performance

<i>Social system</i>	<i>Beta coefficients</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>Sig</i>
Family support	.066	2.816	.005
Socio-Cultural Factors	.057	2.078	.039

Notes: $R^2= .059$; $F=7.782$; $Sig =.001$

2. Relationship of Family support and Socio-Cultural Factors with Empowerment

The results of regression analysis of Social system and Empowerment are given in Table 4. The results show that Family support and Socio-Cultural factors have a significant impact on the Women's Empowerment ($F=8.507$; $p=.000$). 6.4% change in the Empowerment is explained by the Social system. The results also reveal that:

- The coefficient for family support is significant ($t=2.848$, $p<.05$). H1 is accepted.
- The coefficient for socio-cultural factors is significant ($t= 2.287$, $p<.05$). H3 is accepted.

Table 4: Social system as predictors of Empowerment

<i>Social system</i>	<i>Beta coefficients</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>Sig</i>
Family support	.192	2.848	.005
Socio-Cultural Factors	.181	2.287	.023

Notes: $R^2= .064$; $F=8.507$; $Sig =.000$

Direct and Mediating Effect of Empowerment

Two models are presented in Table 5. Model 2 presents the direct relationship of Empowerment on the Performance ($p<0.05$) which leads to the acceptance of H5 that Empowerment significantly impacts women's performance working behind the veil.

This study finds the role of empowerment as a mediator in the relationship of social system and performance using the recommendations of Baron and Kenny (1986) according to which a variable acts as a mediator if it meets the following conditions:

1. The independent variable significantly influences the dependent variable in the first regression equation.
2. Independent variable significantly influences the mediator in the second regression equation.
3. Mediator must significantly influence the dependent variable in the third equation.

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As the above mentioned three conditions in the present study for all the variables are met, therefore the role of Empowerment as a mediator can be checked whether it mediates the relationship between Social system and performance or not.

Table 5 reveals that Empowerment mediates the relationship of Family support and performance as it is shown that from Model 1 to 2, there is an increase in R^2 (coefficient of determination) of approximately 9.6%. In addition to that, the beta coefficients have decreased from Model 1 to 2 for Family support and Socio-Cultural Factors. Hence decrease in beta coefficients and increase in R^2 elucidates the mediating effect of Empowerment. Furthermore, Empowerment has made the prior significant relation between Socio-Cultural Factors and Performance as insignificant which means that full mediation is there. Hence H5a and H5b are accepted.

Table 5: The mediating effect of Empowerment

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Model 1 Regression without Empowerment B (p-values)</i>	<i>Model 2 Regression with Empowerment B (p-values)</i>
Family support	.066(.005)	.045(.049)
Socio-Cultural Factors	.057 (.039)	.037 (.161)
Empowerment	- $R^2 = .059$.111 (.000) $R^2 = .155$
	R^2 change= .059; F change=7.782; Sig F. change=.001	R^2 change= .096; F change=28.282; Sig F. change=.000

Discussion

Social system makes it easy for the people to work according to the norms and traditions. Women in rural areas and restrictive societies try to work within the boundaries prescribed by the social system which they are part of. Working in such social systems becomes even more difficult for women who observe *Pardah* and are not allowed to step out of their homes so easily. Empowering such women is essential in order to facilitate them to carry out their personal and work related activities to improve their performance. In Pakistan, despite several programs running in the rural areas for the development of such women, still neither due recognition is given to them nor is their contribution ever recorded. In this backdrop, this study has been undertaken to determine the relationship between Social System, Empowerment and Performance of working women behind the veil in rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The results of this study make a real theoretical and empirical contribution in the extant knowledge base as none of any study targeted the Pardah Observers in rural areas of Pakistan before. Highlighting the main issues faced by the sub-group of women “under the veil” is an attempt in developing new knowledge of Pakistani women entrepreneurs that empowering rural women leads to their increased performance even in a strict socio-cultural society where woman is considered to be kept inside homes. Where the families of rural based Pakistani women entrepreneurs are often supportive and provide them financial and moral support and result in their enhanced performance have been area of great interest to the scholars; contrary to that how Pakistani women working behind the veil without the support of their husbands and fathers work and perform was an issue not highlighted before in the literature and explored in the study and found that family support has an impact on the performance of such women. It adds to the Esoteric theory which explores the entrepreneurial challenges in the social structuration and socially constricting environments. Although the prior studies emphasized that family support and socio-cultural factors affect the performance (Giwa & Babakatun, 2019; Khan, 2014; Maziku & Mashenene, 2014; Mbiti, Mukulu & Kyalo, 2015; Neneh, 2017; Noguera, Alvarez & Urbano, 2013; Ondiba, & Matsui, 2019; Rajani & Sarada, 2008; Siddiqui, 2012; Wube, 2010) but none of these studies targeted the sub-group of women working under the veil.

The results of the study also give valuable insights into the rural based self-employed Pakistani women working behind the veil that empowerment can be a powerful tool for them if they want to achieve success in their work life. It supports the Feminism theory and prior studies (Alireza, Parvaneh, 2012; Bandrez, Niknami, 2013; Bushra & Wajih, 2013; Choudhry, Mutalib & Ismail, 2019; Khan, M., Mazhar, 2017; Kiani, Aghamohammadi & Zafari, 2018; Kumar, 2014; Masiaga & Namusong, 2016; Swain & Wallentin, 2008) that women should be empowered in order to enjoy benefits like men. Moreover, in a conservative and restrictive Pakistan's society where males are dominant and claim privileges for whatever they earn, a supportive family is more than a blessing which impacts the performance of women who work while observing complete Pardah. The results support the Embeddedness and Esoteric theory considering the role of Pardah observers as entrepreneurs in the society with having family as a formal institute and they work in resource-constrained socially constricting environment where free mobility is considered as inappropriate and an issue of family's honor.

Implications

Pardah in rural areas of Pakistan restrict women to staying at homes and perform their domestic duties. In Pakistan, where women are deprived of free mobility, it is a challenge for Pardah observers to carry out their entrepreneurial activities in strict families of a patriarchal society. Because of cultural values and male dominance, women don't enjoy the same prospects like men (Roomi & Parrott, 2008). Non-supportive families and socio-cultural barriers hinder their performance. In this scenario, empowering such women will lead them to achieve their performance goals even in restrictive societies. The notion that men are breadwinners and women are house makers can only be changed when the socio-cultural barriers are removed, families especially husbands give moral and financial support to women who work behind the veil. This will not only lead to contributing to the household financially but also encourage

other women to get motivated and also enter into the entrepreneurial world even with observing strict veil. Media must highlight the success stories of Pardah observers in order to create an environment where such women are accepted by society as role models. The role of policy makers is also of utmost importance in initiating women entrepreneurship assistance programs which target especially the rural women who are competent and have abilities to carry out their entrepreneurial activities. Such women must be honored with awards so that they can also get social recognition of their work.

Future Direction

This study is limited only to the villages of one of the provinces of Pakistan i.e. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In order to generalize the results, future researches may be conducted targeting the population of all the provinces of Pakistan so as to get more insights into the factors affecting the performance of women working behind the veil. Moreover, how effective are the government programs in empowering rural women of Pakistan is an area which needs to be explored by the future scholars. Future researches are also suggested to investigate the impact of moderators on the relationship between social system and performance with large samples and different contexts to contribute to the existing literature in relation to results of this study.

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