

Women Fruit/Vegetable Vendors of Lahore: Exploring Mobility, Decision Making and Push and Pull Factors of Empowerment

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the decision making, mobility and level of women empowerment among fruit/vegetable vendors working in weekly bazaars (markets) in Lahore. In line with previous research, this study is carried out to explore the practices of mobility and empowerment (decision making at household level and economic decision making) of women working in informal sector (fruit/vegetable vendors). This study employed the cross-sectional survey design. A sample of 150 women fruit/vegetable vendors was taken randomly from weekly markets of Lahore with age range from 25-65 years. The study was theoretically dwelled upon the socialist feminist perspective. A self-developed questionnaire was used to collect the data. Correlation analysis revealed that there is a significant relationship between mobility and dimensions of empowerment, and decision making and property ownership among women fruit/vegetable vendors of Lahore. On the basis of empirical evidence, this study suggests to make policies for women working in informal sector (women fruit/vegetable vendors) by introducing economic relief packages. These steps can enhance visibility of women in informal sector and bring them in mainstream of economic policies.

Key Words: Women vendors, empowerment, decision making, mobility, informal sector

1. Introduction

Economic empowerment of women has been a great challenge for Pakistan since its inception. The existing body of literature has suggested that women's restricted mobility is one of the leading causes of women's invisibility in economic spheres. The purpose of this study was to unveil the nuanced understanding of the challenges of mobility and social outreach of women fruit/vegetable

vendors in Lahore. In terms of economic input as well, it is a global phenomenon that women working in informal sector do not reflect in statistics of labour (Cohen, Bhatt & Horn, 2000). Majority of women workers in Pakistan belong to the informal sector, rather than formal sector (Hassan & Farooq, 2015). According to ILO (2000), sixty percent of women workers around the globe, excluding agriculture, are informally employed. There is, however, dearth of data as regards to the real contribution and status of women workers in informal economy. In Pakistan, 73 percent of women participating in economic activity work in informal sector (Khan & Ali Khan, 2009) and “61 percent of urban working women are involved in informal sector” (Khan & Ali Khan, 2009). Also, despite increasing participation of women workers in informal economy in Pakistan, there is disparity as far as gender wise labour force participation is concerned (Pakistan Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2014).

Women as fruit/vegetable vendors: Notions of mobility and empowerment

Fruit/vegetable vendors are sub-categorized under the broad term of “street vendors”, related to the informal economy sector (Roever, S., & Rogan, M., 2020). Due to unavailability of any particular statistics regarding fruit/vegetable vendors in Pakistan, the participation ratio of women fruit/vegetable vendors cannot be quantified. Fruit/vegetable vending is one of the most flexible options for poor women to be opted for employment. It does not require a high cost and particular working schedules to enter such employment opportunities. As “street vending is an important domain of poor women’s economic activity, therefore, it is important to recognize their efforts by facilitating them with needed resources and empowering them by expanding their ability to make choices and exercise control over their lives” (Matos-Rodriguez, 1995).

Women’s mobility has been studied in various ways such as mobility of resource, mobility of services, but mobility of female vendors has yet to be the part of empirical literature. Women’s mobility in Pakistan however has been in the debate for a long time due to certain reasons. For instance, harassment is one of the reasons limiting female mobility. Social norms, contact with unrelated men during commute, and discomfort are some of the other reasons. Mumtaz and Salway (2005) suggested that women’s mobility in Pakistan is relatively complex issue rather merely curtailing their free movement. These factors limit women’s choice to take part in labor force, their participation in education and engaging in several independent activities. Due to aforementioned hurdles for women’s mobility in Pakistan, females are discouraged to travel even in metropolitan cities like Lahore. Center for Economic Research in Pakistan (CERP) conducted a survey from 1000 families in Lahore and 70% males in the survey responded that would discourage women from their families to travel in public transport. These impediments in women’s mobility are associated with family norms. Key components in family norms restricting women mobility include *purdah* [veil] and *izzat* [honour] (Khan, 1999). Although, separate female compartments are available in local buses but the access to these buses is also an issue in women’s mobility. Female-only bus service (pink bus service), recently started in Lahore has also an issue of limited geographic area service in the city, which restricts women mobility. These hurdles call for

solutions to resolve women's mobility issue to increase the chances of women's empowerment, which is much needed for the empowerment of fruit/vegetable vendors belonging to the low-income class. Amin and Pebley (1994) suggested that in male dominant societies, mobility impediments affect women as regards to health and social and economic dependence. Increased mobility is associated with greater decision-making power and women empowerment (Schuler, Hashemi & Jenkins, 1995). Empowerment is closely connected to the ability to exercise control over one's environment; social, economic, and political, which means that women with stronger agency are more likely to fully exploit the ever-expanding opportunities available to them. Agency as a component of empowerment gives actors the ability to translate choice into a desired outcome.

Women's mobility for participating in social and economic activities is an important dimension of women empowerment. Resolution of mobility issues can be one of the contributing factors in order to resolve women empowerment issue in Pakistan. Rahman et al (2013) suggested that "The physical mobility of women outside home for income generating activities or other purposes indicates their capacity in achieving certain objectives and are considered to be more empowered than those who are unable to achieve the same objective." In a male dominated society like Pakistan, where decision making power is associated with men for managing their economic position, women's mobility creates a sense of women empowerment and leads towards female decision-making power as well (Rabail et al., 2022).

To understand the notions of women's empowerment and mobility, the present study is theoretically grounded in socialist feminist perspective. Socialist feminism argues about women's empowerment as continues process, which involved a detailed scrutiny of the capitalist and patriarchal intent (Sharma, 2000). In this regard dismantling patriarchy and capitalism can be a key solution. The theory provides a comprehensive framework about women's spaces and mobility, which are the key features of women empowerment (Haraway, 2006). In patriarchal setups of Pakistan, women fruit/vegetable vendors are struggling with the issues of mobility and safe spaces (Rubab, 2019). Invisibility of women vendors' informal labour work from the mainstream labour work has left them in vulnerable position. In this situation, the study was much needed and research topic was significant to bring change in the lives of women fruit/vegetable vendors. Socialist feminist theory helped the research in argument building, tool development and refining analytical explanations.

Study objectives and researchable dimensions on the basis of body of literature

For available literature on women's empowerment, we have drawn the following objectives for this study;

1. To find out decision making at household and economic decision making among women fruit/vegetable vendors working in markets of Lahore
2. To explore the push and pull factors in empowerment of the women fruit/vegetable vendors working in markets of Lahore
3. To find out the relationship between mobility and empowerment of the of women

vegetable/fruit vendors working in markets of Lahore.

For available literature on women's empowerment, we have taken the following dimensions for this study

- (i) Empowerment of women fruit/vegetable vendors in terms of decision-making at household-level
- (ii) Empowerment of women fruit/vegetable vendors in economic decision-making
- (iii) Push factors in empowerment of women fruit/vegetable vendors
- (iv) Pull factors in empowerment of women fruit/vegetable vendors
- (v) Correlation between mobility and dimensions of empowerment of female fruit/vegetable vendors

2. Methodology

The aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between empowerment and various other parameters using a cross sectional survey design. The present research was quantitative in nature in which a survey was conducted on mobility and empowerment

Research Design

This study had chosen the cross-sectional survey design in order to get information from women fruit/vegetable vendors, working in different local fruit/vegetable markets in Lahore.

Sample and Sampling Strategy

Sample was selected in two phases. In the first phase, all weekly bazaars (Local fruit/vegetable markets) in Lahore were identified in Lahore. These weekly bazaars are held on specific week days in different areas of Lahore i.e., Sunday bazaar (*Itwar bazaar*) in Wapda Town, Thursday bazaar (*Jumairaat bazaar*) in Chungi Amarsidu, and Wednesday bazaar (*Budh bazaar*) in Pir Makki etc. Such weekly bazaars are particularly popular among the citizens for fruits and vegetable shopping for the whole week on cheap rates. These weekly bazaars are arranged with the permission of the local government with minimum security and logistic arrangements and vendors have to pay nominal rent for the space where they set the stalls on their own. Number of stalls in each weekly bazaar can vary every week according to the availability of the vendors but mostly remains proportionately similar with a slight variation. The city map below in Figure 1 highlights the areas where most of the weekly bazaars are usually arranged.

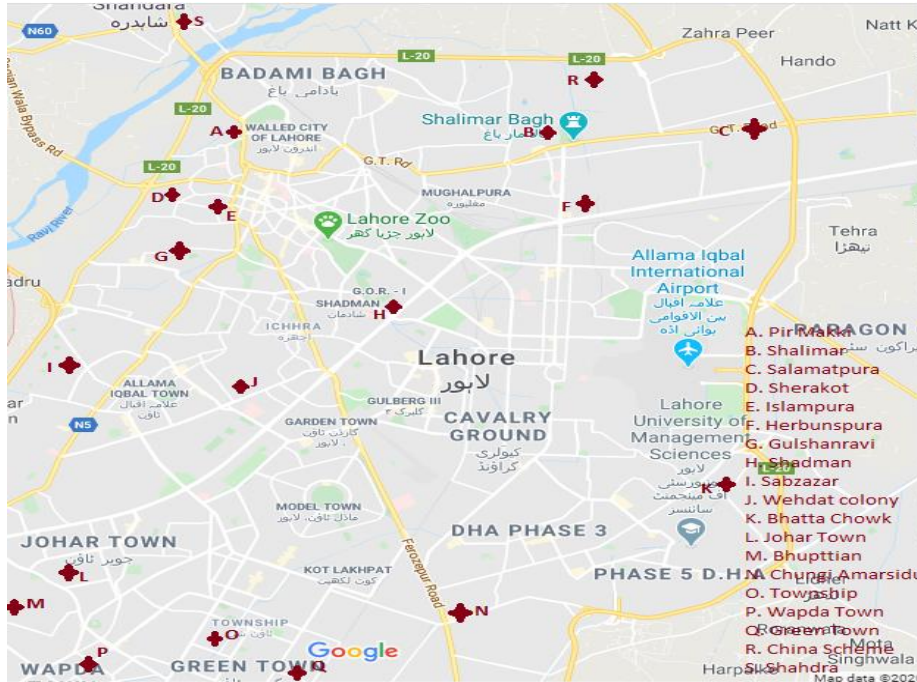


Figure 1: Weekly bazaars of Lahore

In the second phase, the following ten weekly bazaars, as shown in Figure 2, were targeted to approach women fruits and vegetable vendors in from each bazaar. Those women fruit/vegetable vendors were selected who put up their stalls in these weekly bazaars on weekly basis.

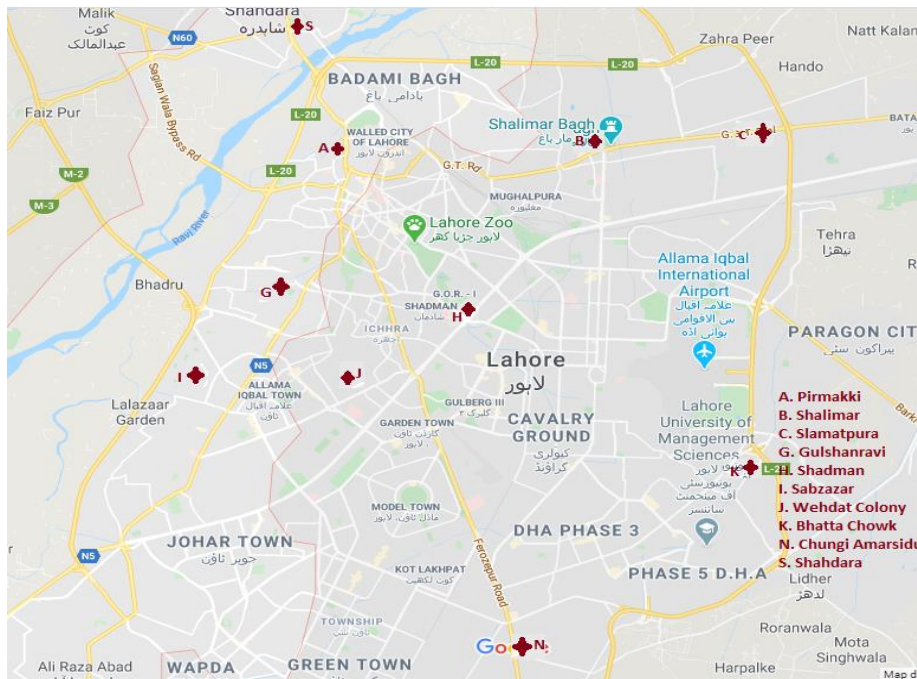


Figure 2: Sample weekly bazaars of Lahore

A sample of 150 women vegetable/fruit vendors were selected randomly across all the ten weekly bazaars of Lahore with age range from 25 to 65 years. The following inclusion criteria was

followed; having independent fruit/vegetable vending set-ups and put-up stall in weekly bazaars only and women fruit/vegetable vendors who have been doing this work for at least last six months on a regular basis.

Data Collection Tool

Data was collected through self-developed questionnaire comprising of 55 items, which were developed on the indicators of previous literature. The existing literature on similar topics, particularly theories of patriarchy like ‘moral authority’ and ‘social privilege’ enriched the researchers’ understanding about initial concepts and indicators in developing survey-questionnaire (Macionis, 2012). The questionnaire divided into four major parts; demographic information of the respondents (fruit/vegetable vendors), decision making at household level, economic decision making, push and pull factors of empowerment handled by women vendors.

Procedure

The University’s graduate committee first approved the project for its ethical and procedural steps. Later on, questionnaire comprised of 55 items was developed. Pilot testing was done on the small sample of 15 women vendors to check the efficiency and effectiveness of the tool.

For the final collection of the primary data, questionnaire was administered on 150 women fruit/vegetable vendors from the main weekly bazaars in 10 towns of Lahore. Before starting the questionnaire, they were provided information about nature of the study and informed consent was taken. They were told that information provided by them will be kept confidential and they have a right to withdraw from study at any point if they wish so. It was ensured that the respondents were willing to participate voluntarily and at their own discretion after thoroughly understanding nature, purpose and objectives of the survey. The researchers filled in questionnaires in weekly bazars by requesting women to spare time for completion of the questionnaire. All respondents were thanked for their cooperation and were paid compensation as an incentive for sparing time for provision of data.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics was computed for demographic and other variables. While, inferential statistics was run to check the relationship between variables.

3. Results

Results contained on descriptive analysis to see the detail of demographic information. And to see the strength of relationship between the variables’ correlation.

Table 1: Demographics information of the Respondents

		Frequency	Percentage	
Bazaars	Ravi Town	17	11.3	
	Shalamar Town	10	6.7	
	Wahga Town	12	8.0	
	Data Gunj Bakhsh Town	45	30.0	
	Samanabad Town	10	6.7	
	Iqbal Town	38	25.3	
	Nishtar Town	12	8.0	
	Cantt	6	4.0	
Educational Status	Uneducated	133	88.7	
	Primary or less	9	6.0	
	8thGrade	5	3.3	
	Above8thGrade	3	2.0	
Marital Status	Single	13	8.7	
	Married	109	72.7	
	Divorced	2	1.3	
	Widowed	22	14.7	
	Separated	4	2.7	
Husband as an Earning Hand	No	15	13.8	
	Yes	94	86.2	
Educational Status of Husband	Uneducated	91	60.7	
	Primary or Less	8	5.3	
	8thGrade	5	3.3	
	Above8thGrade	5	3.3	
Have Children	Yes	127	84.7	
	No	9	6.0	
Children's Access to Education	Yes	70	54.3	
	No	59	45.7	
Have Siblings	Yes	142	94.7	
	No	8	5.3	
Family System	Combined/Joint	40	26.7	
	Nuclear	110	73.3	
Duration of Work	6-12Months	6	4.0	
	1-3Years	9	6.0	
	3-5Years	9	6.0	
	Morethan5Years	126	84.0	
Sufficiency of Daily Income for	Food	Yes	102	68
	Clothing	Yes	68	45.3
	House Rent/Repair	Yes	40	26.7
	Health	Yes	18	12.0
	Education	Yes	30	20.0
	Personal Savings	Yes	24	16

Women Fruit/Vegetable Vendors of Lahore: Exploring Mobility, Decision Making and Push and Pull Factors Of Empowerment

Table 1 shows that, majority of the respondents from Data Gunj Bakhsh town and most of them were uneducated, making the highest percentage of eighty-nine. Most of the respondents were married with the percentage of seventy-two. Moreover, it illustrates that in case of majority, educational status of their husbands was uneducated, with highest percentage of eighty-four. A vast majority of the married women (72.7 %) reported that their husbands helped in earning. Among married women, most of them had children, and almost half of them reported that their children go to school. Majority of the women were living in nuclear family system. Furthermore, the largest number of the respondents reported to have been associated with vending business for more than five years.

As seen in Table 1, less than half of the respondents reported that they had sufficient amount of daily income for meeting daily expensed incurred on food and clothing. Whereas, a very small percentage of respondents claimed to generate sufficient daily income for house rent/repair, health, education, and personal savings. Most of the respondents reported to have arranged capital for their business inform of loan.

Table2: Empowerment of Women Fruit/Vegetable Vendors in Terms of Decision-Making at Household-Level

		Frequency	Percentage
Insetting up business	Decided herself	122	81.3
	Husband/Parents	28	18.7
Preference for work	Yes	52	34.7
	Someone else	7	4.7
Decisions at home	Husband/Parents	53	35.3
	Collectively	53	35.3
	Myself	37	24.7
Buying Land/home	Yes	83	55.3
Marriages at home	Yes	98	65.3
Buying Cattle	Yes	87	58.0
Daily Expenses	Yes	104	69.3
Celebrations	Yes	104	69.3
Family Planning	Yes	59	43.4

As shown in Table 2, most of the respondents reported to have taken the decision themselves for starting business. When asked for the preferences of working as compared to staying at home, only a fraction of respondents showed their interest to continue working. When asked about role of respondents in buying land/home, marriages at home, buying cattle, daily expenses, and

celebrations, almost half of the respondents reported to play their role. Whereas, in terms of family planning, less than half of the respondents reported to have their say.

Table3: Empowerment of Women Fruit/Vegetable Vendors in Economic Decision-making

		Frequency	Percentage
Handler of daily income	Someone Else	3	2.0
	Parents/ husband	50	33.3
	Yourself	97	64.7
Personal savings	Yes	125	83.3
Other Source of income	Yes	114	76.0
Others' contribution in income	Mother/Father in Law	2	1.8
	Husband/Parents	97	85.1
	Son/Daughter	9	7.9
	Siblings	6	5.3
Others 'contribution in expenses	Yes	110	96.5
Whether family expenses can be managed without her earning	No	150	100
Whether owns land	Yes	150	0.00
Whether owns house	Yes	25	16.7
Whether owns cattle	Yes	2	1.3
Whether owns Jewelry	Yes	4	2.7
Whether owns something else	Yes	1	0.7

Table 3 illustrates that over half of the participants reported saving from their daily income for themselves. Whereas, a large fraction of respondents reported that they save some amount from their daily income for their personal needs. With regards to another earning hand in family, majority of respondents (76%) responded positively and reported that their close relatives contribute in generating income. All of them reported that their family expenses could not met if they would stop working. Moreover, none of the respondents had ownership of land. With regards to owning house, cattle, jewelry, or something else, a vast majority did not have any such possession. As, there is no ownership, there by indicating a gap in empowerment of these women.

Table4: Push Factors in Empowerment of Women Vegetable/Fruit Vendors

		Frequency	Percentage
Family's support	Yes	127	84.7
Help in childcare	Son/daughter	54	45.4
	Parents	4	3.4
	mother/father-in-law	10	8.4
	Daughter-in-law	5	4.2
	Herself (Takes to Work)	36	30.3
	Someone else	7	5.9
	Husband	3	2.5
Housework by someone else	Daughter	43	58.1
	Mother	10	13.5
	Mother/father-in-law	4	5.4
	Daughter-in-law	6	8.1
	Someone else	6	8.1
	Sister	5	6.8
	Someone else	7	5.9
Gender Based Frequency of Customers	Male	21	14.0
	Female	23	15.3
	Both	106	70.7
Help in acquisition of place for stall	Yes	93	62.0
Support by male vendors	Yes	39	26.0
Support by female vendors	Yes	45	30.0
Awareness of Government a incentives	Yes	1	.7
Husband's assistance n house work	Yes	29	24.0

Table 4 shows that most of the respondents reported to have family's support, which is one of the facilitating factors of empowerment. With regards to help in acquisition of place for stall, more than half of the respondents reported to have this facility. But, only a few numbers of female vendors reported to have support from other female and male vendors. A very minute percentage of female vendors reported to have awareness regarding governmental incentives. And a little percentage reflected to have their husbands' assistance in housework.

Table5: Pull Factors in Empowerment of Women Fruit/Vegetable Vendors

		Frequency	Percentage
Manage house work themselves		76	50.7
Do work during pregnancy		93	75.6
Post child birth rest	15 days	16	13.3
	30Days	37	30.8
	45Days	26	21.7
	60Days	28	23.3
	90Days or Longer	8	6.7
	Does not take Rest	5	4.2
Gender-based discrimination by customers	Yes	4	2.7
Face gender related challenges	Yes	46	30.7
Domestic Violence	Yes	13	8.7
Forms of domestic violence	Physical Violence	11	84.7
	Fighting	1	7.7
	Using abusive Words	1	7.7
Instigator of Domestic Violence	Brother	1	7.7
	family members	1	7.7
	Husband	11	84.6
Hurdles in acquiring workspace	More rent compared to male	4	6.0
	Bribery	52	77.6
	Harassment	3	4.5
	some other reason	8	11.9

Table 5 explains that most of the women reported to face hindrance in empowerment by not being able to rest during their pregnancy. Half of the respondents reported to manage their household chores by themselves. Other factors acting as hindrance in their empowerment were reported by a fraction of respondents in terms of gender-based discrimination by customers, gender related challenged and domestic violence.

Table6: Correlation between Mobility, Dimensions of Empowerment of Female Fruit /Vegetable Vendors

		Decision Making	Property Ownership
Mobility	Pearson Correlation	.18*	.19*
	Pvalue	.05	.01

Pearson correlation indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between decision making and mobility of the fruits/vegetable vendors. The results further indicated the significant positive relationship between property ownership and mobility of the women fruits/vegetable vendors. This shows that women getting the opportunities of mobility are more likely to take decisions by themselves at household level (buying land/cattle, setting up their own business, daily expenses and decisions about family planning) and economic decision making (to manage their income, contributing in household expenses). Furthermore, it also illustrates that women fruit/vegetable vendors with mobility have decision making power to own property i.e., jewelry, land and cattle.

4. Discussion

The main purpose of the study was to explore decision making, empowerment and mobility in women working as vendors of fruits and vegetables in weekly bazaars of Lahore. Decision-making was explored through household and economic decision making of women vendors. For finding out the level of empowerment, push and pull factors of empowerment i.e., at home; support of husband family and their help in childcare and household chores, and in weekly bazaars; help and support in acquiring space, gender ratio of supporters and well as customers and government's help. Also, the relationship between issues of mobility and empowerment was explored in this quantitative study.

The rate of female labour force participation in informal sector has been rising in South Asia (Unni, 2011; Islam & Alam, 2019). The socialist feminist perspective also believes that it is a very slow process to challenge and change patriarchal and capitalistic hegemony so it must also be kept in mind that still the overall participation of women in the national economy is very low (Salahuddin, Mahmood & Ahmad, 2021). It must be noted that there are differences in mobility and empowerment of rural and urban women (Baruah, 2004), but the intersection of economic status and working class with gender i.e., being a woman, contributes towards creating barriers of mobility and empowerment and rural and urban divide become hazy. The results of this study showed consistency with existing literature and latest studies conducted on women vendors in South Asia, particularly India and Bangladesh with somewhat similar social conditions (Saitluanga, Baite & Thangluah, 2019; Chakraborty & Koley, 2018; Rahman, Mukta & Rahman, 2020, Lata, Walters & Roitman, 2021).

The current study showed that most of women fruit/vegetable vendors entered into this work by choice but the reasons were mostly circumstantial i.e., because of poverty, economic issues like inflation and other constraints. So, from the very start, the choice of working shows a lack of decision-making and most of the women would have stayed home instead of working if there was a choice available. Also, women vendors confirmed support of family but very few pointed towards support of life partner. They also showed a disconnect in knowing about the initiatives of government for working women, vender-work or vender women.

In household decision making about major decisions, half of the women confirmed their participation. Women vendors lacked ownership of anything ranging from property to cattle or jewelry. So almost fifty percent participation in decisions and lack of ownership certainly does point towards lack of empowerment. Results have also shown a positive relationship between decision making and mobility and also between ownership and mobility. So, the women who have ownership and who play role in decision-making, face lesser barriers of mobility despite the challenges in commuting and getting approvals from male members of house for social mobility due to patriarchal hegemony.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The present study examined the level of women empowerment and mobility among fruit/vegetable vendors working in district Lahore. The level of women empowerment, in terms of economic decision making and general household decision has been found to be satisfactory, whereas, the level of mobility was not satisfactory. On the basis of study results, the current study suggests that Government should take initiatives based on empirical evidence and input from relevant stake holders to improve the living conditions of women fruit/vegetable vendors, such as reducing labor by subsidizing the transportation fares for daily commute and to carry the merchandize to markets and bazars. Similarly, there is a dire need to develop a database of women working as micro-entrepreneurs, and those working in the informal economic sector, in order to convert them into policy frameworks allowing economic relief packages. These policies and/or relief packages may include affordable housing, shelter, food and healthcare facilities. The aim of these policies should be decreasing the gap between family income and expenses for women micro entrepreneurs including vegetable and fruit vendors. Women micro entrepreneurs may also be accounted for in national economic policy by allocating special quotas for empowerment of women micro entrepreneurs including fruit and vegetable vendors. Inclusion of women fruit/vegetable vendors in mainstream national policy and enhanced chances of mobility may increase the instances of women empowerment.

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