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## What Shapes Attitudes toward Women's Empowerment? A Demographic Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study was to determine whether there were distinct demographic variables that can predict attitudes toward women's empowerment among university students in Pakistan. Using a cross-sectional research design, data were collected via a self-administered questionnaire completed in Urdu by 200 students enrolled at the University of Gujrat. The measure of attitudes toward women's empowerment utilized the Attitudes toward Women Empowerment Scale (Fatima, 2018) and assessed participants' perceptions regarding women's empowerment across four different domains. Neural Network Analyses were performed to identify the relative strength of various demographic factors as predictors of attitudes toward women's empowerment. Results showed that marital status was the single strongest predictor of attitudes toward women's empowerment (100% normalized importance), followed by family structure (77.5%) and gender (72.8%). Age (55.6%) and residency status (26.8%) had the least predictive power of the model. These findings suggest that personal and family structural factors marriage and living in a joint family are strong influences on students' gender ideology formation. Gender-normative educational interventions and policy structures should be developed and implemented to target traditional and patriarchal domestic norms. Future longitudinal studies should be conducted to examine changing gender norms with respect to a more varied and representative sample of the population.*

**Keywords:** Women Empowerment, Attitude, Adults Opinion, Gender Difference, Inequality.

### Introduction

#### Empowerment

Empowerment is, initial and front most, about power dynamic power relations in favor of those who antecedently exercised little power in their own lives. Power consists of two central characteristics: control on the resources (physical, human, intellectual, financial, and the individual), and control on the ideology (beliefs, values and attitudes) (Karim, 2023). If power effectuation control, and then empowerment consequently is the procedure of gaining control (Theresia et al., 2025). Empowerment has got over one of the nearly elastic of international development's numerous buzzwords (Batliwala, [2007](#)). Formerly utilized to

expound grassroots struggles to confront and modify unfair and unlike power relations, it has change state a term utilized by an expansive communication coalition of corporations, global non-governmental organize, banks and modification donors. In the procedure, numerous display from feminist conceptual work carried out in the 1980s and 1990s have been gone (Sigle et al., 2025).

### **Women empowerment**

The empowerment of women acts as a crucial factor in creating social and economic change empowering women to be able to take part in decisions that impact society and themselves (Kabeer, 2005). The age of many university students puts them in a unique situation whereby their transition from the theoretical concept of empowerment to the practical application occurs. Higher education provides a real opportunity for women to build their own agency by developing their critical thinking skills and forming their professional identities enabling them to combat the structural inequalities found within our society (Murphy-Graham & Lloyd, 2016). Empowerment of female university students occurs within three different but equally important domains of empowerment: psychological, social and economic. The psychological domain relates to the development of self-efficacy and sense of internal control, which both are critically important to accomplishing goals in both academics and careers (Miedema et al., 2018). Within the social domain, the university acts as a space for collective action and peer to peer networking that provides the means for women to challenge the patriarchal stereotypes that would have otherwise limited their aspirations as they grew up (Malhotra et al., 2002). Additionally, there has been an increasing recognition of higher education as an opportunity for economic empowerment as higher education allows women to develop human capital required to enter into higher status labor markets (Duflo, 2012). Despite these advancements, female university students continue to face barriers such as "the glass ceiling" in academic leadership and gender-based micro aggressions on campus. Research suggests that for empowerment to be truly effective, universities must move beyond mere enrollment numbers and focus on creating inclusive environments that support women's leadership and autonomy (Unterhalter, 2003). In essence, empowering women at the university level is not just an individual benefit; it is an institutional necessity that reshapes the future of global leadership. Hereby, it is important to check attitude towards women empowerment.

### **Factors Affecting Attitude towards Women Empowerment**

Women's empowerment attitudes are a complex construct influenced by internally and externally derived forces. Many different perspectives exist; however, the following are the primary factors that influence how society perceives and supports empowerment:

**Cultural/Traditional Norms:** Historically, patriarchal traditions have often defined the "appropriate" role for the woman therefore creating barriers to empowerment (Lwamba et al., 2022).

**Educational Attainment:** As educational attainment increases, there is a corresponding increase in the level of progressiveness regarding gender equity and female autonomy (Zulfiqar & Kuskoff, 2024)

**Media Representation:** Depiction of women in digital and broadcast media in leadership and non-traditional roles, alters public perspective and becomes more acceptable to society (Ashraf & Jepsen, 2024).

**Legal/Policy Frameworks:** The presence and enforcement of laws protecting women’s rights (i.e. workplace harassment laws, inheritance power) provide a structural base for changing social attitude (Zulfiqar & Kuskoff, 2024).

**Psychological and Socio-Political Factors**

While demographic variables like age and gender are important, research indicates that psychological orientations and ideological beliefs play an even more critical role in shaping attitudes. Factors such as Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) and Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) often predict attitudes toward gender equality more accurately than simple demographic data (Kislev et al., 2025). For instance, individuals who favor social hierarchies (High SDO) are generally more resistant to empowerment movements, as they perceive a shift in gender dynamics as a threat to the established social order. Furthermore, internalized gender stereotypes among women themselves can sometimes limit support for empowerment initiatives. Recent empirical evidence suggests that psychological resilience and exposure to egalitarian ideologies are pivotal. Data shows that in regions with high digital literacy, the "ideological gap" between genders narrows, regardless of the socio-economic status (Dahal et al., 2022; Möring & Pratto, 2024).

Factor	Impact on Attitude
Social Dominance Orientation (SDO)	High Social Dominance Orientation levels are strongly correlated with negative or restrictive attitudes toward women's agency
Ideological Affiliation	Psychological barriers in women can lead to the Queen Bee syndrome, where empowered women may not support others.
Internalized Misogyny	Psychological barriers in women can lead to the Queen Bee syndrome, where empowered women may not support others.

Attitudes toward women's empowerment are not merely a product of one's environment but are deeply rooted in psychological predispositions and the degree to which an individual justifies existing social hierarchies (Khan & Maqsood, 2023).

**Demographic Component in Women’s Empowerment**

Women’s empowerment is generally characterized as the expansion of women’s capability to variety strategical life quality and exercise agency, substantiated by approach to resources and opportunities Quantitative investigation frequently operationalizes empowerment through with sphere much as household decision-making, quality, financial control, and attitudes toward gender norms. Nevertheless, measuring varies crossways studies, which affects how demographic effects are approximation (Chowdhury & Haque, 2025).

**Age and Women’s Empowerment**

Age show an important role in constructive empowerment outcomes. Younger women frequently face mobility constraints and restricted household causing, while older women particularly those with children or economic roles might experience greater bargaining power

(Schuler, 2002). Studies in South Asia display that empowerment angularity with age, merely cohort effects (e.g., education expansion) simplify interpretation (Pei et al., 2024).

### **Gender Norms and Roles**

Flat bottom inside samples of women, gender direct through expectations approximately appropriate roles and power distribution. Prevailing gender ideologies limit women's agency, formative the turning to education or income (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Cislighi & Heise, 2020). For instance, younger women might face stricter expectations, while married women's empowerment is mediated by spousal attitudes and household norms (Lwamba et al., 2022).

### **Family System**

Household structure significantly influences empowerment. In nuclear families, women often report greater autonomy in decision-making, while joint families may restrict mobility due to in-law authority (Acharya et al., 2010). However, extended families can also provide childcare support, enabling women's economic participation. Thus, family system effects are context-dependent (Agha, 2018).

### **Marital Status**

Marital status reconfigures bargaining cognition. Married women's empowerment look on spousal attitudes and household structure, while unmarried women may enjoy greater mobility but more bargaining leverage (Allendorf, 2007; Fatima & Athar, 2025).

Widowed or divorced women frequently regain decision dominance merely face economic exposure (Mason & Smith, 2003). These effects change crossways domains: married women might score higher on household decisions but lower on mobility in conservative matter (Morgan, 1989).

### **Interactions and Moderators**

Education and income magnify demographic personality. Higher education rationalize restrictive gender norms, heighten agency crosswise marital statuses and family systems). Urban residence besides moderates' empowerment by expanding labor market opportunities and reducing mobility restrictions (Abbas et al., 2021).

### **Rationale of study:**

Despite the global push toward gender equality, achieving true women's empowerment is often inhibited by many deeply rooted social attitudes. Research has indicated that an individual's demographic characteristics can serve as through which lens someone would view gender roles and female autonomy. Understanding these characteristics is critical for a number of reasons. Empowerment attitudes are frequently shaped by variables like education (e.g., higher education attainment is often statistically correlated to having more progressive views on gender equality (Duflo, 2012), and by determining specific demographic factors that hold more traditional or resistant views, this study will provide a resource for targeting demographic specific awareness campaigns. Age provides some insight into the sociocultural context of an individual's upbringing. Younger individuals have been exposed more to globalization and global discourses about human rights; whereas older generations may be more attached to a system of traditional gender norms and family structures. Similar to the generational gap, SES also influences access to resources; individuals in higher SES may define empowerment as an economic necessity, whereas individuals in lower SES may define empowerment as a threat to their traditional survival strategies (Schuler, 2002).

## Objective of the Study

- To examine the role of demographic factors in determining attitudes toward women's empowerment.

## Methodology

### Study Design

Current research used a cross-sectional survey design to study university students' attitudes toward women's empowerment.

### Participants and Sampling

The research population consists of undergraduate and postgraduate students registered at university of Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan. A convenience sampling technique was used to select the sample size. The sample size was 200 students both male and female.

### Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

**Inclusion criteria:** adult presently enrolled students, agreeable to give informed consent.

**Exclusion criteria:** Students with any physical or mental problems were excluded from study.

### Measures

#### Demographics

Demographic variables encompassed age (continuous), residence (urban vs. rural), marital status (single, married, divorced/additional), gender (male, female, other), family system (nuclear vs. joint), and faculty/discipline (voluntary, for exploratory examination).

#### Attitude towards Women's Empowerment (Fatima, 2018)

Attitudes were measured by means of the 38-item Attitude towards Women Empowerment Scale (Urdu version). Responses remained documented on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree). Items were reverse implied so that higher scores replicated more positive attitudes in the direction of empowerment. The whole score were considered by summing entirely reverse-coded items, with higher scores representative stronger pro empowerment opinions. Internal consistency was evaluated by means of Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha \geq 0.70$ ), and item-total correlations remained examined. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) showed good construct validity (Fatima, 2018).

#### Data Collection Procedures

A short study explanation was provided to students, and written informed consent was given to them to get their permission. Surveys were administered both in paper-and-pencil format and via a secure online form. Students took 8–12 minutes to complete the survey. Anonymity was confirmed by avoiding collection of names or student IDs. The participants were guaranteed the confidentiality and privacy of their information with the right to withdraw from research at any time. After completion of data gathering the responses were screened and computed the scores. The analysis of the data was done using SPSS to get the correlation and regression in alinement of the study objectives.

#### Data Preparation

Attitude items remained coded from 1–5 and reverse-coded so that developed values designated additional pro-empowerment attitudes. Demographic variables remained coded as follows: residence (urban = 1, rural = 0), marital status (single = 0, married = 1, divorced = 2), gender (male = 0, female = 1, other = 2), and family system (nuclear = 0, joint = 1).

#### Statistical Analyses



Formal data analysis was performed by use of SPSS (Statistical Package for social science). This was applied to analyze the obtained demographic data, to provide descriptive summary of the sample characteristics. Further, neural network analysis was done to determine the normalized significance of the demographic items (Age, Marital Status, Gender, Residence and Family system) in predicting attitude towards women empowerment.

### Results:

The mean age of respondents was 21 years. The gender representation was nearly equal. A good number of the respondents were single. Major part of participants are from rural areas. The family system representation was nearly equal.

**Table 1** Relative error of Training and Testing (N= 200)

	Relative Error
Training	1.01
Testing	1.00

The difference between the relative error of the training dataset (1.01) and that of the testing dataset (1.00) is small, indicating that the model may have consistent performance and has not shown any signs of overfitting, which is defined as a model performing much better on its training dataset than its testing dataset (which does not contain any of the training dataset observations). When relative error is closer to zero, the model has performed very well and has made good estimates for the observations (predicted) in the testing dataset.

**Table 2** Demographic Factors Normalized Importance on Attitude towards Women Empowerment (N=200)

Demographic Variables	Importance	Normalized importance
Marital Status	.301	100%
Family System	.233	77.5%
Gender	.219	72.8%
Age	.167	55.6%
Residence	.081	26.8%

According to the results from the Importance Analysis, the highest relative importance (100%) of all variables for the younger generation in their attitudes toward women's empowerment is their marital status and has been identified as the most important demographic variable for this age group. The family system was established as being the second most significant predictor of attitudes toward women's empowerment, with its normalized relative importance being 77.5%. The family living arrangement (nuclear vs. joint) also greatly influences how people socialize regarding the roles of men and women. Gender was third (72.8%), thus indicating that biological sex is an important factor in determining attitudes toward women's empowerment, but it is slightly less impactful than marital and family systems in this specific model. Age (55.6%) and Residence (26.8%) were the variables with the least normalized importance; therefore, even though an individual's residence can attribute to the model, its low normalized relative importance indicates that residence (whether urban or rural) is much less significant than the individual and family demographic variables for determining individual attitudes toward women's empowerment in this sample.

### Discussion

The present paper has made a hierarchical model depicting the effects of demographics on attitude towards women empowerment. There is significant role of the marital status (100.0%) in attitude towards women empowerment. Most researches shows that the married individuals mainly in traditional societies often hold more conservative gender-role attitudes, which can impact the support for women's empowerment initiatives (Kabeer, 2016; Jayachandran, 2020). The high predictive value of family system (77.5%) and gender (72.8%) supports the important role in attitude towards women empowerment. Individuals raised in joint or in extended family systems might internalize traditional gender norms more strongly than from the nuclear families in which women might experience the greater independence and role flexibility (Chen et al., 2023). Different studies have shown that the family socialization plays fundamental role in shaping attitudes towards women's empowerment (Prata et al., 2017). The women normally representing favorable view points toward empowerment compared to the men. This supports extensive literature that women, due to lived experiences of the inequality, are more likely to support gender-equitable policies and the empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2024). The age (55.6%) show moderate influence on the attitude towards women empowerment that suggest generational differences in attitudes. Mostly younger individuals tend to approve more progressive views towards women's rights and empowerment, mostly due to the increased exposure to education, media, and the global gender equality movements (Lwamba et al., 2022). On the other hand the older age groups might retain more traditional perspectives (Löckenhoff et al., 2009). The residence (26.8%) had least influence on the attitude towards women empowerment however still relevant. According to researches the urban residents generally exhibit supportive attitudes toward women empowerment as compared to the rural populations, where the cultural traditions and limited education and employment opportunities may restrain progressive gender norms (UNDP, 2022).

### **Limitations and Future directions**

The usage of convenience sampling limits generalizability outside the participating universities. Dependence on self-report methods might introduce social desirability and acquiescence bias. Investigations in the future need to be designed based on longitudinal studies. And conduct the study on the more generalized and large sample.

### **Conclusions**

The findings of this study lend support to the idea that university student attitudes towards the empowerment of females derives primarily from immediate social environment (family and home) rather than land, location or historic time frame alone. These findings suggest that marital status, family system and gender were the most important factors in attitude towards women empowerment.

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