

Nurturing Women Empowerment? A Phenomenological Study of the Linkages between Women, Micro Entrepreneurship and Access to Microcredit

Sarah Wali Qazi *

M. Zaki Rashidi †

Abstract: This is a phenomenological study which has explored the structural meaning of empowerment from the women perspective, and secondly it would discuss the tie between women, access to microcredit, and micro entrepreneurship. The main objective of this study to extract the women lived experiences that how they feel empowered when the financial inclusion is entered into their lives. There is a strong need of women empowerment because of cultural influences, social taboos, and religious misleading interpretations which lead women towards the journey of disempowerment. This study is based on the abductive research strategy being qualitative in nature; hermeneutics phenomenological philosophy is applied for interpreting the women in-depth interviews. The participants are selected through non-probability purposive maximum variation sampling, 46 women were interviewed from 17 districts of Sindh till the saturation level. Through interpretative phenomenological analysis, the interviews are analyzed through which empowerment meaning constructed that women who feel and realize financial stability are empowered; also findings show the linkage between the women, micro-entrepreneurship and access to microcredit and these in combination nurture empowerment. This study provides the evidences on the basis of women experiences as empowerment phenomenon can be realized by the women due to its categorical nature and it varies culture to culture. Micro-finance practitioners and policy makers can design strategies, products, framework and trainings according to the specific needs noticed in this study.

Keywords: Women empowerment, micro-entrepreneurship, micro credit, phenomenological study.

"We do not only want a piece of the pie, we also want to choose the flavour, and know how to make it ourselves" (Ela Bhatt, SEWA quoted (Mayoux, 2005))

Introduction

This study is designed to reconnoiter the bond between women, micro-entrepreneurship and access to micro credit towards the empowerment of women. Before understanding the women empowerment, it is necessary to highlight that why women are dis empowered. As word dis empowered is the combination of 'dis' and 'empowered' that means lack of power or the process which reduces the authority of an individual or group to

* Assistant Professor, Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology, Karachi, Pakistan.
E-mail: sarawali.qazi@szabist.edu.pk

† Director QLI, Professor, Iqra University, Karachi, Pakistan. E-mail: zaki@iqra.edu.pk

make crucial decisions and shape their lives accordingly. According to the philosophers, researchers, and experts in the field of gender studies, dis empowerment is not only the issue associated with the developing or under developed countries but the women in developed countries have also faced hurdles in gaining power. There could be many reasons associated with this like religion misinterpretations or patriarchal societies; lack of education, employment opportunities, or financial resources etc (Bhat & Lakshmi, 2002; Sinclair, 2012). People live in the patriarchal society where the male dominancy prevails and due to cultural and societal taboos, women are considered inferior to men despite the fact that they are half of the population (Alshebami & Khandare, 2015; Akram & Hussain, 2011).

Micro credit is considered as an efficient tool for women empowerment and alleviating feminization of poverty, it is the provision of small loan and financial inclusion to the life of weak division of society (Pradipta & Kalachand, 2016). This financial enclosure transforms the lives of women in the positive manner. Micro-entrepreneurship, when people start their small businesses, is surged as these women are encouraged by the institutions to invest in productive economic activity so they can generate income. But, this side is hidden in our local context of Sindh that how women transmute their lives after involving in the micro credit program, how they utilize and invest their money and to what extent they realize empowerment (Saleem, 2017).

This study would be beneficial for the policy makers and micro finance practitioners that they can design policies and strategies according to the need of the women and also micro finance institutions would be encouraged to work on the women empowerment paradigm which would be beneficial for the economic growth.

The main motive of this research is to explore the empowerment meanings from the women's perspective when they utilize micro loans for investing in any income generating activity. Also to gauge the women lived experiences regarding their usage of micro credit facility and how they realize empowerment when they invest their small loans for developing micro enterprise. Through their lived experiences, the link between micro credit, women micro-entrepreneurship and empowerment can be explored. Women empowerment is the outcome not process (Kabeer, 2005; Pradipta & Kalachand, 2016). The sub objective of this study is to extract that how micro credit programs and services precipitate feelings and thoughts about empowerment amongst women.

Literature Review

The literature review is developed by using the topical structure, in which every concept and construct of our study is discussed from the scholarly view point.

Micro finance has positive impacts on different economies social dilemma (Addai, 2017). There is evidence in the literature that micro finance tools have a strong impact on smoothing income and increasing income level but on the other side it is less helpful in providing sustainable and substantial impact on health, nutrition or primary education. Micro finance is an instrument that works under right conditions to facilitate the needs of the poorest but this tool is not for everyone in the society (Zulfiqar, 2017). Evidence

shows that micro finance services and products are beneficial to the poor from both the social and economic aspects whereas there are biases presented in the literature against extending loans to the poor. There are little positive evidences to support this side of the flip Jonathan (Galema, Lensink, & Mersland, 2012; Khachatryan & Avetisyan, 2017). Interventions of micro finance have positive impact on increasing consumption level, income level and also generation of income particularly in urban areas (Parvin, Shaw, & Kazi, 2016).

The study conducted by Torri and Martinez (2014) also stated that micro finance has not shown very positive influence on women empowerment. The measures were diverse, incongruous in most of the cases so it is doubtful that micro finance has a significant part on women liberation. In the development policy section by UNDP Pakistan, it was discussed that micro finance played significant role in accomplishing the sustainable development goals (SDGs) specifically the goal of eradicating poverty and hunger, to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women, children's education, health and women maternal health (Janjua et al., 2010; UNDP: Women's Empowerment, 2013). Micro credit promotes self-employment and provides financial sustainability to poor. It enhances their purchasing power and eventually they enjoy the higher consumption level (Asher & Haider, 2017).

Micro credit targets women because women always think beyond their own benefit; women generate incomes and invest in their household for the well-being of overall household (George, 2014); also micro finance has three paradigms to work on i.e. poverty mitigation, financial sustainability and women empowerment. The improved well-being includes children education, nutrition, health, men well-being and women also invest on themselves. Boyden (2013) suggests that initially their children were not going into the schools specially their daughters because they were employed somewhere and had to bear the pressure to earn money for household and they were pressurized to drop their education. But when their mothers and elder sisters are earning enough they send their daughters and sister to schools with their brothers and sons. This way micro credit extends support in the economic as well as social context (Liton & Muzib, 2014).

Micro credit programs provide professional skill enhancing trainings to the women who are doing work at home, so they can be able to transform their domestic abilities into commercial activities (Agier, 2013). In Pakistan, women are hardworking, skilled but they are initially excluded from the economic activities. Still there remains a vast gap but micro credit fills it to some extent. It promotes women entrepreneurship, in return women are earning, contributing to their household significantly, take part in various decisions, value gender relations and feel empowered (Banerjee & Sain, 2016). Better earnings lead them to increase their consumption level. They are able to gain better nutrition and can avail better health facilities. Not only children or women, but men of the households who appreciate their efforts enjoy the improved environment of household (Jaffery & Farooq, 2015; Panigrahi & Satapathy, 2014).

Basically micro finance services are the financial support that would provide the opportunity to poor to exploit their capabilities, reach to desired aims, recognize opportunities and start living dreams (Quinoes & Remenyi, 2014; Radhakrishnan, 2015). Entrepreneurship is setting up the business, taking financial risk in the hope of profit. Shane's

Entrepreneurship Theory proposed in 2003 is based on the three main factors that are recognition of opportunity, evaluation of the opportunities, and the decision to exploit these opportunities. Other than main factors, the few elements like self-employment, business performance and operations are also considered (Eriksson & Folke, 2017). The survival, growth, income, and experiencing initial public offering the entrepreneurship can be measured (Shane, 2003; Díaz-García & Byrne, 2016). As per different scholars, it had been observed that in developing countries, like in Pakistan women entrepreneurs have lack of access to the loans for their operating and economic activities (Babajide, 2012; Ibru, 2009) although in informal sector, their rate of participation is more than the males that means their contribution is higher in the economy (Saleem, 2017). Women entrepreneurs, if they have skills and techniques for setting up their businesses, can generate income and provide financial and emotional support to their families, but if women are not risk takers and do not have the capabilities for running up their ventures then they face some troubles which may lead them to under burden of returning credit. Therefore, trainings from the micro finance institutions are mandatory as with these support women may work as engine for the train of growth of country's economies and their contribution would affect the global poverty in the positive way. From the previous literature it is highlighted that entrepreneurship is considered as the effective strategy for poverty mitigation (Sultana, Jamal, & Najaf, 2017; Munoz, 2016).

According to Rajouria (2008), micro credit creates conflict between the genders and also result the social disruption conducted study in Punjab Pakistan. Organizations and institutions target women because they are weak and can repay loans easily, male clients may not return the loan. So, MFIs are extracting dual profits by targeting women, they avoid violence against staff which is from male clients and higher repayments (Ziem & Bebelleh, 2014).

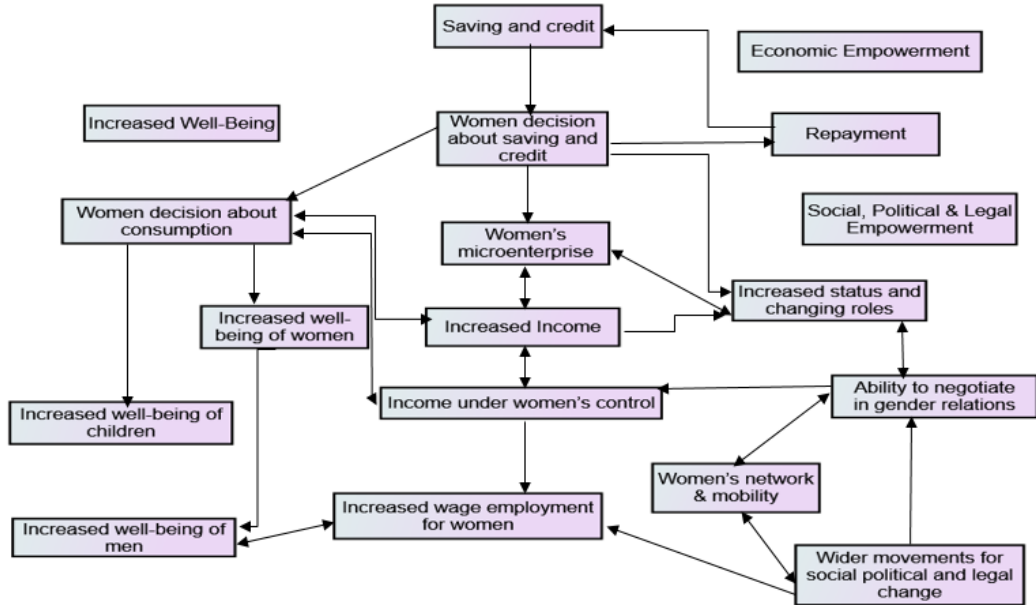
In the given comparison, Mayoux (2008), not only considers three paradigms which represents the nexus among the micro finance and women empowerment but in this virtuous spiral, she reflected the way where three dimensions of empowerment had been achieved through this paradigm. Due to this access, women were able to achieve financial sustainability, mitigate poverty, attain economic, social and legal empowerment, and increase household well-being this virtuous spiral leads to the empowerment objectives and gender equality (Thrikawala, 2017). The given model epitomizes the nexus between three paradigms and dimensions of empowerment that are based on micro finance and women empowerment literature:

The center of diagram reflects that women access to loan for saving or investing the money into any productive activity is because they get access of their own money first time. They may start their own businesses, expand their existing one or enhance the economic activity within household; this would highlight their capital contribution in the household. Their visible and enhanced participation in the economic practices may facilitate them to enjoy increased income and to control their own and overall household income. Their engagement in the market, decision regarding the investment, and control on income also support them in the wellbeing of their household overall nutrition, consumption and education. This can be seen in the left of the flow chart, that women take decision regarding their consumption; they not only augment the nutrition of their chil-

dren but also strive to fetch better education, medical facilities and nutrition for overall household including themselves. But for this, women are needed to be authorizing with the credits and they must engage themselves in any economic activities, another major benefit of this increased household well-being is their improved positions at homes and are the revolutions in gender inequalities (Mayoux, 2005).

Figure 1

Virtuous Spirals: Paradigm Compares (Mayoux, 2005; Panigrahi & Satapathy, 2014)



As it is reflected in the right side of the diagram, the social and political women empowerment can be achieved through the women's involvement in the economic activities and their decision making power at ménages. They fathom higher confidence and stronger value in addition they recognize their self-worth, confidence, increased knowledge related to market and mobility with in the society; they obtain greater status and respect in the communities consequently influencing the lives of other women (Aggarwal, Goodell, & Selleck, 2015). The women who feel socially empowered are able to negotiate with their family members about their health and take decisions related to their family size and conquer the violence (Weber & Ahmad, 2014).

With the micro credit, women are becoming more over-burdened, as in the patriarchal society, most of the women never be able to get control on their incomes, in few of the cases it was evident that men withdraw their contribution and support, this not only create financial problems for women but also generate violence, tensions and misunderstanding in the relationship (Aggarwal et al., 2015).

Gap Analysis

From the intense review of literature, it was observed that there are studies available on the relationship of women empowerment and micro credit and even on micro credit and entrepreneurship which was measured through quantitative methods. Entrepreneurship is the middle outcome in between the micro credit and women empowerment. [Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender \(2002\)](#) tried to measure the phenomenon of women empowerment with the six dimensions: legal, political, familial-interpersonal, socio-cultural, psychological, and economic, which reveal the complex nature of empowerment concept and difficulty in catching its essence in multiple and varying contexts. [Chaudhry and Lodhi \(2012\)](#) revealed in one of their study conducted in Southern Punjab, Pakistan, for quantifying empowerment by using the same dimensions but they again concluded without any appropriate result and then question arise that how empowerment can be investigated ([Evelyn & Osifo, 2018](#)). They recommend considering some categorical variables related to context which vary culture to culture like religious interpretations and beliefs and regional and social aspects which interact in this patriarchal society. In this study, we are going to extract the meaning women associate with empowerment; bottom to top approach would be used. After evaluating the realization of empowerment, the ripple effect amongst the micro credit, micro-entrepreneurship and women empowerment can be contextualized.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This is an exploratory study with abductive research strategy and phenomenological philosophy because it starts with participants everyday activities descriptions and how they associate meanings with the phenomena experienced, as a result categories and conceptual meanings would emerge which construct the grounds for understanding and realizing phenomena ([Reichertz, 2010](#)). In the study we are conducting, women have provide the sense of meaning to their routine activities and associate meanings with the empowerment that they experienced through utilization of micro credit and investing same in establishing micro businesses. Their feelings and descriptions can explore the transformation process of being empowered. For gauging the lived experiences and perception Cselenszky in 2012 suggested hermeneutics phenomenology, in our study hermeneutics phenomenology is used to understand the interpretations of lived experiences of women who availed loan as hermeneutics phenomenology would reveal the true essence of experiences. The motive of this qualitative approach is based on the faith that crucial truths about reality are grounded in routine experiences. The participants when give definitions to empowerment, express visual meanings of feelings, generate expressions, providing structural illustrations are more in line with the development of theoretical aspect which is concomitant with the qualitative study. Within constructivist and interpretivist nature of knowledge, meanings of the phenomena considered as the extremely subjective and

can be understood by focusing on the personal histories, lived experiences and social interactions (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

Phenomenology is basically the philosophy focuses on the participants' perceptions, experiences of the world or the perception of the 'people's things which they have in their appearing' (Kafle, 2013). As a method, the meaning and understanding of the phenomenological description is embedded in interpretation; (Heidegger, 1976) interprets that hermeneutics proposes the basic ontological insights into the understanding and interpretation of human. He indicates that existence in the world or Being in the world is fundamentally hermeneutics in nature and interpretive in its structure (Cammell, 2015). The abductive process begins with the discovery of how social performers view and understand the particular part of their world, with the perspective of this study the point was to determine the women's views, perceptions, experiences and understandings of empowerment, their work and utilization of micro credit in their world.

Participants and Sampling Method

Through the non-probability purposive maximum variation sampling technique, women are selected for taking in-depth interviews in their local context. Purposive maximum variation sampling is applied because participants who are interviewed actually from different states, districts and regions which reflected the heterogeneous meanings of the empowerment. Participants belongs from the Sindh region in which 17 district are covered, other districts are not accessible due to poor infrastructure, willingness and availability of participants. Sindh is selected due to few reasons primary is to fulfill hermeneutic phenomenological assumptions that researchers must know the language of target audience and also researchers must involve in the field. Researchers know the languages of Sindh's women who can speak Sindhi, Siraeki, and Urdu and researchers visit fields by themselves and conducted in-depth interviews (Giorgi, 2010). Second reason to target Sindh is that it is the second largest province of active borrowers of micro finance (Pakistan Micro finance Network: Annual Report, 2012). Participants are from Sindh active borrowers list, who are involved in any business activity.

Data Collection Procedure

By using the interview protocol, interviews had been taken from the 17 districts; interviews were stopped at 46 interviews. The questions of interview protocol were designed with the help of experience-based studies related with empowerment through micro credit conducted by Berglund (2007); Cole (2014), also researcher's own life situation analysis allowed her to craft few questions in such a way that would prompt the discourse about what women perceived through their work, and what sort of circumstances may be encountered by them during the process of empowerment. The pilot interview is conducted to modify the interview protocol and to validate the reliability of the interview protocol by analyzing that either protocol is completing the task of get appropriate information or not. One pilot interview was conducted in Thatta district with one woman with the essential criteria to contribute in the research study. This interview was conducted to

see whether women felt comfortable during the interview; both verbal and non-verbal behavior was noted (Berglund, 2007; Cole, 2014).

Plan of Analysis

The interviews of these women had been analyzed through interpretative phenomenological process in which chunks of relevant information grasped through the process of coding, sorting, sifting and by using matrices. Interpretative phenomenological analysis is the analysis method of phenomenological design which support to identify the universal and invariant themes through analyzing the interpretations of women which are their expressions of experiences.

IPA with ideographic focus aims to explore the details how respondents are creating sense of their social and personal world, and the main objective of this analysis is the meanings of the specific experiences, occasions, events, states embrace for respondents. The respondents tried to create sense of their world; then the researcher tried to create sense of the respondents. Intellectually, the theoretical basis of IPA is hermeneutics and interpretation theories (Kafle, 2013).

The data was analyzed through the cycle of hermeneutics which comprised of the three stages: reading, reflective writing, and interpretation. The hermeneutic cycle starts with the reading of the text which took place when participants involved themselves in the ongoing conversation, and each of the participant reflected multiple realities or constructions. Reading and writing play vital role in producing the meanings in the hermeneutic approach as there is no particular process for structuring the interpretive process. Through reading and writing which reflect the true essence of the participants' dialogues emerges the initial interpretation that arises from pre-understandings and arises from a dialectical movement between the whole and the parts of the text of participants. The final interpretations arise through the fusion of the context, under which dialogues were produced, and text, as well as the researcher, participant and their contexts (Seidman, 2013).

Reflections in the Research

Bracketing has been practiced by the researchers that researchers tried to detach themselves from indulging their own thinking during interpretation and data collection. Member checking was also practiced that conclusion has been shared with the participants of Karachi so they endorsed the results of conducted study.

Credibility

The credibility is practiced by applying two methods that is researcher and data triangulation, and member checking. The researchers had interpreted the transcript and drawn the almost same conclusion that researcher includes, research experts, domain experts and qualitative researchers. Data had been gathered through the interview protocol and observation protocol, also secondary data sources used like annual reports of micro finance

institutions. Member checking had been done after drafting the conclusion that findings had been shown to the respondents specifically to those who live near Karachi and within Karachi.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Essence

Interpretative phenomenology analysis or hermeneutics cycle is used to analyze the data as per the logical steps. To gain the sense of the meaning or essence of the experience that each participant attached to her experience, several reviews of transcripts are needed. Then the content headed towards the general themes and categories then the gleaned themes emerged that contained a combined textural description for all districts of participants as a whole (Beharry & Crozier, 2008). Knowing the significance of preserving natural contexts for qualitative research design (Seidman, 2013), the selected participants for this study are studied in their convenient environment (Reybold & S., 2013). Building trust and showing appreciation to these women, mostly the micro-entrepreneurs, was expressed in respecting their preferential choices of time and place to hold the interviews. Ideal venues were participants' homes from where they were operating their businesses and the shops where they were sitting, where utmost privacy could be maintained. The interpretative phenomenological analysis matrices are given in the appendix section which shows that different themes have been emerged during analysis process and then every theme is analyzed against each participant.

It is a commonly accepted feminist motto that external forces and other people cannot empower women; 'real' empowerment emerges from the inside. However, this axiom is generally accepted, there is less consideration to this although Marx explained the point that women's empowerment paths are followed under some situations which are forced or may not be of their choice. Development programs and agencies often induce pictures of empowered autonomous subjects, capable to select, make and design their own directions of journey but in reality, few of us have this capability to have independent choices and to follow them through. These 'structures of constraint' initially mentioned by Marx and usefully emphasized by feminist economists like Kabeer (2005) bound women's capability to pick their own ways. But, also the actual mean of empowerment was roughly far more conditional and contextual, and eventually less predictable than the quick fit answers, that what spread by development agencies.

Articles by Abdullah, Ibrahim, and King (2010); Darkwah (2010) highlight the consequences of contextualizing frame to augment women's empowerment in time and place. As Darkwah (2010) reflected that in Ghana, in older generation women, education was more effective pathway towards the empowerment; but now for younger women and girls the route map has transformed, as have the means of increasing their possibilities in the contemporary labour market but within the context of this study, either education or labour market both played minimal role in empowerment process (Abdullah et al., 2010). Most of the women were bound to the cultural values that education was not for the girls, not only this but their male family members used to say

"The asan je riwaj je khilaf ahe ta chokri taleem wathe, chokri taleem wathdi ta galat kam kandi", (Sindhi)

"It is against our traditional values if girl can avail the education because when she will be educated she will do wrong deeds"

Not only males but females also thought the same way that education even religious one is not essential for girls. In upper districts of Sindh, specifically in the rural areas thinking of the women was also in line with this perspective that household chores and traditional art work are enough for girls as eventually they would move to other families after marriage, girls do not belong to maternal families. Even after these conditions, women used to work for agriculture, operating businesses but mostly within the context of their homes. In lower districts of Sindh like in Thatta, Badin, Hyderabad etc., social and cultural values were in the process of being modified, people are realizing the significance of education and sending their girls to schools.

As according to Aggarwal et al. (2015), women empowerment is an evolution under which weak segment of the society is given power to decide for itself, to take part in the development of the country, to be self-confident and to be good human. But in the context of Upper Sindh, where culture is deeply practiced on the basis of patriarchal society, the decisions are taken by the males whether they earn or not. In lower Sindh context, people were aware of independent decisions and their thinking was slightly different than the upper Sindh's male family members: they were in the favor of women stability and they provided power to women for decision making at least.

In our study, one of the aims was to explore contextual meaning of empowerment from the women's perspective that availed microcredit, through their situational knowledge (Creswell & Clark, 2007). The women lived experiences were interpreted for the empowerment more through the social, cultural, and sub cultural lens. One woman said

"Pait bhare maani tha khayoon harein, pehreeen bhukh te sumdaseen, murs khe maani dayee, baran khe maani dayee poe bachando ta khaee wathanda howa sii, harein gath ma gath bin pehran jee maani peth bhare tha khayoon"

"Atleast we are having two meals per day, before that we use to sleep with empty stomach as due to small amount of food, we first distribute that among our children then husband then we had if something left for us"

These women, while sitting at their homes which were their working places also, considered as rich contexts, saw themselves financially powerful because if they compared their situation before the utilization of micro credit, they were very weak and according to few women, who were from small villages, they didn't even have food to eat and they used to sleep with empty stomachs, the food which they had was in minimal quantity and as per the norm of this society their husbands had the first right to eat food then the children, so even the women were deprived of the basic right to food. From their reflections, it was explored that financial stability is empowerment for the lower region of Sindh mostly 46 percent women were stuck to this because they are more close to urban areas and macro environment had influenced them. But in the upper region, most of the women associate word empowerment with the basic right of food 20 percent agree with this meaning and 34.8 percent link it with family well-being, seen in table 2. On the individual basis, they initiated businesses but with the family male member support, and

transform the environment of their homes, work on the well-being of children, family and do not realize self-empowerment.

Rajouria (2008) studies asked the question that how we perceive or recognize the idea of empowerment in a context where patriarchal mindsets are underpinned and prolonged warlike conditions and illegal murders of women are a common thing; and instability is the norm. Their study questioned that women involvement in the informal sector trapped them and only micro credit was not enough to pull them out of the poverty, the conclusion of our study which came from the interpretations of few women were exactly the same. Women who worked hard for earning money became over-burdened and under the financial obligation too. According to them earning money and feeding children were the responsibilities of their male family members not theirs. Even after earning money, their income was not in their control and they became responsible for domestic as well as economic work.

Sindh has most part of it dominated by feudal thinking where particularly women from the downtrodden classes are in a vulnerable situation. They are considered as the source of delight for which their body is a matter of consideration. If they possess this quality, they have the worth; otherwise they prove to be the fallen flowers. They have no independent economic life. If they work at all on the dictation of their husband, the economic benefit goes to the pocket of their husband. They have neither freedom to claim it theirs nor they can use it for their own advantage.

The society they belong to is afflicted with religious bigotry. In the name of religion, they are deprived of what is said to be their rights. They are not granted any significant social status either. Simply they are slaves in the guise of housewives.

Most significant questions asked from the women were: 'Does micro credit lead to economic empowerment? The results of this study prove that micro credit in each context has different influence on women's empowerment. It was seen that women are mostly empowered in economic sphere, if they invest their money into any economic activity and be entrepreneurs. Keeping the women's micro-entrepreneurship as their starting place, many of researchers observed positive transformations in the material level like higher incomes, increase in household expenses, availability of money for the strategic and immediate needs, and these changes translate into an expansion of opportunities of choice in the economic sphere. As a consequence, most of the women were capable to accomplish their set economic goals. In Sindh's context, women are at the basic level of economic empowerment because they are earning well but access to market is very low and their mobility is almost negligible as shared by the women.

The ripple effect can be seen through women micro-entrepreneur's experiences that how from access and utilization of micro credit, they transform their family lives. This is also suggested by Matsangou (2017) that she has discussed about ripple effect of female entrepreneurship and micro finance. In her view poverty-stricken societies mostly rely on informal employment, due to which they enjoy little security and few rights. Moreover, initiating business and developing businesses for them is virtually difficult without access to financial resources, people in these societies have restricted opportunities which need to be exploited to get rid of poverty.

Rupert Scofield, Founder and CEO of private micro finance institution, confirmed the

same by saying: "In many countries where we work, cultural norms deny women the opportunity to seek employment or start their own businesses. At our MFI, we made it our mission to redress this enormous waste of valuable and productive human resources. We provide many enterprising women with the resources to start their own businesses ([Matsangou, 2017](#))."

In the same way, women of Sindh shared their experience that with the access of micro credit, they got opportunity to start and grow their businesses which give them power to fulfill their basic economic needs, take decisions, improves their own well-being, and male and children well-being. The exploitation of opportunities in the informal sector is simply unable them to push themselves out of poverty. Due to cultural influences their mobility and education are minimal.

This is the cumulative influence of Sindh women's micro-entrepreneurship which fetches empowerment in them and changes within a society. Micro credit programs have been designed exclusively for women; because, it is argued in the literature that women spend money on goods and services that improve families' wellbeing. According to [Scott \(2014\)](#), the men's income does not generate the same ripple effect within a society; supporting women's entrepreneurship has become a preferred method for economic development.

In our study, it is explored from the women experiences, reflections along with our observation of surroundings that micro credit would support in surging their consumption status, transform their lives if it is utilized for an investment and they become entrepreneurs but it is also noticeable that only one time investment is not leading towards success; skill development trainings, financial literacy trainings, vocational trainings etc. are crucial for sustainable success. The successful micro-entrepreneurs have been identified who are earning profit and have knowledge about their work, one main fact was extracted that they get trainings from their particular micro finance institution for polishing their skills. Women who feel happy by having basic rights and enjoy decision making authority about their children, household, family planning etc. considered themselves as empowered women in that society.

Conclusion and Implications

Without any doubt, micro credit works as a vehicle which stresses the importance of self-sufficiency, self-efficacy, and economic independence. Logic behind this strategy of using micro credit is that poverty can be mitigated by surging women entrepreneurship.

The gap was highlighted in the literature that the quantitative measures are available which provide quick view of this phenomenon but they are limited because of using few measurable variables, ignore subjective experiences, leave details, and other ontological issues that enrich the whole picture. This study compiled the interpretations of the 46 rural and urban women of Sindh, who are real unit of analysis, actually realized and predicated the feelings and thoughts regarding empowerment.

In our study, the research question was based on the possible structural meanings of the empowerment among women and how they interpret their experiences. Women

shaped the meaning of empowerment but two different meanings had been identified according to their environment. Through their experiences, they share that their empowerment is their earnings and the valuable place in the heart of their male family members; it is their earnings which strengthen them to involve in the decision-making process and mark their presences. On the other hand, second definition can be structured with the perspective of women who are under the moderate conditions. They don't link the financial stability with themselves but they think their empowerment is lying with the family well-being and their own respect within the family. In short, the structural meaning of empowerment from the perspective of most of the women is that financial stability, familial happiness and respect within the family provide strength to them.

The second main concern of this study to determine the link between micro credit, micro-entrepreneurship and empowerment which seems clear that micro credit open the ways for women to exploit opportunities and be micro-entrepreneurs, this claim is also explored that successful micro-entrepreneurs feel empowered as compare to those who do not have full access to credit. Also, the institutional support and male support from the family play crucial role if provided on time.

Limitations

The data had been gathered with the support of micro finance institutions so it might be possible that managers or bankers may hide their unsuccessful cases. Other than this, the critical constraint of our study was respondent's reluctance to provide sufficient information due to some social repercussions and they were not willing to answer for unknown reasons, so efforts had been made for developing trust and then information had been explored. In-depth discussion had been followed by the informal style of conversation which create different questions and lead towards the collection of different information. This process is less structured and succinct due to which data analysis had been quite difficult. Researcher observed the facial expressions, tone, gesture and body language during the interview as the audio-recording did not capture these things which have significant meaning and for video-recording, rural women was feeling reluctant, pictures were taken during the interviews and reflective notes were also noted.

Contribution of Research in the Current State of Knowledge

In the context of Sindh, meaning of women empowerment is structured which is quite new and had not been extracted before. Hence, our research study would be helpful in refereeing the meaning of empowerment in the context of Sindh. On the basis of this, theoretical frameworks would be developed in future and quantitative studies can be conducted in that particular context.

Managerial and Practical Implications

Implications for Microfinance Practitioners

Micro finance and Development Practitioners (MDP) of Sindh micro finance institutes and banks must plan and implement the programmatic components like leadership opportunities, vocational trainings, and financial literacy trainings etc. that directly lead women into the empowerment journey through exaggerating micro-entrepreneurship. They must focus on the capacity building programs and trainings for the women involved in micro credit programs as Sindh has largest clientele. MDP must take women's perspectives and women into the management, governance, and execution of different micro finance programs and to gather gender disaggregated numerical data so the proper micro credit programmes can be designed and executed. They also design and implement the strategies based on the women empowerment paradigm.

Implications for Donors and Research Professionals

Donors and Research professionals should provide orientation and trainings for the procedures of access, credit utilization, interest and principal payments and installments to the women clients of Sindh different districts. They must also develop strategies for targeting the left over poor women who lived in the same locality, as there is the intense need of micro credit in different villages of Sindh. They should start work on the promotion of financial sustainability of borrowers.

Implications for Government

Government, State bank of Pakistan and Pakistan micro finance network must develop and design the policies and legal framework. These frameworks can promotes gender equality, women empowerment and guard's women's right in main zones of society like ownership of property, inheritance, unavailability of food, and domestic violence. They also incorporate the women's small businesses into the consideration for gross domestic product. Women comprise almost half of the population, so they consider women's needs into account while developing infrastructure, economic policies and other relevant projects; also promote education and provide the well infrastructure for girls schools

This study can contribute towards the number of practical implications. Women experiences with the micro credit program proved that micro credit work as a cushion during crisis and powerful tool in transforming the lives of poor. In the light of our research, only micro credit is not the correct intervention for the poor women, they require much more support from the families, trustworthy trainings and workshops from the micro finance institutes. Micro finance practitioners must target women for aligning the objectives of women empowerment paradigm not for the social trust only. They must be supportive enough for the women borrowers; they must conduct appropriate meetings and setup the proper structure where women can be trained for different skills and understand the

aspects of life like financial literacy trainings, where women learn about the utilization of funds and control their expenses.

Secondly, the most important thing which was shared by the women who feel disempowered is the recovery of loan. If, women or other family members are met with any emergency and failure of businesses they should not be kept as defaulter but there must be a credit intervention or a social security plan backed by insurance against these types of crisis which can upset the family's plans. Such sort of financial facility provides the vigorous cushion against the economic shocks or in case of illness or in time of natural disasters. Third important aspect discovered through the women experiences, is the heavy demand of credit, in our study it was reflected that lending micro credit to women may not fetch any significant change in their lives although their household consumption pattern has transformed but there is no such modification in their empowerment.

If government along with the private institutes and developmental organizations work together for resolving these issues, they could better address the need of rural women. Strategies to combat the lack of empowerment must address not only the immediate need of rural women but must also focus on the root cause of women's powerlessness.

Area of Future Research

This study has covered the region Sindh as it was the requirement of the methodological approach that researcher must know the language of respondents and also due to the limited resources only Sindh was focused. The same study with the same methodology can be conducted in the different region of Pakistan where micro finance institutes and banks are operating their functions as empowerment cannot be generalize due to its categorical nature and every culture has different dimensions. At the later stage, after these exploratory studies, the scales can be designed for the different indicators which cater empowerment and then SEM and other quantitative tools can be used to identify the women empowerment. Other than this, women empowerment is one of the paradigm of micro credit, the third paradigm is untouched in our context that is financial sustainability of clients which should also be considered in the further studies.

Table 1
Meaning of Empowerment

Structured Meaning of Empowerment From Women Perspective	Number of Females share this	Percentages of females shared this meaning
Financial Stability and Success in business	21	45.7
Basic Right to Nutrition for own self	9	19.6
Familial Empowerment	16	34.8
	46	100

References

- Abdullah, H. J., Ibrahim, A. F., & King, J. (2010). Women's voices, work and bodily integrity in pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict reconstruction processes in Sierra Leone. *IDS Bulletin*, 41(2), 37–45.
- Addai, B. (2017). Women empowerment through microfinance: Empirical evidence from Ghana. *Journal of Finance and Accounting*, 5(1), 1–11.
- Aggarwal, R., Goodell, J. W., & Selleck, L. J. (2015). Lending to women in microfinance: Role of social trust. *International Business Review*, 24(1), 55–65.
- Agier, I. (2013). Microfinance and gender: Is there a glass ceiling on loan size? *World Development*, 42, 165–181. doi: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2012.06.016
- Akram, M., & Hussain, I. (2011). The role of microfinance in uplifting income level: A study of District Okara-Pakistan. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business*, 2(11), 83–94.
- Alshebami, A. S., & Khandare, D. (2015). The role of microfinance for empowerment of poor women in Yemen. *International Journal of Social Work*, 2(1), 36–44.
- Asher, S. N., & Haider, S. (2017). Role of mico-credit to empower women regarding health and family issues in Pakistan. *International Journal of Rehabilitation Sciences*, 4(1), 11–14.
- Babajide, A. (2012). Effects of microfinance on micro and small enterprises (MSEs) growth in Nigeria. *Asian Economic and Financial Review*, 2(3), 463–477.
- Banerjee, P., & Sain, K. (2016). A case study on women empowerment and financial literacy through SHGs. *International Journal of Research in Economics and Social Sciences*, 6(11), 295–301.
- Beharry, P., & Crozier, S. (2008). Using phenomenology to understand experiences of racism for second-generation South Asian women. *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, 42(4), 262–277.
- Berglund, H. (2007). Researching entrepreneurship as lived experience. *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Entrepreneurship*, 3(4), 75–94.
- Bhat, R., & Lakshmi, J. (2002). *Feminisation of poverty and empowerment of women-an Indian perspective and experience*. International Women's Conference Conference Paper Australia: Townsville.
- Boyden, J. (2013). 'We're not going to suffer like this in the mud': Educational aspirations, social mobility and independent child migration among populations living in poverty. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 43(5), 580–600.
- Cammell, P. (2015). Relationality and existence: Hermeneutic and deconstructive approaches emerging from Heidegger's philosophy. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 43(3), 235–249.
- Chaudhry, N. F., I. S., & Lodhi, M. I. (2012). Women empowerment in Pakistan with special reference to islamic viewpoint: An empirical study. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 32(1), 171–183.
- Cole, S. (2014). *Seven women speak: Perceptions of economic empowerment opportunities among diverse women in four different Cape Town communities today*.
- Creswell, J. W., & Clark, P. V. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed method research*.

- Darkwah, A. K. (2010). Education: Pathway to empowerment for Ghanaian women? *IDS Bulletin*, 41(2), 28–36.
- Díaz-García, M. C., & Byrne, J. (2016). *Entrepreneurial role models: An integrated framework from a constructionist perspective*. Taylor and Francis.
- Eriksson, S., & Folke, O. (2017). *A credit-plus approach: The way to increase women's empowerment in micro credit? Evidence from Colombia*. Colombia: Uppsala University.
- Evelyn, U., & Osifo, S. J. (2018). Microfinance and female entrepreneurship in Nigeria. *DBA Africa Management Review*, 8(1), 36–43.
- Galema, R., Lensink, R., & Mersland, R. (2012). Do powerful CEOs determine microfinance performance? *Journal of Management Studies*, 49(4), 718–742.
- George, D. B. (2014). A review of literature on micro finance and women empowerment. *Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research*, 9(1), 505–522.
- Giorgi, A. (2010). Phenomenology and the practice of science. *Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis*, 21(1), 3–22.
- Heidegger, M. (1976). *Brief über den Humanismus*. Gesamtausgabe.
- Ibru, C. (2009). *Growing microfinance through new technologies*.
- Jaffery, H., & Farooq, H. (2015). The impact of structural empowerment on organizational citizenship behavior-organization and job performance: A mediating role of burnout. *Journal of Management Sciences*, 2(2), 274–289.
- Janjua, Y., Ahmed, A. M., Hamid, A., Bashir, S., Umer, Z., & Akram, N. (2010). *Pakistan Millennium Development Goals Report-2010*. Islamabad: Planning Commission, Government of Pakistan (Tech. Rep.).
- Kabeer, N. (2005). Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal. *Gender & Development*, 13(1), 13–24.
- Kafle, N. P. (2013). Hermeneutic phenomenological research method. *Bodhi, An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 5, 181–200.
- Khachatryan, K., & Avetisyan, E. (2017). Microfinance development in Armenia: Sectoral characteristics and problems. *Strategic Change*, 26(6), 575–584.
- Liton, S. M., M. R., & Muzib, M. (2014). Micro-credit as a tool for poverty reduction in Bangladesh. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 6(5), 30–38.
- Malhotra, A., Schuler, S., & Boender, C. (2002). Measuring women's empowerment as a variable in international development. *JSI Research and Training Institute*.
- Matsangou, E. (2017). *World finance: The voice of the market*. Retrieved from microfinance: empowering female entrepreneurs. Retrieved from <https://www.worldfinance.com/banking/microfinance-empowering-female-entrepreneurs>
- Mayoux, L. (2005). *Women empowerment through sustainable microfinance*. Pakistan: Aga Khan foundation Canada.
- Mayoux, L. (2008). *Taking gender seriously: Towards the gender justice protocol for a diversified, inclusive, and sustainable financial sector*. Canada and Pakistan: Oxfam Novib's Women's Empowerment mainstreaming and Networking (WEMAN) programme for Gender Justice in Economic Development.
- Munoz, L. G. (2016). *Gender, development and globalization. Economics as if all people matters*. Newyork: Routledge.

- Panigrahi, R. R., & Satapathy, S. K. (2014). Women empowerment through micro finance & turning challenges into opportunities: Indian scenario. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, 3(1), 310–316.
- Parvin, G. A., Shaw, R., & Kazi, F. S. (2016). *Urban disasters and microfinancing*. United Kingdom: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Pradipta, D. B., & Kalachand, S. (2016). A case study on women empowerment and financial literacy through SHGs. *International Journal of Research in Economics and Social Sciences*, 6(11), 295–301.
- Quinoes, B., & Remenyi, J. (2014). *Microfinance and poverty alleviation: Case studies from Asia and the Pacific*. London and Newyork: Routledge.
- Radhakrishnan, S. (2015). “low profile” or Entrepreneurial? Gender, class, and cultural adaptation in the global microfinance industry. *World Development*, 74, 264–274.
- Rajouria, A. (2008). *Micro-finance and Empowerment of women: Evidence from Nepal*. Nepal: University of Hawai.
- Reichertz, J. (2010). *The logic of describing of grounded theory*. Qualitative Social Research.
- Reybold, L. J. D., L. E., & S., S. (2013). Participant selection as a conscious research method: Thinking forward and the deliberation of ‘emergent’ findings. *Qualitative Research*, 13(6), 699–716.
- Saleem, S. M. (2017). Does international financial integration spur economic growth? Evidence from Pakistan. *Journal of Management Sciences*, 4(1), 116–130.
- Scott, L. M. (2014). *Thinking critically about women’s entrepreneurship in developing countries*. England: University of Oxford.
- Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Shane, S. A. (2003). *A general theory of entrepreneurship: The individual-opportunity nexus*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Sinclair, T. J. (2012). *Beyond the control: the disempowerment of women in Middle Eastern and African literature*. East Carolina University.
- Sultana, H. Y., Jamal, M. A., & Najaf, D.-E. (2017). Impact of microfinance on women empowerment through poverty alleviation: An assessment of socio-economic conditions in Chennai city of Tamil Nadu. *Asian Journal For Poverty Studies*, 3(2), 175–183.
- Thrikawala, S. (2017). Does gender diversity influence the operational sustainability of microfinance institutions (MFIS) in Sri Lanka. *Journal of Business and Technology*, 5(2), 65–83.
- Torri, M. C., & Martinez, A. (2014). Women’s empowerment and micro-entrepreneurship in India: Constructing a new development paradigm? *Progress in Development Studies*, 14(1), 31–48.
- UNDP: Women’s Empowerment. (2013). Retrieved August 19, 2013, from United Nations Development Programme:. Retrieved from <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/womenempowerment/overview.html>
- Weber, O., & Ahmad, A. (2014). Empowerment through microfinance: The relation between loan cycle and level of empowerment. *World Development*, 62, 75–87.
- Ziem, R., & Bebelleh, F. D. (2014). Microfinance and rural women empowerment in the Kpandai District of Ghana: The role of SEND Ghana microfinance scheme. *European*

Journal of Business and Management, 6(24), 50–66.

Zulfiqar, G. (2017). Does microfinance enhance gender equity in access to finance? Evidence from Pakistan. *Feminist Economics*, 23(1), 160–185.