



**Copyright** © The Author(s). 2023 This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.



**DOI:** 10.29052/2413-4252.v9.i1.2023.27-32

**Citation:** Shah S, Parveen Q & Dahar M A. Investigation of Empowering women through vocational trainings in Hunza, Gilgit Baltistan. *IJWE*. 2023; 9(1): -27-32

**Corresponding Author Email:**  
seemahasil@gmail.com

**Funding:** The author(s) received no specific funding for this work.

**Conflicts of Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

**Received** 12/03/2023

**Accepted** 14/09/2023

**First Published** 01/12/2023

## Original Article

# Investigation of Empowering women through vocational trainings in Hunza, Gilgit Baltistan.

Seema Shah , Qaisara Parveen & Muhammad Arshad Dahar

PMAS Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi-Pakistan.

## Abstract

**Background:** Women's empowerment is about improving confidence and independence through different programs. It not only contributes to social growth but also to economic development through diverse entrepreneurial activities. The study was conducted to determine the role of vocational training in skill development for women and to identify challenges encountered by women during vocational training in Hunza.

**Methodology:** The study was conducted in Hunza Valley, and a qualitative research design was used. The population of the study consists of KADO handicrafts companies. Purposive sampling technique was used to conduct interviews with participants working at KORGAH Carpet Center. The data was analyzed through thematic analysis.

**Results:** The findings reveal that financial stability, the desire for independence, personal growth, and learning new skills are primary motivations for women to join vocational training. Challenges faced by women during vocational training include balancing training with household tasks, language barriers, societal judgments, and external disruptions such as the Attabad disaster and COVID-19.

**Conclusion:** The journey of women during vocational training is evidence of their determination, adaptability, and the transformative power of skill development. These women not only enhance their economic prospects but also view vocational training as a pathway to personal and professional growth. In spite of facing challenges, their commitment to acquiring skills and overcoming obstacles reflects the impact of vocational training on women's lives. Future researchers can explore the long-term effects of vocational training on women's careers and financial empowerment in Hunza.

## Keywords

Women Empowerment, Vocational Trainings, Skill Development, Challenges.

## Introduction

In Hunza Valley, women have played an integral role in shaping the identity of their community and nation. Over the years, they have ventured into various fields, including education, healthcare, and entrepreneurship, breaking down barriers and challenging societal norms. Their journey towards empowerment is a testament to their resilience and determination in the face of numerous challenges.

Through pursuing vocational and technical training, women, who represent half of the world's population, can gain economic empowerment<sup>1</sup>. Empowerment involves changing the balance of power between men and women, not only in interpersonal connections but also within societal institutions, fostering a more unbiased distribution of influence<sup>2</sup>. Women's empowerment is the initiative of training women with essential resources and opportunities to stress their rights, engage in decision-making processes, and take charge of their own lives. A woman who is empowered possesses a strong awareness of her self-worth and has the ability to make choices that can impact both her own life and contribute to societal change for herself and others<sup>3</sup>.

In Pakistan, the concept of the role of women in society varies, and their access to services and opportunities is controlled. The role of parents, particularly mothers, has consistently held a position of maximum importance in Pakistani society<sup>4</sup>. In more advanced countries, the status and significance of the parental or maternal role have advanced and are expected to evolve quickly. However, in Pakistan, there is currently a lack of awareness on this matter. Nonetheless, with the active involvement and efforts of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), there is some improvement in raising awareness and addressing issues related to the parental or maternal role<sup>5</sup>. Pakistan, like many other developing countries, is witnessing increasing poverty patterns and a day-by-day increase in the cost of living, convincing women to engage in numerous forms of economic activities through which they can generate income to meet their family's well-being and improve their standard of living<sup>6</sup>.

In the 21st century, economic competition has encouraged a shift toward building methods that emphasize both capital-intensive and labor-intensive processes, grounded in technology and science. To effectively prepare for this era of globalization, there is an urgent need to enhance technical and vocational education through a variety of methods and concentrated efforts<sup>7</sup>. Skills development is a key to success which improves efficiency, employability, and earning opportunities. It is the bridge between job and workforce; today, it is considered an important and essential tool for women's empowerment<sup>8</sup>. Training provides a positive impact to train the skill set of an individual. It also enhances the skills of women and empowers them to work self-sufficiently and support their family. It also provides broad support to poor women in societies who can work hard and play a vital role in increasing the income level of the household<sup>9</sup>.

Women's empowerment has been recognized as a crucial aspect of sustainable development and social progress worldwide. This study aims to determine the role of vocational trainings in skill development and also to identify the challenges faced by women during vocational trainings. By identifying the role of vocational training in skills development, this study seeks to provide useful knowledge on how women can be better prepared for employment opportunities in Hunza. Understanding challenges faced by women when seeking vocational trainings, the research aims to contribute to the progress of approaches that reduce challenges and enhance the success of women in vocational training in Hunza. This research is concerned with recognizing and improving the impact of vocational training on women's empowerment in Hunza, Gilgit Baltistan. By exploring the role of skill development and identifying challenges, the study desires to provide valuable insights for both academic and practical purposes.

## Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the experiences of individuals working at KORGAH Carpet Centre in Gulmit Gojal, Hunza.

The study included five participants working at KORGAH Carpet Centre, selected through purposive sampling. The selection criteria aimed to capture a diverse range of experiences and roles within the organization. Participants were approached through the head of KORGAH Carpet Centre. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow for flexibility and depth in exploring participants' experiences. The interviews were conducted in Wakhi, the local language spoken by the participants, to ensure cultural sensitivity and a more detailed understanding. The interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and completeness. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, and confidentiality and privacy were maintained throughout the study. Participants were assured that their participation was voluntary. Thematic analysis was employed as the method of data analysis. The interviews were transcribed precisely and analyzed thematically, following the course of coding and categorization.

## Results

The study's conclusions showed that women seek out vocational training programs for skill development due to a variety of factors and motivations, such as financial stress, a desire for independence, acquiring new skills, and personal growth and development. In addition, women had difficulties during vocational training due to juggling training with domestic responsibilities, social criticism, and working in conjunction with men. Additionally, women encounter external obstacles like the COVID-19 pandemic and the Attabad accident. In the COVID-19 pandemic, the vocational center remained closed for three months, and women working at KORGAH Center faced financial challenges. The following key themes were identified

### Primary motivation and factors that drive women to seek vocational training for skill development

- **Financial stress:** Participants constantly stated that the need for financial stability was a primary motivation for pursuing vocational training. Learning new skills was seen as an

effective way to address financial challenges within their families.

- **Desire for independence:** The goal for independence began as a significant factor driving women to seek vocational training. Participants desired to gain skills that would enable them to live independently.
- **Personal growth and development:** The study revealed that women observed vocational training not only as a means to gain specific skills but also as an opportunity for personal growth and development. The training programs were seen as transformative experiences for women.
- **Livelihood:** Participants joined vocational trainings because they believed that mastering vocational skills would lead to financial stability and security in times of crisis.

### Challenges encountered by women during vocational trainings

- **Balancing vocational training and household activities:** Participants faced challenges in balancing vocational training with household tasks. This included managing time efficiently, especially when dealing with home commitments.
- **Societal judgment:** Women faced societal judgment and criticisms, particularly when working alongside men. Societal pressure stood as a significant challenge during their training.
- **Financial challenges:** Financial challenges were significant hurdles, with some participants facing setbacks due to the economic impact of events like the Attabad disaster and the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these hurdles, the participants improved their work strategies to overcome losses.
- **External challenges:** External challenges, such as the Attabad disaster and the COVID-19 pandemic, disrupted participants' vocational training. During COVID-19, the KORGAH carpet center remained closed for three months. Regardless of these difficulties, the women established resilience, flexibility, and a refusal to give up.

## Discussion

This study uncovered a range of motivations driving women to pursue vocational training programs. Building upon our findings, a comparative analysis with existing literature reveals both consistencies and unique contributions. Notably, financial stress emerged as a primary motivator, with participants viewing skill development as a means to address economic challenges within their families. We have seen a pattern of studies highlighting financial stress in males being evident in financial crises as compared to their female counterparts<sup>10</sup>. However, recent studies underline women being more stressed in financial crises, which directly impacts their mental and physical health as well as productivity<sup>11</sup>. Previous studies also mark depression being prevalent in females with financial stress, specifically after COVID-19, as compared to their male counterparts<sup>12</sup>. Nonetheless, women sought vocational training for livelihood purposes, believing that mastering vocational skills would provide financial stability and security, especially in times of crisis.

The desire for independence played a significant role, highlighting women's aspirations to live autonomously by acquiring new skills. Vocational training was not merely seen as a skill-building endeavor; participants perceived it as an opportunity for personal growth and development, transforming their experiences. Similar to previous studies, vocational training has proven to be a potent tool in fostering the psychological empowerment of women. It has not only equipped them with valuable skills but has also played a pivotal role in instilling a sense of security and freedom of decision-making. Through the acquisition of vocational skills, women are not only better prepared for economic self-sufficiency but also experience a heightened sense of confidence and autonomy, contributing significantly to their psychological well-being<sup>13</sup>.

Despite the evident benefits, women faced various challenges during vocational training. Balancing training with household activities posed a notable hurdle, requiring efficient time management,

particularly in the context of domestic commitments. In Pakistan, as in other developing countries, rural women make ample contributions to the economy through vital productive and reproductive roles. It is evident that women account for almost half of the population and contribute substantially to productive labor, and sometimes even exceed men in agricultural activities, in addition to performing significant domestic responsibilities. Still, the socio-cultural setup in Pakistan, with gender inequality in the labor force, creates many constraints for women's participation in productive activities<sup>14</sup>.

Developing countries like Pakistan are ill-prepared for these changes, where society still emphasizes adherence to traditional gendered roles along with no support networks and mechanisms available for couples in non-normative work-family arrangements<sup>15</sup>. Cultural factors, the cultural beliefs, and attitudes that social group members have about themselves and other members of their group, may strongly influence one's standpoint and can also affect the behaviors of those who belong to these groups<sup>16</sup>. Societal judgment and criticisms, particularly when working alongside men, were significant obstacles, reflecting the influence of societal attitudes on women in non-traditional fields. Such negative judgments are not merely social; they also have implications in organizational settings, such as limiting career advancement opportunities and reduced rewards in their working roles<sup>17</sup>. Unfortunately, this also depicts that women's significant input has continued to be underestimated in traditional agricultural practices, economic studies, and policy formulation, and men's input has remained the central and sole focus of attention<sup>18,19</sup>.

Financial challenges, exacerbated by external events like the Attabad disaster and the COVID-19 pandemic, were substantial hurdles. Notably, the closure of the KORGAH carpet center during the COVID-19 pandemic for three months resulted in financial challenges for women. External challenges, including the Attabad disaster and the COVID-19 pandemic, disrupted vocational training. However, participants exhibited remarkable

resilience, flexibility, and a refusal to give up, adapting their work strategies to overcome losses. This also contradicts previous studies highlighting males being more psychologically resistant than females<sup>20,21</sup>.

These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of women's experiences in vocational training, emphasizing the importance of addressing challenges while recognizing and building upon the strengths and motivations that drive women to seek skill development. The study's results not only contribute to the understanding of the motivations and challenges faced by women in vocational training but also underscore the need for targeted programs that address these aspects. Policymakers and educators can use these insights to design interventions that better support women's aspirations and navigate the obstacles encountered during vocational training. Future research should aim for a more comprehensive exploration, considering diverse participants and contexts to enhance the generalizability of these findings.

## Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that various factors and motivations, including financial stress, the desire for independence, learning new skills, and personal growth and development, drive women to seek vocational training for skill development. Furthermore, challenges encountered by women when seeking vocational training included balancing training with household activities, societal judgment and criticism, particularly when working alongside men. Women also face external challenges such as the Attabad disaster, the COVID-19 pandemic, and associated financial crises. The results of the study have consequences for educators and policymakers. Program design can be made more focused and efficient by taking into account the needs and obstacles faced by women enrolled in vocational training. More comprehensive and diverse participant studies could be investigated in the future to improve the generalizability of the results.

## Acknowledgment

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the women employed at KORGAAH Carpet Center for their indispensable contribution to our research. Their participation has been invaluable, enriching our study with their insights and perspectives.

## References

1. Abid I, Afaq K, Atif S, Sana M, Saiqa A, editors. Role of vocational and technical training in achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls: An empirical study of Sindh, Pakistan. E3S Web of Conferences; 2020: EDP Sciences.
2. Tandon T. Women empowerment: perspectives and views. *Int J Indian Psychol.* 2016;3(3):6-12.
3. Tiwari P, Malati N. Role of Training in Women Empowerment: An Empirical Analysis: Women Empowerment. *J Tech Educ Train.* 2023;15(1):234-245.
4. Hakim A, Aziz A. Socio-cultural, religious, and political aspects of the status of women in Pakistan. *Pak dev rev.* 1998;727-746.
5. Jahan F. Measuring the impact of training for the development of women empowerment in Pakistan. *IJWE.* 2015;1(1):5-12.
6. Sarwar F, Khan REA. Factors Contributing Towards Women Employability: An Impact Assessment of a Women Skill Development Training Program. *Rev Economics Dev Stud.* 2021;7(3):417-431.
7. Le SK, Hlaing SN, Ya KZ. 21st-century competences and learning that Technical and vocational training. *J Eng Res.* 2022;1(1):1-6.
8. Vyas A. The impact of skill development on women empowerment. *IJARnD.* 2018;3(1):8-11.
9. Nikkhah HA, Redzuan MrB. The role of NGOs in promoting empowerment for sustainable community development. *J Hum Ecol.* 2010;30(2):85-92.
10. Etheridge B, Spantig L. The gender gap in mental well-being during the Covid-19 outbreak: evidence from the UK. ISER Working paper series, 2020.
11. Cheng Z, Mendolia S, Paloyo AR, Savage DA, Tani M. Working parents, financial insecurity, and childcare: mental health in the time of COVID-19 in the UK. *Rev Econ Househ.* 2021;19:123-144.
12. Thayer ZM, Gildner TE. COVID - 19 - related financial stress associated with higher likelihood of depression among pregnant women living in the United States. *Am J Hum Biol.* 2021;33(3):e23508.
13. Rani A, Mohapatra S. The effect of vocational training programmes conducted by KVK on farm Woman of Allahabad district. 2021.

14. Jabeen S, Haq S, Jameel A, Hussain A, Asif M, Hwang J, et al. Impacts of rural women's traditional economic activities on household economy: Changing economic contributions through empowered women in rural Pakistan. *Sustainability*. 2020;12(7):2731.
15. Shah R. Navigating non - normative roles: Experiences of female - breadwinning couples in Pakistan. *Eur J Soc Psychol*. 2023.
16. Davis TM, Settles IH, Jones MK. Standpoints and situatedness: examining the perception of benevolent sexism in Black and white undergraduate women and men. *Psychol Women Q*. 2022;46(1):8-26.
17. Jiggins J, Samanta R, Olawoye JE. Improving women farmers' access to extension services. In: Swanson B, RP Bentz, and AJ Sofranko (eds) *Improving Agricultural Extension: A Reference Manual*, Chapter 9. 1997.
18. Fabiyi E, Danladi B, Akande K, Mahmood Y. Role of women in agricultural development and their constraints: a case study of Biliri Local Government Area, Gombe State, Nigeria. 2007.
19. Karaşar B, Canlı D. Psychological resilience and depression during the COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey. *Psychiatr Danub*. 2020;32(2):273-279.
20. Kabeer N. Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. *Dev change*. 1999;30(3):435-464.
21. Chant S, Pedwell C. Women, gender and the informal economy: An assessment of ILO research and suggested ways forward. 2008.