SOCIAL MARKETING AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: IMPACT OF SOCIAL WELFARE PROGRAMS ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND ECONOMIC WELLBEING

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is crucial for a society to have a knowledge-based society wherein the personal growth of women will decisively contribute to individual families, thereby contributing to the community and the country as a whole. Social Marketing is a rising trend and a powerful channel for discussing women's empowerment. This study attempts to examine the impact of the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) on women's empowerment in Pakistan. BISP is one of the rigorous social welfare programs initiated by the government of Pakistan. The program was introduced to empower economically deprived women. It targets the provision of social security, improvement in living standards, and poverty reduction. A sample of 300 respondents was utilized from Khairpur, Pakistan, to gather the data. The study carried out quantitative techniques to measure the impact of BISP on women's empowerment, thus, for this, regression analysis was conducted, and the association between the variables was explained through Pearson correlation. Furthermore, the questionnaire was designed and distributed among BISP beneficiaries to understand its effect. Hypotheses were tested and validated through statistical analysis. The study's findings recommend a positive and significant impact of BISP on women's empowerment and have a strong correlation with women's empowerment. The study revealed that the BISP program contributed to 35% of living standards, 29% of poverty alleviation strategy and 24% of social security. In this regard, it is ensured that the government of Pakistan may take more similarly effective initiatives to empower women and should also introduce non-gender discriminatory programs to empower communities at large.

Keywords: Benazir Income Support Program (BISP); Living Standards; Poverty Alleviation Strategy; Social Security; Social Welfare; Women Empowerment; Social Marketing.

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INTRODUCTION

Social marketing provides a platform to advocate women's voices, which have been restricted and contained for generations, especially in rural communities in developing economies. Not only women, but social media also brings people together and make their voice heard. Women, especially in developing countries, are not empowered in most fields. In most cases, they are dependent on the male members of their family; however, in recent times, with access to technology and through education, society's attitude towards women is changing. Social protection is concerned with preventing, managing, and overcoming situations that adversely affect people's wellbeing. There are many social protection programs instigated by the Government of Pakistan to target different socio-economic issues and cater to varying strata of the economy. BISP is one such program that focuses explicitly on women's economic empowerment in Pakistan. BISP was launched in 2008 by the Government of Pakistan (GOP) as a basic social security scheme. It is Pakistan's most extensive and highly planned social security activity. The speed and fairness of the project in 2008 aimed to eliminate the adverse effects of food insecurities and emergencies on the poor. Still, its long-term goal was to provide a basic income package to the poor and ensure the poor and weak were maintained and given short-term access to basic necessities as a counterproductive strategy. The Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) was announced as the country's compulsory social insurance scheme in 2008 and the most prominent social security scheme in South Asia (Ahmad et al., 2021).

The project has two essential milestones. The first is improving the financial boundaries of the poor women, and the second is establishing and managing a comprehensive system that focuses on the poor women and completing the general low wages needs. The plan is to empower women in the emerging economies in countries like Pakistan, and its establishment can ensure the social security of its people, especially women (Nayab & Farooq, 2014). Although it provides an opportunity to solve its problems and use its potential, it equalizes gender power and freedom of choice (Cheema et al., 2016). BISP is an unconditional scheme for women that impact women's economic and social life. The investment in the project is huge, but to analyze the impact of the plan, the results and outcomes are not yet known. This study thus has been designed to identify the impact of BISP on women's empowerment.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this study is to know the impact of BISP on women's empowerment. Specific objectives are given below:

• To determine the impact of the living standard on women's empowerment.
• To explain the relationship between Social Security and women empowerment.
• To measure the impact of the poverty alleviation strategy on Women empowerment

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

The Pakistani government launched the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) - in July 2008 as one of Pakistan's leading safety net activities. The BISP was initially formed when food prices rose sharply in the country. In 2008, food, grain, and fuel prices reached their highest levels, surpassing a thirty-year record. (Pasha, Shah, & Rahpoto, 2018). The global economic downturn in 2009 already damaged the wellbeing of vulnerable families. Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) is an immovable unconditional program in Pakistan. Its implementation is focused on poor women, and its explicit goal is to smooth economic consumption and reduce the adverse effects of slow economic growth.

According to World Bank (2015) data, the social safety net programs help reduce the global poverty gap by 15%. In this context, the main objective of the scheme is to provide affordable consumption to poor households and provide them with a buffer to cope with the negative economic shocks, including the global financial crisis and rising food prices (Amrin & Ashfaq, 2020). Its long-term goals include achieving specific objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to eliminate extreme and chronic poverty and empower women.

**Poverty Alleviation Strategies**

Poverty alleviation strategies can be divided into four categories: community-based microfinance, capacity-based and market-based social security, and good governance (Iqbal & Akhtar, 2015). In this regard, BISP was employed as a strategy to cover many social issues in society. However, women's empowerment was one of the core objectives of this program. The purpose of financing women through this program was to help the poor and eliminate poverty through this strategy.

**Tools to Improve Quality of Life**

Women are an essential part of every economy. Only when women are considered partners in equal development as men can the country's comprehensive and harmonious development be possible (Malik, Kiran, & Alam, 2013). However, women's social and economic status is low in most developing countries. The effective empowerment of women is essential for using women's labor in the mainstream economic development in these countries. For any society to achieve a high level of social development, it is vital that the women enjoy a better position in education, health, employment, family, community, national and civil society, and decision-making (Panda, 2000).
To protect the citizens in a society, a country is obligated by international and national legal instruments. As far as Pakistan is concerned, Article 38 of the Constitution generally calls for various measures to improve its citizens’ economic and social status. These include access to food, clothing, shelter, education, and medical care (Naseer, Hu, Yaseen, & Tariq, 2021). The state needs to maintain fairness in providing the above services to ensure that people of different genders enjoy equal economic growth.

**Women’s Status in Pakistan**

Due to the imbalanced social and economic structure and the influence of tribal and feudal social systems, women's lives vary greatly based on class, regional and urban-rural differences. Overall, women's rights in Pakistan are improving, and more Pakistani women are getting education and literacy (Bengali, 2019). Religious groups and civil society continue to condemn violence against women. The All-Pakistan Ulema Committee (Pakistan's largest religious clergy group) has issued a fatwa banning honor killings. The court responded to calls from women's rights advocates across the country and imposed harsh sentences for violent crimes against women.

**Women Empowerment**

Pakistan ranks second in the world regarding gender equality and holds the 148th position out of 149 countries. The country ranks 146th in terms of economic participation and opportunities and 97th in terms of political empowerment. To improve women's empowerment in Pakistan, international human rights organizations are working with Pakistani women. The United Nations Development Program and the United Nations Women are taking steps to support greater political and economic equality.

Men and women are an important part of any society, but in a male-dominated society, the female population is backward in society. If men and women are born equal, the phenomena of women's empowerment show that they are first deprived of power, and again, they are encouraged to have some power for the betterment of the family or society. Women's empowerment often belongs to men. Men's status is a measure of how much women need to be empowered (Jalal, 2017). On the other hand, women's empowerment is also seen as a threat to men's sovereignty, but it needs to be made clear that women's empowerment does not mean depriving men of power; they are at the same time. Such empowerment is not limited to the physical or material aspects of life but also reflects their intellectual and emotional development. This relationship is necessarily mutual (Ahmad et al., 2021). For example, suppose a woman wants to participate financially freely and actively in social activities. In that case, she must first increase her self-confidence and self-esteem and then raise her self-esteem and dignity in society. It affects the people around you. It needs to be
understood that it can only be created to strengthen the physical body (Waqas & Awan, 2018). There are seven components to women's empowerment: awareness of their rights, improving living standards, equal access to productive resources, providing them and their children with better medical care, and higher education to strengthen the economic and commercial sectors.

**BISP and Women Empowerment:** "Gender equality and women's empowerment are not privileges but a condition of sustainable economic development." The word authority comes from the word "power," which was explained as "the ability to choose" (Kabeer, 2005). Gender economic equality requires an equal attitude. More social security measures to improve the status of women and prevent them from danger is a prerequisite for any social change. Education, economics, culture, politics, or governance these measures are a catalyst for challenging broad and deep-rooted gender prejudices in social institutions. The social security program is an important tool for enhancing women's economic, social, and decision-making capacity and the family and society.

One of the programs to improve Pakistani women's economic and social status is the (BISP). It is the largest social security program and the most extensive program in South Asia. It was started in 2008 by the Pakistani government. The scheme targets women who have an unconditional cash transfer of Rs.500. 1000 every month. For a family with a monthly living cost of Rs. 5,000, this amount is equivalent to a 20% increase (Iqbal & Akhtar, 2015).

**Chronology of Program:** The main goal was to reduce the impact of inflation on the poor. According to the Finance Ministry, the BISP ensured assistance of Rs. 500,000. The national population increased from 122 billion in 2012 to over 4 million (Nayab & Farooq, 2014). The national plan is implemented in the entire Pakistan.

Cash delivery was made for door-to-door delivery at the beginning of the program. Later, new systems were placed to ensure fast, transparent, and secure access to cash (Saeed et al., 2020). Introducing technology-based cash transfer methods include Benazir Debit Card (like ATM card usage). Mobile phones and SIM cards are distributed to the poor (Nayab & Farooq, 2014).

The BISP has proposed a two-pronged strategy to combat discrimination that defames women. There are social and economic consequences of cash transfers. According to the 2016 BISP Impact Assessment Report by Oxford Policy Management (OPM), transfer payments provide financial support and strengthen the status of women in their communities (Memon, 2017a).

**Political Participation:** Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) is required for cash transfers. From 2011 to 2013, there was a significant increase in female CNIC cardholders Ambler.
& Brauw, 2017). Even the World Bank report of 2015 endorsed a bulk change in the registration of women CNIC. In addition, it is said that women are now actively participating in political aspects and want to show their legitimate power, especially in backward areas.

Ullah et al. (2015) found that this increasing number of CNIC ensures women to vote, and it is significantly increased. This is real awareness to be the part of political participation. It was also seen that in 2016 the number of voters increased by 70%, which was just 40% in 2011 (Cheema et al., 2016). Due to the BISP support and various included programs increased the literacy rate in women up to 9%, whereas 8% have completed their primary education. It was also ensured through Waseela Taleem that there was a significant change in enrollment of children, and almost 1.3 million students were enrolled, and among them, 49% were girls (Wasif, 2017).

**Change Platform:** Under this scheme, 55000 beneficiary committees were formed in 32 sectors (Memon, 2017b). These committees are forums to discuss and debate important issues such as nutrition, education, family planning, literacy, and women's empowerment. This platform forms the basis of new initiatives.

**Sovereign Economic Decisions:** Financially, the beneficiary women are more independent in spending, and 76% of the beneficiaries showed more decisiveness. This change has changed the mindset of men, who see women as important members of the family who can make critical decisions.

**Enterprise and Economic Reform:** As more and more women participate in small-scale money-making activities such as sewing, there seems to be less purposeful work.

**Poverty Reduction:** A study conducted by OPM shows that BISP positively affects the poor. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) dropped from 31% to 23% in 2016 (Wasif, 2017). The MPI considers a few non-essential needs, including health and education.

**RESEARCH MODEL**

![BISP Model](image)
RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

H1: The rising living standard has a significant and positive impact on women's empowerment.

H2: Social security for women has a significant and positive impact on women's empowerment.

H3: The poverty alleviation strategy has a significant and positive impact on women's empowerment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The quantitative research techniques were applied in the study to examine the impact of BISP on women's empowerment. The questionnaire comprised 24 questions, and it was borrowed from the BISP office in Khairpur. Only minor changes were made to it. The sample was taken through Krejcie and Morgan's table. This study was conducted among the women beneficiaries of BISP in district Khairpur. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed among the respondents, and 300 were returned. Data was entered in SPSS version 25. First, the frequency distribution was conducted of the demographic data, later; data consistency was checked through Cronbach Alpha. Finally, regression analysis and Pearson Correlation were applied to compare the difference and measure the association between the variables.

RESULTS

Frequency Distributions

Table 1. illustrates the demographics of beneficiaries of BISP. Unquestionably data was collected only from women. In this connection, mostly women aged 41 to 50 years old, a majority were widows, and only 134 were married out of 300 respondents. It was also seen that 253 out of 300 lived in a nuclear family, and most of the women had 1-3 children (163 out of 300); further, 277 were illiterate. It was also measured that 221 women had income less than Rs, 10000 and 81 respondents had income between Rs, 11,000 to Rs, 30,000.

Table 1. Respondents’ Demographic Profile

| Items            | Option | Frequency | 100 % |
|------------------|--------|-----------|-------|
| Age              | 20-30  | 34        |       |
|                  | 31-40  | 98        |       |
|                  | 41-50  | 159       |       |
|                  | Above 50 | 9        |       |
| Marital Status   | Option | Frequency | 100%  |
|                  | Widow  | 27        |       |
|                  | Married| 273       |       |
| Head of Family   | Option | Frequency | 100%  |
|                  | Self   | 211       |       |
|                  | Husband/other | 89   |       |
**Table 2. Reliability Test**

| S. No. | Name of Variable                  | Number of Items | Reliability score |
|--------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1.     | Living Standard                   | 05              | .75               |
| 2.     | Social Security                   | 05              | .73               |
| 3      | Poverty Alleviation Strategy      | 05              | .80               |
| 4.     | Women Empowerment                 | 09              | .79               |

**Table 3. Correlation Analysis**

| Living Standard | Social Security | Poverty Eradication | Women Empowerment |
|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1               |                 |                     |                   |
| Social Security | .747**          | 1                   |                   |
| Poverty Alleviation Strategy | .760** | .767** | 1 |
| Women Empowerment | .768** | .767** | .747** | 1 |

Table 2 represents the thickness of data responsiveness taken from the study respondents. Cronbach alpha was used to access the reliability. Reliability is established if its result is (greater than) >7, so the four variables of this study, living standard, social security, poverty eradication and women empowerment, have the reliability of 0.77, 0.73, 0.80 and 0.79, respectively, as shown in the table below and hence validate the reliability of the data.

Table 3 represents the association between variables and is labelled as Pearson Correlation. The results of all variables living standard, social security, poverty eradication and women empowerment lie between the range of 0-1 and are thus confirm strong association with one another; hence it is validated that the BISP is directly associated with women empowerment. In
addition, hypothesis 3 (H3) is accepted because of the association between social security and women's empowerment.

**Regression Analysis**

**Table 4. Model Summary**

| Model | R       | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1     | .760a   | .714     | .708              | .669                        |

*a. Predictors: (Constant), Living Standard, Social Security, Poverty Alleviation Strategy*

Source: Study Analysis

Table 4. represents the variance between independent and dependent variables. The findings appear significant at the value of .05 according to the cutoff value, and values (greater than ) >.05 are considered significant. Thus, based on the results, the variables, living standard, social security, poverty alleviation strategy and women empowerment have significant variance.

**Table 5. ANOVA**

| Model         | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F       | Sig.  |
|---------------|----------------|----|-------------|---------|-------|
| Regression    | 46.109         | 1  | 23.055      | 51.471  | .000b |
| Residual      | 100.781        | 299| .448        |         |       |
| Total         | 146.890        | 300|             |         |       |

*a. Dependent Variable: women empowerment*

*b. Predictors: (Constant), Living Standard, Social Security, Poverty Alleviation Strategy*

The ANOVA table (5) shows the model's fitness, which signifies the model's fitness as the P-value is less than .05.

**Table 6. Coefficients**

| Model                   | Unstandardized Coefficients | Standardized Coefficients | t    | Sig.  |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|------|-------|
| (Constant)              |                            |                           |      |       |
|                         | B                          | Std. Error                | Beta |       |
| Living Standard         | .268                       | .043                      | .390 | 6.226 | .000  |
| Social Security         | .283                       | .068                      | .259 | 4.144 | .000  |
| Poverty alleviation strategy | .278                   | .070                      | .351 | 4.312 | .000  |

*a. Dependent Variable: Women Empowerment*

Source: Study Analysis

Table 6. demonstrates that living standard predicts 39% of women empowerment, social security contributes to 25.90%, and poverty alleviation strategy contributes to 35.10% of women empowerment through BISP, as shown in the beta column. Thus, H1 and H2 are supported here from these results.
Table 7. Hypotheses

| Hypothesis | Statement                                                                 | Status  |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| H1         | Rising living standards have a significant and positive impact on women's empowerment. | Accepted |
| H2         | Social security for women has a significant and positive impact on women's empowerment. | Accepted |
| H3         | The poverty alleviation strategy has a significant and positive impact on women's empowerment. | Accepted |

CONCLUSION

This study focused on the findings related to effectiveness of the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP). BISP is one of the leading programs in Pakistan. It is a multifaceted program started by the government. It aims improving living standards, social security, poverty alleviation and women empowerment. This study found that BISP ensures the living standard of women and women empowerment; it supports women in facing social challenges such as inflation, food shortage, poor health, education, and poverty (Memon, 2017a). This study found that the study variables living standard, social security, and poverty eradication are major focus areas of BISP that emphasize on empower women and are strongly associated with each other (Saleem, 2019). This study validated through quantitative analyses that the contribution of living standards, social security, and poverty alleviation strategy in women empowerment covers 39%, 25.9% and 35.1% (Wasif, 2017). Through various initiatives, BISP has successfully tackled the extreme poverty poor women face in Pakistan. The program’s measures have translated domestic violence and subjugation into autonomy, trade, mobility, education, family savings, nutrition, health, and political participation. It is the most extensive social security program in Pakistan to empower women as well as society (World Bank, 2015).

The results indicate that statistically, living standards, social security and poverty alleviation strategy have strong, positive, and significant influence on women empowerment in Pakistan. Therefore, it can be concluded that this program has an overall positive effect on poverty reduction, which further leads to women's empowerment. The program has made noteworthy progress in improving women's lives, especially in rural Sindh. More than half of the population of Pakistan is women, and their participation and empowerment have increased recently. Due to the BISP program country is experiencing a significant change in the society. Women's empowerment refers to decision-making power in the social, economic, and political spheres. Hence, the success of BISP is evident from the fact that the number of female students’ enrollment has increased in rural schools.
RECOMMENDATIONS

- The BISP opportunity should be provided to more women in rural areas for women empowerment.
- The government of Pakistan should encourage such programs to empower women and expand the area of these programs.
- Government and organizations are engaged in the policy-making process to participate in designing more Poverty Alleviation Strategies.
- Government should provide micro-financing loans facility to the women so that they feel empowered. It will allow them to feel socially secure because the entire burden of poverty affects women because they take responsibility for taking care of children.
- If we have to improve the living standard of life, then there is a need to empower women. Poverty seems a never-ending process, so there is a need to work on it continuously. Programs like BISP as well as Ehsaas should be encouraged, and more aspects of human life may be covered in these programs.

LIMITATIONS

This study investigated the impact of BISP on women's empowerment in Khairpur. In contrast, it was a quantitative & cross-sectional study on a limited sample size of 300 women who only belonged to district Khairpur, Pakistan.
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