The Influence of Cultural Barriers and Media Representation on Women's Empowerment in Pakistan; Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

The present Study investigates how media representations and cultural barriers impact women's empowerment in Pakistan With a focus on the possibilities and challenges that women face in a multicultural society. The liberation of women has always been hampered by Pakistani cultural customs. However, by drawing attention to the problem and highlighting strong, independent women in Pakistani Dramas and entertainment programs, the media—particularly electronic media—has played a critical role in dismantling these obstacles. Researcher analyzed two mainstream Pakistani Dramas in order to find-out the Influence of Cultural Barriers and Media Representation on Women's Empowerment. Given that women comprise half of the population and are vital to a country's growth, the research emphasizes how important it is that they have more authority. Positive media depiction encourages women's empowerment, according to survey data and an examination of a few shows

Keywords: *: Pakistani Dramas, women representation, Cultural Barriers, Media*

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INTRODUCTION:

Women's Empowerment means to promote women's in every aspect of life with freedom and liberty. The empowerment defines the power of authority to make any decision at one's own will do to something (Akhater & Naheed, 2014). Cultural Barriers influence women's empowerment all across the world, especially in Pakistan. In Pakistan, there are various culture that limits the freedom of education, freedom of expression freedom of rights so on. There is media representation of women's empowerment provides certain opportunities along with challenges that affect Women's living in Pakistani society. Media plays a significant role in freedom of expression, is a suitable channel to express public reviews and can successfully demonstrate the women empowerment and gives the reason behind the influence of cultural Barriers, challenges and opportunities.

Conceptualizing the meaning of Women Empowerment

The United Nations Population fund describe women rights World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 1993, "The full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life, at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex are priority objectives of the international community" (UNFPA: World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 1993). The cultural barriers and media representation influences the participation of women in decision making as mentioned in the above definition need participation in every decision-making process civil, economic, cultural, and societal.

Historical Background:

In Western Countries, Women Empowerment is the result of different movements for the rights of women in history. This movement tends to be split into three waves, the first beginning in the 19th and early 20th century where suffrage was key feature. The second wave of 1960s included the sexual revolution and the role of women in society. Third wave feminism is often seen as beginning in 1990s (world Vision). Women are also having rights to liberty but in history there are certain barriers which doesn't allow the right to express, they are being suppressed by man all around the world. In ancient times, women are treated as an object, subordinate to men suppress by patriarchal society and culture. The movements for empowerment of women in developed nations give liberty and freedom to the women in Britian, USA and other developed Nations. The States in Gulf region and developing states of third world nations started struggle of empowerment in late 20s. There are several cultural barriers which third world countries influences the empowerment of the women.

Current situation in world:

The influence of cultural barriers reduced to very less extent in the developed nations that women's do necessary efforts in nation building and their electronic, print & social media promote the positive image. The states in Gulf region, the third

world countries having several cultural barriers, there electronic & social media is not yet matured. Cultural and religious barriers still influence on the decision-making participation of the women's and still patriarchy dominates. In Physcologs magazine of how media Influences Women's empowerment, "David Gauntlett's argument in his work titled "Media Gender and Identity," since the 1970s, there has been a decrease in stereotyped depictions of women in the media and an increase in the diversity of these representations. This trend likely reflects broader societal shifts" (physcologos 2024). (Naheed, 2014)

In Pakistan:

In Pakistan there are different cultural barriers which suppressed the women's. Pakistani society is male dominated society having different cultures which influence and suppressed the female gender to move outside, participate in decision-making, and even freedom of education. Several cultures across different regions of Pakistan doesn't give liberty of Education right to women. Pakistani Media played vital role in empowering women's.

Rationale of the study:

There are women empowerment in rest of the world but after different movements and struggle there are certain barriers in Pakistani society that culture of Pakistan imposed different restrictions on the decision-making participation of women. In Pakistan, Media play important role but that work is not enough to represent or unable to develop rationale of the society. In Pakistan, Electronic media especially the drama industry also showed the women in suppressed role.

Statement of Problem:

Women are half of the population the world and also in Pakistan half population is female population. If half population of the world is not participated than there is no development across the world. Women face a wide range of problems in Pakistan, from poverty, illiteracy, diseases, malnutrition, and insecurity to gender discrimination, female infanticide and lack of participation in law or decision-making (Kakar, Tobwal, Bareach, Sultan (2016)). Across the Pakistani society different areas like in Sindh, KPK, FATA, Balochistan, South Punjab region (Ahmad & Bhatti (2023)). Media influence the rationale of the society, the work is not effective, suppressed role of women showed in the Pakistani dramas. The problem of women empowerment challenges remain same as far as different regions of Pakistan is concerned influence of media is somehow effective but less and no more effectiveness on average basis. This study helps to develop new ideas in empowerment of women in Pakistan and the influence of the role of media and cultural barriers towards women empowerment as far as Pakistani society is concerned.

Objectives of Study:

To analyze the influence of Media on the attitudes of Pakistan's society towards women empowerment and what are the challenges and opportunities regarding to the women empowerment.

To analyze both genders views on cultural barriers towards Women's empowerment.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Ahmad & Bhatti (2023) conducted research to analyze the laws and regulations in Pakistan according to women's rights or women empowerment. The study of researcher focused on women rights by international perspective. The data collected in this research is secondary data by examing different laws, regulations and constitution of Pakistan. This is also comprehending the women rights from ancient times to present. The research also illustrates the concept of right with the support of crux of various definitions of Jurists. This study also examines the historical perspective of women rights, Islamic perspective on women rights, & comparative analysis of women's rights in Islam versus west. The writer discussed about the situational analysis and cultural resistance of South Punjab, FATA, KPK, Balochistan region to provide the status of women rights.

Naeem, Ashar & Tajdar (2021) conducted research on role of electronic media in factors affecting the women empowerment in Pakistan; A case study of Lahore. The writer give the detailed concept of empowerment, by further explanation women empowerment can be explained in terms static & dynamic. This study explained that gender is one of the structuring concept of Pakistan develop through the ideology of sexual divsion of work which created artificial divsion. The writer in this research claim that the empowerment process of women needed the inner voice development. The study focused on the role of media globally and portrayal of women in Pakistani dramas are mentioned. The writer set the objectives of this study to identify the role of dramas depriving participation of women. The study conducted survey research, proved mostly in Pakistani dramas women are suppressed by males.

He, Firdaus, Gong, Dahrejo & Aksar (2024) the exploration of how the social media impact women's psychological well-being in the patriarchal structure? The moderating effect of social capital despite technological, political & economic progress Pakistani society is still a patriarchal society & cultural barrier suppressed the rights of women socialization. In this study writer mentioned that whether offline or online is concerned environment is same; women's are suppressed. The study context claim that there is gender digital gap of 78% males & 27% females. The research grounded in three theoretical frameworks, the studies in the developed part of the world has positive and nations like Pakistan has negative impacts. The results of the study are positive that social media help in developing women a freedom to reduce patriarchal dominance, but the research conducted on educated women or social media users.

S. Hussain (2021) this study investigating the influence of TV morning shows on women's empowerment. After the emergence of social media importance of electronic media remained same. The study uses the mixed method approach by claiming that the visual effects of electronic media affecting directly the lives of women's. in electronic media, TV shows proved to be the silent revolution in empowering women of Pakistan. The study gives the quantitative data women financial assistance must be in her custody, decision making & self-esteemed. Women's watching TV morning shows, their interest in empowerment related content showed positive impact but it was statically not significant.

Mahmoud Al Samman, Khalifa & Abdelsaheb (2021) conducted research on societal & cultural barriers impact on women contribution in the private service sector, even though most of the advancement regarding women empowerment but challenges are down the road. This study constitute the study variable which represent the cultural barrier & societal challenges & other one is dependent variable, which is women contributed to the private labor market. This study mentioned adult women in the labor market represent 55% globally while in average 40% wage gap & 50% income gap. The research conducted on the using of random sampling in Bahrain. We may work on enhancing the society's perspective towards the working woman which could be reflected on widening the horizon of the society's stance concerning women assuming leadership positions in the private sector concluded this study.

Theoretical Framework:

Cultivation Theory:

Cultivation theory of cultivation analysis focuses in the effects of long-term television viewing on an individual perspective world around them. In this study cultivation theory is used in framing and analyzing the research.

Cultural Theory:

Cultural theory seeks to define heuristic concepts of culture. Culture theory is the branch of anthropology and is used in social sciences and communication to represent or analyze different cultures. This study used this framework to determine the influence of cultural barriers towards women empowerment and role of media.

Research Questions:

What challenges and opportunities towards the women empowerment along with the cultural barriers and influence of media?

What role both the gender played to reduce the challenges of cultural barriers in media or within the society?

Research Methodology:

The researcher used the Mixed Method approach is an approach in which more than one method have been used to get the results of the research. For the first portion of the topic the influence of cultural barriers and media representation of women empowerment in Pakistan; challenges and opportunities, the influence of cultural barriers on women empowerment; Challenges and opportunities survey has been conducted to get the findings of the research. For the second portion of researcher topic the influence of cultural barriers and media representation of women empowerment in Pakistan; challenges and opportunities which is media representation of women empowerment in Pakistan; challenges and opportunities thematic analysis of Pakistani dramas.

Population
A population is the set of subjects, people, objects, units on which the research topic fall, and are under the consideration of your research study, it refers to the audience which is the requirement of the research study or the desired audience. The population may be human, group of peoples and non-human are the subjects or the data is in the form of books the research whose methodology is different population of researcher would be different.

For the first portion of the topic the influence of cultural barriers and media representation of women empowerment in Pakistan; challenges and opportunities, the influence of cultural barriers on women empowerment; Challenges and opportunities survey has been conducted to get the findings of the research. The students of Khawaja Fareed University selected as a population for survey research. For the second portion of researcher topic the influence of cultural barriers and media representation of women empowerment in Pakistan; challenges and opportunities which is media representation of women empowerment in Pakistan; challenges and opportunities thematic analysis of Pakistani dramas. All the Pakistani dramas would be the population of researcher.

Sample:

Sample is technique in which small portion of the whole population has been taken and the result of these small portion would be applied to the whole population.
The researcher selected 82 respondents in order to conduct survey and applied technique of simple random sampling.

The researcher selected two Pakistani dramas as a sample by applying purposive sampling technique:

•   Sare Rah
•   Razia

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Thematic Analysis:

Operational Definitions:

Positive portrayal of Women Empowerment:

Any scene which supports women empowerment or women shown to choose live independently without any financial and so-called male dominating society pressure.

Negative portrayal of Women Empowerment:

Any scene which is against women empowerment or the women shown to live under the society pressure or forced other women to live under the suppression of society pressure.

Neutral portrayal of Women Empowerment:

Any scene which does not fall in the category of positive or negative portrayal of women empowerment.

Scene 1.1 from Sare Rah in which main lead character decided to choose a male oriented profession. After surgery of his father unable to do hard work to meet the financial needs of his family. The character Rania decides to drive is father's taxi to fulfill the financial needs of her family. This scene falls under the category of positive portrayal of Women Empowerment.

The scene 1.2 from Sare Rah in which a passenger sits in the taxi of Rania give her a lesson that this society is full of men, the women like you cannot be tolerated in this society but you still do your job with confidence. He said to her that always talk to the passengers looking in two their eyes without losing her confidence. This scene portrays positive effect of Women Empowerment.

The scene 1.3 from Sare Rah in which lead character of the drama cancelled her engagement with his cousin because his mother demanded dowry and asked to left taxi driving. But he takes stand for her life and cancelled the engagement. This scene falls under the category of positive portrayal of Women Empowerment.

The scene 1.4 from Sare Rah in which character decides to do her job. She is a professional doctor but her mother-in-law do not allow her to do job, she succeeded in convincing her spouse to do her job. This scene falls under the category of positive portrayal of Women Empowerment.

The scene 1.5 from Sare Rah in which the female character doing job, take stand against work hours harassment which she is facing in doing her job. She exposed the person to the client and her boss when he tried to get her sympathy to approach her by exposing that person who harassed her already by exaggerating her work, and questioning her capabilities. This scene portray under the positive category of women empowerment.

The scene 1.6 from Sare Rah in which character decided to take her property right from her father and asked him to forgive her who got angry after her fake video leaks. After his father forgives her she showed the confession video and said I received this four days ago but I don't want that my family forgive me after watching this. This scene falls under the category of positive portrayal of Women Empowerment.

The Scene 1.7 from Razia in which the narrator of the story in fare going to start its story, a person start hoarding on her which she managed with confidence and start her story with the same potential. This scene support strong women empowerment.

This scene 1.8 in which she continued her studies without giving the consent of her family with the support of her friend. She studied hiddenly at the roof of the house and keeps her books outside the range of their family members. This scene falls under the category of positive portrayal of Women Empowerment.

The Scene 1.9 from Razia in which Razia give birth to a baby girl make her feel special and her expressions full of happiness and courage. At that time she decided to take stand for her daughter. This scene falls under the category of positive portrayal of Women Empowerment.

The scene 1.10 from Razia in which Razia is smiling the leading character of the drama while his husband divorced her because she gave to baby child. She slaps on his face and move out with confidence with full of potential in that society in which divorced women is considered as worthless. The scene describes the positive image of women empowerment fall under positive portrayal.

The scene 1.11 from Razia in which the character talk to her daughter to give her new bicycle. The scene shows the support of a mother towards her daughter in order to build her confident and independent in near future. This scene falls under the category of positive portrayal of Women Empowerment.

The scene 2.1 from Sare Rah in which character of mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law job and always blaming her for not having child and tell her that her work is only limited to the family. She cannot move outside to do work, and she does not give her permission to move outside. This scene falls under the category of negative portrayal of Women Empowerment.

The scene 2.2 from Sare Rah in which an old passenger said to the character which is taxi driver that in this era when women work outside choosing male dominating profession is unethical. This scene falls under the category of negative portrayal of Women Empowerment.

The Scene 2.3 from Razia in which character Razia's father celebrate the birth of child because the child is male. The women(wife) will be awarded with honor after getting birth to male child only. This is the harsh reality of our society as mentioned in this drama that how they celebrate their male children birth with happiness but are worried on women's birth. This scene falls under the category of negative portrayal of Women Empowerment.
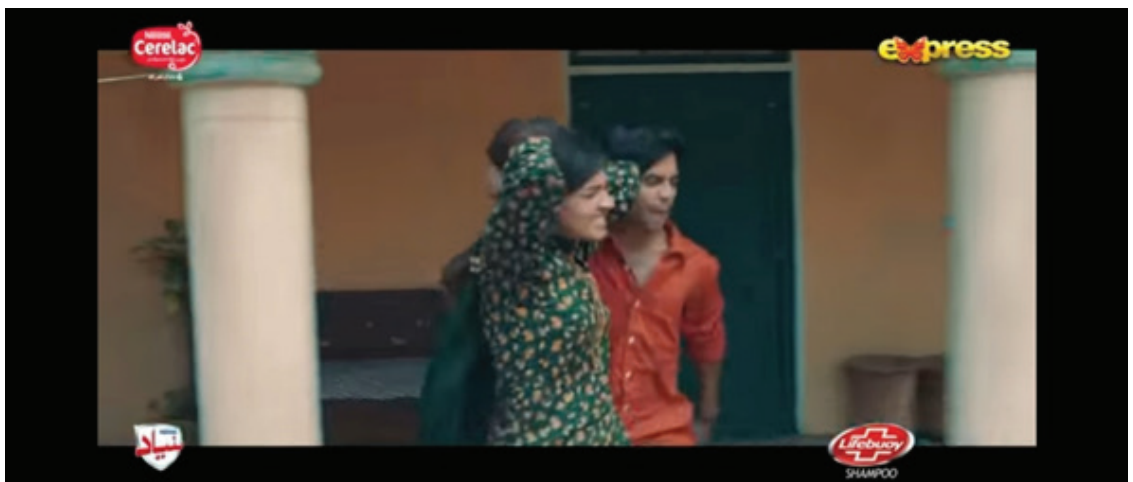
The scene 2.4 in which Razia is beaten by his brother because he seemed her talk to her male friend who supports her is getting further education. The father and brother decide to murder her by showing accidental death due to the only reason that she seen to talk with her friend. This scene portray negative image fall under the negative portrayal.

The scene 2.5 in which the group of people are shown who decides to married Razia with the brother of that sister to whom Razi's brother got harassed. This scene falls under the category of negative portrayal of Women Empowerment.
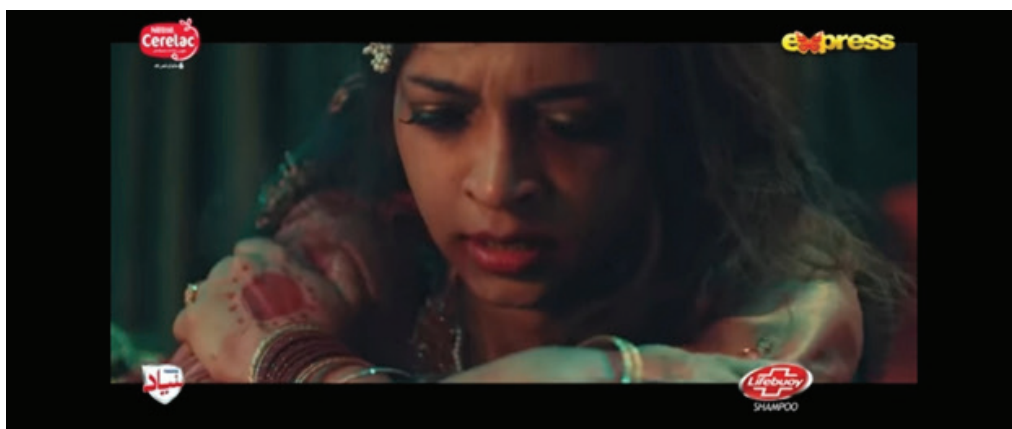
The scene 2.6 in which Razia's husband beat her with belt at her first wedding night. She just keeps silencing and not tried to be resistant and bear the torture without making any sound. This scene falls under the category of negative portrayal of Women Empowerment.

The scene 3.1 from Sare Rah in which Sunita Marshal playing character of doctor decided left her spouse house to raise a child which she adopted in hospital when they refused to raise someone else child. She takes decision own her own to raise a child own her own. This scene fall under neutral portrayal.

The scene 3.2 from Sare Rah in which Saboor Ali take decision own her own with the help of her mother and aunt to marry her fiancée because her family's men are not agreed to move her out. She lost the trust of her family's men when there is a fake video leak of her dancing with men's. but she takes to move out from her house and married to fulfill her dreams. This scene fall under neutral portrayal.
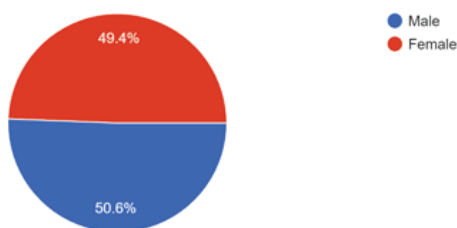
This Scene 3.3 from drama serial Razia in which she got position in matriculation exams and she is very happy. But she knows she is unable to continued her study, her instead of supporting her to complete her higher studies, she convinced her to accept the reality. This scene fall under neutral portrayal.

Survey Results:

Fg:1

In Fig 2:. Eighty-three responses have been collected which are divided between both male and female, 49.4% have been collected from females and 50.6% responses collected from male. Both the populations are equally important in the research the influence of cultural barriers and media representation of women empowerment in Pakistan; challenges and opportunities.
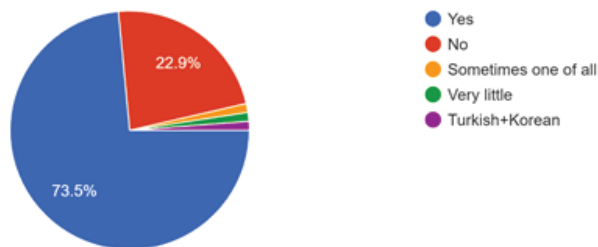
Age
83 responses
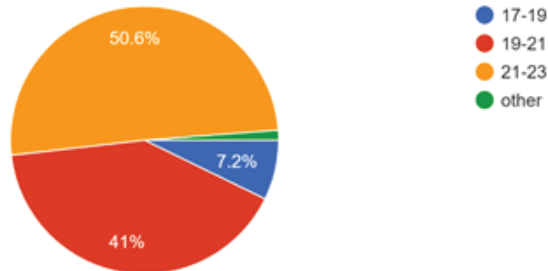
Fg:2
In Fg:2 the sample of the researcher is all above eighteen they are mature enough to answer the important questions regarding the research. Both the male and female respondents are mature to answer on the basis of their knowledge which is necessary to conduct research for the researcher.
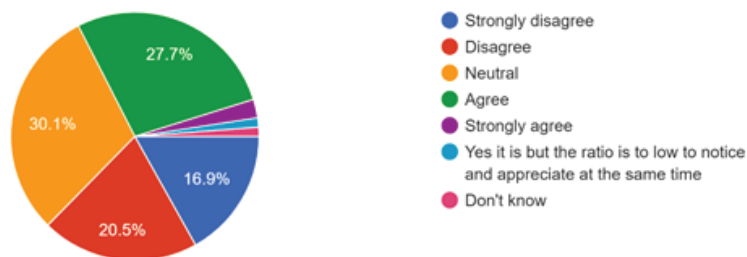
Do you watch Pakistani dramas
83 responses

Fg:3
In Fg:3 73.5% respondents watch Pakistani dramas, that they actively consume their time for getting entertainment from Pakistani dramas. the most of our sample is active user of Pakistani entertainment media watch dramas and obviously after watching it had led some impact on them on their thinking process.

Do you agree that the content shown in Pakistani drama supported Women Empowerment
83 responses

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Yes it is but the ratio is to low to notice and appreciate at the same time
- Don't know

Fg:4
Fg:4 showed that 27.7% agreed that Pakistani drama supported Women Empowerment and there are few respondents who strongly agreed with this. 30.1% respondents are neutral that Pakistani dramas somehow show content support women empowerment. 16.9% respondents disagree that the content shown in Pakistani dramas doesn't support women empowerment.

Do you allow your family females to work outside
83 responses

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
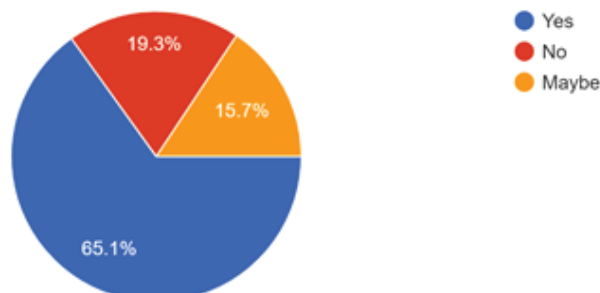
Fg:5
In Fg:5 65.1% respondents allow their females to work outside that our population started motivated towards women empowerment. The figure shown in above figure that very a smaller number of respondents doesn't allow their females to work outside. Overall, it is positive that most of the respondents are agreed to allow their females to work outside.

How much percentage do you think that Pakistani culture influence women empowerment

83 responses
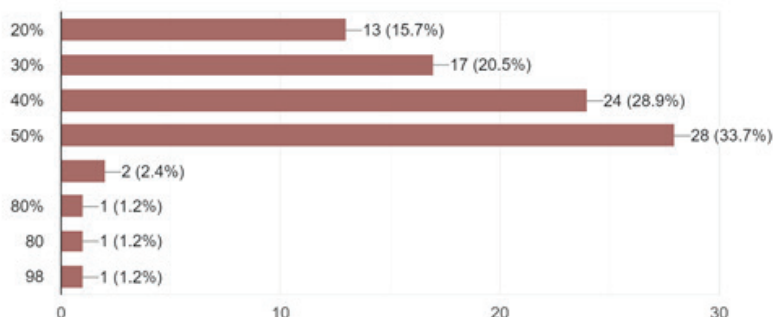
Fg:6

In Fg:6 40-50% respondents agree that Pakistani culture influence women empowerment. Pakistani culture with some superstitious beliefs influence Women Empowerment in Pakistan.

Are you agree that our media take initiative towards women empowerment in Pakistan

83 responses

Fg:7

Fg:7 shows that 45.8% respondents agree that media take initiative towards women empowerment in Pakistan. The numbers are satisfactory that in Pakistani media take initiative towards empowering women in Pakistan. 30.1% respondents give neutral response that our media take initiative towards women empowerment. Overall, responses shows that our media take initiative towards women empowerment in Pakistan.

Do you think the problems being discussed in Pakistani dramas are original problem of society
83 responses
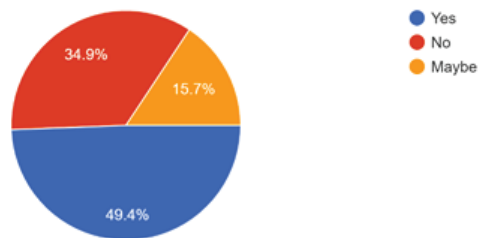
Fg:8

In Fg:8 49.4% respondents think that the problems being discussed in Pakistani dramas are original problem of the society but 34.9% respondents think that the problems being discussed in Pakistani dramas are not the original problems of the society.

At last, there is question in the survey that what is your opinion about the office work harassment. There is some sort of suggestions from some respondents that media should raise awareness about office work harassment that office work harassment can't be tolerated in the society. Some respondent's response is in negative but very less, most of the respondents show positive response that harassment in our offices very less but there is need to remove this at all from its roots with the advent of media or social media by raising the issue and supporting women empowerment.

Discussion:

Pakistani society has diverse culture, cultural barriers influence women empowerment in Pakistan from history to now-a-days. In history cultural practices limited women only to there houses, they do not even have the right to participate in the decision-making process of their family, whole society dominated by the man. After the emergence of media technology, electronic and social media, media campaigns have been done in order to empower women by sometime showing the strong characters of women in Pakistani dramas and exploring the strong ladies all over the state. Women get educated and take part in decision-making process of the state of Pakistan like Benazir Bhutto become Prime Minister and now-a-days Maryam Nawaz doing work as a chief Minister of Punjab. This is new trend in Pakistan that support women empowerment. But there is gap in the thinking process of the society that women are lesser than man in every aspect, women has been harassed in the offices, and the survival of educated women become difficult to some extent. And cultural barriers are also imposed sanctions to women to get higher education, most of the women population do not do jobs after being graduated in Pakistan.

The culture is a barrier but the role of media help to reduce these barriers by raising awareness and showing content in entertainment media in the favor of Pakistani society females. But these campaigns are not enough as the researcher survey shows that the gap is present which can't be neglected at that time.

Conclusion:

Pakistan is a diverse cultural society almost all the cultures in Pakistan proved as a hurdle in empowering women but media awareness reduced the ration of barriers towards the women empowerment. Pakistani electronic media played their crucial role in empowering the women by raising awareness and by showing characters by the Pakistani entertainment media in order to motivate women. Women empowerment is necessary in the state of Pakistan or all over the world that world comprises half of the population is female which played a vital role in the process to maintain and formation of nation building. In Pakistani dramas content shown are mostly the positive content support women empowerment it has been proved through the survey result by the researcher as well. Women empowerment necessary for the development of the state as a whole complete state status.

Suggestion for future researcher.

The researcher suggests the future researcher to analyze the thematic analysis of content shown by the entertainment media with the Lense of women empowerment. They will conduct their research in the news sector of electronic media, filtered or non-filtered news with the lens of women empowerment. They also studied the influence of cultural barriers by meeting those educated women who are unable to do job due to the hurdles in society practices after getting higher education from universities and colleges. The researcher also conducted research on cultural research by applying ethnographic method or by conducting interviews of the victims of the culture practices.

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