

GENDER RESEARCH IN PAKISTAN: A SCOPING REVIEW

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Abstract

Researchers focusing on gender issues usually concentrate on how people perceive and interpret gender, understand or construct sex and gender etc. Much needs to be explored and understood in relation to research and concepts of gender studies.

The present study “Gender Research in Pakistan: A Scoping Review” was carried out with the purpose of mapping literature on gender research in Pakistan, further exploring how gender concepts like social construction of roles, power relationships, division of labor/resources are understood and constructed by researchers in social science research. Also the review intended to provide grounds for critiquing how researchers problematize and integrate gender concepts in their phenomenon of interest and while doing so what research methods are applied by them.

The paper will share the importance of gender sensitive research and the results of the scoping review carried out. It shall also attempt to document methodological gaps in the retrieved literature, concluding with some recommendations for way forward.

Keywords: Gender Research, Scoping Review, Pakistan

Introduction

Gender inequality concerns are globally recognized as gender disparities have been prevailing in all societies at all times. However gender discourse gained momentum in Pakistan in mid-80’s when there was a shift from women in development approach (WID) to gender and development approach (GAD). The establishment of women and gender studies across academia in Pakistan in the 1980s onwards was a formal recognition of an emerging discipline that centered on deep-seated socio-economic and political inequalities confronting women. Historically, in Pakistan, in the year 1989 after the military regime of General Zia, Ministry of Women development established the “Center of Excellence in Women’s Studies” in 5 public universities across Pakistan. In the later decades many public and private universities initiated courses on women and gender studies. All these endeavors indicate the efforts made in Pakistan to develop capacity of individuals and promote knowledge, scholarship and research around women and gender issues. Our search showed that there are about 2 journals on gender studies that are published from local institutions; there are several others from disciplines such as mental health, education, public health and social sciences that publish on similar issues.

Following section briefly touches upon the significance of gender sensitive research.

Importance of Gender Sensitive Research

Gender sensitive research is not research on women or on gender relationships; it is research that takes into account gender as a significant variable in environmental and development studies (Leduc, Brigitte. 2009). Gender-sensitive research pays attention to the

similarities and the differences between men and women’s experiences and viewpoints, and gives equal value to each. It helps both men and women concerned by a problem to analyze an issue, understand its causes, and find solutions. A gender-sensitive research methodology is usually more participatory and can contribute greatly to empowering people, notably women (Callamard, 1999; Leduc, 2009).

Gender can be approached in two ways. Firstly it can be approached as a unit of analysis for instance making methodology more inclusive by collecting data from men and women. Secondly, gender is approached as content of analysis where gender theories are invoked to study content of inquiry itself. (Aslam, 2014)

We made an attempt to see how researchers problematize gender, integrate gender concepts into their phenomena of interests in the context of Pakistan. This paper aims to share the findings of a scoping review carried out to map and explore literature on Gender Research in Pakistan. Specific objectives of this scoping activity are to identify, retrieve and summarize literature on gender research relevant to Pakistan. It also aims to describe the focus and nature of research in the area of gender. Furthermore the paper talks about gaps in research and the suggested way forward.

Methodology

York framework put forth by Arksey O’Malley (2005) was employed as the methodology for the scoping study. As per York framework the indicated five steps were followed for the scoping exercise.

Initially the research question was framed after discussion and deliberation with the research team, other expertise and literature search. The question framed to pull out adequate literature was “What is the scope (focus and nature) of gender research in Pakistan”.

After framing of the question, search strategy was developed. Relevant databases inclusive of CINAHAL, PubMed, Eldis, SSRN and SCOPUS were used to search for published and grey literature. A comprehensive search strategy was applied to all mentioned databases to collect data. Then an inclusive and exclusive criterion was applied to narrow down the data. Only research articles and reports of studies conducted in Pakistan or in the context of Pakistan during 1985-2013 were selected. We included studies using all types of methodology and published in English with accessibility of abstracts. However articles related to health and education were excluded as separate studies were carried out for them. Also excluded were conference proceedings and newspaper articles.

The collected data was then charted for analysis. Charting included: title of study, authors, study site and design. To elaborate and analyze descriptive data was also charted which included objectives, methodology, relevant findings and emerging themes. Finally data was synthesized and summarized, themes identified and formal structure given.

Findings

Following section describes findings of the scoping review.

Table I:

| # | Search and Selection of Articles | Results |
|---|---|---------|
| 1 | Total articles retrieved | 3272 |
| 2 | Articles selected after applying inclusion and exclusion criteria | 35 |
| 3 | Articles that applied Gender Concepts | 10 |
| 4 | Articles talking specifically of gender issues (Domestic Violence, Intimate Partner violence, honor killing etc.) | 21 |
| 5 | Articles addressing differential behaviors among men and women | 4 |

As shown in the above table I, a total of 3272 articles were retrieved using the designed search strategy. Thirty five articles were narrowed for review of abstracts which

were charted and analyzed. Of these twenty one articles were inclusive of studies talking of gender issues and concerns such as domestic violence, intimate partner violence, honor killing etc. Only ten studies showed researches where gender concepts like gender roles and relations, gender division of labor, patriarchy, sexual rights etc. were researched. Four studies were addressing differential behaviors among men and women such as saving behavior, use of telephones etc.

Table II: Methodologies employed for Gender Research

| Methodology Used | Number of studies utilizing this methodology |
|-------------------|--|
| Quantitative | 7 |
| Qualitative | 12 |
| Mixed Methods | 5 |
| Literature Review | 11 |

Table II. shows the common methodologies used for gender research in Pakistan. Most researches that is twelve out of thirty five utilized qualitative methods for their studies and eleven researches were literature reviews. Moreover quantitative method was used by seven and mixed method employed by five researches.

Table III: Year of publication

| Year of Publication | Number of Studies |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1985 – 1995 | 3 |
| 1995 – 2005 | 3 |
| 2005 – 2013 | 29 |

Figure III shows that very few studies were done from 1985-2005. The main bulk of studies fall between 2005-2013. Analyzing the data it could be commented that the trend of gender inclusive research has gained momentum in the last decade.

Analysis of findings

We made an attempt to understand how researchers delved into the notion of gender in their work and in so doing we appraised the selected research studies for mainstreaming gender dimension, for instance applying feminist stance, conceptualizing gender sensitive research question and research methodology.

We were able to retrieve ten out of total of thirty five studies applying gender concepts in a varying manner. Studies that incorporated gender concepts addressed the notion of patriarchy as a deterrent to female decision making, differential rearing of boys and girls, female subordination and sexual rights. Twenty one studies looked at gender issues and discrimination against women such as either in the context of special population such as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), honor killings, intimate partner violence and domestic violence and sexual orientation. Research studies that attempt to highlight role of women's movement also discuss engagement of women in politics and social political movements.

However interestingly, about only four studies considered only behavioral differences between men and women like saving behaviors, or investment profiles with reference to socio-demographic factors. To our understanding these studies applied a neutral approach making it unclear to conclude what is contested or challenged from a gendered framework.

Based on the limited scoping exercise we have attempted to highlight three types of approaches that use gender as a research framework.

- Religion, social norms, customs used to construct the meaning of “gender”
- Vulnerability and victimization as a result of a given gender’
- Behavioral differences amongst sexes.

Conclusion

It is clear from the available data that researchers engage themselves in varying degree of depth in applying feminist and critical research framework to answer their research questions. Hence there are challenges to be met by researchers, academicians and others involved in gender scholarship. In order to take forward scholarship of transformative nature more depth has to be brought in the theoretical underpinnings of feminist and critical research methods. It is also evident that gender work in Pakistan has been primarily focused on women and men's experiences have been ignored in most work so unless masculinities are linked to gender studies the process of engendering scholarship will not be complete.

Furthermore, in order to produce quality scholarship on gender it is important to strengthen existing social science curriculums with emphasis on theoretical rigor related to feminist and masculinity theory, political and social theory. Similarly rigor is required in teaching and practice of research methodologies to best answer gender questions e.g. qualitative research of participatory nature.

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