

EXAMINING THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN CREATING AWARENESS AMONG WOMEN ABOUT THEIR LEGAL RIGHTS UNDER THE NIKAHNAMA

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Abstract

In Pakistan, women are granted certain rights in nikahnama under the Muslim Family Law Ordinance 1961. However, women in Pakistan rarely utilize these rights due to insufficient information and limited authority. To encourage the exercise of these rights, it is essential to educate women first. In the modern era, media's significance cannot be denied in disseminating information to people. Moreover, it is the core responsibility of media to educate and empower its audience. Hence, this study aims to explore the role of media (TV and social media) in educating women about their legal rights under nikahnama. A survey research design was employed to collect data from the educated women of Lahore. The theoretical framework of "Social Learning Theory" was employed to get in-depth understanding of the above said phenomenon. Results indicate that women are aware of their legal rights under the nikahnama, but they lack sufficient knowledge about the legal penalties for violation of these rights. Media was the primary source of information that educated them about nikahnama. Role of social media was found eminent in empowering women with knowledge about their legal rights. However, the role of TV in this regard needs improvement. The study recommends government and NGOs should utilize media to educate women about their legal rights in Pakistan.

Keywords: Media, TV, Social Media, Awareness, Women's Rights, Women's Legal Rights, Educated Women

1. Introduction

Pakistan is a patriarchal society where men are considered primary authority figures. All decisions of family are supposed to be taken by male heads especially decisions related to legal matters (Bari, Pal, San & Bernal, 2000). However, men do not compromise their supremacy, honor and ease when they make decisions related to legal matters of female family members. As a result, they deprive women of many of their legal rights. Legal rights are those ensured by the legal system of society (Campbell, 2017).

Women in Pakistan have various kind of legal rights which secure them from injustices and inequalities. But this study is only concerned with the rights of women related to marriage, divorce and polygamy which are normally compromised by the male heads of the family at domestic level. Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961 deals with these issues and confers multiple rights related to marriage, divorce and polygamy in nikahnama. MFLO 1961 was amended by the Provincial Assembly of Punjab in 2015 to add some important inclusions for the protection of women and known as Punjab Muslim Family Laws (Amendment) Act, 2015. This study deals with the legal rights of women under PMFL (Amendment) Act, 2015 because this research has been conducted in the city of Punjab (Pakistan) i.e. Lahore.

At the time of marriage, husband and wife both have to sign a marriage contract (nikahnama) in Pakistan as majority of population (i.e. 96.28%) belongs to Muslim community (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023). On the behalf of women, their male counterparts decide what to write in nikahnama. In the majority cases, section including the right to divorce is cut from the

nikahnama (SOC Films, 2018) and section of special condition leave unfilled (Nishtar, 2014). Usually, women sign their marriage contract without reading it because they do not understand what their marriage contracts say (Nishtar, 2014; Ovais, 2015). According to a report of Pakistan Commission on the status of Women, two-thirds of Pakistani women do not know about the details of nikahnama (Arif, 2021). Little or no consideration to the sections present in nikahnama means a woman has started her new life with her partner without awareness of her marital rights (Ovais, 2015).

When these rights are not conferred to women at the time of marriage then they have to face different kind of issues in matrimonial matters. Men know that they are legally not bound in strict conditions. Thus, it gives them courage to compromise the basic rights of women related to marriage including amount of maintenance, dower, polygamy and their will to live their lives. Due to this, marriage becomes miserable for women where they may have to face domestic violence too. A recent report of National Commission for Human Rights revealed that 47% women in Pakistan face domestic violence (Daily Times, 2024). In 2023, 10,201 cases of domestic violence were reported from Punjab alone (Bandial, 2025). A research study showed that in Pakistan, different factors contribute to domestic violence, including low level of education and empowerment among women (Falak, 2022).

So, it is high time to educate women about their legal rights especially their rights protected by nikahnama (Dawn, 2011). Although, it is duty of government to implement laws and rules related to women's rights but government always need help of other institutions for the implementation of laws. Many non-governmental organizations, for instance, All Pakistan Women Association, Tehrik e Niswan, Shirkat Gah, Aurat Foundation, Dastak, Bedari etc. are working for the betterment of women in Pakistan. They are also trying to spread awareness among women about their legal rights (Farooq & Waseer, 2017; Critelli, 2012). Recently, The Legal Aid Society in collaboration with Tehrik e Niswan and other organizations organized an interactive event "Mela on Women Rights in Marriage" to spread awareness about the women's legal rights in marriage. In a panel discussion, potential of nikahnama was also discussed to secure the rights of women (The Nation, 2024).

Social activists are putting their efforts to empower women but they are unable to reach large number of women because of limited access. To fill this gap, media can play pivotal role (Yasmin, 2012). It has already improved the status of women by educating them about their different rights (Saleem, Hanan & Arshad, 2017; Zaheer & Mubeen, 2016; Awan, 2012). In a two-day session titled "Diagnostic Study of Registered Nikahnama in Punjab: A Review of Women's Marriage Rights", prominent female politicians and legal professionals stressed the importance of raising awareness regarding nikahnama and marital rights on print, electronic and digital media (The Nation, 2023).

To expose role of media in empowering women specifically about their legal rights under PMFL (Amendment) Act, 2015, there is need of scholarly work. Media is an important source of information and it is duty of media to educate its audience regarding every aspect of life. There must be awareness programs to educate women about their rights secured by PMFL (Amendment) Act, 2015 to increase the practice of these rights.

Newspapers, magazines, radio, TV and internet are different kinds of media. But this study is only based on two mediums of mass communication including TV and social media.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

1. To determine level of awareness among educated women about their legal rights under nikahnama.

2. To find out whether mainstream media (TV) or social media is creating awareness among women about their legal rights.

1.3 Research Questions

The questions on which study is based upon are:

RQ1: To what extent educated women of Lahore are aware about their legal rights under nikahnama?

RQ2: Which medium (TV or social media) is creating awareness among women about their legal rights?

2. Literature Review

In Pakistan, different efforts have been made to promote women's rights. But still many of women have lack of knowledge regarding their rights recognized by law. Different studies reveal the level of awareness among women about their legal rights in Pakistan. Arjumand, Malik, and Javed (2021) carried out research to investigate the awareness level of unmarried females and males of Lahore regarding nikahnama. Results of the study revealed that majority of the respondents were not aware about the women supportive clauses present in nikahnama.

Quddoos (2019) examined awareness level of working women of Lahore regarding five pro-women laws of Pakistan. Researcher used survey method to analyze awareness level of respondents. It has been showed that most of the respondents only knew the names of laws. They had no detailed knowledge that how these laws are protecting women at workplace and domestic level. Batool and Batool (2018) also measured legal rights' awareness among women through a survey. Study was conducted in four cities of Pakistan. Legal rights measured in the study includes property rights of women, choice of husband, right of divorce/khula and steps taken by government to safeguard these rights. Majority of the women who participated in study were barely aware of their rights.

Similarly, Khan (2010) found low level of awareness among Pakistani women about their legal rights. At the time of marriage, majority of the respondents had no information what is written in their marriage contract. They signed their marriage contract without reading it. Most of the parents (85.8%) of respondents handed over their daughters to their husbands without making any contract about economic and personal security of women. Though the majority of the respondents (56.0%) showed favor of making such agreements.

From above studies, it has been observed that women have average awareness about the laws which are passed for their well-being. If they know the laws, they have lack of information about the details of laws. So, there is dire need to spread awareness among women about their rights secured by the law. Along with that, literature also reflects that, in Pakistan, very less studies are conducted to address the rights women possess according to nikahnama under Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961.

There are various factors explored by different social scientists in their studies which affect the awareness level of women about their legal rights. Devi and Ranjithamani (2017) revealed that there is a significant difference between awareness level of female teachers about their legal rights on the basis of their locality. Urban teachers (working women) possessed better awareness about their legal rights than rural teachers (working women). Likewise, study of Arjumand, Malik, and Javed (2021) showed that people who belong to urban areas have better level of awareness about their rights under nikahnama than people of rural areas. Guru (2015) acclaimed that legal awareness was high among those women who were better educated, had higher level of professions

and had good income. Hence, it can be said that demographics of women play eminent role in awareness level of women about their legal rights.

Yasmin (2012) stated the necessity of introducing Public Legal Education in developing countries like Bangladesh where majority of population is living below poverty line and literacy rate is very low. Other studies also proposed that basic knowledge of law should be imparted to a large section of people especially women who suffer the most in society (Devi & Ranjithamani, 2017; Kaur & Kaur, 2016). It was found that legal awareness was inversely related to victimization of women. In effort to prevent women from violence and abuse, it has been proposed that education, sexual literacy and legal awareness should be promoted among women (Guru, 2015).

Women's lack of access to justice is due to their lack of knowledge about their rights, lack of decision-making power in family and lack of conformity. Mass public education programs regarding legal and human rights for women are required in Pakistan to combat these issues (Arjumand, Malik & Javed, 2021; Critelli, 2012).

It has been showed by the above-discussed studies that most of the problems faced by women regarding their legal rights are deep rooted in system of the society. A single woman cannot do anything to overcome this issue, so, it is necessary to provide them platform where their voices can be raised. Effective media campaigns through newspaper, radio and TV are required to change traditional mindset of society (Khan, 2010).

Ahmad, Bibi and Mahmood (2012) examined that formal sources of information including media can play instrumental role in improving attitudes of people towards women's legal rights. It is influential in forming positive attitude of society towards women's rights than informal sources like parents and elders. Awan (2012) assessed that conditions of women in urban areas are better as compared to rural areas because they have exposure to education, media (print and electronic) and various awareness programs organized by civil organizations.

Tunio and Shouakt (2015) surveyed the role of media (TV) in creating awareness among Pakistani women about their rights. Results confirmed that media (TV) informed women about the laws and conventions made at national and international level to protect their rights. It had also motivated them to take up their rights. Thus, its role should be further increased in creating awareness among women about their rights. Government should also sponsor programs related to health, education, rights and issues of women.

Literature shows that mainstream media is playing eminent role in women's awareness about their legal rights but there is need of enhancing this role. However, studies related to role of social media were not found to the researcher. So, it is important to explore role of social media in creating awareness among women about their legal rights.

It is indicated in study of Whitten-Woodring (2016) that digital communication (especially social media) can have positive effects on women's rights. Social media can cover domestic repression which may be neglected by the gate-keeping role of traditional media. Additionally, activists and journalists can employ social media to mobilize international support on women issues. Consistent use of social media can help in changing cultural attitudes by building awareness. On the other hand, Yasmin (2012) described that electronic media, print media and internet, all mediums are useful to disseminate information regarding legal rights of masses. It depends on the nature of audience. For some of the audience, internet is the most convenient way of getting information and for some people, other media may appear more effective.

It can be summed up that there is need to enhance knowledge level of women about their legal rights. Otherwise, there is no advantage of making laws for the well-being of women. Media can be a pivotal tool to create awareness as it is found in literature that media can have effective

results in empowering women about their legal rights. But scholarly work with reference to Pakistani media in creating awareness of women's legal rights under Family law is hardly found. So, the current study is aimed to assess role of media (TV and social media) in creating awareness among women about their rights under PMFL (Amendment) Act, 2015.

3. Theoretical Framework

Researchers have applied "Social Learning Theory" to this study because it seems suitable. Social learning theory was proposed by a psychologist named Albert Bandura in 1977. Bandura added a social element in process of learning arguing that people can learn new behavior and information by observing others (Observational Learning). One observes others and forms an idea that how these behaviors can be performed. Later on, this coded information serves as a guide for action (David, 2019). Individuals who have been observed in the learning process are known as models. Three basic models of observational learning identified by Bandura are as follows:

1. A live model which involves an actual individual displaying or acting out a behavior.
2. A symbolic model which entails real or fictional characters demonstrating behaviors in books, television programs, films and online media.
3. A verbal instructional model which involves explanations and descriptions of a behavior (Nabavi, 2012).

Kinds of models present in the mass media have been a matter of concern for those who seek social change, such as minorities and women's groups. These groups pointed out that media present minorities and women in stereotyped roles which may have affected their general sense of self-efficacy. The media must offer new kinds of accurate models for minorities and women, such as educated and successful professionals. Social learning theorists concur that this is an adventurous strategy to employ in the hope of expecting social change in society (O'Rorke, 2003). So, social learning through the media cannot be overlooked.

This theory is relevant to this study because it suggests that people learn from their environment. In today's era, media has become an important part of everyone's life. People learn various things from media, as it plays a significant role in the socialization process. This study examines the role of media (TV or social media) in enhancing knowledge of women related to nikahnama. Media can educate women about the benefits of reading and wisely filling out the sections of nikahnama. It can also encourage them to exercise the rights guaranteed by PMFL (Amendment) Act, 2015 through nikahnama.

4. Methodology

This research study is quantitative in nature as data is collected by using quantitative research approach. From quantitative methodologies, survey method is used to analyze perception of women. This research was conducted in the area of Lahore as it is the second largest city of Pakistan and capital of Punjab province. It is known as an important educational center of Pakistan. It is also leading Pakistan in commercial, banking, and industrial centers (Dixon, 2020).

This study intends to get responses from educated women, for that purpose, education institutes of district Lahore were visited to collect data. Four universities (two public and two private) of district Lahore were selected as a population on the basis of accessibility to researchers (i.e. University of the Punjab, Lahore College for Women University, University of Management and University of Central Punjab). Media departments from the mentioned universities were selected as a sample to conduct this study. To select sample from population, researchers had used simple random sampling.

Sample size of the study is comprised of 400 women. 100 women were approached to fill questionnaires from media department of each university. After the collection of data, it has been entered in SPSS version 21 for the analysis.

4.1 Limitations of the Study

This study has some limitations mentioned below:

- This study is based on the Muslim Family Law Ordinance 1961 of Pakistan. Therefore, researchers may not be able to effectively reflect a comprehensive understanding of this law.
- This study is only based on responses of educated women. Perception of uneducated women is not analyzed.
- Findings of this study are based only on the views of women. Content of media has not been analyzed to evaluate the role of media.
- This study is purely quantitative in nature. Qualitative methods are not used to collect data.

5. Findings of the Study

5.1 Awareness Level of Respondents about their Legal Rights

Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
Low	54	13.5
Moderate	152	38.0
High	194	48.5
Total	400	100.0

Interpretation: To check the level of awareness among respondents about their legal rights, collective analysis was done. Firstly, researchers gave values to the responses of nine statements in SPSS i.e. No=0 and Yes=1. Then composite score of nine statements regarding awareness level of legal rights was calculated by computing them in SPSS. Minimum score could be 0 and maximum score could be 9. Awareness between score 0-3 is considered low, awareness between 4-6 is considered moderate and awareness between 7-9 is considered high.

Table shows that 54 (13.5%) respondents have low level of awareness about their legal rights. 152 (38.0%) have moderate and 194 (48.5%) have high level of awareness about their legal rights under nikahnama. Thus, majority of the respondents know about their rights related to nikahnama. However, it was analyzed that more than half of respondents (61.3%) had no information regarding legal penalties about violation of their rights under nikahnama.

5.2 Role of TV in creating Awareness regarding Women's Legal Rights

Options	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Awareness through TV	1.6646	0.53100	1.00	3.00

Interpretation: To analyze role of TV in creating awareness regarding women’s legal rights, seven statements were computed in one variable then mean of the computed variable was calculated. Values assigned to options were 1=Not at all, 2=To a Small extent & To Some Extent and 3=To a Moderate Extent& To a Large Extent.

Thus, table 5.2 shows that mean value is 1.6646 which is illustrating that majority of respondents have opinion between 1 and 2 (i.e. “Not at All” and “To a Small or Some Extent”). It can be concluded from the data that majority of respondents said TV is not playing any role in educating them about their legal rights while second highest majority said TV is educating them to a small or some extent about their legal rights.

5.3 Role of Social Media in creating Awareness regarding Women’s Legal Rights

Options	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Awareness through Social Media	2.0957	0.62243	1.00	3.00

Interpretation: To examine role of social media in creating awareness among respondents about their legal rights, seven statements related to social media’s role were computed in to one variable. Then mean of the computed variable was calculated. Values assigned to options were 1=Not at all, 2=To a Small extent & To Some Extent and 3=To a Moderate Extent& To a Large Extent.

Table depicts that mean value is 2.0957 which is between 2 and 3. It showed that majority of respondents believed social media is creating awareness among women about their legal rights to a small or some extent while second majority said social media is educating respondents to a moderate or large extent. So, it can be summed up that majority of respondents agree that social media’s role is satisfactory.

5.4 Paired Sample t-test for Role of Media in creating Awareness of Women’s Legal Rights

Variables	Mean	N	SD	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Role of TV	14.5325	400	6.26995	-14.651	399	0.000
Role of Social Media	19.9675	400	7.69314			

Interpretation: Table shows that paired sample t-test is conducted to evaluate role of media (i.e. TV and social media) in creating awareness among respondents about their legal rights. Sig. (2-tailed) value in the table is less than 0.05 i.e. 0.000 which shows there is significant difference present between the mean scores of both variables (TV and social media). Mean score of social media (19.96) is higher than TV (14.53) which reflects social media is playing more eminent role in increasing awareness among women about their legal rights.

6. Analysis and Discussion

RQ.1: Are educated women of Lahore aware about their legal rights under Family law?

Findings of this study revealed that majority of respondents knew their rights under PMFL (Amendment) Act, 2015. 48.5% respondents had high awareness and 13.5% respondents had low awareness. Women participated in this study knew almost all the clauses of nikahnama. This is might be because women were well educated. It has also been found in various studies that education positively affects the awareness level of women regarding their legal rights (Rubab, Parveen & Usman, 2016; Guru, 2015). Additionally, Lahore is an urban city, mostly women

belonged to urban areas are aware about their legal rights (Arjumand, Malik & Javed, 2021; Devi & Ranjithamani, 2017) as they have good exposure to media and society (Awan, 2012).

But significant minority of respondents had less knowledge about the clause of special condition (39.3% respondents), right to divorce (40.5% respondents) and clause which asked current marital status of groom (39.0% respondents) in marriage contract. This shows that there is dire need to spread awareness about these sections of nikahnama.

Findings of the study also revealed that majority of respondents (61.3%) did not know about the legal penalties if their rights were violated. This is noticeable finding of the study as it shows that majority of women have no idea that in case of violation of their rights, nikah registrar, chairman of Union Council and male members of their family have to pay legal penalties. Women's lack of awareness regarding legal punishments increases the likelihood of them not exercising their rights.

RQ.2: Which media is creating awareness among women about their legal rights?

Contrary to findings of (Cheema, 2018), collected data has explored that TV's role in creating awareness among women about their legal rights is not satisfactory. Majority of respondents reported that they do not learn anything related to nikahnama from the TV.

However, second highest majority of this study agreed that TV is educating them about their legal rights to a certain extent. It might be because TV has started putting some efforts to educate women about nikahnama clauses. Easypaisa's largest campaign "Audio Nikahnama" educated masses regarding matrimonial rights with morning show appearances on TV (Sohail, 2024). A drama serial "Kuch Ankahi" has also shed light on the clauses of nikahnama (The Express Tribune, 2023). It can be said that TV has started discussing women's legal rights but this current role is not satisfactory. There is need to increase awareness campaigns to educate women about the nikahnama.

While exploring role of social media in creating awareness among women about their legal rights, it is analyzed that significant majority of respondents agree that social media is disseminating information regarding their legal rights. Similar results were found in the study of (Zaheer & Mubeen, 2016). Respondents of the study (36.8%) who had sound knowledge about the nikahnama reported that media was the eminent source of information for them. 55.5% respondents of this study also said that social media is creating more awareness among them than TV when it was directly asked from them.

Paired sample t-test was also applied on the computed values of TV and social media. Significant difference is found between mean values of TV and social media. Moreover, mean value of social media (19.96) is higher than mean value of TV (14.53) which depicts that social media is playing more eminent role in spreading awareness among women about their legal rights under nikahnama. It might be because the content of TV is designed under high supervision and gatekeeping is done at different levels. Along with that, purpose of TV is to earn profit which may put pressure on producers to generate such content which grabs the attention of audience.

Contrary to this, social media's content is not restricted and decided by gatekeepers. It has become mouthpiece of common people where everyone is trying to generate content. Hence, it increases the chance of spreading awareness regarding every aspect of life (Kashyap, 2014). Many bloggers on social media are writing blogs regarding legal rights of women. For instance, Dr. Hina Sikander (an influencer and a CSP officer) and Nadia Hussain (a model and an actress) wrote a detailed post on the clauses of nikahnama on Instagram (Images, 2021). Easypaisa's largest campaign "Audio Nikkahnama" also used social media to raise awareness about marital rights (Sohail, 2024).

Different Facebook pages are also spreading information among society regarding their legal rights. For instance, The Legal Diaries (a page on FB) covers different topics to educate people about their rights ensured by law. Now, many lawyers have made their websites and YouTube channels to disseminate legal information among common citizens. Social media has given platform to common people through which they are spreading awareness among people regarding legal matters.

7. Conclusion

Media's role in development of women is undeniable. It has empowered women in different ways. Thus, this study examines role of media (TV or social media) in creating awareness among women about their legal rights under nikahnama. Women who participated in this study had satisfactory knowledge about the nikahnama possibly because they were educated (Zaheer & Mubeen, 2016; Rubab, Parveen & Usman, 2016; Guru, 2015) and belonged to urban community (Awan, 2012). However, they lacked awareness regarding legal penalties if their rights were violated. Moreover, their knowledge was insufficient regarding the clause of special condition, clause of right to divorce and clause of marital status of groom. Therefore, more awareness programs are needed to improve the knowledge of women about nikahnama.

Majority of women revealed that media was the principal source of information which educated them regarding the details of nikahnama. Social media had played eminent role in educating them about their rights under Muslim Family Law Ordinance 1961. While, role of TV was not found satisfactory. So, it can be concluded that there is dire need to increase role of TV in promoting awareness of women's legal rights. Like social media, TV should also produce content which educates women regarding their rights ensured by laws. Government and social activists must utilize media platforms (both traditional and digital) to improve the knowledge of women about their legal rights. If awareness among women will be increased then gradually, they will start practicing their rights.

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