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Abstract

Several things have influenced the political participation of females in the Local Government Elections 2022 in district Dir Lower, KPK, Pakistan. Female political participation was very poor as compared to men in the district. Although, after the introduction of the Elections Act, of 2017, the participation of females has been raised in elections the role of the ECP was still not effective despite the fact that various administrative and legislative powers were vested in it. As a consequence of this study, multifarious factors were uncovered due to which female political participation was very low including, meager resources, cultural issues, administrative factors, and absence of political consciousness, etc. To overcome the fundamental issues faced by females regarding political participation the results of the study urge for more advocacy and the making of policies at both national and provincial levels.

Keywords: Elections Act 2017, ECP, Women Participation, KPCSW, DCSW

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Abstract

Several things have influenced the political participation of females in the Local Government Elections 2022 in district Dir Lower, KPK, Pakistan. Female political participation was very poor as compared to men in the district. Although, after the introduction of the Elections Act, of 2017, the participation of females has been raised in elections the role of the ECP was still not effective despite the fact that various administrative and legislative powers were vested in it. As a consequence of this study, multifarious factors were uncovered due to which female political participation was very low including, meager resources, cultural issues, administrative factors, and absence of political consciousness, etc. To overcome the fundamental issues faced by females regarding political participation the results of the study urge for more advocacy and the making of policies at both national and provincial levels.

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Introduction

Females comprise 50% of the global population, in developing countries. Participation of women in politics and their presence in other institutions always continued poor. Even though, according to global estimates, political participation of women in politics is about 15 percent in the world as compared to the developed countries (Chesser, 2021). South Asian countries are displaying unsatisfactory development in the participation of women in

politics. The process in South Asian states is dismal, in contrast to the developed states. Political participation of the majority of people is prevented due to inequality and injustice. However, the political participation of women has been growing in South Asian countries since 1995 (Mukherjee & Bhargava, 2009).

Pakistan is considered to be the sixth largest populated country in South Asia where women's political participation in elections is very poor as a



result of many challenges and factors. The society of Pakistan has been classified keeping in view the economic position of the family. Usually, the females of rich families participate in elections as contestant candidates while the females of poor as voters. For example, Maryam Nawaz Sharif, a women politician, belongs to a popular industrialist family in the province of Punjab. The majority of the women voters are working in the feudal rich's farmlands. There are almost 44% registered women voters in Pakistan while the entire female population of Pakistan is approximately 51 percent (Liaqat et al., 2019).

Despite the fact that the political participation of women is unsatisfactory and poor, an increase has been observed in the 2018 election as around 23.26 million women participated in the said election in contrast to 22.8 million in the general election of 2013. In comparison to the 1995 general election, the Participation of women in elections has risen to 24.5 % (Daily Nation, 2019). In the 2018 General Elections and Local Government Elections-2022, turnout in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was comparatively higher than in 2008, 2013 General Elections, and Local Government Elections 2015. Considering the growing tendency of political participation of women and their required participation in accordance with the growth of the women population, this turnout is still very poor in Pakistan. One basic reason for the failure of democracy in Pakistan is discrimination on the basis of gender. However, there are many governmental, non-governmental, and civil society organizations that are striving hard to create awareness among women in the country in order to enable them to vote in the elections.

The province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is highly condemned as the most fundamentalist province in Pakistan, in which women are not allowed to go outside their homes and poll their vote until allowed by their male family head. In the second phase of Local Government Elections-2022, 7291 polling stations were established for women in the 18 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to estimates, 30 % of women cast their votes which means that the majority of them were not allowed to avail their right to vote (Fafen, 2022). Article 25A (2) of the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan states equality of both genders and discourages any difference in every aspect in this regard. The ECP (Election

Commission of Pakistan), in 2017, was empowered through the legislation of Elections Act-2017 according to which the Election Commission of Pakistan has the power to cancel the election results if less than 10% of females have cast their vote in any constituency in the election so that participation of female in the elections is ensured. According to the Act, the political parties in the country have to give women 5 % general seats (Election Act, 2017).

Moreover, in the Local Government Elections-2022, the Election Commission was empowered by the government of Pakistan to conduct and monitor elections by acting upon the powers entrusted to it through the Elections Act 2017 enabling females to cast their votes in the elections. In spite of the poor participation of women in past elections, their participation in the General Election, in 2018 and Local Government Elections, in 2022 is up to the mark because of the Elections Act, of 2017. Women's political participation is however poor up to the present time when compared to other advanced countries due to various challenges and reasons.

The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also constituted KPCSW (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Commission on the Status of Women) in 2010, which was amended in 2016, in order to ensure women's political participation and empowerment in the province. This Commission scrutinizes projects, policies, and their implementation and investigates those laws and regulations that obstruct the fundamental rights of women and their status. Amendments are also suggested by the Commission in legislation of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province so that women's participation in politics may be increased. It also monitors the departments to check the infringement of women's rights and tackle their grievances. KPCSW also cooperates with international as well as national organizations in the provision of equal opportunities to women and their emancipation in the province (Abdullah et al, 2015).

The KPCSW constituted, along with 15 other committees, the DCSW (District Commission on the Status of Women) in District Dir Lower in 2016 so that its activities may be carried out in the far-flung areas of the province. These District Commissions struggle for the empowerment and political participation of women and try to bring them on equal footing with men in society. Due to certain factors, these Commissions are not very effective at the district level.

Literature Review

This section of the paper has to analyze all the past work that had been carried out to determine those factors that affected women's participation in elections in Pakistan in the District Dir Lower. No all-inclusive research study was found on this topic however, various periodicals and articles in well-known international and national newspapers, published books, magazines, and electronic media sources were reached which have been studied, analyzed, and presented below. Latif, 2015 has pointed out that males in our country believe that the duty of women is to look after the home, raise children, and parents/husbands care, etc. Men are autonomous in decision-making, economic affairs, and governmental activities while females are ignored in this regard. The reason is that women are not considered fit for participation in the socio-economic and political environment of the country. Besides, the religious belief of people also plays a role in affecting women's role in politics. Moreover, they have further pointed out that there is a bad law & order situation in the country which makes political participation for women difficult (Bari, 2005).

Khan (2019) explained that there are some societal difficulties and beneficial trends that need exposure to aspects of the political engagement of women. Although, there are no barriers even rural women are not taking part in elections due to which there is poor women participation in politics. However, the gap between male and female political participation was minimized and 45.07 percent of women participated in the election of 2018 as compared to the general election of 2013 in which 37.32 percent of women polled their vote. From a historical perspective, Pakistan's historic depository is full of stories of women's participation in politics. Before partition women remained active and agile in politics and helped in the social development of the Muslims. They were not only good leaders but also helped in constitutional and legal matters (Ikram, 2010). For example, Shasta Ikramullah, Lady Hafeezullah, Begum Hafeez Ud Din, Rana Liaqat Ali Khan, Begum Shah Nawaz, and Ms. Fatima Jinnah played positive roles side by side with Muslim leaders before partition (Khan, 2009). After partition, women continued their active

participation in the political affairs of the country like Ms. Fatima Jinnah, Benazir Bhutto, Fehmida Mirza, Hina Rabbani, Marriyum Aurangzeb, and Maryam Nawaz Sharif, etc. have presented an enticing image of Pakistan in relation to participation of women in political affairs.

Pakistan was the first Muslim country that set a precedent when the people elected Benazir Bhutto (late) as Prime Minister and Fahmida Mirza was appointed as the first National Assembly women speaker (Rapila, 2013). Moreover, Marriyum Aurangzeb has been appointed as Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Sherry Rehman has been designated as Minister of Climate Change, and Shazia Marri as Federal Minister for Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety. Previously, Dr. Firdous Ashiq Awan was assigned Ministry of Health, Hina Rabbani Khar remained the Foreign Minister and is now as State Minister, and Sherin Mazari is the Minister for Human Rights. Fafen, 2018 explained how the Election Commission of Pakistan acted to resolve the problems of disabled people and minority groups. Provisions have been included in the 2017 Elections Act, to improve the conditions of these people including disabled women. If the CNIC of these people is in 1403 voting locations, they may be assisted through employees in the polling of their votes in privacy and necessary legislation may be carried out in this regard as this law was violated in Punjab, 964 times, in Sindh, 222 times, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 165 times, in Baluchistan 31 times and in Islamabad, 07 & 21 times.

According to Herald (2018), the right to vote is the constitutional right of both genders, but women in some backward regions are not permitted to cast their vote. Although women constitute half of the country's population their participation in decision-making is very crucial. Various governmental and non-governmental organizations are trying their best to involve women in the domestic stream but the social norms are creating problems in this regard. The women have adapted themselves to this complicated situation and have failed in their struggle for freedom and empowerment. So, the election scheme is not friendly to women. There shall be equality between both genders and must have similar rights to vote in the system moreover, separate platforms must be established for this purpose.

In the Peshawar High Court, a petition was filed by the Aurat Foundation in 2001 and raised questions on the process of preventing women from collecting their ballot, which disclosed a former subject. This petition was based on the precedent of Swabi District when women were stopped from participating in By-Elections in 2013 in the said district. Though this petition was set aside by the Peshawar High Court, a ground was prepared through it for further possible betterment in the matter. The Peshawar High Court took action against the stoppage of women from registration in the said election and the ballot of the 2013 By-Election was declared to be not acceptable but later on, the Supreme Court of Pakistan reversed the decision of the High Court. Questions were again raised on the decision when political parties, political leaders, and the people stopped women from casting their vote in the By-Elections of PK-95 in district Dir Lower and the election results were declared void by the Election Commission of Pakistan. The non-appearance of women and obstructions to them in casting their vote was shown by the newspapers. Moreover, 11 million, fewer females than males have been registered by the Election Commission of Pakistan in the electoral rolls (Dastagir, 2018). Open participation of women in politics increased with the introduction of the system of Local Government and the ensuing amendments in the Constitution which supported women in this regard. As a consequence, the number of women of KP who secured Parliament seats was increased and 08 women of KP reached the National Assembly, 22 to the Provincial Assembly, and 04 secured the Senate seats. However, there was no competition for seats as they were appointed to the seats that were reserved for women.

Repila (2013) has stated that females are not allowed to vote in Pakistan which is illegal. Different tactics like fatwa from the Clerics, pressure from the family side, and signing of agreements by the political parties and leaders of the villages are used to stop women from participating in politics. In District Dir Upper, a single female had cast their vote in UC Darora in the General Election of 2013 while in District Dir Lower, women were not allowed to vote in 07 constituencies. Similarly, females were barred from casting their votes in 17 Union Councils in district Buner in the said election. The same was the case in other districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa like district Mardan, district Malakand, district Dera

Ismail Khan, district Swat, etc. The election of 2013 was the first since the inception of Pakistan in which power was transferred from one democratic government to another and there was hope as well as fear before the election. There was an unusual level of political disorder in the 2013 election as one hundred and thirty people were reported to have been killed in the 02 weeks before the election and sixty-four on Election Day.

Waseem (2022) has evaluated the political liberation of women in Pakistan from many social and cultural perspectives. In his research, he has pointed out whether the national election laws encourage female political empowerment and whether females are represented on equal footing with registered male voters in the country or otherwise. Keeping in view the registration rates of males and females, the Elections Act was published in 2017, on the eve of the general election of 2018. In the research study, it has been highlighted that increased efforts are needed on the part of ECP, the development sector, and NADRA in order to increase the registration of women for voting. He further argued that in FATA, there is still a long journey in order to achieve equality for females in politics. Moreover, there is a big gap between the registration of males and females in backward areas like North Waziristan, South Waziristan, Dera Bugti, Kohlu, and Momand Agency which is about to reach up to 30%.

Although, from all aspects with which the study has been carried out, yet the gap remains with respect to women's political participation in the district Dir Lower. Hence, this paper examines women's political participation in Local Government Elections-2022 in District Dir Lower and the role of the Election Commission of Pakistan in voting.

Research Methodology

This section presents the research methodology in order to achieve the set objectives. The study was carried out in district Dir Lower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with selected women voters and members of ECP, Politicians, academicians, political activists, and journalists. Primary data was collected through an interview schedule with open-ended questions. Moreover, interviews were conducted in accordance with the political, cultural, and social conditions of the focused population. Secondary

data was gathered from various internet sources, research articles, newspapers, and other published materials. The sampling size was segregated and categorized through a nonprobability sampling technique.

Research Population

People from different parts of Dir Lower who had taken part in Local Government 2022 have been included in the study. Moreover, officials from the office of the District Election Commissioner Dir Lower and Education Department District Dir Lower, DCSW, and KPCSW have also been included in the study.

Sampling Size

30 respondents have been included in the sampling size of this research study involving specific females who participated in the Local Government Elections 2022 in district Dir Lower as voters and 22 ECP officials, KPCSW, and DCSW members. Sampling was carried out considering the results of the election and samples were taken from those areas in which ECP, KPCSW, and DCSW were engaged and where female participation in the elections was reportedly poor.

Limitations of the Study

This research study has been carried out in district Dir Lower, being a backward district and no sufficient awareness of the females the researcher has faced challenges in interviewing or collecting the data to highlight the reasons for poor female political participation in Local Government Elections 2022, and to know the role of ECP in ensuring female participation in politics after the implementation of Elections Act-2017. Females were reluctant to get interviewed due to their conservative family environment and restrictions from their males.

Results and Discussion

This paper aims to highlight the main factors responsible for the poor political participation of females in Local Government Elections 2022 in the Dir Lower district. However, the classification of the data has been carried out on the basis of similarities and differences across the themes that emerged.

Factors Influencing Women's Political Participation

Local Government Election, 2022 (2nd Phase) was conducted on Thursday, 31st March 2022 in order to choose 02 City Council Mayors, 63 tehsil Council Chairmen, Village Councilors of 1659 villages, and members of 171 Neighborhood Councils throughout the remaining eighteen districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Out of the 6170 Polling Stations, 1151 were established for men, 1068 for women and 3951 were combined Polling Stations. The voting turnout of women was 30 % in comparison to the 41% turnout of men in the said election. Moreover, no women candidate was elected on the seats of the Council Chairman and City Council Mayor while 533 women candidates were elected on the women seats unopposed in the province. There was no tehsil where the voting turnout of females was reported to be less than 10 percent. The gap between male and female voting turnout remained at 11 % as compared to the Local Government Election 2015 in which the voting turnout gap was recorded to be 23.58 % (Ahmad & Anwar, 2019).

The involvement of females in politics in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has mostly been constrained as a consequence of different factors related to culture and politics. Men have always played a dominant role in politics like those events carried out on the local level, organization of party meetings, as well as national level politics (Cheema, 2019). Despite the fact that females have been empowered through the Constitution and equal political rights have been guaranteed through Article 25 (A) of the Constitution still women are deprived of their political rights due to various religious norms, administrative problems, and social and cultural hindrances.

Social and Cultural Factors

In the conservative society of district Dir Lower, people have the tradition that females are barred from carrying out activities outside the house and have limited them to household jobs like caretaking of children, preparing meals, caring for their husbands, etc. Females have a lot of work in the house and, therefore, they have no time to participate in political activities. Women are illiterate and have no awareness of their political

rights and responsibilities which has hindered the empowerment of females in politics. Due to Pakhtun culture, mobilization of females has been limited and the cultural traditions do not allow males and females to simultaneously appear in public which has posed a serious challenge to females to actively participate in politics. Moreover, it is believed culturally that men have to lead women but women cannot become leaders of men. Such kinds of stereotypes have become the main challenges for women to become leaders and assert themselves which has restrained women from political participation. The conventional perspective regarding equality on the basis of gender has affected the development of female political participation to a great extent (Azhar, 2018). *An aged female asserted:*

"Virtuous women get out from their house two times in their lives only i.e. going to the house of husband at the time of marriage and going to the grave at death. Apart from that, women remain at the house carrying out household activities. Those women who are frequently going out of their houses are treated as morally bad having no self-respect.

Absence of Family Support

Women are not wholeheartedly supported by their family members which is another factor affecting female political participation in the Lower Dir district. Moreover, politics is considered a bad practice and those women who join politics are behaved with disrespect and are stigmatized by the other women in the society. They try to discourage such women as they are earning a bad name for their fellow women. Therefore, those women who have an inclination towards politics are challenged by their fellow women to take part in political affairs. Due to these circumstances, women refrain from joining politics in order to save their status and honor in the family as well as in the community. During the interviews, most of the women prioritized their honor and respect rather than participating in politics against the wishes of their family members. Some of the women who get an education are advised in the family to join the Education Department as teachers or the Health Department as nurses because there is less interference from men as compared to politics (Bari, 2005). Moreover, women are kind-hearted and innocent and therefore, are suitable for teaching and nursing

professions which are according to their psychology. Moreover, the majority of the journalists are reluctant to play a positive role in encouraging and supporting female political participation which has proved an important factor in the low political participation of females in district Dir Lower.

Gender Discrimination

Maximum of the participants were of the view that politics in our society has been dominated by men as they do not want women to play superior roles in politics. In District Dir Lower, the roles of women and men have been defined by the dominant patriarchal ideology. Men are always taken as the head of the household and are responsible for earning their livelihood. All the decision-making powers are exercised by them in the family as well as in society (Eagly, 2016). One of the respondents stated that all our actions are dictated by male members of society we go to the polling station along with our male family members and the vote is polled in favor of that particular candidate which is supported by our male heads. Another respondent opined that women are weak and therefore they are fit for the household jobs and cannot do the hard activities outside the house as men are fit for it. Females are emotionally weak and have less intelligence as compared to men (Fair, 2018).

Lack of Education

Education plays a key role in the overall development of a society. But district Dir Lower was a princely state that was governed by Nawab Shah Jehan till 1960 who refrained their subjects from getting an education. Consequently, men in general and women in particular have remained illiterate for a long period of time. Moreover, due to the social norms and cultural values women's literacy rate is very low in district Dir Lower and women have no political awareness. Before the introduction of the Elections Act, of 2017, women were completely excluded from politics through agreements carried out by the political parties due to which they faced difficulties in polling their vote and were guided by their male family members. The majority of the women were not aware of their political rights and they even did not know about the Elections Act of 2017 and its provisions regarding female political participation. They pointed out the lack of education as one of the main reasons behind the low

political participation of females in politics (Imran, 2018). *As one of the respondents commented:*

"Majority of females in the area are illiterate and consequently they are carrying out the household activities and do not have knowledge about government and politics. Moreover, they are not bold enough to make decisions; therefore, females are unable to participate in government and politics. They are not suitable for the outdoor activities in the society which can be carried out by males efficiently".

Under the influence of the patriarchal nature of society and religious interpretations etc., women have remained illiterate and have been limited to household activities like kitchen work, breeding children, and taking care of husbands. Consequently, they are not financially independent due to which they cannot make decisions of their own. The majority of the women are taken to the Polling Station by their male family members and the votes are polled as advised by their family heads. Due to the above circumstances, female political participation is low as compared to male political participation in District Dir Lower (Jamal, 2018).

Wrong Perception of Females in Politics

Those females who take an active part in political activities are treated with dishonor by the people in district Dir Lower. Such women are considered ladies of the evening, disobedient, obstinate, and defiant of cultural norms and social values, etc. Questions are raised about their character by the male political candidates during the election campaigns and they are publicly dishonored. In order to safeguard their status and the honor and dignity of their family in society, women avoid participation in politics (Khan, 2019). *It was argued by a respondent:*

"Women joining politics are not behaved as women and are thought to have turned men doing bad things. They are thought to have lost their honor which is the identity of women. Such women are considered dirty having no morality. Due to such wrong perception of women in politics, we cannot join politics with freedom in order to safeguard our status and relationship in the family as well as society".

Women in the district are discouraged from participating in politics as a consequence of negative criticism against politically active women, their

public disgrace, using derogatory language, and disrespect in society. In these circumstances, the voting turnout of females also remained low as compared to males in district Dir Lower (Khan, 2013).

Pakhtun Code of Life (Pakhtunwali)

Another factor that has affected female political participation in Dir Lower is the Pakhtunwali or Pakhtun code of life. Pakhtunwali is a centuries-old code of life consisting of customs and traditions and the daily life in the society is directed by this code of life. Valor (Ghairat) is a powerful trait of Pakhtunwali which is related to the prestige power and authority of men. Many respondents were of the view that if we join politics or go to the polling station without the permission of male family members then we will be stigmatized in the society and people will satire our family heads. Due to these traits of Pashtun society, people keep a strong check on their females and they are not allowed to go outside the house without male family members. Even the men of educated and broad-minded families do not allow their females to go outside the house without a male in order to maintain their honor and dignity in society. The social norms, customs, and traditions are not in favor of females to participate in politics independently (Latif et al., 2015). In view of the above, it is obvious that females are strongly discouraged by the codes of society like Ghairat, Peghor, and Toor from voting in the elections, affiliating with political parties, contesting elections, and making political demonstrations as such activities are threatening the photon dignity and honor.

Security Issues

An apprehension regarding lack of security and law & order situation is another factor that compels men to restrict women to their houses which has affected female political participation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in general and district Dir Lower in particular. After the 9/11 incident and the US War against Terror, the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) targeted Law Enforcement Agencies as well as civilians. Girl schools were destroyed through bomb blasts and women were warned to remain inside the houses. The situation further deteriorated when Malala Yousafzai, a school-going girl, was shot in the head by the Taliban. Similar terrorist activities were

carried out by Maulana Sufi Muhammad, leader of the Tehrik-i-Nifaz-i-Shariat-i-Muhammadi (TNSM) in Malakand Division especially in district Dir Lower. One of the respondents of tehsil Lal Qilla, Dir Lower stated that the Taliban still have their presence in the area, and due to the fear of the Taliban they cannot go out of their houses to participate in political activities (Mukherjee & Bhargava, 2009). Moreover, the situation of political parties is not suitable for females, and different kinds of issues are faced by them when they join politics. One of the female respondents opined that no proper mechanism is made by the political parties in order to protect the women and, therefore, we are not allowed by our family members to join the political parties. She further stated that those people allow their women to join active politics that are having enough money and do not think that they will be blamed by the people of the area. Female are sexually harassed, and exploited and questions are raised about their character due to which they are discouraged from taking part in active politics. Therefore, the law & order situation and the sense of insecurity are other factors due to which men are compelled to keep a strong check on their females (Rai, 2003).

Political Factors

In District Dir Lower, politics has been dominated by men, and the important party positions in the district are occupied by men, leaving no space for women folk. Females are not guided to take part in politics and to become political leaders. Women are deliberately humiliated and frustrated by the political leaders so that they may not concentrate on taking an active part in politics. Moreover, the party meetings are scheduled at a late time, and due to long distances and traveling, it becomes impossible for women to participate in these meetings. Many respondents were of the view that no emphasis is given to female rights and no opportunities are offered to them as the parties are in the control of the male segment of society. They further stated that all our efforts are made by politicians to get the support of men prior to the election and the entire vote including female votes is demanded from them. Therefore, women have no knowledge about the contesting candidates and they poll their votes according to the dictates of the male family head (Shah et al, 2020).

Moreover, females had having very negative perception of politics. Politics was considered by them as a bad game full of violent activities, fighting, and power shows for the elite class, baseless commitments, and fraudulent activities. When the female were asked about their independence in politics, most of the women stated that they polled their vote in the election as dictated by their male family head having no freedom to independently decide about exercising their voting rights. The following views were shared by one of the respondents:

"Men are decision-makers in our family and prior to the election, we are advised by them to cast our votes in favor of their favorite candidates. The vote is polled to the specific candidates according to the wishes of our male family members". Similarly statement by another respondent was given as: "It is astonishing that some females are alone going to the polling stations for political campaigning and casting their votes. Such women are defaming their families and their men are not stopping them from this practice which seems very bad. It is not possible for me to cast a vote in the polling station having no male family member".

As expressed above, those women who belong to the middle class are reluctant to join active politics i.e. to convince and persuade people, to carry out election campaigns as well as to take part in elections as contesting candidates. They are in favor of vote casting but the same is considered to be polled as directed by their male family heads. All the political powers are thought to be the prerogative of males and women are left with no option but to act as desired by their male family members (Waseem, 2019).

Thus women are contributing to their own subordination as they have accepted the reality that in this patriarchal society, men are superior to women and they cannot go against this fact. Moreover, the political leaders have to visit the government offices and courts, etc. in order to help the people in various matters. Women face a lot of difficulties in such situations as women are not treated fairly in male-dominated public offices. As evident from the above, it is a reality that men are not accepting and tolerating any change in the structure of power, and any change in this regard is resisted in various forms.

Ignorance Regarding Political Affairs

The majority of the females in the district lack information regarding the process of politics, elections, and civics. Women do not know about their political rights and liberty to participate in political activities. Moreover, they are ignorant about the various rights and opportunities provided to women in the Elections Act, of 2017. Despite the fact that due to the introduction of the Elections Act 2017, female political participation has been raised but still the Election Commission and other institutions like KPCSW, and DCSW have not played their due role to implement the Elections Act in letter and spirit. The majority of the Polling Stations in Local Government Elections, in 2022 were combined, where both men and women had to poll their votes due to which females faced difficulties in casting their votes (Mukherjee & Bhargava, 2009). As commented by a respondent:

"We do not have the requisite information about the political process and the skills to overcome the technicalities therein. Men can handle the political process effectively and therefore we seek guidance from them in the electoral process. We hardly manage the household activities".

Due to such kind of ignorance of women regarding their political rights and the opportunities provided to them, women have lagged behind men in participating in the political affairs in Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa in general and district Dir Lower in particular.

Conclusion

Several factors have affected female participation in politics together with a lack of information and meager resources. The society of Dir Lower district is typically dominated by males. The norms and traditions of society and religion hinder females from participating in election campaigns and other social activities. Moreover, terrorism and security issues resulted in low female political participation in the Local Government Elections, in 2022. It is clear from this research study that though women are willing to take an active part in politics, there are certain factors that have limited their political participation like gender discrimination, social and cultural norms, economic dependency, domestic responsibilities, religious influence administrative problems, etc. Female political participation will be highly increased in Pakistan in general and in district Dir Lower in particular in the coming elections if the above issues are resolved in a befitting manner and the implementation of the Elections Act, 2017 is carried out in letter and spirit by the government and the Election Commission of Pakistan. In this way, females would be enabled to play their due role in political reforms and the development of the country.

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