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Behind the walls: How are female home workers compromising their labor rights to secure their livelihoods in the garment supply industry?

Farah Naz

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Farah Naz

Behind the walls: How are female home workers compromising their labor rights to secure their livelihoods in the garment supply chains of Pakistan?

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Abstract

The study focuses on women homeworkers in the garment industry of Pakistan with the objective of analyzing the challenges faced by women home-based workers. The paper is also an endeavor to understand the ways through which women's involvement in homework through global supply chains has empowered or constrained them in terms of access to their labor rights and entitlements in Pakistan. Existing labor rights entitlements available to homeworkers at the national and the international level are first reviewed and assessed. The study also introduces the local and global context in which homeworkers are situated and their work is analyzed both at the level of the labor market and at the household level, in order to explore the implications of global supply chains for their empowerment and agency. The paper argues that women's involvement in homework within the private sphere of the household holds implications for their labor and other human rights in Pakistan. Women's involvement in homework brings some positive changes in the life of a few women, but the process of change is very slow and choices are limited for homeworkers in general. However, despite the limitations of homework there is also some, limited, scope for women's empowerment through the establishment of different support mechanisms.

Keywords

Home-based Work, Supply Chain, Labor Rights, Garment Industry, Pakistan

1. Introduction

The garment industry is very labor-intensive and has grown to become the largest employer of female labor in the world¹ over the last two decades, providing income and other opportunities for millions of women (Hale and Wills, 2004, Oxfam, 2004). At the same time, the globalization of the production process, facilitated through trade and economic liberalization, has allowed investors to switch their factories from one country/region/locality to another, to lower their production costs and maximize their profit margins (Gereffi, 1994). In this process, there has been additional pressure on local factories in many developing countries to lower their wage costs in order to remain competitive in the global market. Wage costs were often lowered by sub-contracting work to women in households, thereby reducing fixed and supervision costs, resulting in a simultaneous increase in the informalization and feminization of the labor force in developing countries. Such flexible employment practices hold implications for the labor rights of workers in the global and local garment supply chains, with many workers working as home-based workers under precarious conditions at the lowest ends of the supply chains (Mehrotra and Biggeri, 2007; Mehrotra and Biggeri, 2010). One of the most vulnerable and invisible groups in the garment supply chains is that of the female homeworkers. Female homeworkers have limited or no access to social protection and they often have to work for long hours at low wages (Sudarshan and Sinha, 2011).

1.1 *The Significance of the Garment Industry in Pakistan*

The ready-made garment production was started in Pakistan in 1970 as a small-scale industry. However, due to rapid industrialization, this industry has expanded to an enormous scale and has become one of the most thriving sectors in Pakistan. It accounts for 700,000 employees in Pakistan and has become a key player in the export sector (Kelegma, 2004). Its products are sold in both national and international markets. The majority of units producing fashion garments are small- and medium-scale, with few

¹ An estimated 40 million workers, mostly women, are employed in global garment industry.

exceptions. Export earnings² from the garment industry have increased tremendously over last few years. The garment industry also provides momentum to many other allied industries, such as spinning, weaving, and printing/dyeing processing (Memoon. n.d).

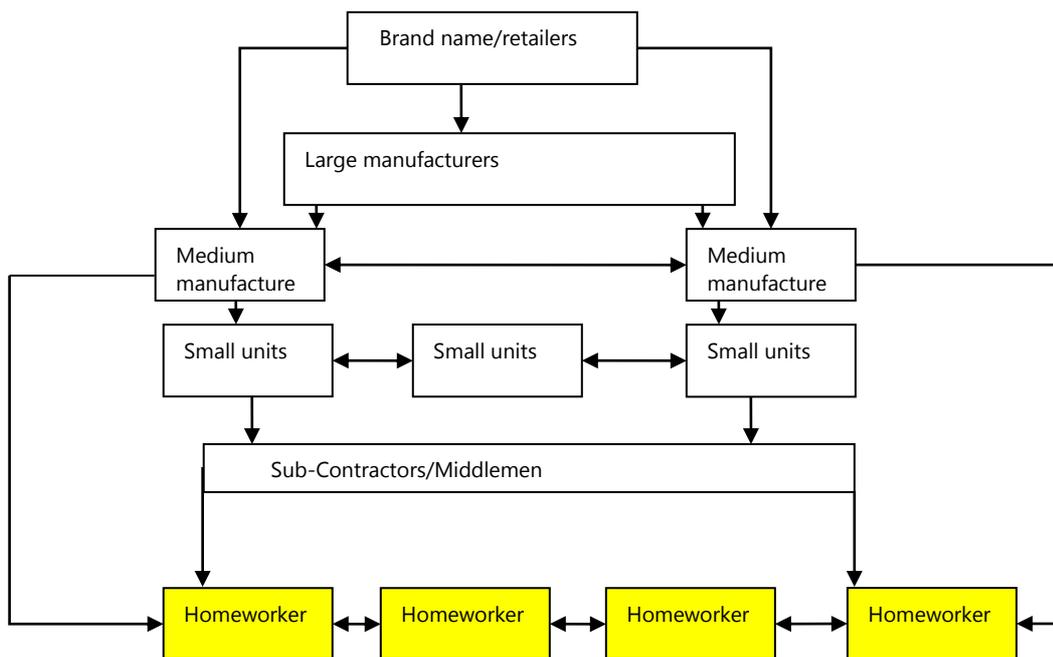
Therefore, the growth of the garment sector extended the employment opportunities through outsourcing and sub-contracting in garment supply chains to those women who were struggling to provide for their families subsistence needs in adverse economic situations. IMF- and WB-led structural adjustment programs (SAPs) introduced in Pakistan during 1991 pushed many women to seek wage labor to cushion dwindling household economies (Sayeed and Khattak, 2000). It is evident from the available statistics that there was an increase in both relative and absolute poverty in Pakistan during the post-adjustment period (Siddique and Kemal, 2006). Existing studies also confirm that despite the use of gender-neutral language, SAPs have serious implication for women and their work patterns in the labor market (Kurian, 2003, ILO, 2011).

However, at the end of 2004, with the phasing-out of the MFA (Multi Fiber Agreement), a new chapter started in the trade of garments in Pakistan. In the post-quota period, countries can no longer make use of the quotas to enter the market of industrialized countries, while it was possible for imports to enter local markets freely. These changes in the trade rules have posed serious challenges for manufacturers and especially for the small producers and have further exacerbated the competition in the garment supply chains (Din, 2005). These changes in the national and international market also have serious implication for the workers' rights, mostly women who are concentrated in the lowest ends of the garment supply chains.

1.2 Home-Based Women Workers in Garment Supply Chains

Figure 1 may help to explain the horizontal and vertical linkages of female home-based workers in the local/global garment supply chains, taking the case of the garment industry in Pakistan as an example.

² Exports increased from 19 million dozens of various types of ready-made garments worth US\$ 394 million in 1989-90 to 1088 million during 2004-05 (Memoon, n. d, BOI, website).

Figure 1: Garment Supply Chains of Pakistan

Source: Own elaboration

1.3 Legal Protection of Homeworkers in Pakistan

According to Ali and Saeed (cited in Khan et al., 2007), the existing legislative structure of the government is not pro-labor. Labor laws and policies are unfavorable for workers, and especially for women and children. There is no direct legislation in Pakistan for the protection of female homeworkers, for the simple reason that labor laws in Pakistan are not applicable to the entire working population, but only to the formal sector. Labor laws in Pakistan are generally not applicable to the informal sector, but it can be said that they are also barely implemented in the formal sector (CEDAW, 2005). However, being a member of a number of different international labor rights and human rights conventions, including the ILO Convention on Home Work of 1996, the Pakistan government has a legal obligation to take active steps towards improving labor conditions in Pakistan.

Although none of them directly address the issue of homeworking, Pakistan has ratified seven out of eight core ILO Conventions regarding Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work that could be extended to homeworkers, given the political will to do so. Along with international obligations, there are certain provisions in the national Constitution of Pakistan (1973) regarding female employment that could be applied to

female homeworkers as well. Article No. 3 of the Constitution of Pakistan states, 'The state shall insure the elimination of all forms of exploitation' (Khan et al 2007, p.124). Article No. 38 states that 'The state shall provide for all citizen within the available resources of the country, facilities for work and adequate livelihood with reasonable rest and leisure and provide for all persons employed in the service of Pakistan or otherwise, social security by compulsory social insurance or other means' (Labor Protection Policy, 2006). Regarding the working conditions faced by women homeworkers, the government has acknowledged their plight in its Labor Protection Policy of 2005. Overall, effective policy implementation remains the biggest hurdle in realizing the goal of better and decent working condition for the homeworkers.

1.4 Relevance and Justification

During the last two decades, the garment industry has become the focus of a great deal of attention in debates on globalization, due to women's increased involvement in home-based work through intricate global garment supply chains, and the implication of this process for labor/human rights in general, as well as women's rights specifically. Homeworking has also become the debated issue in the national and international forums in recent years. There is an on-going debate in the existing literature asking whether this type of work is a source of women's emancipation or grounds for their further exploitation within the productive and the reproductive spheres. This research is an attempt to contribute to these discussions by looking into the living realities of homeworkers in the garment industry of Pakistan. There is very little published work on the garment industry in Pakistan, which adds to the importance of this research (Farhat and Ali, 1996; Khan et.al, 2001; Khattak and Sayeed, 2000; Weiss, 1996; WWW, 2003). This research is also significant at this moment in time, when there is a persistent and substantial increase in female home-based work in Pakistan and many civil society organizations³ are strongly lobbying the GoP(Government of Pakistan) for the extension of social protection to homeworkers

³ The Kashaf Foundation and the Aurat Foundation are playing a leading role in lobbying for the homeworkers' labour rights in Pakistan.

through the introduction of positive national legislation in Pakistan (ILO, 2011). Therefore, the study of existing deficits in the labor/human rights entitlements of homeworkers in the garment industry of Pakistan will offer an important contribution to this cause as well.

1.5 Research Objectives

The objective of this study is to analyze the challenges faced by female home-based workers in Pakistan and make an endeavor to understand the ways through which women's involvement in homework has empowered or constrained them to have access to their labor right entitlements.

1.6 Research Questions

This research is an attempt to answer the following questions:

- What is the role of homeworkers in the local/global supply chains of the garment industry in Pakistan?
- What are existing and potential legal and non-legal supportive mechanisms for homeworkers at the national and international level?
- Has women's involvement in homeworking enhanced their capabilities to make effective choices, and thereby improved their access to labor rights and entitlements?
- How do women's own notions of agency and empowerment, or the lack of these, influence their perceptions of homework, and their access to their labor rights and entitlements?

1.7 Working Proposition

Patriarchal norms in Pakistan define women's role in society primarily in terms of their role as mothers and wives within the household. This is in contrast to the role of men, which is defined in terms of their role as 'breadwinners'. In this research, the general thesis is that these strictly gendered (and privatized) notions of appropriate roles for women (and men) complement and reinforce women's specific exploitation as cheap labor through subcontracting practices in the garment supply chains. This in turn leaves relatively little space

available to these women homeworkers to exercise control over their lives and to thereby gain-improved access to their labor rights and related human rights entitlements. However, even this little space can open up some new possibilities for some women homeworkers.

1.8 Research Methodology

1.8.1 Approach

The paper uses a labor/human rights-based approach to analyze the situation of female homeworkers in the garment supply chains of Pakistan. While locating their role in the global supply chains, including their invisibility and marginalization with regard to work and labor rights, the paper uses anthropological insights based on work in the field, and some familiarity with the women's daily situations, to analyze their perceptions and their access to labor rights in particular. The analytical framework also uses insights gained from existing research on globalization, global commodity chains, and on home-based work, including in the textile industry, elsewhere in the world.

1.8.2 Sources of Information

This research relied on primary and secondary sources of information to understand the dynamic of homework and location of homeworkers in the garment industry in Pakistan. Based on this information, the women's position in the garment supply chains was analyzed, especially from the perspective of their labor rights (e.g. decent working conditions, reasonable pay, minimum age, right to organize). To a limited extent only, their position is also analyzed in terms of their access to human rights in general (e.g. right to participation, free expression), in relation to their position as homeworkers in the supply chain. Primary information has been used to build a case to conduct a situational analysis of female homeworkers.

1.8.3 Sample Survey

It is hard to establish the exact number and extent of homework in Pakistan's garment sector for the reason that female homeworkers and their contribution to the economy are

'veiled' in the available official statistics. Due to a lack of such historical information regarding female engagement in homework, a survey of female homeworkers in the garment sector had to be conducted to get a snap shot of the female homeworkers and explore the nature of the problems faced by them in the garment sector. A self-administered semi-structured questionnaire was used to get information about the situation of homeworkers in their respective productive and reproductive spheres. Questions were asked about the general profile of workers, their awareness of their labor rights entitlements and their own perceptions about their work and its implication for their agency and empowerment. Snowball sampling was used to select the respondents. The sample was comprised of fifty homeworkers selected through the snowball sampling method. These women resided in different localities in Lahore and the city's outskirts.

1.8.4 The case study method

In order to locate the homeworkers and get first-hand information about the working situation of homeworkers, ITL a leading manufacturer, and garment export firm was used as an entry point in this research. Lahore was selected as the main area for study for the reason that it is one of the largest garment-producing cities of Pakistan. One of the most challenging tasks was to have direct contact with homeworkers themselves. To seek out initial contacts with the homeworkers was a tedious and time-consuming task, especially since management denied any direct contact or knowledge about the female homeworkers who were producing for them. Through different meetings and informal discussions with workers and administrative staff, a link was traced with the homeworkers through a sub-contractor. The sub-contractor, who was a woman, was also quite reluctant initially to share information about the workers and to provide their contact details. Finally, she agreed to call them to her house to conduct the interview with them. The small number of workers who were initially interviewed in the house of the sub-contractor were hesitant to talk about their working situation.

However, this became an important starting point that helped to trace more homeworkers in the supply chain and to establish independent contact with them. Once the initial contacts were established, it became easier to trace other homeworkers through

neighbors or residents in the same locality. Therefore, the case study of ITL was a very helpful way to locate the workers and analyze their working conditions, their labor rights entitlements and their position in local and global supply chains in the garment industry. Primary information was generated through informal and semi-structured in-depth interviews.

1.8.5 Secondary Data

Secondary data includes a comprehensive literature review⁴ of relevant books, academic articles, and recent reports by different governmental and non-governmental organizations. Some important web resources⁵ were also explored to gain secondary information.

1.9 *Structure of the Paper*

This paper is structured in five chapters, including this introduction. This first chapter has briefly introduced the research area and explained its significance for Pakistan and for women's rights, especially their labor rights. The problem area was outlined, and the key research questions to be explored in the paper and research methodology were outlined, along with a working proposition about the topic. The methods that have been used during the research process were also explained and justified. The second chapter will establish the conceptual and analytical context of the study, provide a theoretical framework that defines and analyzes various concepts important to the understanding of the dynamics of women's homeworking within the structures of current production processes, and these women's room for maneuver in terms of accessing labor rights. The third chapter is a case study of a garment-producing firm, and describes in some detail the supply chain of ITL. The situation of women workers in the supply and production chains of the company is analyzed from the perspective of their rights, conditions and the nature of their work. The fourth chapter is an analysis of female homeworkers and their situation at what can be termed the 'crossroads' of production and reproduction. This chapter is an

⁴ Books, reports and articles are listed in reference section.

⁵ Web sites are listed in reference section.

effort to establish from the available data just how women homeworkers' identities and perceptions are formed through their positions and their relationships. This sets the ground for exploring whether their work can contribute towards their empowerment or just serves to further their exploitation in the household and in the labor market more generally. The last chapter discusses general conclusions based on the research findings.

1.10 Limitations

Analysis and conclusions in this paper are based on survey results and case studies of the female homeworkers, which were carried out in collaboration with an assistant researcher in the field. The relationship was a close one, and the researcher, who was also solely responsible for analyzing and processing the data obtained, carried out the process of drawing up questionnaires. However, had it been possible to visit the field for an extended period, it may have been easier to follow up on certain interesting questions that arose, something which proved logistically impossible. It may well be difficult to generalize on the basis of this data alone, but it does seem that these findings give us at least an initial sense of the complex and varied situations faced by female homeworkers in the gendered spheres of household and the labor market in Pakistan's garment industry.

2. Globalization, Global Commodity Chains, and Home-Based Work

This chapter sets up the main analytical and conceptual framework, which can help to understand the dynamics of homework in the garment industry of Pakistan. The first part introduces the global garment industry in the context of the current wave of globalization. The second section discusses the concept of global commodity chains and its relevance for the study of the global garment industry. The third section defines and analyzes the home-based work, characteristics of homeworkers and political and economic conditions that support this type of work especially with reference to the garment industry. The fourth and fifth sections review the current debates on the women involvement in paid labor and its implications for their empowerment. The final section considers current basic labor rights entitlements of homeworkers as per the ILO Convention on Homework (No. C171).

2.1 Trends in the Global Garment Industry

Over the past few decades, due to rapid changes in the world system, trade and production have become more integrated and diversified at the global level (Lund-Thomsen, et al. 2012). The garment industry has a buyer-driven system of governance. Therefore, large retailers, brand name merchandisers, and trading companies play a very important role in the global garment industry (Gereffi and Korzeniewicz, 1994; Hurly and Miller 2005). These big buyers exert greater control on the process of manufacturing through their innovative organizational strategies and control over large consumer markets. They are in a position to exert pressure on manufacturers due to lower production cost. As 'gate keeper' to the consumers, they have the power to dictate their rules to the suppliers and producers down the chain (Gereffi., 1994; OXFAM, 2004). Technological advancement also facilitates the control of the retailers and brand name companies on producers. The introduction of an Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) system enables the retailers to track the consumer purchase through barcodes. This facilitates them to enhance their flexibility by placing 'just in time order' and reduce inventory cost by transferring the risk to the manufacturer to supply orders in the limited time (OXFAM, 2004; Taplin 2004).

Thus, the global garment industry is in a state of constant flux. Manufacturers, in order to be competitive, adopt multiple strategies to reduce their costs. The old production model, characterized by mass production and a 'just in case' inventory system, has been replaced by production methods that are more flexible (Gereffi 1994, Prugal, 1999). According to Atkinson (1984, cited in Allen and Wolkowitz 1987; 165) firms sought to increase their flexibility and reduce their production cost through 'flexible manning'. The firms use three main strategies of 'flexible manning'. First is functional flexibility; that is through deploying workers in different tasks; second is numerical flexibility; that is the strategy of the firms to cut down the permanent labor force and hire the workers according to the changing demand; and third is financial flexibility; sought through lowering wages with an increase in labor supply.

All these tactics allow firms to reduce their commitments and obligations towards their workers and cut down the costs of production to compete in the international market. There are two different and incompatible views among academic scholars on the implications of the globalization of the garment industry (Rani and Unni, 2009). Mainstream analysts consider low-skilled, low-wage industrialization as a milestone for the industrial development of exporting countries that is providing employment to millions of people. Whereas, the other side see it as worsening of labor conditions termed as 'race to bottom' and exploitation of labor rights in both advanced and developing countries through downward harmonizing (Hurly and Miller 2005 ; Schrank, 2004; Singh and Zammit, 2004).

2.2 *Global Commodity Chains (GCC)*

The concept of the Global Commodity Chain that was initially developed by Gereffi and Korzeniewicz (1994) offers a very useful analytical framework to understand the complex and internationally dispersed global garment industry (Hurly and Miller, 2005). This framework was used in many interesting studies to explore and analyze the power relations that influence the distribution of human financial and material resources (Barrientos, 2001; Kurian, 2006; Khan and Kazmi, 2008; Rani and Unni, 2009). According to Gereffi et al. (1994; 2), 'GCC consists of sets of inter-organizational networks clustered

around one commodity or product, linking households, enterprises, and states to one another in the world economy.' Gereffi has classified GCC chains into two types, buyer-driven and producer-driven commodity chains. Producer-driven chains are mainly governed by the large translational companies (TNC) and have centralized governance structure, whereas buyer-driven chains are controlled by retailers, brand name merchandiser and trading companies (Gerrefi,1994).

Production in buyer-driven chains is mostly labor-intensive and located in peripheral countries due to availability of cheap labor in these countries, whereas high-value activities like designing and marketing are controlled by the core countries mainly in consumer goods like garments, footwear etc. Thus, the relative position of the country in the world economy, due to its comparative advantage, determines the share of each country in the production process. Peripheral countries have the advantage of cheap labor force; however, this is a 'lower order' advantage (Porter 1990 cited in Gereffi et al. 1994). The garment industry has a buyer-driven system of governance. There is intense competition among the producers that is driving down the prices in the international market because sourcing companies are in a position to switch factories or countries for small price reduction (Oxfam, 2004).

Brand name companies and retailers further protect their profit by demanding high-quality and low-priced products from the supplier at short notice. Six to eight fashion seasons in the year have become the norm in the Western market, which has built up time pressure on the producers (ibid). This pressure is ultimately translated into pressure on the work force in the form of unpaid overtime and sub-contracting and outsourcing (ILO, 2000). A large number of the women who are doing industrial homework are closely integrated into the closely-knit local / global supply chains. Although there is not much data available about home-based workers due to their invisibility, it is estimated that approximately 30 - 80 percent of all home-based workers and 80 percent of industrial out-workers are women located at the lowest nodes of commodity chains (Mehrotra and Bigeri, 2007; 7).

It is also evident from the fact that women's share of industrial employment has increased dramatically during last two decades for the reason that there was pressure to

create a new industrial division of labor using flexible forms of production. Women workers were considered the ideal workforce for these jobs due to commonly held notions about their docility, submissiveness and dexterity to perform monotonous tasks at low wages under flexible arrangements (Chhachhi, 2006). There was an increase in the demand for unskilled and flexible female labor force. Numerous studies have found a close relationship between trade liberalization in developing countries and female employment (Randriamaro, 2005, Tran-Nguyen, 2004, Cagatay, 2001 cited in Siegmann, 2005, Kurian 2003). As argued by Chhachhi and Pittin (1996; 4), women are playing a significant role in both productive and reproductive spheres, and are using different coping strategies to juggle different and contradictory roles at the same time.

2.3 *Home-Based Work*

The term home-based work is the subject of ongoing debate and it is difficult to encompass due to a lack of consensus on the single definition of the term. However, a general definition of home-based workers includes all kinds of remunerative work carried out from inside the home and encompassing the self-employed; piece workers; salaried employees who work for a 'middle- man' or a firm; or even unpaid workers in a family enterprise (Rani and Unni; ILO, 2011; WEIGO, 2011). Home-based workers perform wage labor inside or near the house, whereas homeworkers are a sub-category of the home-based workers, who work from the home for factories mostly on piece rate. Largely, they are involved in industrial out-work. The majority of women in the developing countries are homeworkers. They are pushed by the economic deprivation to seek wage labor, but often cannot find regular wage labor and instead work for low piece rates or low daily pay under exploitative conditions without any job security, formal contracts or any fringe benefits. They have to cover some production cost themselves, such as the provision of the work place, equipment, energy, and utility costs and so forth (Mehrotra and Biggeri, 2010).

2.3.1 Characteristics of Homeworkers

According to Wendy and Gomez, (n.d), home-based worker are individuals who are not willing or able to work outside the home due to various reasons. There are three different

categories of such individuals confined to the private sphere of the home. Firstly, women who carry the reproductive burden and perform care work inside the house, secondly disabled individuals and thirdly individuals who have difficulty in entering the labor force due to legal constraints, discrimination and information asymmetries. There are two main approaches regarding women's engagement in home-based work. The first approach is based on the assumption that women are willing to work in the homes due to their dominant gender responsibilities to take on the roles of 'care givers' and familial reproduction. Whereas the second approach emphasizes the role of patriarchal social structures and the contractual underpinning of the intra-household decision-making that constrains the women's entry into the public sphere.

2.3.2 Political Economy of Home Work

Since primordial times, the home has been the site of production and consumption. Women were engaged in subsistence activities inside the household along with the men. In the pre-industrial societies, women's traditional economic contribution was generally recognized. During the industrial revolution, new divisions of labor were created by initially employing women in harsh conditions in factories, mines, and so forth and then by confining women to the private sphere of the home. The public world of work was increasingly restricted to men. New identities thus had to be carved out in order to suit the new division of labor. Femininity was associated with hegemonic notions of motherhood and a caregiver's role. Masculine identities were associated with income earning and the bread-winning role of the male household head. Thus, the roles of the head of household, the single male income-earner and the full-time housewife, evolved during the industrial revolution by means of a new form of 'industrial patriarchy' (Prugal, 1999). Women's position was accepted and further established as the 'supplemental income earner'. Women's new role of second earner was also reinforced through the changes in the wider global economic order that increased the demand for a low-skilled and flexible labor force. Thus, the interplay of material circumstances, ideas, and institutions play a vital role in the construction of identities

2.4 *Women's Home-based Work: Existing Debates in Academic Discourses*

Until the 1980s, feminist literature was dominated by the integrationist approaches Women in Development (WID). Feminist scholars mainly argued for women's incorporation in the existing labor regime by taking multiple roles of women more seriously (Prugal, 1996). However, the traditional model of employment that was based on the norms of the male worker was not challenged in the WID approaches. Women's employment in the public sphere was considered as a major source of their liberation, while women's reproductive work in the private domain was devalued as non-productive (Allen and Wolkowitz, 1987). However, during the 1980s, new production models emerged due to wider changes in global economic patterns, being characterized by the increased feminization of the labor force through the multiple layers of the sub-contracting process (Chhachhi and Pittin, 1996). Therefore, changes in economic conditions increased the visibility of homeworkers and thus, the traditional model of work that was based on the male breadwinner – 'housewife' ideology was challenged and boundaries between home and wage labor started to be redefined (Prugal, 1999).

However, there is intense debate in development literature and feminist theorizing about the causes, consequences and implications of the feminization of the labor force. There are two major strands of debate around the issues of women's labor force participation in the new production model. One group is optimistic about the transformative potential of female labor force participation (Allen and Wolkowitz, 1987; Chhachhi, 2006; Kabeer, 2004). It is claimed that current changes in the world system have extended the opportunities for women workers, previously excluded due to their limited human capital and their cultural constraints. Homeworking, along with self-employment, part-time work and temporary contracts in sub-contracted production chains are seen as boon for the women, since they have to continue with their care work inspite of their wage labor. Homeworking is thus viewed as having some advantages for mothers with young children to care for (Allen and Wolkowitz, 1987).

Increased sub-contracting is considered advantageous for the firms as well, for the reason that it decreases the cost of production through reduction in overhead and labor costs by employing 'reserve female labor force'. This is seen as an advantage to increase the

competitiveness of the firms in the international market. It is claimed by the proponents that changes associated with the women's employment have positive implications for the women's status within the family and their empowerment and agency over time. As argued by the Kandiyoti (1988), 'women strategize within the set of concrete constraints and devise strategies to make patriarchal bargains to maximize security and optimize life options'. Whereas opponents take it as another form of female exploitation through biased labor market practices that naturalize women's role as caregiver and constrain women's opportunity structure in the labor market and society (Elson, 1995; Pearson, 1998).

The prevalent image of the homeworkers as housewives, who are utilizing their free time to earn some 'pin money', does not apply. This illusion was exposed in the case of the lace makers of Narsapur, who were forced by economic needs to produce for the global market at very low wages (Mies, 1982). Eviota (1995) argues that, although export-led industrialization created employment opportunities for the women, the nature of the work made them the prey of global capital. Integration of the household into capitalist labor processes has tended to reinforce patriarchal relations and sharpen the gender inequalities (Allen and Wolkowitz, 1987). Most of the jobs created in the informal sector are due to increased sub-contracting and outsourcing that characterized the export sector in particular (Allen and Wolkowitz, 1987; Prugal, 1996).

This increased female participation in the informal economy, and particularly within the private sphere of the household, has redefined the boundaries of work and traditional employment. Women play a significant but precarious role at the intersection of productive and reproductive work. According to Mehrotra and Biggeri (2007), this expansion in the informal sector is linked not only to the capacity of the formal firms to absorb labor, but also to their willingness to do so.

2.5 Women's Empowerment and Agency in the Context of Home-Based Work

There is ongoing debate in feminist and development literature about the implications of women's paid work within the domestic sphere of the household from the perspective of their empowerment and agency. Empowerment is a dubious term in development and feminist literature, however, in broader terms, empowerment can be defined as the

capacity of the individual or groups to make choices and transform these choices into desirable forms of action. It is evident from the existing studies that the individual capacity to make choices does not automatically lead to women's empowerment, for the reason that effective choice can only be made in the first place, if a person has agency and appropriate opportunities exist for making choices and getting at least some of the desired results (Alsop et al. 2006). Agency is the ability of an individual to envision and make resolute choices. Many factors constrain the individual ability to make effective choices. Individual agency may be hindered by the cultural context and everyday realities of a person's life.

This is mainly the case with the women who are unable to exercise their choices due to cultural and social factors. Social institutions are a reflection of social norms and play a very important role in shaping women's perceptions about their abilities. These values are so deeply rooted that the women themselves cannot fully perceive the disempowering impact of these values. Women themselves see their disempowerment as fitting in with morally virtuous and socially appropriate behavior. In many countries, women accept the right of men to domestic violence as 'doxa', which is seen as a natural and common sense phenomenon (Kabeer, 1999). Therefore, normative structures of society play an important role in determining and shaping the individual choices. In many cases, patriarchal norms are so deeply embedded that women are not always aware that their habitual choices undermine their own position with regard to their own agency, their rights in the broadest sense. They may fail to appreciate that their 'desirable' behavior is not natural, but rather tends to be socially constructed (Alsop et al 2006).

Beechey (1979) also argued that women have a marginalized status in society and the patriarchal norms and values are the key site of their oppression and subordination in society. Such patriarchal norms and values that justify women's oppression are the source of their subjugation. Many choices that women make in their life emerge from their marginalized status in society. Therefore, women's empowerment could be achieved by undoing such internalized oppression. Any effort of women's empowerment must involve changes in the patriarchal order, which requires change from within at the level of individual consciousness, in power relations within the household, and more generally in

social attitude and resources in the wider society. Empowerment should include not only the expansion of choices, but also the ability of women to exercise these choices without risking social stigma and further social exclusion (Mehra, 1997).

2.6 *The Struggles for Rights: ILO Convention on Homeworkers*

The ILO convention on Home Work (C177) is applicable to 'all people carrying out homework, which results in a product specified by the employer, in his or her own place of choice for remuneration' (article 1). All ratifying states are obliged to formulate their own national policy on homework and they should promote equality between homeworkers and all other waged workers. Equality of treatment through the homeworkers right to organize, protection against discrimination, protection in the field of occupational safety and health, remuneration, statutory social protection, access to training, minimum age for admission to employment or work and maternity protection are all fundamental human rights. It is argued that social protection to homeworkers should be provided by means of laws and regulations and any violation should be penalized (articles 4 and 9).

All these fundamental labor standards covered under the ILO Convention on Freedom of Association (Nos.87 and 98), Forced Labor (Nos. 29 and 105), Discrimination (Nos. 100 and 111) and Child Labor (Nos.138 and 182) are linked with fundamental human rights issues. These Conventions have been widely ratified by member states. However, the ILO Convention on Homework that was passed in July 1996 had been ratified only by four countries by December 2005 (Mehrotra and Biggeri, 2007). That reflects the contentious nature of the convention. Although there are serious concerns about the potential of the Convention to reform existing legal structures within a short span of time, however it reflects an important victory for home-based workers, as it set international standards for home-based workers and initiated a debate at the global and local level about their basic labor and human rights entitlements.

2.7 *Conclusion*

Homeworking is a complex issue that is hard to theorize. However, this chapter attempted to outline a few basic analytical concepts that could help to direct this research and situate

the female homeworkers in a local and global context of garment industry. Important analytical frameworks explored in this chapter were globalization, global commodity chains and the political economy of home-based work. All these factors contribute to an increased number of homeworkers in the garment industry. These frameworks are used in the following chapters to analyze the conditions of female homeworkers in the garment industry of Pakistan from the perspective of their labor and other human rights entitlements.

3. Homeworkers in Production

In this chapter the case of the company Irfan Textile (Pvt) Ltd. will be presented and located within the supply chain of the garment industry in the local and global context. This case will be analyzed and the position of homeworkers explored in this context. The first section provides some background information about ITL, one of the leading garment manufacturing and exporting firms in the city of Lahore. The next part is an effort to map the supply chain of the above-mentioned firm, looking at different levels. The rest of the chapter is based on an elaboration of the different tiers or links in this complex supply chain that binds the garment industry together, as it were. The final section of this chapter analyzes in more detail the position of the women homeworkers in Lahore within the supply chain of ITL, as already traced in the outline earlier in the chapter. Throughout, this chapter sets the context for a more detailed study of working conditions of the homeworkers, their agency, and limitations on their agency.

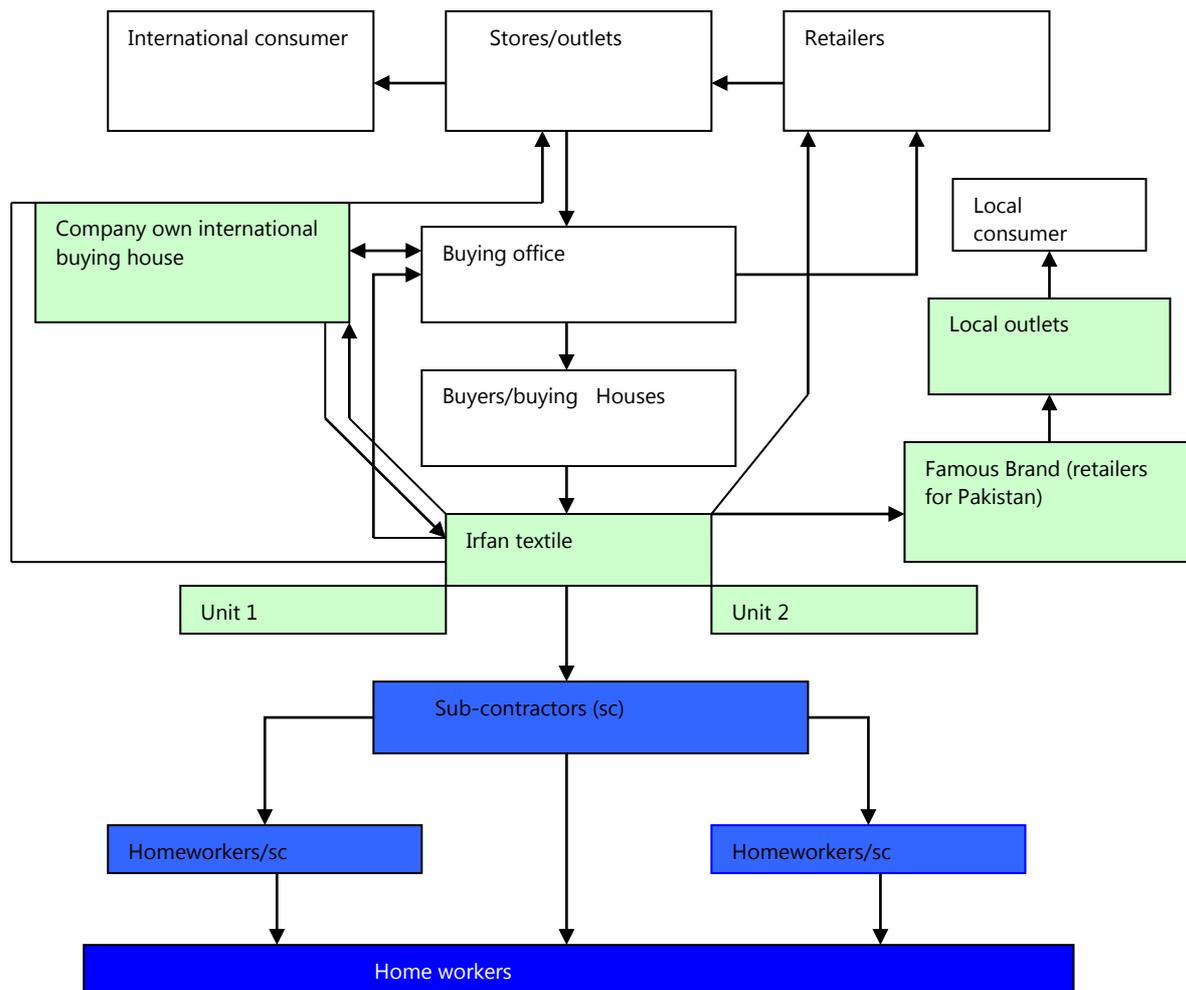
3.1 Background

ITL was established in 1990. It is the flagship company of the Irfan Group of companies, established in 1949. Over the years, this company has grown substantially. The company is now a leading knitwear exporter in Pakistan. It has set up three modern production units for knitwear in Lahore. The knitwear industry is almost totally export-oriented industry in Pakistan. It is highly value-added, earning much valuable foreign exchange. During the last few years, the segment of knitwear has shown a substantial rising drift in exports. Export of knitwear increased from \$464 million in 1992-93 to \$1,147 million in 2002-03 (Yusuf, 2007).

ITL is the first knitwear company in Pakistan to win an ISO 9001 award (ITL, website). The company has 4000 employees. Women are just two percent of their total labor force. There are no women in administration (informal interview with a manager of the garment production unit of ITL).

Since the phase-out of the quota system, there has been a rapid expansion in investment in new textile technology in Pakistan. There is fierce competition among the manufacturers, both at the global and national level. This situation is further exacerbated due to the drastic changes in the trade rules after the expiry of the ATC at end of 2004. Although, it has opened new windows of opportunities for large competitive firms like ITL, but in order to compete with large producers like China, they have to produce high-quality products at a low rate. Production costs in Pakistan are comparatively high for different reasons like high labor cost, higher utility costs, and higher financial costs as compared with India, China, and Bangladesh. Therefore, despite having enough orders, manufacturers are having a tough time meeting the demands at a cost that is not feasible for them due to the high unit cost of production (ibid). Tight delivery schedules are also reported as a problem for the manufacturer. They usually have no more than ninety days from the day of the order to the delivery of the products. There is also fluctuation in the orders. Therefore, the firm has to use different organizational strategies to become more competitive and flexible by transferring the pressure to the bottom of the chain (ibid).

Figure 3: The Supply Chain of Irfan Textile (Pvt) Ltd



Source: Own elaboration based on findings

It has been revealed during the informal discussions with the officials that after the phase-out of the quota, the knitwear industry in Pakistan has come under great stress. It is severely affected by the low-priced and high-quality goods from China, India, Bangladesh, and Cambodia. Knitwear was one of the most flourishing sub-sectors of the garment industry in Pakistan, but 77 exporting units have already closed since the expiry of the quota system. Of the closed knitwear units, 31 units were based in Lahore. ITL was the largest quota holder in Pakistan in category 338 of men's knit to USA, enjoying comfortably high margins during the quota regime. However, after the quota expiry it came under strain and now has to face fierce competition in the global market. Export margins on the products in general have decreased in a highly competitive global market without the guarantee of a secured quota. Figure 3 reflects the complex web of the various

trading relations of ITL within local and global garment supply chains. This may help us to understand the complex nature of the globalization of the production process that emerged in the wake of economic restructuring. There are five main tiers of this production chain. A small number of retailers and brand names govern the chain. They are located in the advanced countries and have greater access and control over the western consumer market. They control research and management, whereas production is carried out in the middle part of the chain. ITL, which carries out the assembly line manufacturing, is located in the middle of the chain. ITL was used as an entry point in this research to locate the homeworkers and analyze their working conditions in complex and multi-layered sub-contracting garment supply chains of Pakistan.

ITL has its own buying house in New York and receives most of its contracts (approximately 70 percent) through their own buying house, which gives ITL some control in this supply chain. The lightly shaded area shows the hierarchy relations of ITL. The same group owns all these lightly shaded firms. This reflects the strong position of ITL in this supply chain. Irfan Textile also produces for the Famous Brand who is retailer for Hang Ten (USA), Jockey International (USA), Slazenger (UK), and Dunlop (UK) in Pakistan. They have acquired the licenses to design, manufacture and distribute the clothing in Pakistan for the above-mentioned brands.

Mapping of this supply chain helped in the analysis of the power relations within the chain. The location of different workers in different tiers of the chain determines their position and bargaining power in the hierarchy of the relationships. Dark-shaded areas point towards the lowest tier in the supply chain in terms of control and location. This is the focus area of this research project. International retailers and brand names at the top end of figure 5, who are the drivers of this supply chain, extract maximum profit without sharing the risk involved in production and market fluctuations (Hurley and Hale, 2003). Female homeworkers who add high value to the products are located at the lowest end of the supply chain.

3.2 *Patterns of Sub-contracting in Irfan Textile (Pvt) Ltd*

ITL is a vertically integrated company that specializes in knitwear. During a field survey, it was observed that in order to be competitive the firm uses multiple managerial strategies. Sub-contracting is one of the most common strategies adopted by the manufacturers to remain competitive in the market (See Box 1). It was found that ITL involves both horizontal as well as vertical sub-contracting practices. In horizontal sub-contracting work is sub-contracted by the ITL to two other sibling factories in the same city. Whereas, dying and fabric painting is mostly sub-contracted to other small units. In the case of large orders and short delivery periods, the company adopts two main strategies of sub-contracting. One of the strategies adopted by the management is 'in-sourcing', in which ITL hires a temporary work force for the short period or involves workers in the overtime. Hiring of workers for the short period is an innovative type of sub-contracting, widely practiced in new production models, in which workers are brought inside the plant to complete the task for a short period. These temporary workers do not have any formal job contracts or any other labor right entitlements.

Box 1: The Practice of Outsourcing

Outsourcing is widely practiced by the garment manufacturers in Pakistan. We do not indulge in these practices. We own three units with large manufacturing capacity, therefore we do not need to outsource our work. However, in peak seasons we may bring women into the plant for work. These women also bring their young daughters with them to help them in their work. We do not employ women without checking their valid ID cards. These women are paid on a piece rate basis. We ensure that they can earn on average 5000 Rs. per month that is our minimum wage level (Interview with male Garment Production Manager ITL)

During the fieldwork, it was revealed in an informal interview with the manager of a garment production unit that these temporary workers, mostly women, are paid on the basis of piece rate. The company does not feel that it has any obligations towards these workers. They do not even maintain records concerning these workers, their hours or production levels and pay. It also came out of the discussion that, in some cases, in hiring these temporary workers, announcements are simply made in nearby villages and

'Bechhari'⁶, considered poor and deserving women, are hired for piece rate work in the factory. Such an edifice of women's work by the employer helps to construct the image of homeworkers as persons in need of 'charity' and capitalists as 'benevolent patriarchs', who are trying to help them to earn some much-needed income in order to sustain themselves and their families (e.g. in the case of sickness, ill-fortune or crop failure).

Such a construction of the work of these women has helped to constrain the women from perceiving themselves as having labor rights and entitlements, and from demanding these rights in a public and open manner. These women homeworkers are not entitled to any minimum wage level, or any other type of social security benefits. They are informal workers in a dependent relationship with a formal enterprise, yet they are largely invisible, including to the researcher. ITL also hires temporary piece rate workers through sub-contractors. Three permanent female supervisors who work in the quality control section also serve as sub-contractors for ITL.

Outsourcing is another strategy adopted by the management to reduce the cost and time of production. In outsourcing, work is distributed outside the factory to home workers through intermediaries. According to the information generated during the fieldwork, the two main types of task that were mostly outsourced by ITL were hand embroidery and fabric painting. Work is sub-contracted through different agents. Company does not have any direct contact with the homeworkers.

3.3 *Working Conditions in ITL: The Gender Division of Labor*

The production capacity of ITL is 500,000 garments per month and 720,000 dozen garment per year. The production process is capital-intensive, except the stitching and packing stages that are labor-intensive. All these functions are carried out in ITL plants well-equipped with modern technology. The production process at ITL is comprised of eight different stages. There are different departments that deal with preproduction planning, knitting, dying, cutting, embroidery, printing, stitching, quality assurance, and packing. It was found during the field survey that there are different categories of workers in ITL.

⁶ This word is mostly used for the helpless and needy person to describe the gravity of her situation.

There are permanent employees with secure job contracts and social security benefits. Another group of workers is employed without any job contract on a piece rate in the factory. They can be fired without any advance notice. They are mostly unskilled workers.

They do not have any formal contract as a proof of their employment. Mostly women are concentrated in these jobs in the packing department of the garment production unit. They have to cut and clean the extra threads from the stitched garment. They are paid at a very low rate of approximately 50 paisa⁷ per piece. However, physical conditions in garment production unit that was visited during the field survey were reasonably good. There was sufficient light and good ventilation arrangements. Women were working in a large room under the supervision of a male guard. There was exceptional silence in the room. Beside the supervision of the guard, inbuilt pressure to complete maximum pieces in the low paid piece rate system could be one of the possible explanations of women's exceptional behavior.

Although stitching is considered as traditional female craft in Pakistan, however there are no female seamstresses in this plant at all, which appears as quite a surprising finding. Male workers have training to be able to take on tasks in this field themselves and they are considered skilled labor by the management. On the other hand, women do not have the training facilities to learn the skills of stitching. They learn it through informal ways so that it is part of their gender role, and this form of training is not considered a marketable skill that makes them skilled workers. This is an example of a sharply skewed and gendered labor market in an area of a traditionally female specialization. This also reflects the bias of the labor market in defining 'skill'. It is evident that not only are women concentrated in low-skilled and low-paid work, but also that whatever the majority of the women does is constructed as unskilled work.

It was revealed from the informal interviews with the factory workers that some female workers in the packing department do have formal training in stitching, are interested to work in the stitching department because it is relatively better paid than the packing work, and have social security benefits as well. Although, complete data on salaries

⁷ This means that to earn one Euro they have to cut the extra threads from approximately 160 pieces of garment.

of the tailors is not available however, minimum wages reported were 5000 Rs. per month. Female piece rate workers in the packing department despite their efforts are not hired in the stitching units for the reason that management considers that it is not suitable to place female workers in a male-dominant department. A very interesting finding indeed, shows that it is not lack of skill, but the 'industrial patriarchy' in this case that keeps the women out of the skilled jobs here. This reflects that societal norms and values are enforced through different institutions of the society. Even if women exercise their agency and try to come out of traditional patriarchal bonds, they are denied the opportunities. These findings point towards the fact that labor markets in Pakistan are not only the bearer of gender, but gender identities are produced and reproduced in the labor market. Similar findings are reported in studies conducted in other parts of the world as well, reflecting that women in general have a comparatively disadvantageous position in production relations (Beneria and Roldan, 1987; Rao and Hussain, 1987)

3.4 Sub-contractors in the Supply Chain

In cases of outsourcing, work is sub-contracted through intermediaries. These intermediaries have the formal contract with the firms on some basic terms and conditions. The terms and conditions are fixed regarding the time and quality of the work. Sub-contractors mostly work for many firms at a time. They get orders directly from the factories and they have their own network of homeworkers. There is intense competition among the sub-contractors and they are highly reluctant to disclose information about their workers. These sub-contractors enter into the category of self-employed entrepreneurs. They do not have a steady flow of orders. No firm is bound to give them the contract. Sub-contractors work under great pressure. They have to provide good quality work within a limited span of time, otherwise they fear to lose their customers. They have the dependency relation with the exporting firms. They do not have any control over the process of production, but they keep a check on the quality of the sub-contracted work. Sub-contractors have limited bargaining power and have to accept low rates for their orders (see Box 2). One of the major problems reported by the female sub-contractor

interviewed during the field survey was the delaying tactics used by the factories in making payments.

Box 2: Power Dynamics in the Supply Chains

I work with many factories. They have my contact numbers and call me when they want to give orders. I have to go to the factory to collect the sample. They decide about the design, labour cost, and material of the product. Then we prepare the sample according to their requirement. If the sample is approved, then we get the final order. I have good teams of workers and distribute work to them. Some time I get a good profit margin but I have to accept low rates in many cases as well (Shela: In-depth interview with female sub-contractor).

She also revealed that female sub-contractors face some additional problems as well due to their gender roles. They have to face the challenges from the family and the community in their efforts to create a new position for themselves in a highly gendered labor market. They have to spend extra efforts to balance work and family needs. They have to pay the cost of their autonomy in form of social disapproval. Their free access to the public sphere is hindered through many cultural norms and they have to make a bargain between social approval, prestige and the autonomy that they gain through their work. All these conditions point towards the need to rethink the issue of women empowerment, not just in monetary terms but also in terms of the non-material aspects of their lives and to devise the strategies to expand women's choices without penalizing them for their struggle for basic rights.

However, despite all the constraints and limitations, the presence of a female sub-contractor in the sub-contracting chain of ITL is one of the interesting findings that point towards the new entrepreneurial opportunities that have been created for the women by globalization. Female sub-contractors in garment supply chains enjoy some degree of empowerment and agency, although it is constrained by the gender power relations within the household and social attitudes in general. However, despite all the constraints, female sub-contractors have created a small niche for themselves in the labor market. These women are among the few who have benefited from the opportunities provided by globalization through the diversification of the production process and the expansion of the export sector in the developing countries. These few female sub-contractors have devised their own strategies to avoid the patriarchal control. This was evident from the

testimony of a female sub-contractor who was interviewed during the field research. She was trying to fit her work into the socially approved boundaries of 'appropriate female work'. She reported that she always wears "Chader".⁸ She also travels with her brother to avoid criticism from family and neighbors. However, female sub-contractors have an edge, or an advantage over male sub-contractors; women sub-contracting entrepreneurs have much fewer problems of access to female homeworkers due to their shared gender identity and their ability to enter the households of women homeworkers more or less freely.

3.5 *Homeworkers in the garment industry supply chains*

Female homeworkers interviewed during the field survey were aware of the exploitation of their labor by the intermediaries through low payment rates. However, they do not have an exact idea of the rate of commission charged by the intermediaries. Their situation is further worsened due to the lack of supportive mechanisms for homeworkers in Pakistan. The social construction of homework as devalued and secondary economic activity also constrained female homeworkers from claiming their labor rights. Homework is constructed as secondary in official and cultural discourses and homeworkers are denied the recognition of a worker, which is a clear violation of (article 3 and article 38) of their right to work and non-discrimination in the labor market, granted to all citizens regardless of their sex in the constitution of Pakistan⁹. Thus, the state is also an important factor in gendering the labor market and maintaining the ideological boundaries of the public-private divide through the official definition of the workers.

From the analysis of this chain, it is evident that gender is not the only criteria or parameter for women's exploitation in the labor market. Homeworkers are not a homogeneous group. They hold multiple identities. The male and female agents equally exploit their vulnerable position. They do not have any formal contracts. Information generated through informal interviews also revealed that women do not share a common position in the

⁸ Chader is a big cloth used by the women to cover their body and head in the public. It signifies women's morality.

⁹ Article No.3 of the Constitution of Pakistan states, "The state shall ensure the elimination of all forms of exploitation". Article 38 states that 'The state shall provide for all citizen within the available resources of the country, facilities for work and adequate livelihood with reasonable rest and leisure'

hierarchy of production relation; some workers get more work than others do. One interesting aspect of these findings is that some homeworkers also serve as sub-contractors for the main sub-contractor even though they do not have any link with the manufacturers or buyers in the upper echelons of the chain. During the peak season when they get more work from their sub-contractors, they distribute it further to their neighbors and friends. They keep a small margin of profit in this process. Thus, it is reflected that through an intricate and complicated set of relationships, female homeworkers in the supply chain are linked not only with the global capital market but also linked to each other. The homeworkers report very low rates of payment. The rates vary, according to the type of work but mostly for one 'Booti'¹⁰ they get two Rs. It takes approximately an hour to complete one pattern. This means that if they work for eight hours per day they can earn 16 Rs per day and 600 Rs. per month, which is not sufficient to take care of the entire family's needs.

It was established, based on formal interviews conducted in August 2007 during the field research, that female homeworkers in the ITL supply chain are the least protected group. They are located at the bottom end of the chain and attached to the global production process through threads of dependency. They have the least amount of bargaining power. They do not have direct access to the labor market. They are connected with the production process through intermediaries and do not have any knowledge of their employers, despite the fact that they have often been engaged in homework for many years. They are not able to understand their position in the hierarchy of the production process. They are dependent on their agents to get the work that is the only visible link for them in the supply chain. They are associated with the agents through the community or familial bonds. Their agents are their only link with the market. Therefore, they are obliged to have good working relations with them.

3.6 Challenges Faced by the Female Homeworkers in the Labor Market

The analysis of the ITL supply chain supports Atkinson's arguments of 'flexible manning' (1984). It is supported by the findings in the field survey that in order to reduce their

¹⁰ A small floral pattern.

overhead costs the firm uses techniques of 'flexible manning' through sub-contraction that allow them to escape any kind of obligation towards female homeworkers that are reducing the cost of production. Homeworkers are denied any kind of social security. They work in hazardous conditions without any health insurance. They do not have a secure job contract or title. Firms try to improve the working conditions inside their plants by reducing their permanent labor force and seeking flexible production strategies. Workers, mostly women, are hired temporarily without any formal job contract through in-sourcing and out-sourcing.

Women homeworkers who work in the confines of their homes are marginalized and exploited by capitalists utilizing the existing gender norms of the society that relegate them to a secondary status in society. They are paid less and have to work for more hours to earn some money to meet their subsistence needs. Although, after the phase-out of ATC demand for high-quality goods increased, which required up-grading, but the most popular form of homework in Pakistan is a different form of hand embroidery. The most common type of embroidery done by homeworkers is to make small patterns on jeans. That is a very tedious task because it is hard to pass the needles through thick cloth like denim. They also attach embellishments such as beads and glass mirrors that are quite in vogue. Machines cannot replace the hand embroidery that adds high value to the fashion garment and is in great demand. Therefore, it can be safely assumed that the trend of homeworking will continue to increase in Pakistan.

3.7 Conclusion

Garment supply chains have a complex sub-contracting system. Power is mainly concentrated in the upper tiers of the chain. There are few actors at the top end of the supply chain characterized by better working conditions, more power and value extraction. Analysis of ITL revealed that the women's position in the labor market is mediated through many factors like education, training and so forth. It was evident from the research findings that educated women with some training are doing relatively well in production chains. However, in general, conditions for homeworkers who are located at the lowest end of the chain are quite bad. These female home-workers are exposed to market fluctuations and

work without any social protection. They are not entitled to any labor rights in the market. They are denied the recognition as a worker; the right to minimum wages and working hours, minimum age of the entry in market and their right to health and better working conditions. They have the least bargaining power and control in the supply chain. They are integrated in the global production process through complex and exploitative relations of sub-contraction.

4. Women at the Crossroads of Production and Reproduction

This chapter is mainly based on the analysis of the survey results and informal interviews conducted with homeworkers in order to explore the strategies through which women fine-tune the patriarchal norms and material conditions of their existence. The first section deals with the gendered division of labor within the household and its implications for labor and other human rights of the female homeworkers. The second part is based on the analysis of women's own perceptions about their labor and human rights. The third section contributes to the debates on the implications of homework for women's empowerment and agency. The final section is based on the women's own assertions about the implications of wage labor for their personal lives.

4.1 Homework and Gendered Division of Labor within the Household

There is a clear demarcation of gender roles in Pakistan. The male has the role of the 'provider' and 'protector', whereas the female's role is defined as 'dependent' and responsible for the reproductive work in the household. As such, social construction of masculinity and femininity has separated the life of men and women into two different spheres. Women's reproductive role together with the ideology of Purdah has confined women to household activities and the men to perform the productive role of the breadwinner in the public sphere. Although, with the passage of time the concept of the Purdah that requires veiling in public spaces has changed, however it is still functional at an ideological level by defining different spheres of work for the men and the women through occupational segregation. Questionnaire data also supports this standpoint, as seventy-three percent of the women did not wear a veil in public. However, ninety-two

percent of the women reported that male family members did not allow them to work outside the private domain of the household. Such physical and conceptual separation of the work into public-private spheres and the gendered division of labor relegate the women to a secondary status and banishes their work to the private sphere (Prokhovnik, 1998). The public-private divide has serious implications for gender equality, both in the 'devalued' sphere of reproduction situated in the private domain, and the 'valuable' productive process in public sphere.

Questionnaire data also supported the view that their families and society marginalized women's paid work in the private domain. Homework carried out in the private sphere of the household was completely blended with the other household chores. Despite the fact that women were spending on average seven and a half hours per day on their productive work, it failed to bring them recognition as a worker. Ninety percent of the respondents reported that they have the consent of the male family members for their homework. However, there was no corresponding change in the expectation of family members regarding the household chores. These were constructed as women's work. Care work, especially childcare and the care of the elderly, was seen as exclusive domain of the women. As shown in table 1, only seventeen percent of the women reported that they get some support from their husband in domestic chores. The rest of the respondents were responsible for devising their own strategies. It was evident from the data that the burden of the housework varies according to the household size and availability of other female family members to shoulder the responsibilities. Figure 6 may help to understand the gender division of labor within the household.

Table 1: Gender Division of Labor within the Household

Marital status	No change in House work (%)	House work Shared by male family member (%)	House work Shared by the female family members (%)
Married	45	17	38
Unmarried	10	0	90
Other	80	0	20

Source: Author's own survey

The data in Table 1 reveals that women's involvement in homework has various implications for different groups of women according to their marital status. Forty-five percent of married women respondents reported that there was no change in their familial responsibilities due to their involvement in the homework and they were managing their time with the help of other female family members. Social and communal networks play an important role in the life of these women. Those most burdened in terms of workload were the divorced, separated and widowed women. They did not have any time for rest and leisure. It was evident from the questionnaire data and individual case studies of the homeworkers that the ideological construction of the women's role in society as 'care giver' is so deeply embedded that they are not released from these responsibilities, even in cases where their income is important for the survival of their families. State discourses also reflect and reinforce the construction of femininity and masculinity. Women's homework conducted within the household is not accounted for in the national statistics, thus denying them the status of a 'worker' and access to the standard labor rights regime. They are denied their labor rights. That is a clear violation of Article 23(1)¹¹ of UDHR.

Data revealed that in order to meet the expectations of the family and the wage labor, women had to juggle multiple tasks at the same time that might take its toll in the form of serious health problems. Out of the forty-four percent of respondents who reported work-related health problems, only twenty percent had received some kind of treatment. The rest of the eighty percent did not have any treatment. None of them were using any safety precautionary measures regarding their work-related health problems. Some of the problems reported by the respondents like backaches can be avoided by using better sitting arrangements. However, there was no such provision by the agents. Women's needs in the family were also assigned a priority in their families. GDI also supports these findings, where women's performance on health indicators is poor compared to men. This is a clear denial of their right to health, rest, and leisure time (Article 24 UDHR).

¹¹ Article 23 states that 'Everybody has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment'.

4.2 *Homework: Concerns from the Child Labor Perspective*

The gendering of space and the division of labor has consequences for the capabilities of next generation as well. In order to spend more time on their homework, women transfer their domestic responsibilities to their daughters. Data generated from the questionnaire revealed that young girls are not sent to school, but rather take care of their younger siblings and carry out other domestic chores to share the burden of reproductive work. Eighteen percent of the respondents reported that elder daughters did not go to school so that they can take care of the entire household work while in other cases girls helped their mothers in their household chores. These young girls are denied their right to education (Article 26 UDHR). Universal primary education is one of the main goals of MDGs as well (Millennium Development Goals). Thus, homework not only involves child labor that violates ILO convention No. 182¹² and ILO Convention No. 138¹³, which is ratified by the GoP, but also impinges on the future capabilities of the girl children by denying them their right to education.

It is evident from Table 2 that mostly women started homework at quite an early age. The minimum age reported in the survey was ten years. Thirty-two percent of the respondents stated that they started homework under the age of 18, which is the minimum legal age of the entry into employment according to the constitution of Pakistan. These findings are in line with and support Mehrotra and Biggeri's (2010) study about the probability of involvement of child labor, especially of female children in home-workers' households. The domestication of child labor in the private sphere in Pakistan helps it to escape public scrutiny for the reason that the public and the private sphere are supposed to operate in a diverse manner. The public sphere is based on the principles of accountability and division of power that is mostly covered under legal jurisdiction and subject to development planning. Whereas the private sphere of the household is based on unequal power relations, mostly governed by the traditional male authority. Despite

¹² Convention; Prohibition and Immediate Action for Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labour

¹³ Convention; Minimum Age for Admission in Employment

considerable variation in the jurisdiction of public-private domains, the idea of male authority in the private sphere is established in almost every part of the country, leading to the women's subjugation and control. As argued by Nussbaum (2003), appeals to the privacy of the private domain are often invoked to maintain and justify these unequal gender power relations.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents According to Their Respective Age of Entry in Homework

Age groups (years)	No. of respondents	% distribution
10-18	16	32
19 and above	34	68

Source: Author's own survey

4.3 Homework: Structure and Agency

Economic stress during the last few decades has deprived men of the material base of their authority, and their income is not sufficient to provide for their families, but there are few corresponding changes in the ideological domain. Gender ideologies are so deeply entrenched in Pakistani society that some women could not even perceive their homework as 'real' work. Although, they were aware of the significance of their income for survival of their families, they did not count themselves as 'worker'. When we enquired about the earning members of the family, they did not count themselves as a working member. Most of the female homeworkers in this sample perceive the 'work' as a paid activity performed in the public sphere. Their perceptions were so structured that they found it hard to see beyond that. This was also supported by the testimonies of different female homeworkers during in-depth interviews.

Box 3 Working from Home: Haifa's Story

I have been working for the last twenty years. I got one year of training in embroidery and started working for different agents. I am able to earn approximately six to seven thousand. I give my entire income to my husband because he is the head of the family and he can manage it in a better way. I do not prefer to go out for work because I can earn in the house and manage the house as well. I have made my house much better through my income than what it used to be.

Table 3 reflects that eighty percent of the respondents reported that they became involved with homework for the reason that the income of the male earner was not sufficient to meet the family's subsistence needs. However, women were socialized under the normative system, which assigns a secondary value to women and to work done by them. This system is so deeply embedded that female homeworkers themselves feared to challenge these norms. They were aware of the potential of their homework. However, they refrained from questioning the male authority (see Box 3). This was also evident from the analysis of questionnaire data, as seventy-nine percent of the respondents reported that they had a male breadwinner despite the fact that they were contributing a substantial amount to the family's subsistence needs. This reflects the deep-rooted values of male domination in Pakistani society.

Table 3: Distribution of women according to their reason to do homework

Reason	Number of females	Percentage
Poverty	40	80
Choice	10	10

Source: Author's own survey

It was evident from the testimonies of female homeworkers that their newly gained opportunities to earn some cash income did not provide them with the means to challenge the existing patriarchal values and norms of society. One of the reasons for this dependency could be that, despite considerable effort and time spent by the women on homework, income earned through their wages was not sufficient to meet the entire needs of the family. Their work was also unstable and there was no assurance about the continuity of this work. Therefore, although their income was crucial for the survival of their families they have a weak fallback position and their paid work does not bring desirable recognition to their contributions. They were supplementing the family income by their paid labor; however, there was no corresponding change in the division of labor within the household. They were carrying the double burden of the productive and reproductive work and they had to stretch their time and energy to their limits to meet the family obligations

and demands of their paid work. Rao and Hussain (1987) documented the same findings in their research on female home-based workers conducted in the garment export sector in Delhi.

None of the respondents in the sample had any information about the various labor rights entitlements that were available to the homeworkers. They had no idea about the exiting labor legislation in Pakistan. They were not in a position to relate their work to the broader national and international scenario. However, they gave explanations about their contentment with their homework that were more realistic. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents reported that they were satisfied with their homework for the reason that it was a source of income necessary to supplement their family needs (see Box 4). They felt some degree of autonomy due to their involvement in the paid work as well. Naseem said, 'I am happy because now I have more chances to meet with different people and I have become more independent'. It was reported by the female homeworkers in the informal discussions that through their involvement in homework, at least they have access to some cash income that they can spend on their family's needs, otherwise they had to ask for even the minor expenditure that they had to incur on family needs.

4.4 Strategic Choices or Structured Responses

It was evident from the responses of female homeworkers that they were aware of the exploitative nature of their work. Many respondents reported that one problem with homework is that it is low-paid work and the agents deduct undue amounts of commission. However, ninety-eight percent reported that they have a good relationship with their sub-contractor. It seems somewhat paradoxical that women are aware of their exploitation by the agents and despite that a large proportion of respondents reported a very good relationship with their agents. The homeworkers are not just 'cultural dupes' but rational actors aware of their limitations and dependency relations in production processes (Kabeer, 2000). They are related to their agent through complex familial and communal relations that further restrict their choices and effectively hide the exploitation. Seventy-three percent of the respondents said that they got the work from one agent whereas twenty-six percent were working with multiple agents. Due to the high dependency

relationship with their agents and limited mobility, choices were limited for the female homeworkers. These findings indicated that female homeworkers were trying to make rational choices within their precarious personal circumstances.

Box 4: Behind the Walls

I have been working for the last four years. I took up this work because my husband is an addict and does not take care of my children and me. I spend the entire day on this work. I earn approximately 4000 Rs per month. My elder daughter looks after the household chores. I am very thankful to my agent who provides me with work that enables me to run my household expenditure with dignity (Nabila).

I can contribute 1500 Rs, to the household budget. That is not enough but I am satisfied and happy with this work '*Bachy pait bar ker kane lag gay hein achhaa panene lag gay hein*' because my kids are taking full square meals and have proper clothing.(Samina informal interview).

In the majority of the cases, female homeworkers receive the payment and work directly from the agent or sub-contractor. Except for unmarried respondents, homeworkers themselves deal with their sub-contractors. Unmarried women depend upon a male family member or older women in the family to get work and payment, as gender codes are relatively stricter for unmarried women. This reveals the diversity among the female homeworkers. They do not face equal levels and types of exploitation in the labor market. Many factors like age, their marital status and class intersect with gender to determine their position in this patriarchal social structure. From the analysis of the homeworkers in the supply chains, it is evident that gender power relations operate differently at different levels of the chain. Women situated at different nodes of the chain experience different constraints and opportunities. However, there are certain common features that impinge on their labor rights entitlement in Pakistan.

4.5 Claiming Rights

One of the common features among female homeworkers was that none of the homeworkers reported any formal contract with the person who provided them with work. In many cases they have verbal agreements regarding the terms and conditions of the work that do not have any legal value. Even these verbal agreements do not cover any

measures regarding health and safety issues. Employers do not have any kind of obligation towards homeworkers in case of work-related health problems. One of the respondents, who had a serious eyesight problem, was interviewed during the fieldwork and reported that she did not expect her agent to provide for her health-related problem. She did not consider herself a part of the regular work force that could have such benefits and social protection. She perceived her work as being outside of the regulatory structure of the standard labor regime. These perceptions about the work have implications for the access to labor rights entitlements (see Box 5).

These perceptions constrained women's struggle to organize themselves for their labor rights. It was also evident from the responses of female homeworkers that they had not shown any interest in organizing themselves for collective bargaining. Sixty-two percent of the respondents said that they have contact with other homeworkers, however only thirty-six percent of the respondents had shown some interest in getting organized to improve their working conditions. They were not aware of any non-governmental organization that works for the female homeworkers. Thirty-six percent of the respondents reported that they engaged in the homework for more than seven years. One of the respondents in the sample had twenty-two years of work experience in homework. Despite that, she did not have any knowledge about existing or about potential supportive mechanism for homeworkers in Pakistan.

Box 5: Claiming Rights: Health and Safety Issues

My eyesight is adversely affected due to long hours of work over the previous few years. I was operated on last year and have to wear eyeglasses during work. Whom should I hold responsible for my miseries and plights? I am not a regular employee, as I do not get work regularly and I work for many agents. Why should the agent provide for my health expenditure? (Bushra: in-depth interview)

Data reveals that none of the conventional labor standards that are extended to homeworkers through the ILO Convention on Home Work (No.C171) is applied to the female homeworkers in the garment sector of Pakistan. They are not entitled to any occupational health and safety measure, maternity benefits, minimum wage, minimum age for admission in work or any other statutory protection. Although in Article No. 4 and 5 of ILO Convention on Home Work (No.C171), it is clearly stated that homeworkers should be

provided legal protection, no concrete effort has been made in Pakistan to extend such protection to female homeworkers. In the Labor Protection Policy 2005-06 for the first time homeworkers right to social protection was formally recognized. However, this conviction failed to bring any change in the existing situation through positive legislation in Pakistan, despite the fact that Pakistan has also ratified the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) that bestows labor rights to all the workers, including the workers in the informal sector. There are also certain provisions in the national Constitution of Pakistan that could be applied to the homeworkers as stated in Article 3 (elimination of all forms of discrimination) and Article 38 (facilities for work and adequate livelihood), but these are never invoked by any of the respondents.

4.6 Empowerment: Myths and Realities

It was evident from the analysis of the questionnaire data and informal interviews with female homeworkers during the field survey that women's involvement in wage labor has provided them with the opportunity to earn much-needed income to meet some of their family needs. However, the question of women's homework from the perspective of their empowerment and agency is a slippery slope. There is no straight equation for the reason that there is no blueprint for women's empowerment. It is not easy to establish a direct relationship between women's involvement in homework and their empowerment. Empowerment cannot be described simply in economic or monetary terms. Many intervening socio-cultural variables influence women's empowerment in family and society. Thus, if we consider empowerment in the broader sense, it can be regarded as the ability of an individual or group to make choices and then achieve desirable results by implementing their choices. It was evident from the women's testimonies that their involvement in wage labor has not broadened the life choices for them to a considerable extent. They are still struggling under patriarchal constraints. Their choices are also shaped mainly by their marginalized positions within society and the household.

Table 4: Homeworkers' Contribution to Family Budgets

Contribution	No. of females	%
Full Income	36	72
Portion of the income	14	28

Source: Author's own survey

It was evident from the responses of female homeworkers that despite being underpaid, they were not willing to work in the factories due to restrictions from their husbands or other family members and their domestic obligations. None of these respondents openly stated that these constraints were unreasonable. They did not raise any issues about the unfair distribution of resources and the division of labor in the household either. They are trying to live up to the social and cultural expectation of 'altruistic mothers' and 'dutiful daughters'. It is reflected from data shown in Table 4 that seventy-two percent of the respondents were contributing their entire income to the household budget. However, gendered construction of work conveys an ideological meaning of women wage labor in private labor as supplementary to the household economy. Such a perception about women's contribution to the household economy failed to enhance their bargaining power in the family and was a main hindrance to their ability to establish their role as provider despite the fact that they were carrying a disproportionately heavy burden of productive and care work to support their families. Another important reason for the devaluation of their work is that despite the long hours of work, due to the lower rate of payment, the homeworkers' contribution to the family budget was not very generous.

It is supported by the data generated through the questionnaire that women homeworkers strongly believed that although their paid work failed to bring any major change in their living standard, it did enable them to survive times of economic distress. Working, even at home, and earning money gave them more confidence and more say in family affairs generally. As Table 5 shows, fifty-nine percent of the married women feel that they had more say in family affairs due to their opportunities to earn an income. However, the situation was very different in this respect for unmarried women, who

generally continued to feel that they had very little say in decision-making, even within the confines of the family and the domestic sphere.

Table 5: Women's Involvement in Decision Making

Marital status	Yes (%)	No (%)
Married	59	41
Unmarried	27	73
Other	60	40

Source: Author's own survey

4.7 Female Homeworkers: Standpoint on Personal Well-Being

Even the analysis of a small sample revealed that the women's perceptions about their work were largely shaped by their personal experiences and unique life situations. Homeworkers' own perceptions about their wage labor had many implications for their personal well-being. Marital status, class, and age play an important role as intervening variable in shaping the women's perceptions about their paid work and its liberating potential. There were distinct views among female homeworkers about the potential of paid work for their personal well-being. One of the groups who were responsible to run the household budget independently without any male support attached great value to their work. These women considered their work as source of their liberation and empowerment within the limited life opportunities that they had. They were at the same time more vocal about their exploitation in the market and were willing to challenge the structure that constrained them. However, the agency of these female homeworkers was constrained by the limited opportunities that were available to them in the given circumstances. The widows who were middle-aged with young children and responsible for managing the household budget attached more value to their paid work that delivered much needed income to them. They showed clear dissatisfaction with their wages from the homework that were not sufficient to meet their entire household needs as compared to the unmarried women who were not responsible for managing the household budgets. The results in Table 6 may help to understand the variation in women's own perceptions at various stages of their life cycle about the liberating potential of homeworking in terms of their choices and the exercise of their rights.

Table 6: Sense of Freedom Due to Involvement in Homeworking

Marital status	Liberating (%)	Not liberating (%)
Married	41	59
Unmarried	36	64
Other	80	20

Source: Author's own survey

It is evident from the responses of the women homeworkers that their work is increasing pressure on them in terms of more responsibilities rather than liberating them from normative controls that limit their choices and constrain their mobility. As shown in table 5 fifty-nine percent of the married women reported increased participation in decision-making within the household, but fifty-nine percent of the married respondents could not foresee any liberating impact of their work (table, 6). This situation reflects that women may have more responsibilities, but not necessarily more rights, or do not perceive it as such. The information generated through the questionnaire survey and informal interviews of homeworkers during the fieldwork pointed towards a positive change in the general attitude of the respondents towards the girls' education. Preference for the girls' education that was reported by the eighty-seven percent of female homeworkers with children, even if it was not realized in certain cases due to financial constraints, is indeed a welcome change in Pakistani society, where girls have mostly been considered a liability in the past.

However, it was evident from the responses that despite some changes in women's perception about girl's education, patriarchal norms to control women's mobility remain intact and are not only enforced through male members, but women themselves constrain the mobility of their young daughters to secure the future prospects of a better marriage partner. Women's morality in Pakistani society is associated with their sexual conduct to such an extent that even just the rumor about a girl's reputation can spoil her future and ruin her chances of marriage. Therefore, the reputation must be closely guarded. Shamim (see Box 6), who chooses to work from home to guard her young daughters, transmitted the gender inequalities and discrimination through her 'Patriarchal Bargains'. Shamim in this case makes a choice to tradeoff between her personal autonomy and social prestige for her daughters (see Box 6). Patriarchal norms may provide protection for conformity and penalize for the deviations through different ways.

However, no matter how well thought through these bargains are, they seem ultimately unable to contribute significantly to improved access for the women homeworkers to their labor rights and entitlements. All too often such 'bargains' made in the context of a patriarchal household and society can serve to further undermine younger women's strategic interests. This is in part unavoidable, to the extent that power operates not only through male coercion but also through the values and the choices made by the women themselves. This situation is quite complex and fraught with contradictions and means that it is problematic to trace any direct causal relationship between income levels of women, choices, and empowerment or access to labor rights. The research has revealed that the limited empowerment achieved by just a few women in the private domain may not automatically translate into empowerment in the public domain at all. In other words, women may make more money, they may have more say in making household decisions, but their work remains largely invisible and confined to the private sphere. This severely constrains women who have to abide by the patriarchal rules in order to gain the social approval, without which their lives can become impossible.

Box 6: Conflicting Choices and Limited Options

I think that education is more important for girls so that they can stand on their own feet and earn for themselves. I regret that I could not provide education to my daughters due to financial constraints. I prefer homework because I have 'Jawan', young daughters, therefore I cannot leave them alone in home.
(Shamim: indepth interview).

Divorced women in this sample did not foresee any liberating impact of the homework on their personal well-being. Their personal life situation increased their dependency on male protection. However, this dependency also varies according to the life cycle stages of the women. Figure 6 may help us to explain the variation in the perceptions of well-being, according to the marital status of the homeworkers. Young women without children or with very young children have to depend on their native family for protection. They have to reside in the parental home or with brothers, where they have to forgo their personal liberty for protection and social approval. They realized that their income was not enough to bring about any positive change in their living standards. Divorced women living without male protection and with young children were in a more critical situation and

willing to transgress the patriarchal norms. However, willingness to deviate from patriarchal norms was a reflection of their poverty rather than a sign of their empowerment, for the reason that female seclusion in the private domain in Pakistan is historically associated with respectability. These norms are not held equally by all segments of society. However, these norms are quite intact in the middle and lower middle classes. These women clearly associated their low wages with the limited and constrained opportunities. They had a realistic assessment of their work in terms of available choices. Although their choices are also limited due to lack of marketable skills

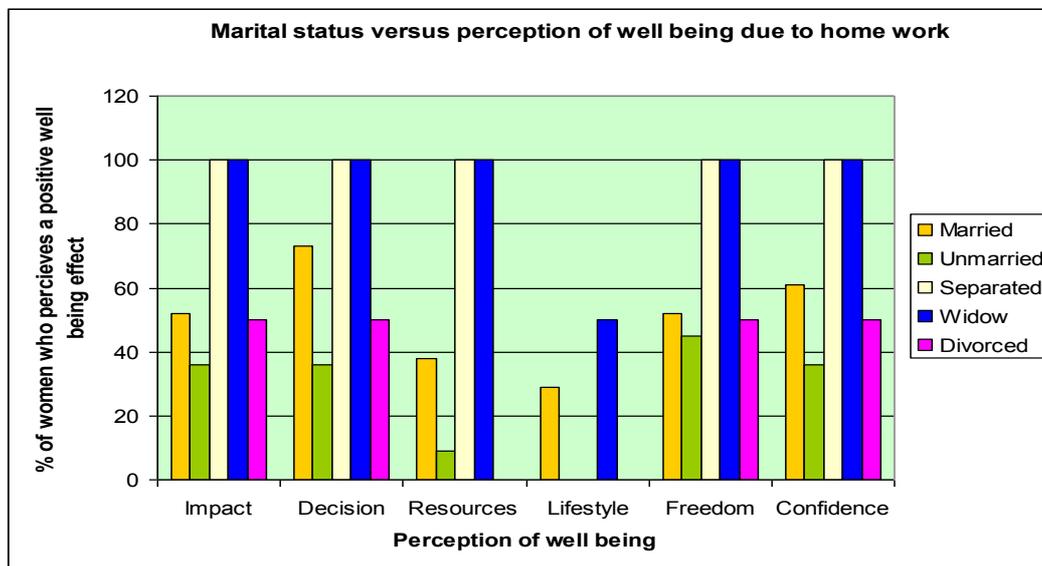
Married women that constituted the largest portion of the sample support Mies' contention of the 'hosewifization' of homeworkers. They were mainly working out of their familial needs to provide much-needed income for their family without claiming the role of provider that could pose a challenge to the traditional construction of masculinity. They were 'altruistic mothers' spending their entire income on their children and on daily household expenses without challenging the existing division of labor. However, a small portion of the respondents perceives that their work had brought some improvement in their position within the household, although they did not have access to more resources. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents reported that they hand over their entire income to their family heads, mostly male, but it helped to boost their confidence and self-esteem.

Some respondents also indicated the reduction in domestic violence that points towards the relaxation in the physical manifestation of male authority and control. However, for the majority of married women, homework is the only viable option within the existing conditions. Their perceptions were mainly shaped by the realities of their life and their choices were embedded in the structural norms of the society. This internalized oppression hinders them to challenge the unjust system and demand their rights. Their limited awareness about their rights made them the prey of male domination both in the public and private sphere. They are 'choosing not to choose' (Kabeer, 1999: 440).

Unmarried women are the group who had the least control over their labor. They were 'dutiful daughters', who worked to support their families. They were not constrained by childcare or household responsibilities to work, but the honor and respect of the family was the reason to work in the private sphere. They were further disadvantaged for the

reason that social values constrained their open interaction with outsiders. Although they did not observe Purdah in the literal sense, their movement was restricted. Therefore, they were largely dependent on their family members to bring work to them. Mostly they were not allowed to collect the work or wages and family members used to bring work from the agent. These family members, mostly male, also deducted a commission for performing this task.

Figure 4: % of women who perceive a positive well-being impact



Source: Author' Survey

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that based on data, it seems that women homeworkers' positions within the household and society, in terms of their differences in age, marital status and class, impose some serious constraints on their ability to realize their basic human and labor rights through claiming such rights in an open or organized way. It is also evident from the analysis of data in this chapter, that the majority of the women involved in homeworking do so out of the need for family income for survival, rather than through choice for additional earnings over and above a subsistence minimum income. This situation is further aggravated due to a lack of institutional and supporting mechanisms for

female homeworkers, which might enable them to overcome the various obstacles to their mobility, and to the claiming of their labor rights in the first place. However, despite the exploitative nature of homework, this is one of the few options they have in their circumstances with limited skills and education to earn a cash income. This income provides the fallback position to families where the majority of male earners are casual laborers that do not provide the security for livelihood.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This research was started on the assumption that women's involvement in wage labor through industrial homework must have helped them to come out of the strong patriarchal control that largely characterize Pakistani society. However, this optimism could not persist after exploring the living realities of the female homeworkers in the garment supply chains of Pakistan, which are extremely tough in terms of living conditions, illness and insecurity of livelihood. It is revealed from the information generated through individual case studies and questionnaire data that the vast majority of the garment industry homeworkers surveyed here belong to the lowest economic strata of Pakistani society. The majority of female homeworkers live in tiny two- or one-room houses, where living conditions are very over-crowded, and where there is almost nothing in terms of amenities or facilities nearby. Poor hygiene and ventilation are problems for all the homeworkers and their families. On average, with three earning members per family, the labor of young children is involved as well as that of women and men. The average family size here is not above average, but it is large in relation to the size of the accommodation, which must also become a workspace for the women homeworkers. It is clear that for such women, the additional income earned is not empowering, but a reflection of their heavier responsibilities in ensuring the reproduction needs of their family members are met on as sustained a basis as possible. One-person income is not sufficient to provide for the family needs among this strata of the population.

Therefore, children are withdrawn from schools to share the economic burden of their families. Young boys are withdrawn from the schools to work as casual laborers or as unpaid family helpers with their fathers. Girls are withdrawn from schools due to poverty-

related reasons and are expected to share the housework from an early age. Girls as young as six or seven shoulder the domestic responsibilities of their mothers, and also contribute to homeworking with their mothers. This reflects the urgency of having more earning hands to meet the basic subsistence needs of the family. Adverse macro-economic conditions thus condition family relationships, and the economic choices of women in homeworking or other forms of work.

However, in Pakistan, women's seclusion still stands for family propriety, in spite of these dramatic economic changes in social structure, and women's seclusion continues to symbolize hegemonic masculine identities. Women are therefore not encouraged to work out in the public sphere, except in the segregated occupations. For the middle and lower middle classes, women working in the public sphere in the male dominant occupations are stigmatized. Whereas women are encouraged to work inside the house, where their paid work is effectively disguised as an extension of the housework and is either not paid at all, or devalued in the private sphere of household as undermining the ideological expectation of the 'male provider' role being able to sustain the family.

5.1 Changing Nature of Social and Economic Structure

The fast growth of the garment export industry in Lahore during the past few decades has opened some new windows on income-earning opportunities for poor women in Lahore and its surrounding villages, where agriculture is no longer able to provide the livelihood for the entire village population. Increased trends of outsourcing through sub-contracting processes in the garment industry have helped women with limited or no marketable skills to earn some cash income to supplement their family needs within the private sphere of home. It has been established from the individual responses of female homeworkers that the earnings of one member was not sufficient to meet the family basic subsistence needs. However, conditions under which they are incorporated in the wage labor process are matters of great concern from the perspectives of human rights and labor rights in particular. The urgency of their needs and cultural norms could not be used as justification for their exploitation, both in the public and private spheres.

In the context of Pakistan, industrial homework that is carried in the private sphere is considered to be a feminine activity. The feminization of industrial work contributes towards its marginalization in production relations. Female homeworkers, in order to raise additional resources for the family, utilize traditional skills and crafts that are learned as a part of gender role socialization. The majority of the women are engaged in embroidery and stitching that is considered as a natural talent or skill for the women, learned informally during their childhood as part of their future role socialization to meet the reproductive needs of their families. Only eight percent of the respondents acquire some sort of training at the later stages. For female homeworkers their work is an extension of their unpaid household work and their assumed role as carers and responsible for the family's welfare. Naturalization of these skills as part of gender role training devalues these skills rather than relegating to their work the status of valuable professional activity. Women could not receive formal training due to absence of supporting mechanisms and facilities in the vicinities where they reside.

Such perceptions about women's traditional skills influence the opinion about their homework as secondary activity by the family and workers themselves. Gender ideologies are so deeply embedded in society that although women are contributing substantial amounts to the family budget, their participation in paid work still fails to bring any substantial change in the existing gendered division of labor in the household. They have to devise their own strategies to maintain the balance between their paid and unpaid reproductive work. It is of great concern that production by the homeworkers mainly involves the unpaid labor of other female family members, mostly the elder daughters that undermines the potential of these young girls. That is a violation of their right to education.

Therefore, the veiling of female homework within the private sphere of household has serious implications for their labor rights entitlements and their other human rights. Female homeworkers are denied the recognition as a worker. They are carry the double burden without any recognition and improvement in their life situation. They spend ten hours a day on average on their paid and unpaid work and still they are denied any social protection. The only positive change that is reflected in their responses is that it helps

them to earn some money for their families that gives them a sense of pride and self-worth. They gain the confidence that they can work to bring their families out of economic stress. However, in this process they are carrying an unequal burden of work. Although they are aware of their exploitation by the intermediaries, they are not in a position to search for better options under strong patriarchal norms and the existing opportunity structure of society. A number of recommendations arise out of these research findings, and are detailed in the following section.

5.2 *Recommendations*

Although in general the situation of female homeworkers is very grave, however the analysis of data shows that some women are able to gain autonomy, even within this exploitative structure, through their positioning in the garment supply chains, at least in the domestic sphere of the household and family. One such manifestation is the relaxation of the norms of 'Purdah' in the public space. Women are allowed to interact with their agents, although there are some restrictions for young unmarried women. Women at various nodes of the chain are devising their own strategies of active resistance or indirect struggle to change their life situations, although their efforts are constrained by the existing opportunity structure and lack of any supporting mechanism to bring them out of their dire stress. Women who have some training or have better education are doing comparatively well in terms of individual achievements. Personal achievements of a few women in different parts of chain, the attitude towards girls' education and the relative acceptance of women in public spaces are all indicators of social change. However, the rate of change is very slow. Overall, there are three recommendations that arise from this research, as follows:

- The need for effective legislation and enforcement mechanisms for women homeworkers
- Organizing women homeworkers
- Training for women homeworkers

Each of these can be dealt with in turn. There is a need for more effective legislation and enforcement mechanisms for female homeworkers in Pakistan. The government should

extend the legal rights to the entire working population, including the female homeworkers, who are excluded from the enumeration as informal workers. The services of female homeworkers should be enumerated in the national accounting system and they should be given the recognition as a worker in official statistics. The evaluation of their contribution to the national economy and its recognition can bring some positive change in the existing situation through making them more visible.

Another important strategy to improve the conditions of homeworkers is to support their efforts to organize themselves. It is evident from the data that homeworkers have contacts with their fellow workers but that the system of sub-contracting works in such a manner that they are severely constrained in their sense of solidarity and common identity. Their contacts with one another are largely fragmentary and there are few, if any, public meetings of homeworkers. The purpose of helping the women to organize themselves, for example in a network, is to enable them to make contacts and frame their demands, but also better to understand just how important their position is in the production process overall.

A very good example of this has been set by the Self-Employed Women Association (SEWA), which supports local organizations of women working in informal activities, across different economic sectors (agriculture, garments, construction, etc.). Civil society institutions can play an effective role in supporting organizations of female homeworkers to make claims, to acquire labor rights and improve respect for those rights by other parties.

Finally, efforts should be made to provide training facilities needed for women homeworkers in their immediate vicinities in terms of acquiring marketable skills that will help them earn a better income. This will not only help the women to increase what they earn through their work, but is also important for the growth of the garment industry in a post-quota regime because of the focus on the quality of work.

5.3 *Final Thoughts*

It seems that the women homeworkers in Lahore who form the object of this research continue to construct their identities primarily as mother and wives. Generally, their particular labor rights and needs continue to be largely ignored by the labor unions. The women homeworkers do not have any written contracts with their employers, neither do they have any other type of social protection besides the help of families and friends. All are denied the standardized labor rights that are supposed to be available for the workforce in medium and large-sized formal sector industries and businesses. This overall dismal situation is further aggravated by the fact that the women homeworkers themselves seem severely constrained in their ability to take on board the importance of claiming their labor rights, largely because of their focus on immediate income and subsistence. Because of being under pressure to earn money, to sustain the family and to do their work, these women are almost by definition not able to see themselves as part of the regular, formal-sector work force, with the same entitlements and labor rights as, for instance, male factory workers with some formal qualifications. Despite adding substantial amounts to the overall family budget, women homeworkers continue to consider the income they earn as supplementary. Very few of these women are able to bring about meaningful changes in their personal lives that would improve their access to labor rights and entitlements. Although the research suggests that women homeworkers enjoy greater agency in the private sphere, translating this increased responsibility into greater control over their lives and labor conditions will require major changes beyond the recommendations just made, in the position of women in general in relation to the public domain. In particular, some questioning of the fixed public-private divisions that poor working women are currently unable to cross will be required in future if their work is to be a source of empowerment.

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