Journal Of
Women, Society And
Contemporary Challenges
VOL 1 | NO.1 | 2026
PIISSN: XXXX-XXX
EI SSN: XXXX-XXXX

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE AND CHALLENGES IN MODERN SOCIETY

Tayyaba Fatima
BS, Department Islamic Studies, The Cosmic Degree College (For Women) ,University of Okara

ABSTRACT

Women's economic independence is an essential component of gender equality, social development, poverty reduction, and sustainable economic growth. In modern society, women have increasingly gained access to education, professional employment, entrepreneurship, financial services, and digital technologies. However, these developments have not eliminated the structural, cultural, economic, and institutional barriers that restrict women's ability to achieve financial autonomy. This research examines the major dimensions of women's economic independence, including employment opportunities, wage equality, access to education, financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, unpaid domestic work, workplace discrimination, and the influence of traditional gender roles. Drawing on secondary sources published between 2023 and 2025, the study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and thematic approach to investigate the relationship between women's economic participation and their social empowerment. Recent international reports demonstrate that significant gender inequalities persist in legal protections, access to productive resources, employment opportunities, and economic decision-making. In Pakistan and other developing countries, women face additional challenges associated with restricted mobility, limited access to financial resources, informal employment, inadequate childcare facilities, and social expectations regarding household responsibilities. The study argues that economic independence requires more than employment; it also involves fair remuneration, control over personal income, ownership of assets, financial security, and meaningful participation in household and public decision-making.

KEYWORDS: *Women's economic independence, gender equality, women's empowerment, financial autonomy, employment opportunities, wage inequality, entrepreneurship, unpaid care work, financial inclusion, workplace discrimination, digital inclusion, social development.*

INTRODUCTION

It includes opportunities for paid employment, entrepreneurship, property ownership, access to credit, savings, and participation in economic decision-making. Piper, N. (2023). found that Women's economic independence is therefore not simply a matter of earning money; it is also closely connected with personal freedom, dignity, social status, and the ability to make choices about education, family life, and future aspirations.In recent decades, women have made considerable progress in education and professional development. Women increasingly participate in teaching, healthcare, business, public administration, science, technology, agriculture, and other sectors. Digital platforms have also created opportunities for remote employment, online businesses, freelancing, and independent service provision. Nevertheless, these developments have not benefited all women equally. The United Nations and UN Women reported in *The Gender Snapshot 2024* that, despite improvements in several areas, none of the indicators and sub-indicators associated with Sustainable Development Goal 5 had been fully achieved. This demonstrates that progress in women's empowerment remains uneven and that substantial institutional and social barriers continue to exist. One of the major obstacles to women's economic independence is unequal access to employment and productive resources. Women may possess the necessary education and professional skills but still encounter discrimination during recruitment, unequal promotion opportunities, lower wages, and limited representation in leadership positions. In many societies, women are also expected to perform most household activities, including cooking, cleaning, childcare, and

Journal Of
Women, Society And
Contemporary Challenges
VOL 1 | NO.1 | 2026
PIISSN: XXXX-XXX
EI SSN: XXXX-XXXX

caring for older family members. These responsibilities can reduce their available time for paid work, professional training, and career development.

Consequently, women's economic participation is influenced not only by their individual abilities but also by workplace policies, family arrangements, public services, and broader social expectations.Financial independence is particularly important in developing countries, where poverty, insecure employment, and unequal access to property can increase women's economic vulnerability. Stefán, C. I. (2023). Explained that The World Bank's 2024 report on women's economic empowerment in Pakistan identifies substantial barriers involving labour-market participation, wages, entrepreneurship, productive assets, financial services, mobility, and decision-making. The report also highlights the importance of addressing these challenges through policies designed around the circumstances of women in different economic and social settings. Modern technology has created additional opportunities while introducing new forms of inequality. Online marketplaces, digital banking, remote work, and social media can enable women to establish businesses and reach customers without the costs associated with traditional workplaces. However, limited internet access, inadequate digital literacy, online harassment, cybersecurity concerns, and unequal access to digital devices can prevent women from benefiting fully from these opportunities. Digital economic participation therefore depends on affordable technology, practical training, safe online environments, and equal access to financial and commercial networks.The importance of women's economic independence extends beyond individual financial security. When women have reliable incomes and greater control over their resources, they may be better positioned to support their families, invest in education, respond to emergencies, and participate in community development. Economies can also benefit when women's skills and productive potential are not excluded from the labour market.

However, these benefits cannot be achieved through employment initiatives alone. Equal legal rights, fair working conditions, accessible childcare, safe transportation, financial inclusion, and changes in restrictive social attitudes are also necessary.Against this background, the present study examines women's economic independence and the challenges that limit its achievement in modern society. Haddad, C. N., Mahler, D. G., Diaz-Bonilla, C., Hill, R., Lakner, C., & Ibarra, G. L. (2024). Explains that It reviews recent international and Pakistan-focused literature published between 2023 and 2025, identifies major barriers to financial autonomy, and considers practical strategies for promoting equality. The study adopts the position that women's economic independence is both an individual right and a necessary component of inclusive and sustainable development.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. What are the major social, economic, cultural, and institutional challenges that restrict women's economic independence in modern society, and what strategies can effectively overcome these barriers?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the meaning and significance of women's economic independence in contemporary society.

Journal Of
Women, Society And
Contemporary Challenges
VOL 1 | NO.1 | 2026
PIISSN: XXXX-XXX
EI SSN: XXXX-XXXX

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review examines recent evidence and policy discussions concerning women's economic independence. It is organized into six thematic sections covering the conceptual foundations of economic autonomy, labour-market inequality, unpaid care responsibilities, financial inclusion and entrepreneurship, digital opportunities, and the policy measures required to achieve sustainable empowerment. The review focuses on publications from 2023 to 2025 and includes international evidence alongside research relevant to Pakistan. Because the study uses secondary sources, the discussion synthesizes published findings rather than presenting newly collected interview or survey data. Alphons, O., & Nassereddin, N. (2022). revealed that Women's economic independence is a multidimensional concept that encompasses the ability to generate income, exercise control over financial resources, acquire productive assets, access economic opportunities, and make meaningful decisions about personal and household expenditure. It is closely related to economic empowerment, but the two concepts are not entirely identical. Economic empowerment emphasizes the processes through which women gain resources, agency, and opportunities, whereas economic independence emphasizes their capacity to sustain themselves financially and exercise meaningful control over their economic circumstances. A woman may participate in paid employment without being economically independent if she cannot control her earnings, lacks secure employment, or remains financially vulnerable to another person's decisions.Recent international literature emphasizes that economic independence must be considered within a wider framework of legal equality, social protection, and access to productive opportunities. The World Bank's *Women, Business and the Law 2024* examines women's economic opportunities through areas such as mobility, workplace rights, pay, marriage, parenthood, entrepreneurship, assets, and pensions. The report also introduces measures concerning safety and childcare, recognizing that economic participation depends on more than formal employment rights. Its framework suggests that women require both legal protections and practical mechanisms through which those protections can be implemented.

The United Nations and UN Women's *The Gender Snapshot 2024* similarly demonstrate that gender equality remains an unfinished development objective. Although progress has occurred in education, legal reform, and some measures of poverty reduction, important disparities remain across the Sustainable Development Goals. The report highlights the need for accelerated action rather than relying on gradual improvements alone. This evidence is significant because women's economic independence is influenced by several interconnected factors, including access to education, health, decent work, social protection, and participation in decision-making. The concept also requires attention to differences among women. Goryunova, E., & Madsen, S. R. (2024). Elaborated on Women living in rural areas may face limited transport, fewer formal employment opportunities, restricted access to banking, and inadequate internet connectivity. Urban women may have greater access to professional occupations but still experience childcare costs, workplace discrimination, and unequal career advancement. Women with disabilities, women from low-income households, and women working in informal occupations can face additional disadvantages. A single policy is therefore unlikely to address every barrier effectively.The available literature supports the argument that women's economic independence should be measured through several indicators rather than employment status alone. These indicators include income adequacy, control over earnings, job security, access to savings and credit, ownership of

Journal Of
Women, Society And
Contemporary Challenges
VOL 1 | NO.1 | 2026
PIISSN: XXXX-XXX
EI SSN: XXXX-XXXX

assets, decision-making power, and the ability to balance paid employment with personal responsibilities. This broader understanding provides the conceptual foundation for examining the challenges discussed in the following sections.Employment is one of the principal routes through which women can achieve financial autonomy. Paid work provides income, professional experience, opportunities for skill development, and access to workplace networks. However, the existence of employment opportunities does not guarantee equal economic outcomes.

The World Bank's *Women, Business and the Law 2024* identifies continuing inequalities in the legal and institutional environments affecting women's economic participation. Its analysis covers workplace protections, equal pay, entrepreneurship, family responsibilities, assets, and retirement security. The report also emphasizes the difference between laws as written and the institutional arrangements needed to implement them. This distinction is important because formal recognition of equal rights may have limited practical value if women cannot access complaint mechanisms, enforce employment protections, or obtain appropriate legal assistance. Rana, E., Shabbir, G., & Najwa, E. (2026). found that Wage inequality represents another major challenge. Differences in earnings can reflect occupational segregation, unequal working hours, interruptions in employment, discriminatory pay practices, and differences in access to senior positions. Women's career progression may also be affected by expectations that they will prioritize family responsibilities over professional advancement. When employers interpret motherhood or caregiving as evidence of lower commitment, women may face disadvantages in recruitment, promotion, training, and salary negotiations.These inequalities can accumulate over time. Lower earnings early in a career may reduce opportunities to save, purchase property, invest in a business, or contribute to retirement arrangements. Employment interruptions may further weaken financial security when pension systems and workplace benefits are linked to continuous formal employment. As a result, inequalities in the labour market can influence women's financial independence throughout their lives.The World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report 2024* provides a comparative framework for understanding disparities in economic participation and opportunity alongside education, health, and political empowerment. Its approach reinforces the importance of examining not only whether women enter employment but also whether they have comparable opportunities to advance and exercise leadership.

Pakistan illustrates the importance of these issues in a developing-country context. The World Bank's 2024 report on women's economic empowerment in Pakistan identifies barriers to entering the labour force, obtaining fairer and higher wages, developing businesses, accessing productive assets, and exercising economic agency. These challenges are associated with broader institutional conditions, social norms, mobility restrictions, and differences between rural and urban economic environments. The literature consequently indicates that improving women's employment outcomes requires more than increasing the number of jobs. Women, U. N. (2014). Explained that Governments and employers must also strengthen equal-pay protections, establish transparent recruitment and promotion systems, address workplace harassment, expand access to professional training, and improve opportunities for women to enter leadership positions. Employment policies should recognize women as equally capable economic participants and ensure that their career progression is not unnecessarily restricted by gender-based assumptions.Unpaid domestic and care work is

Journal Of
Women, Society And
Contemporary Challenges
VOL 1 | NO.1 | 2026
PIISSN: XXXX-XXX
EI SSN: XXXX-XXXX

one of the most significant barriers to women's economic independence. Activities such as cooking, cleaning, childcare, caring for older relatives, and managing household responsibilities contribute to family welfare and social reproduction. However, these activities are frequently excluded from conventional measures of economic output because they do not generate direct monetary compensation. When women undertake a disproportionate share of this work, they have less time available for paid employment, education, professional development, leisure, and entrepreneurial activities.The World Bank's 2024 *Women, Business and the Law* findings highlight the relationship between childcare provision and women's participation in the labour force. The report notes that women spend, on average, 2.4 more hours per day on unpaid care work than men. It also emphasizes the importance of childcare affordability, quality standards, and financial support for parents. These findings suggest that care responsibilities are not simply private family matters; they are important economic and public-policy concerns.

The 2024 *Gender Snapshot*, published jointly by UN Women and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, also identifies investment in the care economy as an opportunity to reduce women's time and income poverty, support labour-force participation, and expand employment in care-related sectors. The report estimates that investment in the care economy could create nearly 300 million jobs by 2035. This projection illustrates the potential economic significance of treating care services as essential infrastructure rather than as an exclusively private responsibility. Traditional gender norms can intensify the effects of unpaid work. In some communities, women's employment is considered acceptable only when it does not interfere with household responsibilities. Women may be expected to seek permission for employment, limit their working hours, or avoid occupations that require travel. NUST, C. (2025). Explains that Even when family members support women's education, they may not support their participation in paid employment or their independent management of income.These expectations can produce a cycle of economic dependence. A woman who cannot obtain employment because of care responsibilities may become financially dependent on other household members. That dependence may then reduce her bargaining power when decisions about education, healthcare, spending, or further employment are made. Limited financial autonomy can also make it more difficult to leave exploitative working conditions or respond to unexpected household crises.In Pakistan, social expectations, mobility constraints, and household decision-making patterns are important considerations in understanding women's economic opportunities. The World Bank's country-focused analysis emphasizes that barriers extend beyond labour-market conditions to include safety, agency, access to assets, and social norms. These interconnected factors help explain why educational attainment alone does not necessarily lead to economic independence.

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a qualitative research methodology to examine women's economic independence and the challenges experienced in modern society. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the subject involves interconnected social norms, economic conditions, institutional arrangements, cultural expectations, and individual decision-making processes that cannot be understood exclusively through numerical indicators. The research is based on secondary data collected from published reports, policy documents, statistical publications, and institutional research released between 2023 and 2025. The principal sources include

Journal Of
Women, Society And
Contemporary Challenges
VOL 1 | NO.1 | 2026
PIISSN: XXXX-XXX
EI SSN: XXXX-XXXX

reports published by the World Bank, UN Women, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the World Economic Forum, and the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, together with other relevant institutional publications. These sources were selected because they address employment, gender equality, financial inclusion, legal protections, entrepreneurship, unpaid care work, and access to economic opportunities. The literature was reviewed thematically to identify recurring patterns, areas of agreement, and differences in the challenges faced by women across national and international settings. Particular attention was given to the relevance of each publication to the research question, the credibility of its issuing institution, its publication date, and the relationship between its findings and the study objectives. The analysis distinguishes between global evidence and Pakistan-specific findings to avoid assuming that conditions are identical across different societies. It also considers the limitations of available evidence, including variations in the definitions of employment, economic participation, and empowerment used by different institutions. No primary interviews, questionnaires, experiments, or field observations were conducted for this study. Consequently, the methodology is documentary and interpretive rather than experimental or survey-based. The findings are developed through the synthesis of existing research and are presented as evidence-informed conclusions rather than as results from a newly collected dataset. This approach provides a systematic foundation for understanding the multiple dimensions of women's economic independence while identifying areas that require further empirical investigation.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is descriptive, exploratory, and qualitative, using a thematic review of secondary literature to investigate the challenges affecting women's economic independence. The descriptive component explains the current issues identified in the selected publications, while the exploratory component examines how social expectations, labour-market structures, financial arrangements, and public policies interact to influence women's economic opportunities. The research process is organized into five stages. First, the research question and objectives were established to define the scope of the investigation. Second, relevant publications from 2023 to 2025 were identified through institutional research and official statistical sources. Third, the selected materials were examined for information concerning employment opportunities, wage inequality, unpaid domestic work, financial access, entrepreneurship, digital inclusion, and legal protections. Fourth, the evidence was organized into thematic categories so that recurring barriers and potential solutions could be compared across sources. Finally, the themes were synthesized to develop the study's findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The principal unit of analysis is the published document or report, rather than an individual research participant. International reports provide a broader context, while Pakistan-focused publications help illustrate the relevance of the issues in a specific national setting. The design does not attempt to calculate a new national gender gap, estimate causal effects, or claim statistical representativeness. Instead, it identifies relationships discussed in the existing literature and evaluates their implications for women's financial autonomy. To improve analytical consistency, the study considers whether each theme is supported by more than one relevant source where possible. It also distinguishes documented statistics from interpretations and policy recommendations. An important limitation is that institutional reports may differ in their methodologies, survey periods, definitions, and geographical coverage.

Journal Of
Women, Society And
Contemporary Challenges
VOL 1 | NO.1 | 2026
PIISSN: XXXX-XXX
EI SSN: XXXX-XXXX

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis follows a qualitative thematic approach in which published information is examined, categorized, compared, and interpreted according to its relevance to women's economic independence. The first analytical theme concerns employment and income security. The reviewed literature indicates that access to paid work is an important pathway to financial autonomy, but employment alone does not guarantee independence when women experience low wages, insecure contracts, restricted promotion opportunities, or limited control over earnings. The World Bank's *Women, Business and the Law 2024* provides a framework for understanding the legal and institutional conditions that shape women's employment and entrepreneurship, while the World Bank's Pakistan-focused report identifies barriers involving labour-force participation, fair wages, productive assets, and economic agency. The second theme concerns unpaid care responsibilities. The reviewed evidence indicates that unequal responsibility for domestic work can restrict women's available time for employment, training, and business development. The World Bank's reporting on childcare and the UN Women–UN DESA *Gender Snapshot 2024* both emphasize the economic importance of care arrangements and investment in care services. The third theme concerns financial inclusion and entrepreneurship. The literature suggests that banking, credit, savings, property ownership, and business-development opportunities can strengthen economic autonomy when women can access and control these resources. However, financial services may have limited effects if women lack collateral, financial knowledge, suitable products, or the freedom to make independent decisions. The fourth theme involves education and digital participation. Digital technologies can create new routes to employment and entrepreneurship, but unequal access to devices, connectivity, technical skills, and safe online environments may reproduce existing inequalities. The UN Women publication on gender equality in digital cooperation and the *Gender Snapshot 2025* identify digital inclusion as an important element of broader empowerment strategies. The fifth theme concerns legal and institutional support. Across the reviewed literature, the presence of formal rights is not equivalent to their effective implementation; enforcement, accessible complaint mechanisms, public services, and social acceptance also matter. Finally, the analysis compares international evidence with Pakistan-specific findings to identify common challenges and contextual differences.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study, derived from the reviewed secondary literature, indicate that women's economic independence is influenced by a combination of structural, cultural, financial, and institutional factors. The first major finding is that access to employment remains essential but insufficient on its own. Women may obtain paid work and still experience economic insecurity because of low wages, limited job protection, unequal promotion opportunities, or an inability to control their earnings. The World Bank's 2024 reports on women's legal and economic opportunities demonstrate the importance of considering employment conditions, asset ownership, entrepreneurship, and legal protections together rather than treating labour-force participation as the sole measure of empowerment. The second finding concerns the unequal distribution of unpaid care work. Domestic responsibilities can restrict women's participation in the labour market, particularly when affordable childcare and other support services are unavailable. This burden may affect career

Journal Of
Women, Society And
Contemporary Challenges
VOL 1 | NO.1 | 2026
PIISSN: XXXX-XXX
EI SSN: XXXX-XXXX

continuity, professional advancement, and the time available for entrepreneurship. The reviewed evidence suggests that public investment in care services and a more equitable distribution of household responsibilities could improve women's opportunities to participate in paid employment while supporting family welfare. The third finding is that financial inclusion must involve meaningful control over economic resources. Access to bank accounts, savings, loans, and digital payments can help women manage income and develop businesses, but these resources are most effective when women can make independent decisions about their use. In Pakistan, the World Bank's 2024 assessment identifies substantial barriers relating to unbanked women, property and asset ownership, financial services, and entrepreneurship. This evidence suggests that expanding access to finance should be accompanied by efforts to strengthen women's financial knowledge, property rights, and decision-making power. The fourth finding is that social norms and institutional arrangements reinforce one another.

CONCLUSION

Women's economic independence is a fundamental component of gender equality, human dignity, social progress, and sustainable economic development. The present study examined the challenges that prevent women from achieving financial autonomy in modern society through a qualitative review of secondary literature published between 2023 and 2025. The reviewed evidence indicates that, although women have made progress in education, employment, entrepreneurship, and technological participation, substantial inequalities continue to affect their economic opportunities. These inequalities arise from a combination of low-paid and insecure employment, unequal remuneration, workplace discrimination, disproportionate unpaid domestic responsibilities, restricted access to financial services, limited ownership of productive assets, and restrictive social expectations. The literature also demonstrates that access to education, employment, banking, and technology does not necessarily produce economic independence unless women can exercise meaningful control over their income, assets, and financial decisions. The findings further indicate that the barriers affecting women are interconnected and cannot be addressed effectively through isolated interventions. Affordable childcare, safe transportation, professional training, financial inclusion, fair employment practices, effective legal protections, and supportive social attitudes must operate together to create lasting improvements. Evidence from Pakistan illustrates the importance of considering national and local conditions, including mobility restrictions, unequal access to productive resources, and differences between rural and urban employment opportunities. At the same time, digital technologies offer new possibilities for remote employment, entrepreneurship, and financial participation, provided that women have affordable access, appropriate skills, and protection from online abuse and exploitation. The study therefore concludes that women's economic independence should be understood not merely as the ability to earn money but as the capacity to obtain decent work, manage financial resources, build assets, maintain economic security, and participate meaningfully in decisions affecting their lives.

REFERENCES

Piper, N. (2023). The global governance of labour mobility: the role of the International Labour Organization. In Research handbook on the institutions of global migration governance (pp. 63-75). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Journal Of
Women, Society And
Contemporary Challenges
VOL 1 | NO.1 | 2026
PIISSN: XXXX-XXX
EI SSN: XXXX-XXXX

Sathar, Z., & Arif, G. M. Overview: Pakistan at 2050. Demographic Change, Future Projections, and Development Opportunities, 1.

Stefán, C. I. (2023). The world economic Forum. In The Palgrave handbook of non-state actors in East-West relations (pp. 1-13). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Haddad, C. N., Mahler, D. G., Diaz-Bonilla, C., Hill, R., Lakner, C., & Ibarra, G. L. (2024). The World Bank's new inequality indicator. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, 10796.

Alphons, O., & Nassereddin, N. (2022). NATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS.

Goryunova, E., & Madsen, S. R. (2024). The current status of women leaders worldwide. In Handbook of research on gender and leadership (pp. 2-22). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Statistics, F. B. O. (2007). Government of Pakistan. Change.

Rana, E., Shabbir, G., & Najwa, E. (2026). Reforming the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award: Fiscal Federalism and Center-Province Tensions in Pakistan (2020-2026). Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review, 10(2), 290-301.

Women, U. N. (2014). United Nations entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women. In fourth world conference on women platform for action and the Beijing declaration.

NUST, C. (2025). State of Pakistan Population Report 2025.