



RURAL WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF LEISURE IN A GENDERED WORLD: A SOUTH ASIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Purpose of the Study: The main objective of this paper was to synthesize and analysing the existing knowledge to evaluate the effect of public space on women's leisure. Another major objective was to check the role of gender in determining leisure activities and opportunities for rural women. The current study focuses on South Asian rural women concerning Pakistani society.

Methodology: For the present study, the researchers analysed and reviewed articles from different databases like Google Scholar, Taylor, and Francis, Springer, and Sage publication journals from 2000 to 2020.

Principal Findings: After reviewing the various studies conducted in the 21st century, the results showed that most rural women are not allowed to do leisure in public space, and they have few opportunities to do it inside the boundary of the household. The public space is used predominantly by males for their leisure. Family pressure and patriarchal social norms also hampered women's desire to claim public space for leisure activities.

Application of the Study: This study concluded that the leisure opportunities for rural women are less as compared to their counterparts. Public space is vital and plays a pivotal role in shaping and determining leisure activities for both genders. This study also raised certain questions which are thought-provoking and can be crucial for future investigation.

Novelty/Originality: this study is a unique effort to discuss rural women's leisure from a South Asian Perspective. It also gives insight with the support of most recent data regarding rural women's leisure and its relationship with the social structure of society.

Keywords: *Women's Leisure, Gender, Public Space, Leisure Activities.*

INTRODUCTION

Leisure is an uncoerced activity that people do in their free time using their abilities and free time in a satisfying and fulfilling way (Stebbins, 2017). The researchers defined leisure is as a freely chosen activity that is mentally motivated and is not part of the compulsory work such as a job or any domestic chores (Kim et al., 2018). Thus leisure activities are generally those activities that are different from work or self-maintenance but the engagement in leisure activities for pleasure and satisfaction with internal motivation (Taylor, 2003). Although leisure is not considered as important as food and shelter are, in turn, comprises fundamental human rights, leisure is also a human right. Article 24 and 27 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) clearly stated that rest and leisure are the rights of every individual without any discrimination of race, class, gender, religion, and region. Article 13 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women reaffirms that women have equal rights to participate and enjoy recreational activities as men. However, studies have shown that there are constraints to women's leisure, and these constraints are cultural, social as well as economic (See; Adam, 2014; Brown et al., 2001; Henderson, 2013; Jackson & Henderson, 1995; Paul, 2017).

One crucial aspect to consider when studying leisure is the fact that leisure is a human right. Different studies, for example (Aitchison, 1999, 2000; Amsden & McEntee, 2011; Shaw, 1994, 1999), argued about gender inequalities, cultural oppression, and gender stereotyping in their studies but unable or neglect the proper aspect of leisure and leisure studies. Veal (2015) outlined a new explanation of leisure and leisure studies by arguing towards a human rights or rights perspective of leisure studies by suggesting that researchers should incorporate the human rights perspective while studying leisure.

Women in South Asian countries generally and in Pakistan especially are less empowered and do not enjoy the rights and privileges equal to men. Their position inside and outside the house remained subordinate to men (Ali et al., 2016). Women are considered inferior and men exploited them through patriarchal cultural norms. The governing system in many parts of Pakistan's rural areas is still governed by a feudal system that sees women as evil to society (Bhattacharya, 2014). However, most of the Pakistani population lives in rural areas, and agriculture is their primary source of income. Both males and females participate in agricultural activities to earn their livelihood. Women are also involved in animal herding, which is vital for family food and household economy (Ishaq & Memon, 2017).



Most of the leisure research has focused mainly on men's leisure and largely ignored women's leisure. However, in recent years, feminist researchers started to study women's leisure. Gender stereotypes played a vital role in determining leisure activities for males and females (Taylor, 2003). Leisure researchers have the view that patriarchal social structure, defined leisure as a male activity. Women in patriarchal societies can interact with other women inside the boundary of the house, and women often considered it as leisure for them. Gender in leisure studies is a vital variable to the research still, now feminist leisure researchers started to develop theoretical knowledge of leisure and placing feminine leisure as a critical concept to the discussions (Adam, 2014).

For feminist researchers/scholars, leisure can reproduce specific gender stereotype roles and can also be used as resistance to gender stereotype roles in society (Du, 2008). While many researchers focused on the gender division of labour in family work, they did not focus on the gendered division in leisure. Leisure time and activities gender differences are essential to check inequality in the quality of life. Women's leisure is more bounded by family work or cares, while men carried out away from family and work boundaries while performing leisure (Yerkes et al., 2018).

Gürbüz and Henderson (2014) conducted a study to explore leisure patterns, perceptions, and constraints among university students of Turkey. They concluded that women, as compared to men, prefer social and cultural leisure and home-based leisure, while the male was interested in sports and outdoor activities. The women considered access to leisure as the most significant constraint of leisure. Gender, as well as socio-economic status, were vital as a constraint perception of students. Adam (2014) concluded in his study done in Ghana university, that female students' participation in outdoor and physical activities was at a minimal level. Gender of students was the main determinant of constraints towards leisure activities.

In the construction of rural leisure, people tend to neutralize gender in the process of leisure determination. Leisure space means a predominantly male leisure domain. Girls living in rural areas are given less spatial mobility than boys and, girls are bound to remain at home (Norman et al., 2011). Gulshetty (2007) concluded that women have double responsibility compared to men if she is involved in paid or unpaid work. This situation should demand more leisure time and opportunities for their social well-being. In rural social structure, all leisure opportunities revolved among men. Women have less access to public spaces like markets, hospitals, shopping malls and they are dependent on their male family members for their daily utility items. Women are often unaware of the meaning of leisure, as they spent most of their time working in agriculture fields throughout the year.

Leisure, Gender and Constraints

The present study adopted the framework used by Shaw (1994) in her article "Gender, Leisure, and Constraint: Towards a Framework for the Analysis of Women's Leisure". According to her, three different approaches can be practice to study women's leisure. The first approach to understand women's leisure is an analysis of how leisure is constrained. From this approach, leisure activities are a desirable experience and constraints are the product of structured gender relationships. The second approach is how the leisure activities themselves, especially stereotypical activities, can be constrained by reinforcing of traditional gender relations. A third, emerging approach examines how women's leisure as an indicator to have the potential for resistance to societally imposed constraints. The researcher will focus on the first two approaches and utilizing them as guiding principles for conducting and analysing the current study.

The current study focused that how women negotiate with the social structure to get opportunities for leisure in a typical patriarchal rural edifice.

METHODOLOGY

This paper reviewed the literature regarding rural women's access to leisure space, leisure activities, and their experiences of leisure in a gendered world by applying a narrative review approach. The researchers focused on the available literature in the sociology of leisure, gender issues in leisure, and the role of public space in determining leisure for women. The researcher reviewed the different articles from 2000 to 2020, and some early years articles included setting the foundation for the introduction and conceptual foundation of this study. In this review study, the researchers searched and reviewed the data from different databases like Google Scholar, Taylor and Francis, Scopus, and Sage publication. Key terms were used to get accurate and topic-specific literature from the databases. The researchers used the following key terms to get data search; rural leisure and gender; rural women and leisure; women's leisure and public space; and rural women's leisure in South Asia. Based on these specific key terms, this article discussed leisure for rural women within the context of gender and public space access.

REVIEW /DISCUSSION

Gender, Leisure and Public Space

Peters (2010) argued that gender is an inherent component between religion and ethnicity. Women have to deal with more leisure constraints as compare to men because of their assigned gender roles. Women have less free time due to their



business in the domestic sphere and time constraints restrict their freedom of choice to do leisure. People of different ethnicities, gender, and classes employed Public spaces for interaction and cohesion building. Women were not comfortable in the public spaces due to unnecessary interaction with strangers, but women were comfortable developing their interaction and social cohesion with the neighbours. [Watson and Ratna \(2011\)](#) studied a specific park event where South Asian diasporas participated. They focused on leisure and public space as a significant context for analysing complex and dynamic social relations. They argued how gender, race, class and ethnic identities, and status determined the leisure space for people. As a researcher, it is vital to hypothesize the space for leisure rather than leisure spaces, like venues, places, and sites. They accredited that leisure is negotiated, contested, created, and experienced at the individual and collective level of the society. [Lewis and Johnson \(2011\)](#) researched to explore diverse expressions and embodiments of gender, focusing on the leisure space and performing leisure. They identified that for creating safe leisure, a female should be an expert in performing masculine leisure and adjusting and creating a safe environment for other people regardless of gender. They narrated the story of a transgender person who shared her subjective experiences regarding leisure in a public place. [Höglhammer et al. \(2018\)](#) elaborated on the adolescents' experiences of leisure in public and private spaces. The study was conducted in Vienna city by interviewing 45 adolescents. This exploratory research's conclusion suggested that participants were much comfortable doing leisure in the private spaces as compared to do leisure in the public spaces. Unexpectedly, boys showed more fear and vulnerability to do leisure in public spaces than girls. The most important aspect that emerged from data collection was that leisure was perceived by participants as an activity where they interact with the peer group; here, the issue of leisure was of secondary importance. [Tucker and Matthews \(2001\)](#) explored the real rural setting of Britain, which in myth regarded as free of conflict and nature zone. They founded that girls and boys had conflict over public space. Girls often were monitored, and supervised by boys in playing areas and boys had the power to regulate these public spaces. The playing spaces like playgrounds and recreation areas were boys' spaces. The ways public spaces in rural areas are gendered combine excluding girls from playing opportunities. The girls could not go to these playing areas because areas were boys-specific. The girls who contested for their right to be in the public spaces were regarded as a danger to social norms and labelled socially undesirable and cheap. [Wagner and Peters \(2014\)](#) studied how Moroccan women negotiate with public spaces during attaining leisure in the Netherland. They found that for women Muslim women face restrictions to be visible in public spaces compared to Non-Muslim women in Europe. The performance of domestic chores inside the boundary and fear and risk attached with outside public places hindered women from leisure activities in public spaces. Women want to create a safe outside space for leisure without compromising their family norms and domestic responsibilities. Most of the participants narrated that they face domestic surveillance while deciding or performing leisure. Our family members consistently guide us or ask for the places we visit for leisure are safe enough to be there. In some instances, we tried to escape from family surveillance, but we cannot go against our family every time. The women narrated their male family members often escaped from their parent's surveillance and went out for leisure during holidays. [Holdsworth et al. \(2017\)](#) conducted a study to investigate the gender differences in teenagers for alcohol consumption and spatial practices. They collected data through focus group activities and separated these groups by gender. The results showed that the boys participated in outdoor sports activities like football clubs and teams. The boys discussed in the focus group about their engagement in different outdoor sports activities such as football clubs and teams. They were participating in the games in an organized manner. Some other boys were interested in computer gaming because their parent did not allow them to go outside. While girls in the focus group reported that they did not participate in organized sports activities as these games are headed or supervised by males. Girls confirmed that there are fewer leisure activities and leisure spaces for the young because most of the leisure spaces belong to male members of society. [Hindley \(2020\)](#) concluded that park run activity is not only a running or exercise activity place rather than is a place for shared leisure. The free accessibility to park-run activity is vital to maintain and manage a more inclusive environment for all people regardless of their gender, class, ethnicity, and affiliation to a specific community. One of the participants narrated that it is not only a park-run activity, but it is a community, and we all belong to it. This feeling of belongingness promotes the social bond with a different fraction of society and pave the way to lessen the gender difference in park run activities and combine public spaces for leisure. [James \(2001\)](#) explored the experiences of teenage girls regarding leisure and leisure space. This study suggested that girls who were going through body image changes preferred to be in the bedrooms. Another important factors were the fear of people regarding being in the public space where everyone can discuss the physical changes one was going through. Young girls were more comfortable with solitary leisure activities than shared leisure activities, and they preferred passive leisure as compared to active leisure. The girls argued that the security issue is an intriguing factor in determining their presence in public spaces. They felt their bedrooms are the place they have control and, power to do, whatever they want to do inside their bedrooms. Outside the room, their control is minimum and anyone can intervene whether a family member or the general public outside of the home. [Paul \(2017\)](#) studied an important aspect of gender and leisure by focusing on gendered spatiality. He argued that there are fewer studies that shed light on leisure and gender with the spatial lens. He found that the new consumption sector is an opportunity for women to do leisure. Shopping malls gave women a new way to stroll around and can enjoy their time. But the question remained that whether doing groceries and strolling around the shopping malls is considered leisure or an extra duty for women. The study elaborated that shopping malls, coffee shops, and departmental



stores can provide leisure still, it depends upon individuals' understanding and mental condition, not the existence of a leisure place. Contrary to the above discussion, [Bagheri \(2014\)](#) articulated the geographies of gender differently. Gender is not the only construct while studying women in public spaces, culture; race, and sexuality are relevant or contextualized to analyse gender and public space in a specific society. By entering a shopping mall which, is a privatized place contrary to [Paul, \(2017\)](#) who thought shopping malls are public places, gives women unexpected freedom which is rare in traditional urban places. Women often are invisible in public spaces designs and construction, so they have the opportunity to manoeuvre and adjust with their own choice. [Mai and Hao \(2020\)](#) reported that women who performed leisure activities with their peer group have positive social and self-identity. They have learned to manage to use private and public leisure space differently, which helped them reconstruct their social capital within family and community. Leisure activities for older women are vital to maintaining a healthy life and, escape from social isolation. They suggested that future studies should focus on lower social class and uneducated women group to measure their access to public space regarding leisure. [Jin and Whitson \(2014\)](#) found that women's choice of leisure places and gendered performance concerning those spaces reinforced a new form of hegemonic masculinity and conformity to femininity. While they also left an opportunity to renegotiate traditional gender roles and leisure space. It clarifies that leisure space proves vital in the production and reproduction of gendered geographies of power and control. [Johnson et al. \(2001\)](#) concluded that women who participated in leisure activities compared to men complained about the structural constraints and personal safety and lack of facilities. Women narrated that lack of money and financial freedom is a constraint in their participation in outdoor activities. For rural women interestingly, natural phenomena that are the fear of pest was perceived as a constraint rather than the male dominance. [Abbott-Chapman and Robertson \(2001\)](#) reported a substantial difference between girls and boys regarding their perception of the role of home, space, and identity in pursuing leisure. The result showed that girls were keen to do leisure inside the home and boys were more attracted to outside leisure. Traditional gender roles shaped girls' identity as domestic care workers and society's norms were hindering them from making their visibility in public space. For the girls, their relationship with friends and family was the most important thing, and they do not want to live away from them, while for boys, it was not significant to be away from family or friends. [Jin and Whitson \(2014\)](#) concluded that physical space is pivotal in determining leisure activities and individual social identity. Public spaces are important to see the differences in leisure activities in different gender. Men, as compared to women, have more access to these places. But in recent times, especially in an urban setting, women have access to public places to maintain leisure activities. Gender norms are restricting women to use public spaces as leisure places. Society expects women to wear a proper dress, and their behaviour in public places should be appropriate according to the set pattern of society.

Leisure and Public Space in South Asia

Women of the Muslim world generally and the South Asian region specifically are encouraged to be inside the home. The traditional social norms and explanation of Islamic teachings played a vital role in determining the public spaces as male space and private spaces as female space. The concept of *Mehram* means the male members with whom women can interact without any restriction and hesitation. In contrast, is *Namehram* male members whom women should avoid interaction. The problem with the interpretation that public spaces are equal to male space is gendered and discriminatory against women. There are chances that women who go to public spaces can interact with *Namahram*, which is illegitimate in the region, restricted females to be visible in public spaces ([Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2001](#)). The social system of South Asia is predominantly in favour of male members of society. Gender discrimination is evident in every sphere of life. The utilization of public space for leisure and free mobility is contested and restricted by male members by any means. Street harassment of females is one classic example where male member tease females from southing to physical assault to make females out of these public spaces ([Wronska, 2018](#)). The social and cultural process that played a vital role in making gendered identities are responsible for framing a gendered perception of public and private space. The patriarchal social norms initiate the internalization of ideal gender roles for both male and female in the public sphere. The systematic exclusion of women from the mobility process and utilization of public spaces undermined the liberty and freedom of choice for women in traditional societies like Pakistan ([Masood, 2018](#)).

[Maharjan et al. \(2012\)](#) studied the conditions and possible benefits and disadvantages for women whose husbands went abroad for economic reasons. In patriarchal societies, men have the advantage and do enjoy more leisure than women. The results of the study showed that women do have more workload than men in nonfarm activities. It enhances the workload burden of women when the husband has left for abroad as she has to do the workload share of her husband. Women who already have fewer hours for leisure, with added work, were deprived of leisure time. [Craike et al. \(2011\)](#) explained the differences between rural and urban adolescents regarding physical activities. They found that in rural areas, girls were less competitive in physical activities because of exclusion and marginalization through systematic prejudice by boys of the community. In rural gendered life, football and cricket are the games for boys, not for women. The role of traditional feminine discourse encourages females to participate in domestic and care work and discourages them from indulging in masculine activities. Results from metropolitan areas were different in terms of gender discrimination regarding access and performing of physical activities. [Bimla and Dilbaghi \(2007\)](#) concluded that women have minimum access to leisure space

and lack of time in Harayana, India. The farm women have a double work burden of domestic work and farm work. They still find their way to enjoy and do leisure within the spheres of workplaces. They enjoy cooking dishes for a social event, knitting sweeter for children, and embroidery work. The most enjoyable leisure for farm women was to chat with each other during the working hours of farm activities. [Khan \(2011\)](#) researched to explore the difference between men and women in travel leisure in India. She elaborated that the women believed gender is a constraint in travel leisure for them. In contrast, men are free to travel anywhere in the world. Resultantly gender remained the one vital contributing factor in leisure constraint for women. Women narrated that social dominance of spouse and family responsibilities hindered them from travel leisure. Women's participation in travel leisure has increased in recent years, but the numbers are still much below that of men. Social change and modernization have affected women's participation positively, but the patriarchal social pressure is hindering them from pursuing their leisure by their own choice. [Mughal \(2014\)](#) argued that leisure patterns are usually traditional. Still, television watching is a leisure that is popular in rural areas of Pakistan. Men usually play cricket, volleyball, and Ludo for their leisure. They used to gossip in a gathering where they all sit together to kill time; this is also a famous form of leisure. For women, leisure is different from men. They would not play cricket or volleyball because of existing social norms. They do play Ludo at times, but leisure opportunities for women are lesser as compared to men. A different study of [Mughal \(2017\)](#) concluded while studying time distribution in the rural village of Lodhran, a district of South Punjab, that women spent only one hour in leisure activities and men spent four hours in leisure activities. Women worked for 8 hours to maintain the household while men spent only one hour in household activities. Women as individuals have less access to leisure time and leisure activities in a traditional rural area of South Punjab. [Hassan and Azman \(2014\)](#) concluded in their study that women's home-based productive work falls into the category of housework that women do in their leisure time. This patriarchal thinking is first damaging women's economic contribution and, secondly, women's leisure time. They argued that in a patriarchal society, there are two types of space one is "private space", and the other is "public space". Men have all the access and control of public spaces, while private space inside the home is for women. The structural pattern of public spaces is not women-friendly as these are prohibited areas for women. [Zubair \(2003\)](#) argued that women in South Punjab are rarely allowed to go outside the house without covering their body, and *Purdah* means having a long shawl or a *Burqa* covers a women's whole body. It is also compulsory for women to be accompanied by a male member or female member when she intends to go outside the home. Result shows for women in South Punjab, their access to public space is limited, and this space is not a space used for their leisure activities.

CONCLUSION

The situation, as revealed by the studies reviewed in this article, shows a significant gap in utilizing public spaces for leisure for males and females. Women are disadvantageous because of the social and cultural norms of society. The literature showed that previous studies have focused on urban areas as their study places for the women's leisure. Leisure constraints and leisure pattern for women in rural areas could not get the attention of the academic community. In rural areas, the social and political structure is a hurdle in accessing public spaces for leisure. Male members have access to public spaces, while women have no access to these public spaces. Women's subordination and their passive role in decision-making in domestic affairs further hindered their capacity to be visible in public spaces. They are encouraged and motivated to do domestic care work as it is the prime responsibility for them. Their well-being and leisure activities are of secondary importance in South Asian societies. There is a need for more primary studies that focus the rural women and their leisure experiences with particular reference to Asian countries where women are facing extreme gender discrimination.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY AND THE SCOPE FOR FUTURE STUDY

The present study which focused only on reviewing the literature has its limitations. Due to a lack of time and resources, researchers could not utilize the opportunity to collect primary data. Nevertheless, this study provides deep insight regarding the leisure of rural women and the use of public space in the context of Pakistan. It further paves the way and opens a window for new researches focusing on primary data and area-specific research.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Muhammad Farhat Hayat: Data Collection, writing introduction, review of literature, methodology, and formatting.

Rukhsana Ashiq: Article Search, reviewing, and reference setting.

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