

CONSEQUENCES OF GOSSIPING ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract

Gossip is prevalent and is widespread in human society. Gossip has been denigrated as ‘idle talk’, mostly among women based on ‘trifling or groundless rumour’. The nature and intensity of gossiping victimise women in society. Consequently, women bear serious threat to their well standardized lives. The study aims to understand the women’s experiences with gossiping as a barrier to empowerment. This is a qualitative study with inductive approach. Men and Women are selected as a informants for this study. The data were congregated through in-depth interviews. The results indicate that gossiping or fear of being gossiped is a strong social control in the social setup of Balochistan. This prevents women from being empowered. This paper is intended to be a contribution to exploiting the ideas of women about gossiping as an essential social control or barrier for empowering women.

Keywords: Gossiping, Male Dominancy, Women Empowerment, Tribal Values, Balochistan

1 INTRODUCTION

Women form an essential and important component of society, still they continue to face hindrances in getting their rights (Sohail, 2014). Discriminatory social structure and the prevalent cultural ideology influence the status, role and social lives of women (Naz, Ibrahim & Ahmad, 2012). Fershtman, Gneezy and Hoffman (2011) are of the view that these cultural norms and rules impact the lives of the people, male and female and a violation is always punished. For maintaining and upholding these norms, gossip is the only influential source of social control, it has been found to drive punishment for violation of these norms. In conservative communities, gossip has been found to be a powerful tool for ensuring that the boundaries of social norms are not infringed (Augustin, Assad & Jaziri, 2012; Wilson, Wilczynski, Wells & Weiser, 2000; Henrich & Henrich, 2014; Bradshaw, Waasdorp & O’Brennan, 2013).

Paterson (2008) says that gossip is a powerful form of social control. Such social control deals with norms. Normative behaviour norms produced by gossip often serve as indicators of social control. Social order is maintained by controls such as gossip. These social norms are the principal barriers to women empowerment (Kalam, 2014). Gossip retains another important function, influencing the behaviour of others (Grosser et al., 2010) (Ganesh et al., 2003). Gossip may be assumed to be the practice of social networking that contributes materially to the culture of diffusion of information and the establishment of behavioural and cultural idioms.

Furthermore, Skolnik (2012) argues, “gossip has a greater impact on women than on

men". (Wert & Salovey, 2004). Women bear serious consequences of this source of social control in the society. Female victims of gossiping bullying rate their academic abilities lower than those not affected (McCracken, Unterhalter, Márquez & Chelstowska, 2015). Women avoid involvement and participation in public activity in order to avoid attracting any possible stigma caused by gossip (Ganesh Kermarrec & Massoulié, 2003).

Moreover, Gossip adversely affects women's physical mobility because the family, whose support is crucial for the freedom of movement, involved in employment or in education, may be overly sensitive to the effect of gossip. It is feared that negative remarks attributed to a female member of the family can tarnish the reputation of the entire family, village or town. Conversely, positive identifications may enhance the social capital of the family or town (Ganesh et al., 2013).

Furthermore, Grosser et al (2010) state that women have a lower place in the hierarchy of access to resources. This placement brings deference norms expressed verbally (gossip). Verbal restrictions imposed upon females include their inability to express opinions and dissent, as well as simply not being heard. Alarmed at being the subject of rumours and gossip overrides any perceived gain the woman might have obtained in terms of enhanced authority within the community or the household (Ganesh et al., 2013).

Since men and women have different degrees of access to resources and therefore power, they are affected by gossip to different degrees. Gossip tends to adversely impact the quality of the lives of women more than it does of men (Skolnik et al., 2012). Ganesh et al (2013) also agreed that any real or imagined non-fulfilment of household responsibilities on the part of the woman can cast aspersions upon her "character". A woman's reputation is strongly associated with her femininity. Even an imaginary failure to carry out the most insignificant of the basic duties of her gender such as housework, rapidly invokes the morality-duty nexus. This can cause aspersions upon her "character" by gossip. Women's mobility, their ability to participate in paid jobs and obtaining their inherited property, are restricted by people racing socio-cultural norms, pottery ample social structure and the ever present threat of gossip. Gossip can be seen to play a significant role in limiting women's participation in society (Khan, 2010 & Skolnik, 2011).

However, in Balochistan gossip enforces the patriarchal structure and the persisting socio-cultural norms. However, this study aims to determine the consequences of gossiping on women empowerment in district Mastung, Baluchistan.

Theoretical support

Men's pervasive oppression of women and their exploitation is a radical feminist watchword. It is found everywhere that men and women come into contact whether it is in the public or in a private place. Male dominated culture is turned on its head by radical feminism. Radical feminism argues that male dominance is very hard to eradicate because its root. It is believed that in a man dominated patriarchal society, men use the method of Gossiping for oppressing and controlling women (Hakala & Keller, 2011).

Feminists focus on and emphasise women's experience with their social setup (gossip). Further, they emphasise issues relating to power (Akman Toner, Stuckless, Ali, Emmott & Downie, 2001). Feminists believe that it is very difficult to eradicate male dominance and their sources of social control (gossip) because the belief that women are different and inferior is deeply rooted in most men's consciousness. However, radical feminist methodologies provide the theoretical underpinnings for this research.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study is a descriptive qualitative research endeavour following inductively collected data. The objective of the study is to know the consequences of gossiping as a barrier to women empowerment. In conducting this study, the researcher constructed semi-structured interview to collect the data. The snowball sampling technique was employed for selection of the informants. The researcher reviewed the literature related to socio-cultural norms affecting women in the rural areas of Baluchistan in order to develop semi-structured interview for data collection. The major categories of the interview were social, economic, and family-related problems resulting from gossip. The items were revised and improved as a result of the opinions of experts. It was pilot-tested before its administration. The items of the semi-structured interviews were also revised in the light of the opinions of the informants at the pilot-testing stage. Informants were advised to comment on and discuss any items that they felt were unclear or ambiguous. The feedback provided by the informants was adopted into the mentioned in the field notes.

Ethical Consideration

The interviewees were socially oppressed women. The interviews were conducted by the researcher herself. The researcher personally visited the homes of the interviewees to administer the interviews. All the participants were assured confidentiality of information and anonymity. The purpose of this study was also made clear to the interviewees. Queries regarding the nature of this study were answered fully and in details in order to satisfy the interviewees. It was also conveyed to them that, in case of any kind of discomfort, they were free to stop participating in this study at any point in time. The interviews were recorded on a handheld digital voice recorder. The audio files were transcribed to generate transcripts required for data analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the thematically analyzing data it was confirmed that women in the male dominated society do not enjoy the right of decision-making. Male members of the family do not permit the women to take a decision without consulting them. It was also found that men who do not control their wives were subject to defamatory gossip. As a result of the gossip and its consequences, women become totally dependent on the male members of the family and are thus disempowered.

One of the informants was of the view that;

“...My husband take all decisions by himself, as villagers laugh and make fun of those guys who follow their wives, it shows that wife is dominant, so people don't give respect to those who have no authority at home. So that's why my husband never involved me in any decision, in this way the villagers will not talk against me.... My husband will not allow my daughter to go to work [job], even if he has to work in the fields whole day as a labour, he used to say that people don't consider me a man if I send my females for job it's against my ghairat [dignity] that they [females] go out of the home and the villagers keep watching them and talking about them....”(interview 6).

On the other hand, in the male dominated Baluch society, people prefer to live within their own community and tribe so as to share the same cultural mannerisms. There is a high degree of interaction among the people and all “keep an eye on each other”. They followed their cultural norms strictly and any deviation is immediately responded to. Violators of accepted cultural norms are punished with defamatory gossip. Gossiping is a tool for social control (Warber, 2003). Grosser et al (2010) is also of the view that gossip is a useful tool for describing the rules and boundaries of the culture. This cultural knowledge, in turn, can enhance individual performance.

“in male social gathers people normally discuss and take more interest in women related issues, sometimes when they observe something against our cultural traits they don’t discuss with the person who is concerned with it, they discuss with other villagers and they keep discussing everywhere, so it is big shame for that person whose females are being discussed by other guys, that’s why I keep an eye on my female members to avoid any risk of being gossiped by villagers....” there the male staff was usually available. He gave me some medicines. But he discussed me with other staff members after two days my husband was told by some relatives, that I visited the village hospital, he [husband] was very angry..... And never allowed me to go to hospital and any public place. Now sometimes when i am sick, i do self medication using different herbals”. (interview 4).

The villagers spent most of their time gossiping about other villagers and their families with their neighbours, peers or people having similar mentality. Gossip has traditionally been defined as idle talk about naming others that are not present in the conversation, and it typically entails damaging, exploitable information about that non present other (Adkins, 2002). Gossip can be positive or negative. In order to save themselves from being subject to gossip and to preserve their reputation, women avoid involvement or participate in any public activity (Ganesh et al., 2013).

“I live in a joint family, where all in all are our men, without their permission, we cannot do anything, they do not allow us [women]. I cannot express my anger, as my mother says that people will pay negative remarks against you and will label you as aggressive and ill mannered girl, which can affect my proposals for marriage. That’s why I keep quiet, although, I know that this is against my rights, but in front of my father and brothers, I cannot say anything” (interview 9).

In a male dominated society gossip motivates against women’s contribution and participation. It is a major barrier to women empowerment. From a cultural learning perspective, gossip is communication that can teach us about our social environment (Baumeister Zhang, & Vohs, 2004) (Grosser et al., 2010).

On the other hand a male informant was defending the system by saying that;

“....To go out regularly they say the villagers will talk, and they will laugh on us that we [men] cannot control our women so it’s better to stay at home. That’s why, I could not go to school..... I work all day at

my home, if, I don't, then my in. Starts back biting against me, which is not good repute for woman as the other women in the village will also get to know and they discuss me, the bad repute can affect the future of my daughter as well, people don not forget bad things easily they keep taunting..." (Interview 4)

Baluchistan is the most conservative and backward province of Pakistan. People strictly follow a strongly fixed and deeply rooted traditional setup which limits women from redefining their roles. Gossip is a powerful form of social control in Baluchistan (Paterson, 2008). In conservative communities gossip is employed as a form of social control to regulate the conduct of society members according to their accepted cultural norms (Augustine Assad & Jaziri, 2012).

Radical feminism turns male-dominated culture on its head. It takes all the characteristics that are valued in male-dominated societies (Lorber, 1997). The tribal society does not like to go against their culture. Fear of being subject to gossip by peers prevents male members of the family from empowering women. Gossip has traditionally been attributed to women and has since long been used as a tool against them. Gossip acts as a form of "social glue" that holds groups together by conveying to them what is and what is not appropriate behaviour. Moreover, gossip acts as parameters for membership within the group (Warber, 2003). Gossip is a tool for women-specific oppression and control. It exists in several forms, including behind-the-back, whispering and spreading stories about target women (Hakala & Keller, 2011).

Unarguably, gossiping is a barrier to women empowerment in a male dominated society. Fear of consequences of gossip prevents women from taking any decision regarding their health, education, and access to paid jobs. This results in low quality of life and dependency upon their men.

4. CONCLUSION

Gossip adversely affects women's lives. Fear of hostile gossip prevents women from taking decisions about their own lives. In a tribal society members live in a close knit group. Every member is under close observation of every other. It is frowned upon the women to leave the four walls in order to seek medical help, education or a paid job. Such activity triggers gossip. The purpose of this paper is to determine the consequences of gossiping on women empowerment. The data for this study was collected by interviewing the informants through chain referral sampling. The results confirm that gossiping is used as a powerful means of social control. It impedes women empowerment in the district. Men avoid the risk of exposure to gossip by not empowering the women. This forms a barrier that prevents women from performing any significant role in their own personal lives or for the well being of the family and society.

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