



**GDAŃSK UNIVERSITY
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FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT AND ECONOMICS

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Review of the doctoral thesis

“Social Norms and Women’s Labor Force Participation: Evidence from Pakistan”

by **Mudassira Sarfraz**

submitted in fulfilment of the PhD program in the discipline of economics
at University of Warsaw (Faculty of Management).

The subject of the review is the doctoral dissertation written by M.Sc. Mudassira Sarfraz entitled “*Social Norms and Women’s Labor Force Participation: Evidence from Pakistan*”, prepared under the supervision of professor Joanna Tyrowicz. I prepare the review following the request of professor Ryszard Kokoszczynski, the Chairman of the Economics and Finance Discipline Council at the Faculty of Management, University of Warsaw (the resolution of the Council of December 22, 2021)¹. The review is to be used in the proceedings for awarding a doctoral degree in economics to Ms Mudassira Sarfraz.

¹ I obtained the thesis in print in mid-January 2022.



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The theme of the thesis can be located at the intersection of labour economics and development economics. The thesis tackles an interesting, socially and economically relevant issue: the relationship between social norms (specifically: equitable gender role beliefs, EGRB) and woman's employment activity (labour force participation, LFP). Ms Sarfraz has chosen to analyse a specific case of Pakistan, providing high quality empirical evidence on gender-biased labour market mechanisms in the developing country context. I have read the thesis with great interest and my overall assessment of the doctoral dissertation submitted by Ms Sarfraz is very positive.

The structure of the thesis is logical and the text reads well². The Author first introduces the research topic, providing a short but meaningful description of the research background and key country-specific facts, along with the explanation of the thesis' contribution with respect to the existing research gap (Chapter 1). Chapter 2 focuses on a review of the related literature on factors affecting woman's labour force participation. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 present the core of the thesis – two empirical studies referring to the specific case of labour market gender structure in Pakistan. The first study investigates the hypothesis that more EGRB cause an increase in LFP among women, the second one examines the hypothesis that higher LFP among women causes gender role beliefs to become more equitable. These studies allowed the Author to draw meaningful conclusions and valuable policy implications summarised in the last chapter.

The research gap is formulated upon a careful reading of the related literature and is convincingly described in part 1.4. The gap refers mainly to our weak understanding of the bidirectional causality in the relationship between woman's LFP and social norms (measured

² From the editorial point of view, the thesis is nicely prepared. There are only some minor shortcomings. For instance, the numbering of the figures in Chapter 1 does not correspond with the text and the list of figures on p. 149.

here via EGRB). Mrs Sarfraz has clearly described how she intends to provide her contribution by verifying both causal directions with the use of the data from Pakistan. Indeed, the thesis makes a nice contribution in the field of labour economics and development studies, showing that the intertwined mechanisms can create a sort of a feedback loop between gender role beliefs and female labour market activity.

The literature review is thorough and based on a wide set of sources. The Author has carefully selected, read and critically analysed most important studies in the field, focusing on key specific research areas: the relationship between social norms or gender ratio and women's LFP, the link between climatic events and migration patterns and, finally, the relationship between cash transfer programs and women's LFP in Pakistan. The only criticism I can formulate with respect to the literature review refers to the weak connection between the part describing climate-induced migration literature (part 2.3 of the thesis) and the other research areas described in Chapter 2, focusing on gender-related issues. Still, Chapter 2 provides a good starting point for the empirical analysis being the fundamental part of the whole dissertation.

The reading of the key analytical chapters of the thesis (Chapters 3-5) makes it clear that Mrs Sarfraz is capable of conducting high-level empirical research. First of all, she has elaborated extensive datasets using individual-level survey data from Pakistan Social and Living Standard Measurement Survey and cash transfer statistics from Benazir Income Support Program Database. It should be stressed that using such data is typically time consuming and complex thus the approach of Mrs Sarfraz was not only original but also ambitious. Secondly, she uses tools typical of high-quality labour economics' research in a very competent way and carefully approaches demanding research problems. In particular, she is well aware of the difficulties arising in the estimations that aim to uncover causal mechanisms linking equitable gender role beliefs and woman's labour force participation. This is not a

trivial issue. Mrs Sarfraz uses sophisticated econometric methods to deal with the endogeneity bias and constructs valid instrument. She also approaches the problem of self-reporting bias in BISP cash transfer data, using coincidence of gender role beliefs' between husband and wife to determine the causality. This is an additional value added of the thesis. Thirdly, she interprets the obtained results in relation to other studies, pointing out the potential sources of differences between them and honestly admitting the limitations of her approach. This is a sign of academic maturity. Finally, she provides robustness checks to support the benchmark findings.

While I find the empirical work of a high quality, I have the impression that the theoretical background of the analysis has been treated with lower attention. In the Introduction Ms Sarfraz refers to the neoclassical theory of labor supply, marriage market hypothesis and the modernization theory, later discussing also the gender stratification approach. Their description is a bit confusing, it appears here and there in the dissertation. Clearly, the empirical focus of the thesis is on woman's LFP in one country – Pakistan – but it would be valuable to provide deeper theory-based understanding of potential sources of variation in female labor force participation observed across developing countries (Klasen, 2019) and particularly low scores in countries like Pakistan and India (Figure on p. 3). Also, I would not call Figure 1.2, or Figure 1.3 (wrong numbering – see footnote 2) a “model” (p. 11)– it is a simple scheme illustrating the mechanism under examination.

Still, I am convinced that after necessary reorganization of the text and its noticeable shortening, the thesis can serve as a basis for two independent research papers, likely to be published in highly ranked economic journals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I can state that the doctoral dissertation of Ms Mudassira Sarfraz entitled "*Social Norms and Women's Labor Force Participation: Evidence from Pakistan*" undoubtedly meets the requirements for doctoral dissertations set in the Polish law. The scientific problem concerning the bidirectional relationship between the activity of women and social norms in Pakistan is original. Ms Sarfraz has theoretical knowledge in the discipline of economics and finance, knows advanced methods of statistical and econometric analysis typical for the discipline, and has proven the ability to conduct high-quality scientific research. I hereby suggest to accept the dissertation and admit it to the public defense.

Konkluzja

Podsumowując, stwierdzam, że praca doktorska Pani Mudassiry Sarfraz pt.: "*Social Norms and Women's Labor Force Participation: Evidence from Pakistan*" bez wątpienia spełnia wymogi ustawowe stawiane pracom doktorskim. Problem naukowy dotyczący dwukierunkowej relacji pomiędzy aktywnością zawodową kobiet a normami społecznymi w Pakistanie jest oryginalny. Doktorantka posiada wiedzę teoretyczną w dyscyplinie ekonomia i finanse, zna zaawansowane metody analizy statystycznej i ekonometrycznej właściwe dla dyscypliny oraz dowiodła umiejętności prowadzenia pracy naukowej. Wnoszę o przyjęcie rozprawy i dopuszczenie jej do publicznej obrony.

