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# The Role of Outdoor Activities in the Individual Empowerment of Women in Pakistan: Male and Female Perspectives

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**The Role of Outdoor Activities in the Individual Empowerment of Women in  
Pakistan:**

**Male and Female Perspectives**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to find out “The role of outdoor activities in the Individual Empowerment of Women in Pakistan: Male and Female perspectives.” Under the light of the views of the informants individual approach towards women empowerment with relation to outdoor education has been examined. This research has tried to answer the questions such as what impacts outdoor education has on women empowerment. What are the motivations and impediments for the women who get engaged in such learning? Other than the two chosen informants my own personal experiences have been woven throughout the study. One male outdoor educator and one female rock climber were interviewed. Their level of participation in outdoor activities was the main criteria. The design of the interviews was semi-structured allowing both informants to give maximum information. Data has been presented into main themes and has been analyzed hermeneutically acknowledging socio-cultural contexts. In the end the findings have been discussed and supported with literature, theory and my own experiences.

**KEYWORDS:** Women Empowerment, Individual Empowerment, Decision making, Self-confidence, Social norms, Experiences, Outdoor activities, Gender, Society, Family.

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## **1. Introduction**

“If a girl can climb mountain, she can do anything” (Pakistan Youth Outreach, 2012). Such words by a twenty one years old Pakistani girl drew people’s attention as it was an emerging voice for women of Pakistan. The women of Pakistan are striving for their rights in a society where according to the native researchers Iqbal , Afzal and Inayat (2012) they are more than half of the total population yet they are relegated to a secondary role. Global experiences repeatedly established the persistent occurrence of gender based violence. The reason of such violence is embedded in a patriarchal social structure which requires submissiveness and ownership of women as a property to survive.

My area of research involves women empowerment taking their submissive status into account. Precisely the topic of my thesis is “The role of outdoor activities in the individual empowerment of women in Pakistan: Male and Female perspectives” therefore it is useful to peep into the background of women status and empowerment in Pakistan. Since women empowerment can be very relative and depends upon the status of women in society so it is worthwhile to look through it.

### **1.2. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to investigate the importance of the role of outdoor activities to empower women of Pakistan on individual level. The question is a big one but the research is highly focused on in-depth interviews with two informants, one male and one female so the two sided picture can be seen. Limited number of women being supervised by the male participant might have experienced it differently but one of them has been interviewed as an example. The main objectives of this study are twofold:

- To find out the connection between outdoor activities and individual empowerment of women in Pakistan
- To acquire male and female viewpoints regarding women’s individual empowerment through outdoor activities in Pakistan.

The study has tried to explore the role of outdoor activities in women empowerment. This research has tried to provide a chance to highlight the voice of woman and man both for women individual empowerment in Pakistan. There is no such research done on

Pakistani women in this regard. This study has helped me to identify those women who have been engaged in outdoor activities. This study also validated the changes occurring in women after participating in outdoor programs through different perspectives. In short this research also brings the male voice for women empowerment to attention who claims to be the first ever outdoor educator in Pakistan.

Different social structure, culture and gender issues are taken into consideration so to explore the motives and impediments behind women's presence in outdoor activities. Hopefully coming from the same country and having trans-cultural experience of outdoor education and analyzing personal thoughts with relation to the collected data will enforce a useful discussion and will stimulate other minds to generate more questions regarding other countries and their women in terms of outdoor activities and empowerment.

### **1.3. Personal interest**

My personal interest in this subject stems from my personal background. Having grown up in Pakistan, coming to Europe and participating in outdoor activities in three different countries has given me a unique trans-cultural experience. My first international experience has changed me over the time. It was an ideal situation and time to evaluate my own experiences by peeping into others. In my opinion where people are more oppressed, there are probably more chances to revolt. It applies to Pakistan's situation where women's oppression is the cause of gender discrimination but can be a reason for empowerment also. Outdoor education probably can serve as a catalyst in that regard.

### **1.4. Women status in Pakistan**

As far as Pakistan is concerned, there is no equal acknowledgment for women's contribution. Woman is treated like a commodity that just belongs to men such as father, husband without the will of independent decision making. Her decisions regarding education, marriage, or giving birth to a child are taken by someone else on her behalf. Women are also socialized in a way that despite doing a lot or at least doing work in the same amount, do not expect any reward and do not participate in decision making. In short the native researchers realize the dire need for women empowerment so to break this gender discriminatory structure they are trapped in (Iqbal , Afzal & Inayat , 2012).

According to the latest report of ICAN, International Civil Society Action Network (2014) in 1947 Pakistan was conceived as liberal and modern nation but today it is divided in a narrow version of religion where regressive agenda regarding the status of women and girls in society is practiced. “An emerging alternative narrative and history of Pakistani women is erasing the past. In 1947, the vision of the new Pakistani state included women as equal citizens. Today, the dominant narrative is of a socially conservative society where the marginalization and silencing of women is depicted as “normal.” (ICAN, 2014, p. 2)

The repression continued and rather pushed women into their homes anticipating the retaliation. This latest report also reflects upon positives steps women are taking in order to participate and raise their voice. They are the leading force as their status in terms of “their participation in the social, political, economic and cultural spaces” is one of the defining factors of country’s direction towards progress.

Karl Marx (as cited in Draper, 1970) confirms this phenomenon in these words, “Social progress can be measured by the social position of the female sex.” The connection of overall progress of Pakistan is deeply connected with the gender gap in Pakistan indicated by the report of World Economic Forum (2013) which has not improved over the years as it has been listed the second worst country in that regard.

Considering relatively the lower status of women in Pakistan women movement became strong during 1970s as result of increased suppression of women through state’s policies; and increased international interest in women’s rights (NGORC, 1999). As a reaction to confinement of women to home many new organizations emerged, some became more active and increased the level of their activities. (Iqbal, 2006)

The very oppression of women also made some women stand out setting an example for others. Rafia Zakaria (2014) under the title of “Seven defining moments of Pakistani Women” proudly lists Benazir Bhutto the first Muslim woman to become Prime Minister of Pakistan. Ayesha Farooqi was Pakistan's only female to become war-ready fighter pilot. Naseem Hameed, only at the age of twenty two became the fastest woman athlete in South Asia by winning a gold medal in the 100-meter event of the 11th South Asian Federation Games in Bangladesh.

Samina Baig, the first Pakistani woman to summit the highest mountain of the world in the year of 2013 is another young addition who expresses her desire to be a role model for other Pakistani women and mentions ‘gender equality and women’s empowerment’ as her motive for climbing. She says “I wanted to climb it for gender equality and women’s empowerment—which is the reason for our climbing expedition. I wanted to represent Pakistani women in adventure sports, such as mountain climbing, on the 60th anniversary of the first Everest expedition.” (Hathaway, 2013)

### **1.5. Women in Outdoors in Pakistan**

Outdoor activities are not generally very much known in Pakistan. The examples I have found so far are from certain areas of Pakistan most likely hilly and mountainous. Other than Samina Baig, there are two more girls skiers Ifrah and Aminah Wali who belong to the mountainous part of Pakistan, located in North and dream to be a part of Olympic Games. They won a South Asian Winter games held in India in 2011 and bagged gold and silver medal. They see women’s talent equally qualifying for bigger competitions. According to the locals of the mountain valley only “educated parents” let their daughters be a part of ski programs which are usually dominated by boys suggesting that there is hostility and more barriers and low acceptance towards women taking part in skiing. (Symington, 2013)

It shows that women’s participation in outdoor activities might not be that simple either but their involvement in such activities seems appealing. Being a student of outdoor education myself and coming across such examples came as a surprise to me. Having known about a male founder of an outdoor organization engaging women from every kind of area of Pakistan (villages or cities). The arrangement of such outdoor programs seemed interesting to me and motivated me to conduct research to see the benefits of outdoor activities for women in Pakistan in terms of empowerment as a positive reaction to the existing suppression.

The status of women in Pakistan has been made very obvious above. On the other hand there is also a drastic picture of prominent women who represent empowerment in one or another aspect. There are already many organizations working for women empowerment but the question arises that can outdoor activities play an important role to empower women also? Although the scale of outdoor activities in Pakistan is very

limited so is the number of women but something must have motivated even a few of them to be a part of such activities in the first place. My curiosity stems from my own experiences as well .Moreover coming across similar examples raises a concern that do women in Pakistan feel individually empowered as a result of being a part of outdoor activities? This general question does not suggest the general answer as the research focuses on two individual perspectives.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Chandler (1998) defines theoretical framework as an early section in a dissertation. In a theoretical framework one would include an outline of existing theories, which are closely related to the research topic. One should make clear the relevance of conducted research and existing theories, including the framed questions. The personal theoretical assumptions and allegiances should be as explicit as possible.

### **2.1. Theories of Empowerment**

Empowerment is a broad term and has different definition in individual, economic and political contexts. Its definition can vary discipline to discipline. The challenge of this research is also to find the definition of “individual empowerment” within the field of outdoor education. Its complexity leads to different definitions depending upon socio-cultural and political term, not easy to be translated either. It can be taken as a “process/product/approach/aim”.

Empowerment can be on individual, organizational, political, sociological, economic and spiritual levels. According to FRIDE (2006) European think-tank for global action empowerment can be considered as a personal process enabling individual to take control of his life or a political process through which human rights and social justice as guaranteed for a marginalized group in society. Empowerment can be seen in segments or certain levels. For Instance empowerment can be understood in a “tri-dimensional way” respectively personal, relational and collective.” Personal empowerment is the sense to develop self confidence. Relational aspect deals with the ability to influence relations and collective one is to achieve a greater impact together (Rowlands, as cited in FRIDE, 2006).

Having read these definitions might not make someone certain about how the concept of empowerment is actually perceived. Page & Czuba (1999) agree that in recent literature the meaning of the term empowerment is often assumed rather than explained or defined. This applies to me as a researcher who has also assumed a certain meaning of empowerment such as ‘self confidence and decision making’ and the questions being asked from the participants focus on these two themes. Empowerment may not be that simple to define considering personal assumptions. However Rappaport (1984) has noted that it is easy to define empowerment by its absence. It is difficult to define in

action as it takes on different forms in different people and contexts. Even defining the concept is subject to debate.

From the definitions abovementioned it appears that empowerment can be extremely relative. This relative approach probably makes it hard to have some common definition to be agreed or relied upon. The concept of empowerment in terms of its definitions types and levels appears to be vast. This study attempts to limit such a vast concept to “individual empowerment.” Its relevancy in terms of individuals being interviewed has given me a chance to have personalized definitions of empowerment.

According to Bailey (1992) how we precisely define empowerment within our projects and programs will depend upon the specific people and context involved. Page & Czuba (1999) add the levels of empowerment such as individual, group, and community. For this study certain meaning of empowerment has been assumed accordingly and the focus is on individual level specified as “individual empowerment.”

### **2.1.1. Individual empowerment**

In the context of this research the focus is individual empowerment which can be understood better by going through the concept of “agency” and “structure”. The term “agency” refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own choices freely. The term “structure” covers the rules and social forces (such as social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, customs, etc.) that limit or influence the opportunities determining the actions of individuals. Much thinking about empowerment originated at the grassroots level and was based on the core elements of agency and the importance of self-esteem. (Luttrell et al., 2009, p .9).

Individual empowerment in other words can be perceived as personal empowerment and can have personalized meaning. For instance Rowland (1995, p. 87) relies on his personal interpretation “empowerment is about developing a sense of self and individual confidence and capacity, and undoing the effects of internalized oppression.”

Empowerment is an active process determined by the circumstances and the events. Human activity is a must leading to the transition from a passive state to an active one. The process of empowerment develops “self-acceptance and self-confidence” and personal ability for decision-making. (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988).Parsons reflects (as cited in Sadan, 1997, p.76) on empowerment as a process of internal and external

change. The internal process is the person's sense or belief in her ability to make decisions and to solve her own problems. The external change involves the ability to act and implement the practical knowledge, the information, the skills, the capabilities and the other new resources acquired in the course of the process.

Empowerment can be further understood as a journey of transformation from passive into active being. For Sadan (1997, p. 133) "individual empowerment is a process of personal development in a social framework: a transition from a feeling of powerlessness, and from a life in the shadow of this feeling, to an active life of real ability to act and to take initiatives in relation to the environment and the future."

Not only empowerment but individual empowerment also appears to be infinite as many writers have tried to define it in their own ways. Yet there are some common factors which have been mentioned by most of them such as individual confidence, capacity of individuals to act independently, self-confidence and decision making. A few other authors have seen it as a combination of two processes precisely internal and external process and the combination or the transition from a powerless state.

## **2.2. Outdoor Education and Empowerment**

As a researcher my hypothesis is that empowerment may occur through outdoor education/ activities as some studies mentioned below suggest so. Researchers emphasize on individual empowerment which includes self esteem, self concept, and self confidence as some studies have found similar outcomes of outdoor education programs. In that regard theoretical framework also helps me to make explicit connection between women's individual empowerment and outdoor activities.

The well suited definition for this research by Zimmerman & Rappaport (1988) suggests that empowerment is an active process influenced by the circumstances and events. Human activity is at its core leading to the change from passive to active state. This process develops self acceptance and self confidence. Since this is an active process and develops self acceptance and self confidence. It has some similarities to share with outdoor education which has been characterized as an action leaning process, often related to activities in the outdoor environment, giving you the experience of useful knowledge and contact with nature (Dahlgren & Szczepanski, 2006). One of its aims is directed towards the increase self-concept domains such as independence, confidence,

self-efficacy, and self understanding (Neill, 1994; Davidson, 2001; Hattie et al., 1997, as cited in McLeod & Craig, 2004). This little similarity connects both outdoor education and empowerment. Outdoor education is being used as a tool to empower women and studies by Denise and Neill support it. Mitten (1992) having worked with women's groups for fifteen years confirms that women do attribute life changes and positive experiences to their participation in outdoor trips and empowerment and self esteem are overwhelmingly expressed. Nina (1996) also mentions some of women's experiences of participating in outdoor activities who agreed that participation in outdoor activities builds confidence and offers challenges which are not available in other fields.

### **2.3. Empowerment in Gender context**

The question might occur as why I, a researcher have chosen women. The reasons are embedded in my own gender and my personal background including the background of my country .My country is Pakistan where I have spent twenty five years of my life. Pakistan is a country of people, struggling for basic rights such as education. Malala Yousaf Zai, a girl from Swat valley continues her fight for the education rights of girls (Vutz, 013). She raises her voice for the formal education which is provided in traditional setting. One can imagine the power of traditional education which can induce a young girl like Malala to speak up for girls' rights. Probably outdoor education or outdoor activities can bring even bigger changes as it has much to offer such as open environment and active physical involvement.

In the outdoors there is more freedom of movement. According to Norfolk Country Council (2009) "the outdoor environment usually offers more freedom and space to move, and inspires different movement from that indoors." Considering and knowing my country one thing should be clarified that outdoor education is a far –fetched concept there. I as a researcher have rather use the term "outdoor activities" which exist in Pakistan or a concept informants can relate to.

### **2.4. Gender situation in Pakistan**

Pakistan has a certain history and certain circumstances. A famous Pakistani Columnist, analyst Hali (2013) informs that "Women comprise more than 50 percent of Pakistan's total population. Despite this, on an average, the situation of Pakistani women compared

to men is one of systemic gender subordination, although there have been attempts by the government and enlightened groups to elevate their status in society.”

He further refers to the report of World Economic Forum which ranked Pakistan as the second worst country in their Global Gender Gap Report. He mentions many sufferings of women such as rape, acid throwing, honor killings, forced marriages, forced prostitution. Hence he proposes “women empowerment” as a major remedy to these problems. Empowerment can assure the inclusion of women in the decision making process at all levels in order to have a constructive and sustainable democratic change in Pakistan.

Another study by Jejeebhoy & Sathar (2001) observe that women’s autonomy regarding “decision making, mobility, freedom from threatening relations with husband, and access to and control over economic resources is highly constrained in Pakistan and in north and south India.” Findings indicate the larger exclusion of women in South Asia in terms of family decision making and access to resources. Their freedom of mobility is severe and only a few women are free from such threats and violence.

Empowerment gives women more control over her life but empowerment cannot be granted if the desire to be empowered does not exist in the first place. In the context of gender Kabeer (2003) formerly interprets “empowerment” as a “redial transformation” of power relations within genders allowing women to have greater power over their lives resulting less power from men over women’s life. Kabeer also redefines empowerment as considering “power from within” a necessary addition which cannot be given but has to be “self-generated.”

## **2.5. Women Empowerment through Outdoor Education**

The aspect of gender adds to the good outcomes of outdoor activities. For example Leupp (2007, p.19) mentions one of the female participant’s impressions who felt more confident doing something more expected from men such as backpacking. That participant asserts:

Normally there are not that many girls that backpack....In the past I always thought of backpacking as more of a guy thing. I like being where if a guy told you he backpacks

you can say, „well I do too.“ When a girl tells you she backpacks it’s a bigger deal than if guys do. You can prove him wrong...I like being the exception to the rule.

Similarly, another female participant felt the same way after having an equitant experience of outdoors. She became more certain about herself as if she could do everything or anything. Such examples affirm that outdoor activities do change women and give them confidence. Greater changes in women are witnessed in Neill’s (1997) report regarding gender’s effects on outdoor experience. He maintains that during past twenty years at least fifteen studies claim that women show greater changes in terms of self resulting from the participation in outdoors.

Gender is one of the factors which cannot be overlooked in this regard. Outdoor education for its design has been criticized from a feministic point of view. Leupp (2007) mentions some feminists’ viewpoint about outdoor education for its design based on ‘male model’ and more beneficial for boys. Leupp also argues that it rather allows girls to enter the sphere of outdoor education leaving bigger impact on their ‘self-concepts’. Women’s participation and positive outcomes apparently weaken the argument of feminists.

This study is directed towards the role of outdoor activities in the individual empowerment of women in Pakistan. However the topic of this research doesn’t necessarily suggest that outdoor activities do not benefit men. Outdoor education benefits both genders but differently. Through this research I have highlighted women’s benefits in terms of empowerment. Empowerment emerges as one of the motives for females to be a part of outdoor activities. Henderson (1992) points out ‘empowerment’ as one of the reasons for females to choose outdoor activities which may not be that important for males. Women empowerment by Mosedale (2005) is defined “as the process by which women redefine gender roles in ways which extends their possibilities for being and doing.”

Women empowerment seems like a reactive approach to male dominance which has been happening in outdoor education field. In this very male dominated domain according to some studies more positive effects on women are witnessed through certain outdoor programs. For instance Leupp (2007) was expecting greater changes in males

after an outdoor program but the result was otherwise. Women showed greater changes and consequently she argues that “outdoor education programs are a positive experience for both boys and girls, they have a greater potential to positively impact female participants, in that they allow girls to enter a traditionally male sphere and perform gender in an androgynous mode.”

The proposal by The Outward Bound Trust of South Africa (2013) is the example of an outdoor program aiming at women empowerment. That program is designed to empower women through outdoor adventures such as hiking, abseiling, rock climbing and water activities like raft building. Through such programs participants can identify their strengths, build self-confidence and feel empowered enough to release their potential. Another such example is an American Outdoor school namely ‘Girlventures’ which claims to have played a strong role in the lives of more than four thousand girls (in the Bay Area). This organization aims at empowering girls by engaging them in activities like rock climbing, backpacking, camping and kayaking which can result in their smart decision making and realizing their own strengths /potential. (Girl Venture, 1997)

Kiewa (1994, p.29) with respect to empowerment attempts to redefine self-control which is akin to self denial for most of the women such as ignoring their own needs and serving others instead. She calls “adventure” a “glorious celebration of self” where self control means the freedom to fulfill one’s own needs. Learning outdoor skills or the use of body (however it is) breaks all the limitations by giving women fulfillment and liberation.

Having known the gender situation in Pakistan this study also explores the examples like Samina Baig (mentioned in the previous chapter) the first Pakistani woman to climb Mount Everest in the year of 2013. She got renowned as a result of her achievements and has been acknowledged on national and international level (The Ismaili, 2013). Her biography in terms of this research topic is highly significant. She comes from a different area of Pakistan known as Northern area of Pakistan. Her valley is called Shimshal. In one of her recent interview (Simerg, 2014) she mentions the golden moments of girls climbing 5000m -6000m peaks. She is currently on international expedition and going to summit 7 peaks in Nepal, United States, Argentina, Indonesia,

Tanzania, Russia and China. In her opinion mountaineering and outdoor adventure can become a source of positivity to overcome challenges and function as a refresher for the brain allowing one to understand the strength and weaknesses. She understands the second class role of women in Pakistan in general and assures “I want to tell women in developing countries that they are as powerful as their male counterparts and they can play an equal role in their respective societies.” (Ghosh, 2013)

Samina Baig dedicated her expedition to “women’s confidence and empowerment.” In one of her interview given to Genevieve (2013) she shares her story and tells ‘gender equality and women empowerment’ as one of her motivation. She gives half of the credit to her brother Mirza Ali who has started outdoor expeditions to promote women adventure in Pakistan. She reckons that she is speaking for all the women in Pakistan without voice and equal rights through her adventures. More so it was not only personal expedition but expedition for the women of the country. In this context her adventure appears like a symbolic language for the empowerment of women in Pakistan who are normally oppressed as obvious from the studies. It is not simple to see the influence of this adventurous exploration on other women in Pakistan. Hence the beginning of outdoor activities based program and inclusion of males and females in Pakistan is as recent as Samina Baig’s accomplishment. It may not be coincident solely but a gradual change happening underneath.

An interesting study conducted by Jepson et.al. (2012) indicates the rise in self esteem as a result of participating in physical activity. One of the informants was organizing outdoor activities for South Asian women who noticed evident differences in women “confidence level and self esteem.” The informant observes, “They (women) found something where they can come and enjoy, get some exercise done and they have started taking an interest in their own selves, valuing themselves that “I’m worth something. And I respect my body and I respect myself.”

Mitten (1992) also shares her first hand experiences with women in outdoors and confirms the occurrence of empowerment. The question arises as what is special about outdoor education which makes it to have such effects such as empowerment. Does it happen automatically or there are some innate factors? Powch (1994) tries to explain the

“inherent” benefits of outdoor education. The factors she could identify after speaking to number of women about their experience in wilderness were:

- overcoming fear
- The immediate feedback from the nature allowing people to be more honest
- Connection with Nature

Eventually she admits that words can barely convey the richness of the experiences of outdoor activities. She gives the example of her connection with mountains in the context. Other authors also authenticate the factor of nature and its connection with women. Many women felt like ‘being in the nature’ was just like “coming to home.” ( Mitten & Woodruff, 2009). The factor of body involvement in outdoor activities can scarcely be ignored. Kohn (1991) propagates the idea of body involvement in the outdoor activities. He views empowerment conditioned with personal power which can be increased by getting in touch with your body, emotions and thoughts. The idea of body involvement, emotions and thoughts leads to the assumption that outdoor activities do provide a chance to women to engage their bodies actively in the activities. This study has tried to touch upon other contributing factors with regard to outdoor education and empowerment which are discussed along. However if you see the bigger picture and include south central Asian state with a totally different culture, could you expect mix-gender outdoor expeditions full of adventurous activities such as hiking , camping , trekking , combating with extreme snow conditions and yet realizing the individual empowerment happening within or without?

In my research I have tried to incorporate male and female both perspectives so to inquire that it is not happening one way only. Do women feel individually empowered as a result of getting engaged in outdoor activities? How a male outdoor educator views it? Does he witness it too? What are the most determining factors contributing to the changes regarded as individual empowerment for women? So far such research has not been done and by then end this study leaves me with some fundamental questions, opening options for further research.

## **2.6. Gender Socialization Theory**

Since my research involves women from Pakistan. It is always very important to understand the cultural and social context. The theory of 'gender socialization' can serve as a lens to look through and to validate my findings. Gender can be understood differently by everyone but one of the definitions most of the sociologists find agreeable includes these three features:

- Gender as a process rather than a fixed state;
- Gender as a characteristic of society as well as individuals;
- Gender as a system that creates differences and inequalities (Wharton, 2005).

Precisely Bem (as cited in Vicky,1999) points out such cultures where distinctions between men and women are believed in such a way that gender becomes a way of processing worldly information for children. She highlights two feature respectively polarization and andocentric. First feature defines the appropriateness and acceptability of any act in terms of gender and the later believes in males as normative standard. Later one leads to the patriarchal structure which is the rule of the day in Pakistan leaving women with the feeling of dependency, lack of confidence and no authority of their own to lead their lives. In this regard 'gender socialization theory' serves as a foundation to have a deeper understanding of informant's approach.

This study has evaluated the different approach towards women individual empowerment through outdoor activities by conducting interviews with the informants who belong to Pakistan. Their background, cultures and the level of participation in outdoor activities have been taken into account. Additionally I have incorporated my own experiences/observations depending upon the relevancy to illuminate the research questions.

## **2.7. Research Questions**

The primary research question investigated by the researcher is:

How may outdoor activities play an important role in women individual empowerment in Pakistan?

The main question is divided into sub-questions:

1. How do the informants define individual empowerment?
2. How do the informants see any connection of individual empowerment through outdoor activities?
3. What are the motivations for women who get engaged in outdoor activities?
4. What are the hurdles women are faced with for taking part in outdoor activities?
5. What is the response of male fellows?

Theory of empowerment has been explained to understand the concept of empowerment and the theory of gender socialization has provided a support to understand the results of the research. This research has helped answer the questions developed after theoretical framing. The methods of data collection are described in detail in the next chapter.

### **3. Methodology & Study Design**

The previous chapter has explored the relation between outdoor education and empowerment. Relevant theories have been mentioned. How explicit the connection between outdoor education and empowerment is, has been investigated through the framed questions. To answer those questions regarding “the role of outdoor activities in the individual empowerment of women in Pakistan: Male and Female perspectives” qualitative methodology has been used. Murray & Brubaker (2000) suggest that the word methodology is used for the steps, researcher follows in answering the research questions, including the collection of information, classification and interpretation of the results.

#### **3.1. Qualitative Approach**

For this research the qualitative approach is preferred as “qualitative methods target the questions like ‘what’, ‘how’ or ‘why (Brikci, 2007).” The questions for this research are designed in that very inquisitive way and probe for deeper understanding for experiences. Qualitative approach is appropriate provided one wants to “understand the perspectives of participants; or explore the meaning they give to phenomena; or observe a process in depth” as further described by Brikci. This research has given a chance to the informants to share their own experiences, their observations. Furthermore the meaning of the phenomenon of ‘individual empowerment’ has been presented from their perspectives.

Rayner, Wall & Kruger (2001) define qualitative research as an attempt to explain or understand something which may involve more discussion and analysis of people’s attitude and behavior. It usually involves working with small number of people. In other words it is a combination of certain techniques by which the data is collected from small number of respondents and the analysis does not use statistical techniques. My sample of study is more like an example of two people and includes:

- The stories of one woman ( Female Informant)
- The stories about several women (told by Male informant )

Therefore the findings cannot be generalized but this study gives an insight in to the limited section of women engaged in outdoor activities in Pakistan. Research questions

have been amended accordingly for both informants. One of the informants is a male outdoor educator who supervised several women in outdoor activities. Other one is the female informant who is currently him. The interviews have included additional questions depending upon the information being gained. The questions have attempted to explore the connection informants find between individual empowerment and outdoor activities. Secondly “decision making and confidence” are the ingredients of individual empowerment emerging from the studies mentioned in a previous chapter. These terms have helped the participants to come up with their own definition or the closest one assumed in the study. More so the questions have enquired about the motivations and hurdles women participants had, from the key informants.

### **3.2. Study Design**

The study design gives an outline of as how the data has been dealt with. Following are the methods of analysis and data collection, this research design involves:

- 3.2.1 Hermeneutic
- 3.2.2. In-depth/ semi-structured interviews
- 3.2.3. Purposive Sampling & Extreme /deviant cases
- 3.2.4. Presentation of Informants & Findings
- 3.2.5. Analysis & Discussion

#### **3.2.1. Hermeneutic**

Hermeneutic as a research method allows me to explore participant’s lived experiences in a relatively suitable manner. According to Gadamer (as cited in Wilcke, 2002) hermeneutic research supports to make interpretations and have an in-depth understanding of the researched phenomenon. It emphasizes on “subjective interpretations” in the research in terms of meanings of texts, art, culture, social phenomena and thinking, opposite to the general approach or strategy and independence from interpretations in the formation of knowledge.

In Manen’s words (1990, p.30) "method of phenomenology and hermeneutics is that there is no method." On the other hand he considers self orientation to the phenomena as one of the basic steps in hermeneutics. Our own pre-notions influence our findings as the orientation is one of the primary steps of hermeneutics methodology. Orientation

makes us aware of our personal stance and yet enables us to distance ourselves from it. In other words Gadamer (as cited in Wilcke, 2002) names the supporting elements as prejudice and fore-meanings and refers to them as helping means to orient ourselves to a topic. Most importantly one should be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself keeping intact its otherness yet asserting its own truth again its own fore-meaning.

I as a Pakistani woman myself have my own pre-notions/fore-meanings/bias emerging from my first hand experiences in Pakistan and being a part of outdoor activities as well. One of my preconception or hidden hypothesis is that the more oppressed women are, the more vigor they develop if offered alternative ways and outdoor activities may be one of them. In personal opinion the personal stance already starts from the selection of the topic yet I have interpreted the text under the light of literature and theoretical concepts which is also my selection or certain pre-notions which led me to that selection.

Wilcke (2002, p.4) also applied the method of hermeneutics to her research based upon refugee Yugoslavian women settled in Canada. As a researcher she did not share the horror those women had gone through but she shared a similar experience in South Africa which could orient her towards her own stance. She expresses "as a woman, I was interested in the experiences of other women, and when war erupted in the former Yugoslavia, I wanted to know more about the women who were experiencing war and dislocation."

It is very much relevant to my stance towards my topic. I lived my outdoor experiences in different places outside Pakistan but I am interested in Pakistani women who are taking part in outdoor activities in Pakistan. I probably did not share the same problems but coming from the same country is a common factor shared between us.

### **3.2.2. In-depth and Semi structure interviews**

In this study, data has been collected through the use of in-depth interviews which have enabled me to address the objectives of this study. Boyce & Neale (2006, p.3) define in-depth interview as, "A qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives

on a particular idea, program, or situation.” For example, the relevant staff, participants or others associated with certain program can be asked their experiences, thoughts, outcomes and the changes they can recognize in themselves as a result of their participation in the program.

In-depth interviews are followed by semi structure format for this research. However the basic questions remain fixed for both of the informants. Semi structure interviews allow researcher to probe for clarification and specification of examples. They also allow the informants to share their past in their own way and in their own words. Main questions are usually fixed but it is partly led by interviewer and interviewee both leaving a margin for improvisations (Arksey & Knight, 1999).

### **3.2.3. Purposive Sampling & Extreme /deviant cases**

For this study purposive sampling has been applied. The selection of informants is based on the perceived level of their participation in outdoor activities. From Pakistan a male founder of outdoor organization and a female rock climber were identified as interviewees. The male informant is running several outdoor programs under different titles for men and women both. The female informant being interviewed for this research has also been a prominent part of such outdoor programs and turns out to be a certified rock-climber. Their active level of participation and accomplishments in the field of outdoors in Pakistan make them suitable informants for this study design.

The approach of “extreme or deviant cases” emphasizes on cases which are special in some way .They can be informative, enlightening and notable for their success or failure (Patton, 1990). Therefore two informants are chosen for this research since the main criterion for their selection is their notable participation in outdoor activities in Pakistan. In terms of gender the perspective of male and female are presented. The introduction of both informants has been given before presenting the results.

### **3.2.4 .Presentation of Informants & Findings**

Informants have been introduced briefly with some of their quotes to give a slight idea about the findings. That introduction will help a reader to be familiar with the backgrounds and outdoor activities of the informants. Pictures of informants in outdoor environment have also been used as reference. The results from the collected data have been presented in the form of identified themes answering the main research questions.

Qualitative content analysis approach to data analysis demands reading and re-reading transcribed texts. This approach helps a researcher to find differences and similarities so the researcher is able to categorize into themes (Kawulich, 2004). Likewise the interviews were transcribed and the most important content was divided into some sections to highlight the most relevant themes answering the research questions. Relevant statements, stories and quoted have been mentioned under every research question. Fictitious names have been used for ethical reasons including the women, the male informant mentioned while referring to their stories and certain incidents.

### **3.2.5. Analysis & Discussion**

Findings have been summarized into themes based on the literature and surprise element. Literature can be used to compare the findings (Connor & Gibson, 2003). In the case of this research literature is incorporated in theoretical framing. In the chapter of Analysis my own experiences, theoretical concepts and available literature has also been used to compare to the findings and discuss them in detail. My own voice and my subjective approach have been woven through wherever the relevancy emerged. Relevant quotes from findings have been presented here and there. The connection between theories, literature, subjective experiences has supported the procedure of analysis of results. In short the results/ findings have been discussed in detail through theoretical framework, my personal experiences and existing literature in the chapter of analysis and discussion in order to reach the conclusion.

### **3.2.6. Ethical Consideration**

- Like other researches this study has some ethical concerns. During the interview informants have talked about their background which includes some cultural and delicate details. As a matter of sensitivity fictitious names have been used so that unavoidable details could be incorporated. Their pictures have been used too as a part of their introduction but the faces are not clearly visible.
- The interviews were audio taped with the permission of informants and they were asked to sign a consent form. The ethical clearance before conducting the interviews was granted by the ethical clearance board in Norway. All recordings and transcriptions were stored in a personal computer locked with password and will be destroyed once the research has been submitted and accepted.

### **3.2.7. Limitations**

- Two in-depth interviews were conducted via Skype. Each interview lasted for approximately sixty minutes. Prior to each interview, the topic of the study was told but not explained so the spontaneous and rather personal answers could be taken from the participants. In Pakistan there is a problem of power cut and its twelve hours every day. Both of my informants were located in different cities. The “Skype interview” could be longer but the power cut was a real obstacle.
- Being physically present in the country could increase more chances to know the informants well enough and could increase the access to other material I might have found useful for my research.
- Not many women in Pakistan take part in outdoor activities so the perception of two informants cannot be generalized.
- The interview was taken in the native language Urdu so the informants could feel more comfortable. Most relevant and useful information has been translated and quoted. As a researcher I have tried my level best not to lose the essence.

### **3.2.8. Strengths**

- This research gives the insight of individual viewpoints of male and female and lets the reader hear about unheard stories of women. The interview questions were semi structured and allowed the informants to share more information which made the study deeper and more interesting.
- Thus study is pretty novel in the field of outdoor education. In the context of my country, culture family setup and gender attitudes this study may be very useful for natives and equally appealing for foreigner researchers.
- This study presents the perspective of both genders. Additionally the use of my first hand experiences gives me a new way to relate to the findings and authenticate the results. There is nothing more solid than my own experiences but to avoid too much subjectivity, theories and literature have been incorporated to discuss the findings.

### 3.2.9. Validity

- The study design includes two examples of two informants so the findings cannot be generalized as the data has been analyzed through theory, literature and my own experiences. To increase the generalizability for future researchers the selection of bigger sample is suggested.
- The informants appear more like individual examples. The information gained from them in the context of whole Pakistan cannot be generalized. The scale of outdoor education is very small so in proportion response from women might be massive but population and cities should be taken into account. In future it can be way too specific to have more reliable or particular results provided it is confined to certain areas of the country and frequency of outdoor programs.
- Subjective experiences are subjectively interpreted so the method of research does involve researcher's personal biases and hidden assumptions. Future researchers can make clear hypothesis to orient the study.
- The interviews were semi-structured so the original data does have additional information. Some of that additional information has been possibly used to analyze to get a bigger picture. Future researchers can design more structured interview questions to have to-the-point information.
- The terms such as “self confidence, self worth, self esteem, self concept” and “outdoor education , outdoor learning and outdoor activities “ have been used here and there. They are mostly used to convey the similar meanings emerging from the produced literature. It may not be very clear so re-reading is suggested.

## 4. Introduction of informants

In this chapter two chosen informants have been introduced. First informant is male and other informant is female. Both are prominent in the field of outdoor education in Pakistan yet fictitious names are used to avoid any future concern regarding any sensitive they might have mentioned. Pictures of the informants involved in outdoor activities have been given as reference. Most of them were emailed by the informants and a few are taken from the websites.

### 4.1. Male Informant Ahmed

Ahmed considers himself a pioneer of outdoor education in Pakistan which according to him is beyond the common understanding of people of Pakistan. He believes in the power of outdoor education and has been arranging many expeditions with clear targets trying to cater to the needs of diverse groups. That diversity exists in terms of cultures, ethnicity, languages and gender.

He himself admits outdoor education as a rare phenomenon. He has made this very phenomenon his purpose of living while he was undergoing through treatment of Cancer. A certified outdoor educator from (NOLS) National Outdoor Leadership School desires to help youth of Pakistan to discover their potentials, transform into more responsible and self –aware humans and to be able to lead in spite of all the uncertainty in the country.



Ahmed during one of his expedition

Ahmed (2013, p.23) writes in the magazine of National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS):

Pakistan is a country where outdoor education is a less-known phenomenon. The country is struggling for peace, prosperity and harmony. I am honored to be first ever Pakistani to be graduated from NOLS in 2007 while doing Outdoor Educator course in Rocky Mountains. I came back to my country to serve as an Outdoor Educator. This has opened a new dimension in my life. I had taken business executives and youth to wilderness and helped them discover their potential. I had an impact on the lives of hundreds of adults in this country who have been transformed into more responsible and self aware humans. The wilderness encounters urged them to explore their purpose of life and set an objective to make a difference. My contribution to this developing country comes from the most precious days of my life that I spent at NOLS.

He has arranged several wilderness programs and dreams to build the first wilderness education centre in Pakistan. His education at the outdoor school changed his life altogether yet his first degree was related to Information technology field.



Ahmed with girls and boys in extreme snowy condition (Youth Impact, 2013)

According to him he already had this adventurous soul even in the earlier days of his life. He would seek adventure in his daily routine by camping on the roof or would go on excursion with his friends who were in Army (personal communication, December 10, 2013). His education at American school gave him a purpose to live and outdoor education became his mission.

He does not primarily propagate the idea of ‘outdoor education’ in a very traditional sense but set of different outdoor activities as a passage which leads to leadership empowerment. After coming back to Pakistan he founded an organization named Youth Impact in 2009. This organization is non-profit and specialized in Youth Leadership Development programs particularly Wilderness Education.

Ahmed lives in a capital of the country and is currently running different outdoor activities based programs. He has been active in corporate training since twelve years and besides he has initiated youth impact. He has worked in Australia, Malaysia in 2010 and United Kingdom in 2012. One of the main objectives of his programs are empowering the youth and enhancing their role. The organization aims at organizing trainings to students at school, college and university level and provides Outdoor Education to develop responsible, self reliant, confident and positive minded young leaders for all segments of society.



Ahmed with males and females both during another expedition (Youth Impact, 2013)

The organization stands for:

**Experiential Learning:** Our participants experience the world around themselves and through facilitated process, develop their own learning models for their life. We Learn by Doing.

**Outdoor Education:** using activities like Camping, Trekking, Rafting, Mountain Biking, Rock Climbing, Survival, Caving, Scuba diving, Paintballing - to name a few.

**Social Interaction:** The participants are provided opportunities to interact and travel with local and international communities. It is at the heart of most of our programs.

**Reflective Observation:** Our participants return home with the same luggage but an enhanced vision about life, their own potential and the purpose to live for. This is achieved through facilitation by our passionate team of outdoor educators and facilitators. The facilitated reviews and debriefs of actions and behaviors are our key strengths.

**Community Leadership:** Our participants develop deep and lasting bonds with their peers and hosts. Through a participatory approach in various community projects, our young participants leave behind real, positive change.



Ahmed teaching one of the girls

The programs he has organized by far are the following indicating the objectives abovementioned:

Markhor - Wilderness based Youth Leadership Conference

Moving Mountain

Be Your Best

Soul Freedom

Rising Teens

Go-Girls!

Jumpstart!

Girls Leadership Adventures

The 7th Sense

Step Up!

Chasing Snow Leopard

Where Eagles Dare

True North

About navigation

Sacred Pearls (Youth impact, 2013)

The names of the program might give some clues to the reader as what type of expeditions Ahmed has been arranging for the youth. It gives a general agenda of outdoor activities in Pakistan considering the factors of cultures, languages, ethnicity and gender. It can also provide a subtle chance to the future researcher about the possible effects of such programs on the participants (women in particular) in terms of individual empowerment.

#### **4.2. Female Informant Sara**

Sara twenty four years old girl, a certified rock climber was born in a village of Azad Kashmir, a hilly area and full of military presence. Later she moved to the capital city of Pakistan namely Islamabad. She studied business administration from a National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) and also worked within her professional field for a year. Currently she is preparing for CSS exams, a competitive exam for government orientated jobs. She started rock climbing 2 years ago and continues to be a part of many outdoor programs arranged by Ahmed. She is also

involved in hiking and trekking. She does rock climbing once a week and has been assisting Ahmed in his outdoor ventures designed for females and males both.



7th December 2011

She describes her interest in outdoor activities such as rock climbing and hiking and mentions two different reasons for both:

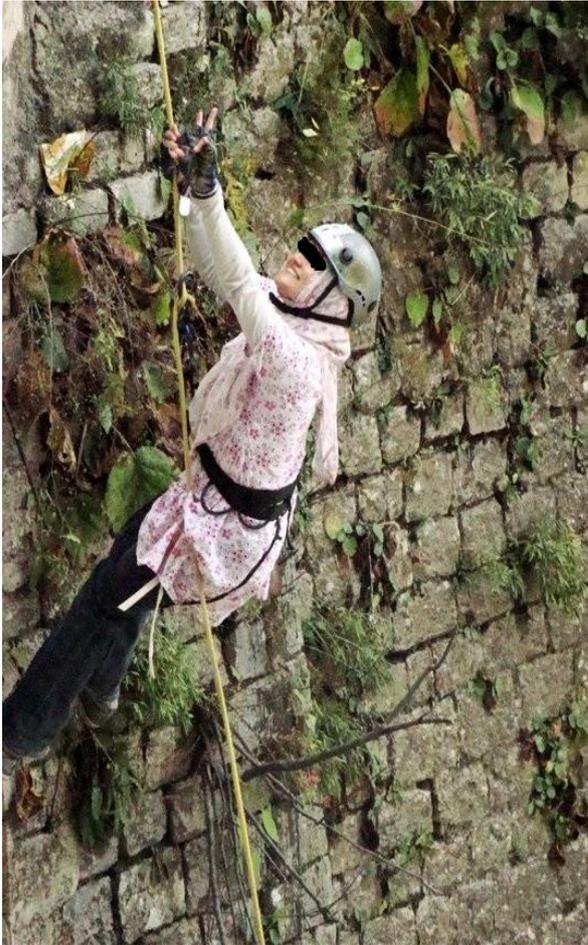
...I have a special interest in Rock climbing and hiking. Actually I belong to a village of Azad Kashmir which is like a valley where I get to see the hills so that is why I wanted to explore those hills and the curiosity developed in me over the time and then I came to Islamabad and started to explore Margalla hills. As far as rock climbing is concerned because in my area there is a lot of military presence so I was very fascinated by military and military drills so they would do those activities, I wanted to do them too. Rock climbing is the specific activity of military drills so I got fascinated by rock climbing and when I joined university, I did rock climbing for the first time in November 2010...



5th November 2011



24th August 2011



10<sup>th</sup> October 2011



23rd October 2011



The factors she finds important and teachable in rock-climbing as an activity are:

- a) Clear targets with a road map
- b) Perfect strength required
- c) Perfect technique
- d) Perfect balance
- e) Strategies



She names rock climbing as ‘self exploration’ which makes her aware of her strengths and weaknesses Rock climbing over the time has become a special part of her life which she find impossible to live without :

...I find rock-climbing as a mean of ‘ personal exploration’ through which I can explore my strengths and weaknesses . When I cannot climb a certain rock, I struggle and I see my strength and weaknesses. My weaknesses tell me that I have to improve so this is my personal venture. If they (my family) do not appreciate, it does not matter as their acceptance is a big thing for me...

## **5. Findings & Research Questions**

Outdoor activities are not very common in Pakistan. I myself am the first woman to be studying outdoor education. When I came across Ahmed, he referred to me as “crazy” which was a sign of appreciation since Ahmed himself is frequently running outdoor programs for both girls and boys in Pakistan. By now all his programs have been mixed gender groups. In this chapter the findings have been categorized according to my personal orientation and relevancy to research questions. The results have been presented into themes. The most relevant statements of informants under every theme have been quoted too. These themes have been categorized in term of their relevancy with the research questions. The surprising information has been highlighted too if found relevant. Moreover the repetition of certain concepts by informants has been also considered. The findings have been categorized into themes under relevant research questions given below:

1. How do the informants define individual empowerment?

Confidence and Decision making

2. How do the informants see any connection of individual empowerment through outdoor activities?

Examples related to confidence and decision making

I can do it ..., I can complete it.

Personal Life

3. What are the motivations for women who get engaged in outdoor activities?

Criticism and fear

From Fascination to Personal Exploration

Nature

4. What are the hurdles women are faced with for taking part in outdoor activities?

Gender and Struggle

Unnecessary Controls and Family Concerns

5. What is the response of male fellows?

Overprotection versus support

Concluding Remarks on Empowerment

## **5.1. How do the informants define individual empowerment?**

### **5.1.1. Confidence and Decision making**

Considering the literature regarding individual empowerment I wanted to know if the informants define it with the association of self confidence and decision making. Even if they define it other way, do they recognize self confidence and decision making as the main ingredients of individual empowerment? They made some obvious connection between all these terms. After thinking about it for a while Ahmed came up with this definition:

...Empowerment is not a wordplay .It is about giving someone authority to make decisions and to be responsible for that decision because empowerment is conditioned with decision if we are saying that someone is empowered enough then it means someone is able to make decisions and take full responsibility of those decisions...You go for decision making when you are confident and when you are confident you make decisions at your own...

I was curious about Sara's viewpoint. She spontaneously associated "individual empowerment" with "confidence and decision making power" and "the authority to exercise that decision-making power." She finds empowerment incomplete without the power to exercise the power or in other words to implement the decisions. She repeats, "Authority to exercise decision is very important." When asked about particularly women individual empowerment Sara opines, "They should have so much space that they can think of themselves, they can make independent decisions. And the decision they take, it should be respected and they can implement that decision. Whatever the way they want their life to be, they should have the right to make it that way."

## **5.2. How do the informants see any connection of individual empowerment through outdoor activities?**

Biggest concern of the research to be addressed is women's individual empowerment through outdoor activities in Pakistan. Both informants tried to answer this question with the help of examples. Surprisingly Ahmed mentioned "massive number of responses from women" for the expeditions he arranged. The response was much higher than men. Consequently Ahmed sees an absolute connection between women individual empowerment through outdoor education/ activities. He thinks that for women "outdoor environment or wilderness environment is such where risk is very high and uncertainty

is very high so outdoor activities serve as an important tool for women to test their abilities and potential and to apply it and to judge (themselves) in terms of their leadership skills and confidence level.”

### **5.2.1. Examples of Confidence and Decisions making**

With his limited exposure he is certain that:

...The girls excelled. In past in every outdoor program there were some girls who came with a lot of concerns and questions and so did their families. Once they become a part of outdoor activities and then they go back and if you follow their facebook (profiles) then you can begin to see the clear difference. The kind of appreciation and recognition they are getting from their friends, their class fellows which are girls and these girls are looking up to them as a role model or as an extraordinary wonderful girls so within their own peers, within their own friends they get such a status that they feel proud about it...

Ahmed shares ‘an amazing story’ of a girl namely Shazia who is from Karachi:

...One of the most violent city and most unsecure where people particularly girls are overprotected. She got permission from her parents, travelled alone and came all the way to Islamabad to attend three days expedition of us. This was the first time she took a risk but she got exposed to these kinds of activities (outdoor activities) and realized that such a fantastic work is going on and how she got an opportunity amongst many boys and girls she had the chance to prove her capabilities, she got very much passionate of all this thing. She made a social group of girls in Karachi where the least they would do, used to come and share their experiences that any time of their life they had done something extraordinary where they had challenge or had faced challenge so the process of sharing started...

In another wilderness program Shaiza brought her three more friends. Ahmed out of curiosity asked those friends of hers as how they happened to be there. They told him that the day Shazia came back from the outdoor program, she was full of stories. It was not only in the words but in her interaction with people in general.

...There was such a change in her confidence level that we realized that she has gone through a magic. We also need to have that experience that is why we came here so that one girl she experienced this thing, went back, she inspired other girls around her circle and she brought them into such segment so what we call 'ripple effect' I am literally seeing that happening where one girl comes and conveys that impact to ten other girls...

### **5.2.2. I can do it ..., I can complete it.**

Fozia, the girl who participated in a hike arranged by Ahmed and was so scared of putting a next step on steep, accidentally lost her father a few days after the hike. When Ahmed phoned her to condole, she surprisingly expressed:

...Shall I tell you one thing when my father died...I was thinking what will happen to my life as I loved him so much then the hike of that day came to my mind . I thought I was depending a lot on my father. As long as he will be there, my life will continue. But I satisfy myself by relating to that hike and got out of that mourning mod...

After coming back from expedition Fozia called Ahmed and said "that was kind of life changing experience about myself , till that time I had this thought that I could not do it but the moment when I did it on my own , gave me a confidence that I can do it."

Ahmed further simplifies it in such words "Indeed they had to prove themselves, they can confidently do something in such an environment where even men are struggling so there being a girl they face the challenge and complete it."

Sara's first experience gives the similar message when she decided not to give up despite the criticism but to complete the activity "I have to perform... I decided I am not going to give up...there is nothing what I cannot do. If I work hard or I really want to do it, I can complete it."

Ahmed mentioned six other names which can be considered as examples of change in terms of empowerment. One of them was Sara (my second interviewee) who considers herself individually "empowered" as a result of being engaged in outdoor activities. She realizes that outdoor activities have changed her.

...I consider myself individually empowered as a result of being engaged in outdoor activities. I don't freak out...I face the resistance, analyze, strategize and I can convince others. I feel strong. Those lessons learnt from outdoor activities are eternal. I cannot leave it. Rock climbing is such a part of my life which cannot be erased and It is impossible for me to quit it...rock climbing which brought like a peace in me and balance in me and confidence and something like you sparkle or you may say, you become vibrant so that vibrancy, that sparkle in me, happened because of rock climbing, hiking and trekking...

### **5.2.3. Personal Life**

She unexpectedly did not identify outdoor activities such as rock climbing as the only reason for her empowerment. Sara mentioned 'adoption' as "the most important factor of change in my life ... which gave me a particular approach towards analyzing and questioning as why things happen the way they do." She opened up about her "inbuilt pressure" being an adopted kid and grieved over her real parents having given her away to someone else without her permission so no independent will was exercised.

She could not even make usual decisions such as "eating" and "sleeping." She lived with both parents in a conflict of what she wanted in reality but what she thought "morally" was correct made her life harder, "Whenever I had to decide something, whether I should go for my real parents or those who have adopted me." Sara's journey of confidence and decision making is not solely the result of outdoor activities as she made her first independent decision at the age of 17, the decision to go to university. The desire to make her own decision was still there but outdoor activity perhaps played a bigger role later in her life to keep that confidence and decision making intact.

## **5.3. What are the motivations for women who get engaged in outdoor activities?**

### **5.3.1. Criticism and Fear**

Other than the struggle of life it might be correct in Sara's case to call criticism her motivation. She repeats her first exposure to rock climbing, "When I got stuck, I thought I have to do it; my getting stuck actually motivated me. In life whenever I have been criticized on something certain, that very thing would become my motivation."

For a few women fear can be the motivating force too. Ahmed shares another story of a girl named Ayesha coming from a “typical Pakistani family” who got permission from her family provided she takes one of her friends with her to the hiking trip. Originally the 3km hike was planned but because of snow the group had to hike for 8km. That very night the girls came up with these concerns:

- Lot of walk in the snow and feet are getting cold
- No extra clothing
- Rucksack is heavy

Ahmed asked them for every possible reason and addressed every concern. He says “To me at that time their stay in that outdoor program was important, no matter how much we had to facilitate them.” The third day when one of the persons was asked to lead, one hand was raised by the same girl who wanted to quit from the trip the very first day. She was appreciated and got a clap from everyone including boys. She led the whole group and took people to the next challenge to walk through terrain. Ahmed told excitedly, “She was absolutely a changed girl.”

Later in the next expedition two more girls showed their interest and wanted to be a part of such programs. They were Ayesha’s friend who got so inspired after hearing stories from Ayesha that they wanted to be one of the participants. For another expedition Ahmed received 10 applications and all were Ayesha’s friends including males who followed her on social media and developed interest for outdoor activities. Ahmed was amazed to see what he calls as “snow ball effect, which happened because of that one girl.”

Ahmed summarized “This is how one girl, she got a wonderful transformational experience from this outdoor program. She impacted three more girls and then she impacted her sister, then she convinced her parents to change their mind and then she was allowed to work in the same organization. And then her male class fellows got involved and got engaged with youth impact.”

Ahmed again gave reference of Fozia (mentioned before) who had to go down 200 feet as it was a steep descend. She had height phobia and was sweating and trembling all over. She was banking on the boys for each step yet repeatedly saying, “I will fall, I will fall, and I cannot do that.” Ahmed comforted her “I am walking ahead you, I am not going to turn back if you are about to fall, you are allowed to hold my shoulder, I do not mind so what worst can happen, the fall, you can just hold me, other than that I am not going to tell you more.” She got worried, was about to cry and resisted “what are you doing to me ...I will die... I will fall.’ What Ahmed did was “defocus(ing) her from her fear”, gradually increasing the pace. Eventually they “literally took over all other groups” leaving rest of the people flabbergasted. In Ahmed’s words “For the next hour she was jumping like a goat and the confidence was so evident. It was a teachable moment.”

In Sara’s case fear is not touched upon at all. It cannot be concluded as utter absence of fear but a motivation which varies woman to woman. It appears to be “personal exploration” and connection with “nature.”

### **5.3.2. From Fascination to Personal Exploration**

Sara remembering her childhood and military presence in her area divulges her fascination for rock climbing and charm associated with army by using a term of ‘heroism’. She defines it as “a mean of personal exploration through which I can explore my strengths and weaknesses. When I cannot climb a certain rock, I struggle and I see my strength and weaknesses. My weaknesses tell me that I have to improve so this is my personal venture.”

More so she likes rock climbing for particular reasons. She names them as “clear targets with a road map, strategies, perfect balance, perfect technique, and perfect strength required.” She emphasizes:

...I found the balance of all that and the factor of mind and body coordination became my motivation and it is like an activity of pleasure, sometimes you get tired a lot, you sweat a lot, you breath heavily but when you reach the top, it is the best moment of life and (you say) that yes I have done it...

### **5.3.3. Connection with Nature**

Having mentioned her “adoption” a turning point of her life she did not socialize with people but with nature:

... Azad Kashmir is where nature is available, it is at your door step so I would go and sit outside. I would listen to birds , I would feel the smell of grass , I would look at the shades of the sky , would see the clouds and rocks and sometime I would think that I can talk to the plants and they can answer me and they are my friends...

She often went to Margalla hills situated in the capital of the country to sit near the stream, listen to birds and read the book. “The moment I step in (there), I am a different person, I feel alive, active and happy.” Sara’s closeness with nature since childhood cannot be ignored. Her interest in outdoor activities later in her life can be a result of her connection with nature. Nature is not the common factor found in other stories of girls narrated by Ahmed who seemingly be living in cities like myself.

## **5.4. What are the hurdles women are faced with for taking part in outdoor activities?**

### **5.4.1. Gender and Struggle**

Gender plays a significant role in the approval of some activities. Considering my experience some rights are just naturally granted from the society to men. For women it does not work the same way. For instance if man cycles on the main roads in Pakistan, people are not going to notice it. It does not work the same for women though. Sara shared her climbing experience and made her point related to gender with pride.

...Many guys climbed successfully but some gave up. I was the only girl to climb and had some difficulty and still continued so it was noticed more as I was a girl. If I was a boy and would have climbed successfully, it would have been a usual thing and even if I was a guy and could not have climbed, it still would be usual. Since I was a girl, I got stuck...People criticized me despite all that I achieved...

Referring to her family concern:

...Obviously if my brother would have asked for it (rock climbing), he wouldn't have been stopped from doing so. Because I am a girl and it is different for girls. The restrictions on me were because of my gender...The kind of hardship physically or environmentally women bear, a boy cannot. Boys know that whatever they will say, will be accepted. They have this space. Girls do not have this space. They have to talk being reserve and in a measured way. They have to talk after thinking from a different angle (such as) how others will see it or accept it...

Ahmed is also convinced about woman's struggle which makes her so much refined that she cannot fail in any field of life:

...Girls have to take extra ordinary challenges and they have to face a lot of 'question marks' raised in the name of social norms to get into outdoor activities because normally it is not accepted as a good social norm in our culture .. As its not accepted that good in such circumstances when a girl does take such a step , she has to make extra ordinary effort to make a space for themselves and to prove themselves in that field for which they make efforts, struggle , do a lot of homework which helps them to become even more effective...

He used the metaphor of a butterfly that has to get out of cocoon by puling herself hard eventually she becomes able to fly. Without struggling that much the real potential cannot be seen. This is exactly the same phenomenon he notices in women in outdoor activities, "When a girl decides that I am going for this kind of (you know) passion/profession or filed of life so the as a result of struggles she reaches a point where she justifies herself. That very struggle takes her to such a level of confidence and then that girl cannot fail in any other filed of life."

#### **5.4.2. Unnecessary Controls and Family Concerns**

Ahmed desisted from generalizing, "Again for every girl there is a different story. It is hard to say, it is hard for me to generalize." But in his limited experience he succeeds to point out a few things he found common in most of the women who took part in outdoor activities under his supervision "If you zoom out, this is kind of struggling or kind of

sufferings they were having in the society as girls.”Ahmed referred to the story of Ayesha (mentioned earlier) who had hard time getting permission to participate in outdoor activities.

...She had to struggle a lot as she was the first girl to go to university so her parents’ expectations were high but on the other side in terms of decision making and freedom she had unnecessary controls. But after getting into this program the definition of freedom changed not for her but for her parents. There were some unnecessary limitations so she had to come with such a thrust into it (outdoor activities) and had to go through that experience to break them (limitations) from which she got confident herself, so did her parents...

When asked to specify the family concerns, Ahmed clearly told that there was no objection in the ‘participation in outdoor activities’ itself. They were more concerned about as “How many other girls” Safety and security? Where they will stay at night? Separate accommodation will be provided? Toilets?”etc. Ahmed understood these concerns in terms of social norms he emphasized during the interview many times. Social norms propagate the segregation of genders. Despite arranging mixed gender programs there was always a female unit designed to deal with females in the expeditions. That unit would satisfy the families of girl participants and would their every question.

He again gave the example of Sara who claims to have learned from the “deprivations of life”. She had to fight against “many taboos and got a chance to prove herself through outdoor activities.” Sara had to go through a lot of struggle, as an adopted child having no friends in her childhood, befriending nature and finally getting into rock climbing has not been a very simple journey for her. In her words:

...For my family to accept that a girl is doing rock-climbing was a difficult thing and for me to convey them that this is not something vulgar instead it is a positive and good thing which girls should be doing. And our religion does not forbid it (for any special reason)... to convey this was an important task ... I had to do that gradually and gradually. I invited my rock climbing fellows to my home and made them meet my family. I took my coach to my home and I

invited my mother to Islamabad and showed her my climbing so she knows what I am doing...

She got more candid “Then I explained to her (my mother) what I feel about this activity and what benefits these activities have for me. Now they are ok with this. They do not (necessarily) appreciate but they at least accept me... If they do not appreciate, it does not matter as their acceptance is a big thing for me...” She further specified the objections of her family “You have started hiking the mountains. You are being a monkey climbing the mountains. Some religious connotations like ‘what are you doing, you are climbing the mountains, and you have to dress up differently. More so boys will be in the activity too (referring to rock climbing).”

## **5.5. What is the response of male fellows?**

### **5.5.1. Overprotection versus Support**

Ahmed identified one factor as “overprotection” from male fellows. He gives an example of Fozia again and shared the anecdote very enthusiastically:

...All her (Fozia’s) team members were males. They were helping her so much so that ‘one of the boys, he was literally telling her, where to put next step.... And when he wouldn’t tell, she would stop and ask...I kept observing that this group was moving so slow...I realized that this is how this girl’s confidence will end forever and she will always remain dependent on the people or the boys around her to tell her where to put the step...

He did not find overprotection a right way to deal with fear and later shared this story with the rest of the boys in the group and conveyed a message, “This is how we try to overprotect people and shatter their confidence on themselves. Let them face their own problems and let them solve on their own.”Whereas at first Sara mentioned “criticism” of males and while elaborating it more she smiled and replied in a lighter tone:

...Initially I was a slow climber. Other people (males) would be bothered because of my slow climbing. She takes so much time; we can climb two times in the same duration. I would get such comments .With the passage of time it

does not happen anymore. In fact there was a joke about me like “bring chips with you, sit on the rock and keep eating them...”

In general during her two years experiences of climbing she witnessed a different attitude and response from males, “Most of the people who come for hiking or rock-climbing with us (girls), they respect you a lot, regard you a lot. They ask for your help and if we ask them for help, they do so the mutual bond comes into being.”

### **5.6. Concluding Remarks**

Ahmed sees a “good prospect for girls” in future. He also gives the example of Samina Baig as a role model and considers it a “positive sign’. He emphasized on “social norms” with relation to empowerment.

... Women empowerment cannot be imported from another culture as it is. If it is done so, it can create an imbalance. Indigenous research, from the locals keeping in view the norms and girls such solutions should be proposed where a girl feels empowered and become a part of mainstream and the culture should be protected and promoted. It is a challenge but an opportunity too...

Sara encouraged women to take part in outdoor activities and focuses on challenges and empowerment.

...I think women should get into such activities as they have to face many challenges in their life and if they start facing these challenges too (challenges related to outdoor activities), it will help them to deal with the challenges occur in real life. They will have different approach about themselves and the world, resistance and obstacles. They will be more confident, effective and empowered...

Both informants defined individual empowerment by connecting it with confidence and decision making. The male informant gave certain examples to validate that very definition with regard to outdoor activities and its effects on women. Outdoor was not solely recognized as the main changing factors in the lives of women. Personal life of

female informant and struggle with decision making process earlier in her life were identified as the most changing factors. The completion of activity and the sense of challenge offered by outdoor activities had positive impact on them. Different motivations were identified by different women as male outdoor educator desisted from generalization. For the female informant it was criticism she faced during her very first experiences, connection with nature, personal exploration for weaknesses and strengths. For a few it was fear.

Struggle with the gender roles, social norms and unnecessary controls from family appeared as hurdles. As far as the response from male fellows is concerned, male informant found it “over protective.” Conversely the female informant felt a gradual change in it and found it supportive. In the next chapter these very findings have been discussed and analyzed in the context of theoretical concepts, literature and my personal experiences where needed.

## 6. Analysis & Discussion

In the previous chapter most important and relevant content has been identified and presented in the form of themes. Those themes can be viewed or testified through the lens of relevant theories, my own experiences and wide literature. I will start out with Ahmed's comments regarding the massive response from women and empowerment in the context of social norms. He found that women's response for the outdoor programs was much higher than men. He definitely noticed the significant role of outdoor activities in the individual empowerment of women in Pakistan but maintained his emphasize on "social norms."

The concept of "social norms" can be understood well by comprehending the concept of Gender Socialization theory. Ryle (2011, p.120) gives a proem of human non-association with gender related memories at very early age and believes that socialization as a fundamental concept for sociologists is a process which begins with our birth and continues till we die. It teaches us new learning and adjustments. Focusing on gender she tries to examine as how our lives are filled with it through a general gender socialization definition, "the process through which individuals learn the gender norms of their society and come to develop an internal gender identity."

Living abroad for two years I have got a chance to observe gender roles in UK, Norway and Germany which are far more progressed compared to the society I originally belong to but when one goes through the literature produced in west, comes to find common grounds to relate to such as the 'gender lenses' identified by Bem (as cited in Vicky, 1999) named as:

- gender polarization (men and women are different defining a central organizing principle of social life)
- androcentrism (males superiority and their experiences are the normative standard)
- biological essentialism (male and female are biologically different justifying the first two lenses).

Coltrane & Adam (2008) also advocate the social constructionist approach and signify that as a result of being treated differently and put into different learning environments boys and girls develop different needs, desires, wants, temperaments and skills. They end up as different types of people, not questioning the difference though.

Sara dared question this stereotyping as her first experience was with males, the only girl to climb the rocks among twenty five males. She opened up about the restrictions imposed on her due to her gender, “Boys know that whatever they will say, will be accepted. They have this space. Girls do not have this space. They have to talk being reserve and in a measured way. They have to talk after thinking from a different angle (such as) how others will see it or accept it.” Gender stereotypes are taught and transferred to generations causing more pressure on women to have a certain self image.

For example I loved cycling and I still do. I enjoyed doing it with my male and female class fellows. My mother happened to be very protective about it and would always warn me to cycle within the street. The boys would cycle much farther. One day I followed my male friends out of curiosity and realized that I was on the main road. Something was not appropriate about me as all men were staring at me. I was hardly eleven years old to realize the inappropriateness related to gender roles. That staring was a wakeup call to learn the traditional gender role but I and my father never let myself be influenced by that.

People think boys and girls are supposed to be different so they need different treatment. They are given different opportunities for development causing certain behaviors and self-images reinforcing cultural stereotypes about gender. The process is repeated over and over again, shaping generations so that gender stereotypes appear natural and are resistant to change (Coltrane & Adam (2008, p.175). Ahmed pointed out this attitude towards women who “have to take extra ordinary challenges and they have to face a lot of question marks raised in the name of social norms to get into outdoor activities because normally it is not accepted as a good social norm in our culture ... she has to make extra ordinary effort to make a space for themselves and to prove themselves.”

Ahmed referring to one of the stories used the term of “typical Pakistani family” which is the reflection of these stereotypes or a certain pattern of socialization in a given culture. He also recognized “unnecessary controls” from the family majority of the women countered as the result of this certain gender socialization.

Mohiuddin (2011) shares her observations about this different socialization of girls who are restricted to homes and the domestic work. They are not allowed to play outside, not given that much love and care. Boys receive more love and care and are taught to be more confident and brave. She also shares the “innocent wish” of girls to be a boy so that they get more love from their parents. She also found girls less confident when it comes to express the future goals.

In my experience I had not witnessed traditional gender roles in my own home yet my mother never thought it appropriate for me to ‘laugh or talk aloud’ or to stay longer outside the home. My mother was born in a family where traditional gender roles were practiced. My father always encouraged me instead and never objected to certain behaviors my mother found objectionable. He believes in individual empowerment staunchly and implements it too. He encouraged me the most to be a part of outdoor activities through my Masters degree. I may say that I partly had gone through a different socialization process. This socialization happens in family which is termed as ‘gender relation’ by Scabini & Cigoli. Family is “the social and symbolic place” constructing gender differences through a process that is surely biological, but also relational and social (as cited in Crespi, 2003).

“Typical Pakistani family” set-up can be understood if the aspect of religion is taken into consideration. Religion is a very dominating factor in people’s lives which possibly influences the process of socialization and gender roles. In Pakistan’s case religion is unavoidable. According to Library of Congress (2005) Pakistan is declared as an Islamic state officially known as ‘Islamic Republic of Pakistan’ with 96.3 percent of the Muslim population.

Mawlana Amin Ahsan Islahi ( as cited in Rauf, 2009,p.183) a famous religious scholar and author of various books and articles dealing with number of issues such as prayers , Islamic laws, monotheism , women etc exempts woman from economic struggles ,

declaring man as a the provider who deserves the obedience of wife . He considers family as a primary function and the first and real place for teaching mannerism and social norms for the upbringing of the younger generations. According to him women and men both are assigned different roles under the light of Islamic teachings. Women are supposed to fulfill all the duties related to home and can work outside as long as the modesty is intact. In case of disorder at home or in the family or disobedience of women, “Man should separate his bed from her and try to make her realize the negative consequences of her behavior. If this does not work, man is then allowed to punish his wife physically. However, the physical punishment should not be severe in nature, but should be that of a teacher correcting students.”

It gives an explicit picture of male domination under the light of religious teachings or the interpretations of the scholars which promote gender discriminatory attitudes. Dahl (as cited in Shakari, 2013) deems it to be a patriarchal view of Islam leaving men with more authority and power over women with lack of freedom. Additionally women’s historical position serves as an explanation as why some secular western feminists argue about monotheistic religions as oppressive towards women signifying their subordinate status within a religious framework. In Pakistan not everyone is expected to read and write since the literacy rate is relatively low i.e. females 46% and males 69% (Ijaz, 2012). In my observation this low literacy leads to the misunderstandings of Islamic teachings and increases the reliance on scholar’s interoperations. It may be one of the possible factors causing gender discriminatory attitudes.

Considering the factor of religion Ahmed’s point of view in social context about “social norms” seems convincing. Likewise when asked about family concerns of the girls, he clarifies that they were more concerned about women’s safety and security such as if they will be living separately ( from boys) or there will be more girls. For that Ahmed established a “female unit” consisting of female supervisors to answer the questions respective families had. Such concerns stem from the religious perspective. One of the key findings for Offenbauer (2005, p.1) while reviewing the literature regarding women in Islamic societies was the male dominated structure, “Women in Muslim societies and communities face gender-based inequalities associated with the so-called patriarchal gender system. . . In Muslim areas, veiling and sex-segregation form part of the gender system.”

In Pakistan gender segregation is really common. Having a firsthand experience as a Pakistani citizen it is unlikely to sit beside men in the bus as seats are compartmentalized for both. Separate educational institutions are also common. However there are some co-education institutes as well but inside the institutes the canteens and hostels are separate. Separate section in the supermarket eatable shops for females is generally preferred. Male and females are supposed to make separate queues in public offices. The concerns Ahmed confronted from the families of the girls emerged as a general concern. It should be remembered that they did not object to the “participation in outdoor activities” in general unlike Sara’s experience. Sara had to struggle hard to convince her parents. She signifies the difference of men and women in terms of convincing her parents. According to her men are heard and are allowed to do the similar things women are being stopped from in the name of “gender” and “religion”. In other words women have to think a lot before expressing their thoughts which she calls “a measured way” or to make their parents known about their wishes which can be taken wrong.

Due to such regressive state of women in Pakistan women empowerment has become a popular concept and attracts many women including me. The concept of empowerment started as a result of emerging feminism. Akhter (2012) skims through the literature related to military rule and manipulative use of religion which left women devastated. In the early 1980 proclaimed feminists such as writers, politicians and performers became active and raised their voice as a reaction. A few of them also fought for women’s rights before independence. The era of 90’s witnessed feminists’ movement which is going through a tussle in terms of its contours such as secular or Islamic.

The stories Ahmed told about women’s engagement in outdoor activities can be seen as a reaction to the unnecessary controls of family which led them to more struggle and made them more “confident” and “effective.” Ahmed justifies this struggle of women by using the word of “thrust” and metaphor of “butterfly.” He believes in these girls’ struggles which bring the real potential with no chances of failure in any walk of life. This is why Sara’s definition of individual empowerment and its association with decision making and confidence was pretty spontaneous.

That reaction to women oppression can be named as women empowerment. Women empowerment primarily includes “women's sense of self-worth” and “their right to have and to determine choices” (United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force, 1995). Self-worth and the right to determine their choices in their lives are akin to self confidence and decision making which constitute to the definition of individual empowerment used throughout my research. Ahmed later in his talk makes a logical connection between both terms and then their connection with individual empowerment. As a researcher I wanted their personalized definition to understand the concept and put the outcomes of outdoor activities for women in that context.

It has been written earlier that comparatively that women do not have that much decision making power and lack confidence,. However the stories Ahmed came up with including Sara’s, were the stories of the girls who are students. A few of them were even the first ones to go to university so the decision to go the university especially in Sara’s case was her first decision. Later a few of them after being exposed to outdoor activities decided to go for further expeditions. At least the decision to have first exposure of outdoor activities was made by the girls themselves in the first place which could be because of their educational backgrounds. The relation between education and increased decision power is clearly shown by Jan & Akhtar (2008) stating that women by tradition are less involved in decision making at all levels. The importance of their role is not recognized and their role in decision making is still not accepted. But higher education can change it by increasing the involvement of women in household decision making process. Education helps break the traditional shackles, which restrain women from involving in the process of decision making.

It should be clear that despite making the decision to take part in these outdoor activities was their own independent decision yet family’s approval was needed. Family’s role is undeniable and much more significant in Pakistani society. They might approve of it after having a certain amount of trust but might not be possibly happy about it .As was the case with Sara whose family does not appreciate it but accepts her passion. Her family thought her passion for hiking as “monkey’s” activity or the reference of religion and gender was used to stop her from doing so.

The unnecessary controls and objections from family and seeking their permission were never experienced by me. Coming from a relatively liberal background I never had to seek my family's permission but had to make them aware of my decisions so I can have their opinion. More so my father has always supported me at every turning point of life. It seems like these girls had supportive parents too but the way to get their support has not been an easy path. Sara had to take her mother to rock climbing session with her. She introduced her coach to her mother and things became easier. In the end the family turned out to be supportive. On the other hand for Ayesha's family in the words of Ahmed the "meaning of freedom" changed since she got into the outdoor activities.

Besides decision making and questioning women individual empowerment, the factor self confidence cannot be ignored. Ellen (1977) assesses previous studies which suggest women's lower self confidence if compared to men. The review for literature also indicates that it is not the case in all achievement situations though. It depends upon many factors such as "specific ability area, the availability of performance feedback, and the emphasis placed upon social comparison or evaluation." She recommends for further research in terms of recognizing more influencing variables with respect to women's self-confidence. For instance Ahmed gives an example of Fozia who was so scared of putting next step, was almost about to cry and was repeatedly saying "I will fall, I will fall." On Ahmed's motivation she still complained "What are you doing.. I will die." But with a little distraction and without any help she overtook rest of the group and this completion of the hike downhill made her very confident.

For Sara herself it took only eighteen minutes to change her life in terms of individual empowerment. From all their experiences this statement by Angell (1994) seems extremely relevant, "It is not the number of experience, but the quality of experience, that determines whether or not a person's self-esteem will be influenced through participating in an outdoor experiential activity." According to Sara begin stuck for eighteen minutes on the rock, the only girl amongst twenty five boys was noticed more and criticized and the reason was "because I was a girl."

Keeping the family background aside the basic treatment toward women from the society does not approve of women doing certain activities. The hidden message is "since you are a girl, you cannot do many things." That very approach may compel

women to do what they have not done before. My involvement in outdoor activities may not be very ordinary thing. I have enjoyed all outdoor activities I have been involved throughout my Masters program. I often tried to imagine the reaction of the men of my country as how would they look at me? What kind of impression I will cast on their minds if they see me kayaking, canoeing or even running?

Jones (2012) in her research conducted in New Zealand identified the similar in one of her case studies when the woman was questioned by a man as if she is fit enough to walk uphill “oh so you are fit enough for this ... are you?” She described it as “awful.” Similar thoughts were expressed in a lighter way by Sara whose male fellows told her to “bring chips, sit and eat on the rock” because of her slow climbing. She calls “criticism” her motivation though.

I very much relate to Sara’s motivation. In my observation if a woman drives the car in my city and the road gets blocked, people naturally assume there must be a woman who is not driving well. She goes to work, makes her own money yet is being criticized for being too outgoing. I was mature enough to not to care for other people’s opinion about me. I was questioned a lot before coming abroad to study “outdoor education.” I was supposedly leaving my comfort zone and living on my own was seen something very radical.

Sara did face such question marks too but rather used the criticism from males very constructively .Currently she assists others and is trying to make changes to other women’s lives. She acknowledges that rock climbing has made her stronger, active, and confident. Not necessarily getting family’s appreciation but the acceptance she is convinced about the benefits of rock-climbing. She emphasizes on strategizing, analyzing and convincing skills with regard to the family. It somehow gives an impression that she makes her decisions yet seeks her family’s approval. For Sara rock climbing is “self exploration, pleasure and the way to know her “strengths” and “weaknesses.” The criticism she mentions worked like a feedback as she used it constructively. In Mason’s words (as cited in Powch, 1994, p.17) “Feedback from one’s action and deliberate inaction is very clear-cut.... On the rock for example, we know clearly when we are on top, when we are stuck, when we are frozen at the bottom,

looking up. The metaphor of rock climbing can thus allow us to become more honest with ourselves.”

Sara describes rock climbing as the best match of “body and mind” and uses it to evaluate her strengths and weakness. She shares the sense of achievement and associates it with the feel you experience after reaching the top despite all tiredness, sweating and heaving chest, “when you reach the top, it is the best moment of life and (you say) that yes I have done it.” Gierasch (1994, p.232) another rock climber shares similar experiences, “After what seems like a very long time. I am at the top. With a sigh, I carefully tie in to an anchor before I yell ‘Off belay Celia. I did it...After a climb; I felt a deep sense of accomplishment. From the rock I take into my life enthusiasm, strength and connection.”

The stories of women Ahmed shared, seemed to be afraid of outdoor activities in the beginning but once the fears were overcome. The outcomes were amazing. Ahmed made the most of this fear and let the girls overcome their fears such as fear of lot of “falling, snow conditions, no extra clothing, heavy rucksacks etc.”As he had countered each concern and made their stay possible. The results were fairly positive. For Ahmed “high uncertainty” and “risk” contribute to the experiences and allow women to test themselves in terms of potential and confidence level in outdoor environment particularly wilderness.

Mitten & Woodruff (2009) refer to number of researchers who have found women reporting more fear at the beginning of programs as compared to men. Nevertheless Mitten & Woodruff maintain that if safety is assured and positive approach and openness are showed then women tend to balance their fears as the trip progresses. In this context Ahmed’s observation of woman with fear, reluctant to leave the comfort zone but then overtaking all other groups by overcoming that fear testifies what has been suggested by the researchers above.

This very fear has been termed as a “a great motivator ... An outdoor trip of this kind brings to the surface quickly a person’s questions, her fears, her anchors, her frailties, her strengths. There was no hiding... I often struggle with self-doubt, fear, insecurity yet I continue to have my brave moments” (Crux, 1994, p.227). The girl who lost her

father later thanked Ahmed for providing her with her “brave moments.” She questioned her “dependency” on her father. Merely the thought of the hike got her out of the mourning phase and be independent.

Unlike the examples of girls aforementioned Sara did not experience any fear. Other than criticism what also motivated her was her connection with “nature.” She shared such connection with nature since her childhood. Being an adopted one she would spend a lot of time just sitting near the streams, listening to birds and talking to plants. None of the girls I knew through Ahmed mentioned the element of “nature.” Absence of fear in Sara’s case was probably because of her connection with this very nature. Angell (1994, p. 93) describes nature as a place where male system does not have control. “In nature, women’s receptive, intuitive powers bring connection, confidence, and empowerment.” She convinces that ‘awareness of personal power and confidence to do anything are conditioned with increased connection with nature.’”

Sara hiked mountains but was criticized by her parents who used the word of “monkey” figuratively or pointed out the gender and religion to support their objections. Even that criticism was taken in a good part by Sara and she ended up as a hiker, trekker and a certified rock climber. Why these women were there (in outdoors) in the first place? The answer I found can be summed up as their “struggles.” Sara opens up about her struggles for her decisions and the divided life she lived. The decisions of daily life such as “eating and sleeping” were not even in her hands. She had hard time figuring out as whether she should follow her real parents or her guardians. She would question as what was actually correct and what was morally correct.

For Sara the conflict was within the parents. For me the conflict was between society and my family. My family supported me on most of my decisions but society did not. Coming abroad for studies on my own is still seen very differently let alone doing outdoor activities. I still cannot think of cycling in the street or park. It is something I enjoyed the most but could afford to do until I was a kid. My father would never stop me but considering the culture, I know I am going to be stared at it and going to become another question mark.

Gierasch (1994, p.232) the passionate rock climber mentions the struggles and pain women usually go through. She claims to be a feminist and expresses, “I hear people’s pain. I have known times when my view of the world became colored by too much hurt. I am a feminist and I know the realities and struggles women have in this world.”

By the end Sara, having witnessed the benefits herself encourages women to get into outdoor activities. She reckons if girls already facing many challenges in their real lives take up the challenges in outdoor activities, they can develop a “different approach about themselves and the world, resistance and obstacles. They will be more confident, effective and empowered.” Ahmed being a male promoting such activities for both genders finds it more beneficial for women and mentions their struggle with “taboos, deprivations and question marks of the society.” He foresees a good prospect for women in outdoor in Pakistan. He clarifies that the true balance between women empowerment can be achieved by keeping in view the social norms.

The “social norms” mentioned in the beginning of the chapter are very much defined by our religion. Ahmed does not believe in applying some imported model of women empowerment but rather indigenous one based upon social norms. That conflict is still not resolved as the status of feminist in Pakistan in terms of religion is divided and pretty much undefined as the literature suggests above.

There is always another side of the picture, a brighter one that youth constitute 67 percent of Pakistan’s Population, a considerable number indeed (Kugelman, 2011, p.11). Younger generation in Pakistan is more optimistic towards modernization of society and a change in gender roles. They are “more intellectual” and aware of opportunities. They do not simply obey but question and expect the young women in future to be able to make a choice for their life partner and be more visible in public life (Ali et al., 2011).

Ahmed is also working for this youth but did not expect so much response from women. Their response also indicates the support of their families. Sara had to struggle far more for that unlike other women but the concerns they showed cannot overshadow their “no objection in the participation in outdoor activities.” More so there is a gradual change in gender attitude as well. The way families letting their girls go on expeditions itself is the

sign of change and one of the surprising elements. Although Sara mentioned the criticism from males as her motivation but she further reveals that “it does not happen anymore” and rather had good things to share such as “strong bond, respect and help.”

Ahmed in one of his examples indicated the factor of “overprotection.” However he did not let the man become Fozia’s comfort zone but tried to handle that situation by not helping her at all. The little distraction was enough and she could experience the sense of achievement, confidence and empowerment.

What this study finds common in all the stories of women with regard to Ahmed’s opinion and Sara’s views that outdoor activities work like a mirror for women. Outdoor activities provide them with their true reflection in terms of their potential and courage. It gives such a space where they can explore themselves and analyze their weaknesses and strengths.

Moreover the struggles of their lives denote their defiance against gender stereotypes and typical gender roles. They do face unnecessary controls from families as a result of standardized gender socialization process. Hence the oppression cannot be considered too severe. Some families succeed to broaden their horizon in terms of the freedom of women as Ahmed did mention such a case. Some families after having a certain amount of trust do not necessarily appreciate but accept the participation of women in outdoor activities. The decision of getting formal education can be very extra ordinary for some of the families especially if the literacy rate of women is taken into consideration. Outdoor learning is a way ahead for them as it is more challenging and enforces all the concerns related to gender and safety.

The general oppression of women leads them to the wilderness and outdoor environment which offers risks and challenges. Such environment lets them use their bodies and introduces them with their fears. Once the fears are overcome, the outcomes can be exceedingly overpowering. At times criticism received from the society, family or males can also lead to the completion of outdoor activities and sense of accomplishment. The stories being shared above might indicate some differences in terms of hurdles and motivation for taking part in outdoor activities. Nonetheless the

outcomes appear to be similar in terms of individual empowerment which enhances self confidence and decision making.

## **7. Conclusion**

This research in particular tries to recognize the role of outdoor activities in the individual empowerment of women in Pakistan by exploring the perspectives of male and female both. Individual empowerment is assumed as a combination of “self-confidence and decision making” defined by the literature produced.

After identifying the main concepts emerging from the collected data in the chapter of analysis and having them discussed earlier leads me to the conclusions such as: Outdoor activities cannot solely empower women on individual level but it can be one of the contributing factors serving as a catalyst for empowerment. In other words these outdoor activities offer such a space which is full of risks and uncertainty. Outdoor environment lets the women confront their fears and connect with nature .Once they experience it; they do feel the change themselves.

Although outdoor activities can enhance the individual empowerment in terms of confidence and decision making but the desire to be empowered should be within. Outdoor activities help materialize this desire. My findings suggest that it took quality of experience not the quantity for women to feel self-confident. The desire to be empowered was always there as the women the male informant as an outdoor educator worked with were students. A few of them were the first ones to go to university like the key female informant who even shifted to another city for education. In that case education also emerges as one of the important factors aiding the process of decision making.

Male informant himself seemed very encouraging and optimistic about women individual empowerment through outdoor activities in Pakistan provided that social norms are not compromised. He practically countered all the concerns of girls and their families as their stay in such outdoor expeditions was highly important. Had they not stayed, such motivational stories would not be heard. Other than education another common factor was the struggle they all went through at different stages of life because of some “unnecessary controls” resulting from certain socialization.

My own experiences have been used as a reference of point. My hidden hypothesis was that the more oppressed women are the more vigor they develop and adapt alternative

ways for empowerment. Outdoor education may be one of them. Higher response of girls than men for outdoor expeditions arranged by the male outdoor educator confirms their active participation in outdoors in this regard. This participation was a reaction to the suppression and unnecessary controls most of the women faced. More so they had to make extra effort to be a part of outdoor activities as families were far more concerned about the assurance of their safety.

In short this research presents both male and female perspectives with the conclusion that male informant a pioneer of outdoor education in Pakistan did not leave the girls behind but brought them forward. He believes in their power and their (girls and families) response indicates the changing attitudes towards gender stereotypes. The process of empowerment equally requires the efforts of both genders. The desire for empowerment emerges from within and can be a result of suppression or stereotypical gender roles. Outdoor activities cannot build this desire but expedite the process of empowerment. The findings of this study cannot be generalized as the scale of outdoor education is very limited and the families of women were rather traditional yet supportive.

### **7.1. Food for Thought**

Here are some critical questions to ponder upon or can serve as another area of study for future researchers:

Women's struggle is found to be a common factor among those I came to know through my research. Struggle is conditioned with suppression which is really common in Pakistan. Does it suggest if women were not suppressed, they would not participate in outdoor activities or their response would not be more than boys who enjoy the freedom in society naturally?

Should the nature of any particular outdoor activity increase a chance of women empowerment as from different activities different outcome can be expected?

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## **9. Appendices**

### **9.1. Appendix A: Interview Guide**

*Number of participants:* two

*Gender:* One Female and One Male

*Age:* between 24 -32.

The interview design was semi-structured and the questions have been amended for both of the informants accordingly. Some of the fixed questions have been written here.

#### **Questions**

1. Can you briefly tell me about your academic or professional background?
2. How did you develop your interest in outdoor activities?
3. How do you define individual empowerment?
4. How do you see any connection between individual empowerment and outdoor education under the light of your personal experience? Any example?
5. What changes you can see in yourself in terms of self confidence and decision making, Can you specify as what exactly changed you? Any particular situation?
6. Can you specify your motivation to be a part of outdoor activities?
7. Would you like to share the hurdles you faced for taking part in outdoor activities?
8. What was the response of male fellows?

Additional comments?

Questions were amended depending upon the informant. For male informant the questions were intended to hear about the experiences of other women participants he supervised during the outdoor programs.

### **Questions**

1. Can you briefly tell me about your academic or professional background?
  2. How did you develop your interest in outdoor activities?
  3. How do you define ‘individual empowerment’?
  6. How do you see any connection between individual empowerment and outdoor education under the light of your personal experience with other women participants?  
Any example?
  8. What changes you could see in women in terms of self confidence and decision making as a result of outdoor activities?
  9. Can you specify any particular motive or inspiration for the women who take part in outdoor activities?
  10. Would you like to share the hurdles you think women face to be a part of outdoor activities?
  11. What was the response of male fellows towards the women who take part in outdoor activities?
- Additional comments?

## 9.2. Appendix B: Ethical Clearance

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS  
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES



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N-2007 Bygdøy  
Oslo  
Tlf: +47 22 36 21 17  
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Kirsti Pedersen Gurholt

Seksjon for kroppøving og pedagogikk Norges idrettshøgskole

Postboks 4042, Ullevål stadion

0806 OSLO

Vår dato: 28.02.2014

Vår ref: 37841/3/LT

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

### TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 24.02.2014. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

<i>37841</i>	<i>Empowerment through Outdoor Education: Women's Individual Empowerment through Outdoor Education in Pakistan</i>
<i>Behandlingsansvarlig</i>	<i>Norges idrettshøgskole, ved institusjonens øverste leder</i>
<i>Daglig ansvarlig</i>	<i>Kirsti Pedersen Gurholt</i>
<i>Student</i>	<i>Risham Saeed</i>

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i henhold til personopplysningsloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personopplysningsloven.

Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html>. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 30.08.2014, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Katrine Utaaker Segadal

Lis Tenold

Kontaktperson: Lis Tenold tlf: 55 58 33 77

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSD's rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.

Aukring på tlf: 220630070

OSLO NSD: Universitet i Oslo, Postboks 1047 Blindern, 0816 Oslo, Tlf: +47 22 36 21 17, www.nsd.no  
OSLO NSD: Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 4911 Trondheim, Tlf: +47 73 31 19 11, www.ssb.uib.no  
TRONDHØI NSD: NTNU Universitet, Trondheim, Tlf: +47 73 31 19 11, www.nsd.uib.no

### 9.3. Appendix C

#### Request for participation in research project

##### The Role of Outdoor Activities in the Individual Empowerment of Women in Pakistan: Male and Female Perspectives

Dear Sir / Madam,

This is a research project for the master's degree in "Transcultural European Outdoor Studies" presented to the Norwegian School of Sport & Sciences. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of outdoor activities in women empowerment in Pakistan. It will provide a chance to informants to share their unique experiences as how did outdoor learning change them in terms of individual empowerment which specifically involves self confidence and decision making.

The data will be collected in form of interviews which will be conducted in private and will last about 60 minutes. Questions will concern your academic/social background, participation in outdoor activities and your personal thoughts regarding individual empowerment. All information will be kept confidential and will be presented anonymously and will be accessible for me and my supervisor. Your participation is voluntary and you can choose to withdraw your consent without giving any reason at any time.

The project is scheduled for completion by August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2014. All data storage will be deleted after the completion of the project. If you have any questions please contact the project supervisor: **Professor, Kirsti Pedersen Gurholt**. Office address: Sognsveien 220, 0864 Oslo E-mail: [k.p.gurholt@nih.no](mailto:k.p.gurholt@nih.no)

Kind Regards,

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Risham Saeed  
rishamsaeed@gmail.com

*The study has been notified to the Data Protection Official for Research, Norwegian Social Science Data Services.*

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Consent for participation in the study: I have received information about the project The "Role of Outdoor Activities in the Individual Empowerment of Women in Pakistan: Male and Female Perspectives" and I am willing to participate.

Date and signature: \_\_\_\_\_