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WOMEN AT WORK: STORIES OF AMBITION AND HOPE FROM KARACHI, DAHARKI AND PESHAWAR

ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY RESEARCH REPORT
“PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS” PROGRAM (DECEMBER 2016 - FEBRUARY 2018)



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“Women at Work: Stories of Ambition and Hope from Karachi, Dakarki and Peshawar,”
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Note from the Training for Pakistan Project Implementation Team

The report that follows is the culmination of qualitative, ethnographic research commissioned by the USAID Training for Pakistan Project (TFP) about the TFP activity “Pathways to Success.” TFP is submitting the report almost exactly as it was received from the research consultants, after minor editing. The report differs in tone and structure from other reports delivered by TFP, in that it contains first-person narrative and subjective insights, and there is extensive attention to research methodology. This report may be seen as a complement to TFP’s separate final activity report on Pathways to Success, which uses a more standard structure and tone and includes extensive quantitative evaluation data.

Executive Summary

This paper documents the stories of a group of young women in the Pathways to Success (PTS) vocational training program, which took place from December 2016 – February 2018 as a sub-activity under the USAID Training for Pakistan Project (2013-2018). The paper analyzes the women's participation in the program as part of their lived experiences, within the wider contexts of gender and class-based disenfranchisement in Pakistan, the increased possibilities for young women's inclusion in the workforce in a changing youth-driven economy, and the program's efforts to further trainees' education and facilitate their socioeconomic empowerment. The intersection of gender and class inequality meant participants' families were only able to provide them with a basic education through government or low-cost private schooling. In addition, the compounded identities held by many families, such as religious or ethnic affiliation, disabilities affecting trainee families, age, lack of access to technology, and the urban/rural divide, meant they were disadvantaged in multiple ways and their avenues for socioeconomic mobility were severely compromised. At the same time, patriarchal notions of women's honor, morality, and respectability emerged, limiting their movement outside the home and therefore their ability to access additional educational opportunities or pursue employment. Their lives speckled with such struggles, the young women we write about shared their learning experiences in the program, their views on gender inequality, career plans, and hopes and dreams for the future. Within such socioeconomic confinements, their stories show the transformative value of gender-focused initiatives, which provide learning opportunities to allow young women to begin reshaping their lives, and conceptualize and build new futures.

Joint TVET and gender equality initiatives such as PTS are seen by the development sector as important for tackling poverty and supporting national economic growth. These programs are believed to be a key component of Pakistan's economic future, particularly in terms of employing the country's youth bulge which numbers over 100 million people below the age of twenty-five. There are currently over 3,500 TVET institutes in Pakistan with approximately six percent of the population benefiting from vocational training. Nearly ninety percent of the institutes are located in the three major provinces - Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa - while the rest are spread across Baluchistan and the disputed territories of Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.¹ While Pakistan public education is making efforts to integrate various types of vocational skill building within the curriculum, these efforts are still nascent. Employers continue to cite major skills gaps in new graduates in terms of technical expertise, ability to use complex equipment, industry knowledge, and practical exposure.² While skills trainings are widely touted as one solution to this issue, the current number of TVET programs in operation, despite being fairly large, is not sufficient to train the number of young people annually entering the job market. Just as important is the need to consider young women's inclusion in TVET offerings in order for this group to have equal access to a changing economy that is coming to be defined by a young workforce in a growing and upwardly mobile middle class.

PTS ran in Karachi and Daharki (in Ghotki district) in Sindh, and Peshawar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), providing technical vocational and work-readiness training to over six hundred young women between the ages of fifteen and nineteen, in a trade of their choice.³ Classes included three to six months of technical instruction in computer focused fields such as graphic design and information technology, early childhood education, and traditional trades such as stitching and cooking. From each location, fifty of the most qualified trainees received internship placements or were enrolled in entrepreneurship and income generation classes (business training). Upon completion, the latter group received start-up toolkits and stipends in order to set up and begin businesses in their trade specializations. The third component of the program involved life-skills and work-readiness training in

¹ Statistics taken from the National Vocation and Technical Training Commission of Pakistan website on May 26, 2018. The NAVTTC is a regulatory body for vocational and technical training in Pakistan.

² PEAD Request for Proposal. TFP internal document. (July 16, 2016)

³ Training Request Pathways to Success (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). (No date). TFP internal document.

which about six hundred participants from component one and two, and about 2,300 additional participants of the same age-group (13 – 19 years) received instruction in gender rights as well as professional skills such as resume writing, interpersonal communication, and networking.⁴ To facilitate enrollment, PTS also worked with families and communities and local businesses, providing sessions on the value of girls' education and employment to help create a wider supportive environment for trainees. These components of the program were meant to equip young women with both the technical and soft skills needed to become successful in the workforce.

PTS, drawing from ideas developed by the World Bank, hoped to introduce the following concept of agency among trainees: "The capacity to make decisions about one's own life and act on them to achieve a desired outcome, free of violence, retribution, or fear."⁵ In order to have agency, girls need empowerment, which the same document defines as "alternatives that promote the development of healthy self-esteem."⁶ This position is consistent with TFP implementer World Learning's [TAAP approach](#) ("Transforming Agency, Access, and Power"), which focuses on how in societies a small number of "people and groups who control resources and make decisions" can come together with the "marginalized and excluded populations who are relegated to secondary positions and excluded populations who are shut out of power entirely" to create just societies and promote equality regardless of one's identity.⁷ With respect to gender, this involves breaking down how assumptions about "socially defined differences between women and men, girls and boys" inform women's unequal inclusion in "economic, social, and political roles, responsibilities, [and] rights."⁸ At the same time, such social justice work must be reconstructive, identifying avenues to strengthen agency, access and empowerment alongside the reform of those structures that include barriers which disempower women and other marginalized groups. PTS's central approach to facilitating agency through empowerment has predominantly involved removing structural barriers to employment by providing educational opportunities (vocational training), and job opportunities (internship placements or business training and start-up materials). Second, it has focused on human development (through women-focused life-skills training) so that trainees can develop the capacity to become self-empowered. In this way, PTS is couched in recent international women's development approaches characterized by a shift from seeing women, as Amartya Sen writes, as "passive recipients of welfare-enhancing help" to "active agents of change" where they are central to transforming conditions of inequality, "ill-being" into "well-being".⁹ In Kabeer's words, then, "*empowerment entails change*," in which people have agency, that is "the 'power to' ... make and act on their own life choices, even in the face of others' opposition".¹⁰

The paper examines a select group of trainees' learning experiences in the program, who had compelling life stories prior to joining PTS, and creatively applied the skills and knowledge gained through the program. The purpose of revealing these stories is to provide evidence, based on the areas where the program has had an impact, and has the potential to change social norms and structures. Through conversational interviews and participant observation in familial and work settings, the paper attempts to provide an ethnographic view of trainee efforts to learn and work in order to improve their lives, while navigating intersectional forms of gender and class inequality. One of the main challenges for the research participants to enroll in the PTS program, further their education, or look for work opportunities, was the social and patriarchal imposition of a morality discourse on their honor and respectability. Such ideas impeded their mobility, significantly informed their education and employment choices, and shaped how they saw themselves as part of the society. Honor and

⁴ Life-Skills Based Education Manuals. (April 2017). PTS internal documents.

⁵ PTS internal document. (September 25, 2017). PDF presentation.

⁶ PTS internal document. (September 25, 2017). PDF presentation.

⁷ TAAP toolkit. <http://www.taapinclusion.org/toolkit/>

⁸ TAAP toolkit. <http://www.taapinclusion.org/toolkit/>

⁹ Sen, Amartya. (1999). "Women's Agency and Social Change." *Development as Freedom*.

¹⁰ Kabeer, Naila. (2005). "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the Third Millennium Development Goal 1." *Gender and Development*. 13:1, 13-24.

respectability existed as concepts that imposed familial restrictions on research participants, leading them to self-discipline certain views, choices, and actions, in order to open up possibilities for their participation in PTS and the workforce. Notions of honor and respectability also signaled real threats to their physical safety, although interviewees did not directly speak about this. In program documentation, including that of implementing partners,¹¹ and in conversations with trainers and field staff, honor and respectability were understood as defining and strict cultural norms that needed to be navigated, but kept intact, so that trainees could complete training while continuing to be understood as ‘good’ daughters by their families.

The research team comprised a multidisciplinary background including social anthropology, sociology, feminism, and journalism, including the Pakistani and international context. Its members have completed a number of projects on women, minorities, and inequality in the country, and drew from these experiences to build relationships with research participants and document and tell their stories. Through this paper, the research team suggests that comprehensive TVET programs, such as PTS, have the potential to promote systemic change and positively affect norms and practices within the girls’ social ecosystems. But to do so, they need to work with trainees, their families, and communities, to actively challenge pervasive notions of honor and respectability that prevent and restrict young women from equal access to education, employment, and quality of life. Such efforts would take the important work of PTS significantly further.

Introduction

In 2017, the USAID/Pakistan Training for Pakistan Project (2013-2018), implemented by World Learning, created and administered a vocational training program called Pathways to Success (PTS) for young women from underprivileged backgrounds in Pakistan. It was designed to provide trainees between the ages of 15 and 19 with technical skills in a variety of fields, so they could expand their career options and employability when seeking work or starting a home business. Partnering under subcontract with the Engro Foundation, the corporate social responsibility wing of the conglomerate, and the Peace, Education and Development Foundation (PEAD), these organizations coordinated the program in Karachi and Daharki, in Sindh, and Peshawar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), respectively. Engro Foundation and PEAD in turn liaised with several local vocational institutes to enroll students and provide training, as well as inform and educate their families about the societal value of supporting girls’ education and employment. The program hoped to provide underserved young women with educational opportunities that they could leverage to increase their socioeconomic capacity.

Trainings involved three to six months of technical instruction, including computer focused classes such as graphic design and information technology, early childhood education, teaching, and conventional trades such as stitching and fabric printing. Participants received different instruction packages, including a trade of their choice; followed by an entrepreneurship training between four and six months if they were interested in opening a home business, at the end of which they received a start-up kit; or a paid internship placement, up to six months in length. The young women also received life-skills training at the beginning and close of the program, which included instruction on various topics such as how to prepare for a job interview, sexual harassment awareness, and reproductive healthcare. **The rationale behind a three-part program was for trainees to not only learn and develop employable skills, but also receive material resources and networks that they could not normally access due to class barriers. As part of this experience, women could**

¹¹ PTS internal document. (July 16, 2016). “Situation Analysis,” PEAD Request for Proposal.

also learn about gender equality in order to handle both life and employment experiences in a more informed way.

Toward the end of PTS activities, many trainees were starting to open businesses or begin internships, signs of the program's positive impact becoming visible. In total, 662 students completed technical vocational trainings and complementary work readiness programs, 112 completed internships, 115 completed entrepreneurial or income generation training, and 2,223 high school girls took part in work-readiness sessions also focusing on life-skills.

Based on these figures, World Learning wanted to understand more about trainees' learning and growth experiences. To that end, with USAID concurrence, an external consulting team was hired to examine what factors had contributed to positive trainee performance and experiences during the program, and how these were sustained beyond their involvement and participation. This research also involved analyzing trainee performance marked by improved knowledge and skills, and personal development in the areas of confidence and self-belief. Typically, evaluative studies of development programming involve presenting measurable, quantitative indicators of the success or failure of a project's ability to meet its stated goals. In the case of PTS, important data points would be the number of young women trained, the number of young women who completed internships, and the number of young women who opened home businesses, and would be analyzed against the amount of funding disbursed. **Rarely included are the voices of the beneficiaries, or the numerous field staff involved in coordinating and implementing an aid project. Including such nuanced pathways of change that can only be represented through personal experiences, show the changes in trainee relationships with their families, communities, and PTS, which comprise their social structure.** While the former kind of analysis is necessary for donor reporting, this paper shows how locally-informed perspectives reveal how a project operates, illuminating the beneficiaries' context sensitivities alongside the complexities the project had to navigate around. We argue, instead, that an analytical focus on trainee experiences is a nuanced means for examining project outcomes in relation to planned objectives, which can be thoughtfully and constructively utilized to institutionalize improvements for future programming and expansion. This is engrained in World Learning's TAAP approach as Principle-II, context sensitivity,¹² and if this was not organically integrated into the implementation of PTS, the project might not have seen the impact it did.

Methodology

PTS sought to reduce structural class and gender barriers to educational and employment opportunities. At the same time, it attempted to teach young women about the importance of individual agency for combating such setbacks to socioeconomic empowerment. In these efforts, different aspects of the program intersected with a variety of trainees' larger life experiences and their understandings about the ways in which their lives had been socially constructed in poverty, limited education, gender inequality, and varying degrees of support and lack of support from family. **This paper tells the stories of eight trainees, locating PTS as a juncture along trainees' lives, examining how they used the PTS training opportunity in intended, creative, and sometimes competing ways from the program's planned objectives.** These stories range from how trainees grew up, and their relationships with their families and community members; how they came to be enrolled in PTS, and their experiences in the program; what it means to them to expand their education and gain employable skills; to how they see themselves as young women, and their plans and hopes for the future. Presented together, the stories are descriptive and illustrative of

¹² See section: Principle Context Sensitivity (pg. 40). TAAP Toolkit. <http://www.taapinclusion.org/toolkit/>

what it means for different marginalized young women to attempt to become socioeconomically capable in a way that is meaningful to them. The stories also demonstrate how change occurred for each of the girls within their individual contexts and struggles, offering insight for programs like PTS to learn from and adapt.

The young women who agreed to participate became known to us through meetings and conversation with field coordinators of World Learning and its partners, through a form of information-oriented sampling, where we came to learn about several trainees in each area who had captured the attention of various program implementers and field staff. As Widdowson writes, whereas random sampling enables a generalizable understanding of an area of research, “with information-oriented selection, cases are carefully chosen for their significance.”¹³ The selected research participants were known for compelling life stories of significant efforts to overcome difficulty, and had leveraged the skills learned during training in ways that stood out as particularly positive markers of the program’s impact. This is not to say that there were only two to three exceptional young women in each location – there were certainly more, as field coordinators suggested several who they had come to know closely. Additional participants and their stories would have been included in this study were it not for time constraints. **Together, the eight trainees selected comprise a series of case studies, which show diverse and comparable experiences outside, in, and alongside PTS, which the research team compiled by recording detailed field diaries and taking field notes of observations while conducting interviews.** They found shared experiences among trainees including poverty and lack of access to resources, motivation to improve their lives by acquiring skills and expanding knowledge, a desire to earn an income, hope to achieve long term career and personal goals, varying degrees of family support in these areas, and views on how gender inequality has shaped their lives.

To document their broader life experiences in relation to PTS programming, the research team conducted field studies with three participants each in Karachi, Daharki, and two in Peshawar. Fieldwork included conversational interviews and participant observation that took place in homes, workplaces, and training centers, individually and with family, colleagues, and field staff from both World Learning and its partners.¹⁴ In the presence of the individuals who informed the social construction of these spaces, we observed trainees being students, professionals, daughters, and individuals. Here, we attempted to observe and examine how the social relationships that operated in these spaces informed and shaped trainee learning experiences, and personal and professional development. Such interactions provided the research team with an introductory but insightful ethnographic understanding of their lives. Collecting their stories in this way was exploratory in method, described in greater detail in the fieldwork section (page 12) and it was from these sites of social interaction that their narratives emerged.

The stories of the eight women show how they narrate their past, live their present, and imagine their future. While the stories are individual, different, and unique, we can find certain common threads within them. Their pasts are mainly recounted as stories of hardship. Their presents are marked by a desire for personal and professional development, and to support their families. Here, the skills they learned while enrolled in PTS appear in their narratives as lessons that gave them the motivation to be productive. A common refrain used to describe their lives following the completion of school, but unable to access options for further schooling or unaware of how to find employment, was “Main ghar pe bethi thi [I just sat at home],” doing nothing, idle. They cited PTS as a way out of this predicament. Finally, their futures are imagined as the fulfilment of life goals. The future is where they want more than a life of subsistence for their

¹³ Widdowson, Mark. (2011). “Case Study Research Methodology.” *International Journal of Transactional Analysis Research*. 2:1, 25-34.

¹⁴ When referring to field staff in this paper, we mean social mobilizers and trainers who work for World Learning and its implementing partners.

families, and a place where they can attain forms of personal fulfilment, including gainful employment or a career, ‘success,’ and a “quality life.”

The young women included in the study came from families whose monthly income was under Rs. 30,000, approximately 260 USD. With some exceptions, broadly speaking, in urban and peri-urban settings, this income was earned by mothers who either performed unpaid labor as homemaker, or as paid housekeepers, and fathers and brothers who worked as cleaners, security guards, or in factories. In rural areas, the family worked together in the fields and tending livestock. With this limited income, families were subsisting and putting their children through government or low-cost private schooling. This meant the young women had a basic education, and therefore had an adequate background to learn a new skill. In terms of transportation, a male family member might own or have access to a motorbike to commute to work, and shuttle other family members across town when needed. Urban or rural, in either case, this meant that the communities research participants lived in were under resourced and set apart from city centers where people commonly have access to consumer goods, transportation options, regular internet connectivity, and government, banking, educational and healthcare facilities needed for daily living. Added to this were restrictive social norms limiting research participants’ independent mobility outside of the home and in public spaces, whether for personal enjoyment, education, or the pursuit of employment. Jennifer and Farah’s stories respectively detail how parents saw PTS as a vehicle for change in their daughters’ lives. Their responses point to the potential that women-focused TVET programs have to provide a means to improve their livelihoods and communities. The parents expressed a desire that their children’s generation – their daughters – not have to continue to live under their current circumstances of financial hardship.

Program objectives

Socioeconomic change

The larger objective of PTS involved addressing how women’s exclusion from access to paid labor, and therefore full economic participation, prevents national economic progress.¹⁵ Drawing from national and international figures from Pakistan’s bureau of statistics, and UNESCO, World Learning reports that only 25% of young women between the ages of 15 and 24 enter the workforce, over six million girls in the country do not attend school, and 37% are married before they turn 18.¹⁶ The inclusion of such statistics are therefore also meant to highlight how women’s curtailed human development through unequal access to education and employment, and the early burden of unpaid domestic and reproductive responsibilities, contribute to lost national economic potential. According to data collected by the United Nations, in countries where women are a sizable part of the workforce, economic growth is higher and poverty rates are lower.¹⁷ At the same time, women also stand to socially benefit from access to employment: with greater visibility comes gender mainstreaming, leading to the undoing of structures that threaten their physical and psychological safety.¹⁸ Development feminist Naila Kabeer’s understanding of poverty as a gendered experience highlights the importance of understanding social and economic relationships together: “If gender inequality is part and parcel of the processes of poverty and discrimination in a society, it must figure just as integrally in the set of measures to eradicate these conditions.” But she cautions that access and presence in the public domain do not end discrimination “because of the unequal terms by which men and women enter the

¹⁵ PTS internal document. (December 2017). 4th Quarterly Progress Report.

¹⁶ PTS internal document. (September 25, 2017). PDF presentation.

¹⁷ UNWOMEN. Facts and Figure : Economic Empowerment. <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures#notes>

¹⁸ Brohi, Nazish. (May 6, 2018). “Sexual Harassment: Pakistan’s Tipping Point.” *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1405703/sexual-harassment-pakistans-tipping-point>

market.” Bringing women into workspaces does not automatically end gendered inequalities; rather, it is vital, “to transform the institutional norms and practices which gave rise to them.”¹⁹

Gender equality

The second objective of PTS involved helping trainees improve the quality of their lives. This meant opening up possibilities for their participation in public spaces. Here, social mobilizers who ran community awareness campaigns were instrumental: they visited villages and slum dwellings to introduce PTS, and the homes of prospective trainees to speak to families about the value of girls’ education. In these conversations, field staff discovered that families were most concerned about how their daughters would commute to and from training. This was partly a financial and logistical concern due to their limited funds and access to independent transportation. But concerns also centered around social beliefs that young (unmarried) women should not leave the home unaccompanied by male or female family members.²⁰ For this reason PTS organized “pick-and-drop” transportation services in order make it possible for girls to attend classes. Information sessions for parents were held onsite at training centers. During these sessions, the content of training and its value were explained, so that parents could see and understand where their daughters were spending their days. In one-on-one meetings with families, social mobilizers explained how education and work outside were beneficial activities, and did not lead to ‘dishonor.’ As testimonies from trainees show, it was such facilitative and supportive infrastructure that allowed them to access training.

Trying to understand how gender inequality directly impacts women’s access to public space in the country as Ananya Mukherjee puts it, involves “a fair bit of debate as to whether the gender discrimination that we see in Pakistan (and other ‘Muslim’ countries) is caused by ‘cultural’ factors or, other ‘social’ or ‘economic’ factors.”²¹ She argues instead that it is patriarchal norms that inform religious, political, judicial, and educational institutional practices. Drawing from Nighat Said Khan, Mukherjee cites Zia era Islamization laws²² as central to women’s subordination in the country. These laws, Khan argues, worked to enact complete state control over “women’s lives, bodies, work opportunities and workspace, customs, conduct, *and most importantly, women’s morality*” (our emphasis).²³ Tellingly, during fieldwork, we found that the concerns young women expressed around mobility were about the possible loss of their and the family’s respectability and honor in the community.

Conversations about the topic of access to public spaces with the informants of the case studies, and with World Learning and implementing partners’ staff also revealed that the young women felt it was their personal responsibility to maintain such honor. The concerns were less about an actual fear of experiencing gender-based violence, despite the prevalence of such crimes in Pakistan, and more about prospective loss of honor which could bring disrepute to their fathers and families. Research participants significantly conceptualized themselves as daughters – as did their parents – and carried the weight of this responsibility with them: daughters who wanted to help their fathers financially but had to ensure no “shame” befell them or reached their families while out in public learning and earning.

¹⁹ Kabeer, Naila. (2003). “Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and the Millenium Development Goals: Promoting Women’s Capabilities and Participation.” *Gender & Development Discussion Paper Series*. No. 13

²⁰ This understanding of the main challenges at the local level was further informed by a 2014 USAID Merit and Needs Based Scholarship Program study referred to in current program documents, which found that young women completing high school were unaware of career options, and at the same time concerns that transportation and employment would increase proximity to men, prevented them from pursuing employment.

²¹ Mukherjee, Ananya. (2008). *Human Development and Social Power: Perspectives from South Asia*.

²² General Zia ul Haq was a military dictator who ruled Pakistan from 1977-1988 and implemented a series of so-called Islamic laws, particularly those limiting the rights of women.

²³ Mukherjee, Ananya. (2008). *Human Development and Social Power: Perspectives from South Asia*.

Field coordinators were proud of the role PTS played in problem-solving around the issue of trainee attendance using a practical solution of transportation provisions. However, by assuming responsibility as the trainees' caretaker when they were outside their homes, PTS also discursively conceptualized them as daughters. Here, as per World Learning's own context sensitivity and "Do No Harm" principles, outlined in TAAP, it is essential to be aware of the prevailing tensions in areas where development work is being carried out, and to ensure that these are not exacerbated in any way. As shown earlier, and as we will discuss later, this is an approach that PTS was compelled to adopt in order to ensure enrollment and training completion. By institutionalizing the safety of young women through transport provision, however, and without addressing the dominant discourse behind such a protectionist measure, PTS reinforced the centrality of honor as a measure of women's characters. Trainees were therefore only allowed to leave their homes after the establishment of an agreement and facilities guaranteeing the safe care and delivery of their daughters. We argue that more work needs to be done by TVET programming (discussed in details in the conclusion and recommendation section of this paper), both within PTS and the sector in general, with a life-skills training component focusing directly on gender inequality issues and solutions which deconstruct notions of honor and respectability so that young women can understand, in a more fundamentally empowering way, that the value of their life is not tied to their chastity.

Comprehensive TVET programs such as PTS, which in addition to trades training include life-skills instruction, have the potential to strengthen positive social norms and challenge pervasive notions of honor and respectability that prevent and restrict young women from equal access to education, employment, and quality of life. With heavy lobbying from women's rights activists, Pakistan has recently implemented legislative moves to address specific forms of violence against women, including the 2016 anti-honor killing bill. While these are significant moves for women's rights in the country, a number of media reports have shown that honor killings themselves have not decreased since the implementation of these laws. Part of the reason for this can be understood through Mukherjee's explanation of the limits of legislating rights under patriarchal societal norms, quoting Bhasin et. al: "With rare exceptions, any legal changes that have been introduced with respect to women have been changes of degree, not essence."²⁴ The introduction of a law further criminalizing honor killing only addresses a single act and not the entire spectrum of gender violence and discrimination. This reality speaks to the need to transform systems and the social norms that undermine them, which World Learning espouses in its TAAP approach. Singling out crimes against women for legislative reform while leaving structural gender inequality intact, particularly in the name of faith and culture, means women continue to be barred from economic and social mobility. It is within this historical and contemporary context of patriarchy informing social norms that we can attempt to understand the complexity PTS trainees faced trying to further their education.

Women's inclusion in TVET

The need to break down patriarchal social norms is crucial for young women's equal participation in Pakistan's changing economic landscape. As various media reports show, Pakistan's population is young: over 50 percent of the country's 207 million residents are under the age of 24. The country's "youth bubble" is described as a valuable asset, but more often as a major concern, with some analysts calling it a ticking time bomb.²⁵ If Pakistan's nearly 100-million strong young population is not adequately employed, they say it could lead to increasing social inequality, as many will not have a means of finally supporting themselves. On the other hand, if the youth population can be provided with education and employment this will lead to young, vibrant, and savvy labor force. This is a relatively recent conversation that has gained traction in the past decade, capturing the attention of economists and policy analysts. Recent international aid for TVET programming also hopes to leverage

²⁴ Mukherjee, Ananya. (2008). Human Development and Social Power: Perspectives from South Asia.

²⁵ Ali, Saadia & Hafeez, Erum. (June 25, 2017). "The Pakistani Youth Bulge: A Ticking Time Bomb." *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1341111>

the potential of this new demographic for economic growth.²⁶ In this conversation about how to productively leverage the latent economic potential of Pakistan's youth there is next to no discussion about how young women might contribute to national growth and stability, nor the implications of their continued further exclusion from economic participation.

TVET programs are increasingly becoming an important government, development, and social policy initiative in the country. Pakistani recruiters and large companies say that newly graduated youth are not skilled enough to be employed in their chosen fields.²⁷ The poor standard of public sector education, primarily involving rote learning, both at the high school and university level, particularly outside the country's major cities, has been widely covered in the media.^{28,29} The problem is far more pronounced when it comes to women, who already have fewer opportunities for education than men.³⁰ Some of the research participants, for example, were pursuing college degrees from home. They did not physically attend college partly because their families could not afford the transportation costs; partly due to the pressure to become economically productive members of the household, as they did not have to time to attend classes; and partly due to family restrictions on their mobility in public space, as discussed earlier. They instead purchased the required texts and paid fees to take exams. The main reason for pursuing such degrees seemed to be about 'being educated,' and less about employability or future career plans. Providing women with vocational training is therefore seen as a way of preparing them for the job market and filling the void left by an outdated education system.

TVET programs can also teach non-traditional skills and trades that participants may be more keen to learn. In PTS, trainings included graphic design and information technology classes, which trainers felt were extremely well-received by students. In Pakistan, the inclusion of new expertise is particularly timely: non-traditional sectors are also part of Pakistan's emerging market, with areas such as information technology competing with the large established economic sectors. The sector already boasts over 4000 companies, and creates over 10,000 new jobs annually.³¹ Women focused TVET programs such as PTS can therefore prepare Pakistan's young female population to work in such new sectors that are growing and recruiting heavily in a fast-changing economy. Not only can technical training provide learning opportunities for the young working class, including women, but with employable skills they can strive for upward socioeconomic mobility in a way that is closed off to their parent's generation. Wall Street Journal correspondent Saeed Shah discusses the growing small businesses and purchasing power of Pakistan's expanding middle class, highlighting a change in the country where there are more opportunities for upward social mobility and new space for a younger generation's economic participation.³² Trainings can therefore be tailored to meet the requirements of the economy, teaching skills and trades that are valued in the local market. PTS, for example, provided web design, and photography training, preparing women to enter and excel in emerging professional fields.

²⁶ TFP internal document.(September 30, 2016). Request for Proposals.

²⁷ We spoke to a representative from IT trade body P@SHA and a leading Pakistani employment recruiter who both said skill levels in new recruits falls below the requirements of large companies.

²⁸ Sayeed, Saad. (October 27, 2017). "Pakistan's Youthful Population Creates Education Challenges." Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-education/pakistans-youthful-population-creates-education-challenges-idUSKBN1CV294>

²⁹ Jamal, Umair. (October 24, 2016). "Pakistan's Broken Education System." *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/10/pakistans-broken-education-system/>

³⁰ Brohi, Nazish. (May 6, 2018). "Sexual Harassment: Pakistan's Tipping Point." *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1405703/sexual-harassment-pakistans-tipping-point>

³¹ Sayeed, Saad. (March 28, 2018). Pakistan Online Infringement Case Could Help Investment Sentiment. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/pakistan-technology/pakistan-online-infringement-case-could-help-investment-sentiment-idUSL3N1QY4NM>

³² Shah, Saeed. (February 1, 2017). Pakistan's Middle Class Soars as Stability Returns. *Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/pakistans-middle-class-soars-as-stability-returns-1485945001>

Fieldwork

During fieldwork we loosely structured conversations with trainees' families to learn how they expressed support or discomfort around trainees' attempts to increase their educational and employment opportunities. We asked how they felt about their daughter's/sister's enrollment in PTS, what conversations took place at home about training content, how family generally felt about women working outside the home, and how they dealt with judgement from the wider community about their parenting choices. In documenting their stories in this way, we explore the question of what it means to be a young woman in Pakistan from a low-income background attempting to improve her socioeconomic capacity. In order to explore this question ethnographically, relationship building and informed consent were important processes. The idea was for research participant, especially the trainees, to see us as people who valued their stories. First, field coordinators informed trainees they would be meeting with researchers. During initial meetings we also explained that we were particularly interested in learning about how they understood themselves as young women who had suffered setbacks due to patriarchy and poverty. All trainees were hospitable - to a fault - as were their families, welcoming us as guests into their homes, and arranging our visits to their workplaces. In less supportive homes and workplaces, this caused trainees personal difficulty, which for the purposes of research was revealing, and we will demonstrate how this informed our findings. Trainees provided full consent to participating in research although some said no to photographs. We have changed their names due to the personal and sensitive nature of their accounts.

Here we were hoping to get a glimpse of what trainees' family relationships were like, but it should be mentioned that our presence informed their answers. At times, parents were trying to show us what they had learned from PTS, nervous about our presence, and these responses seemed rehearsed. At other times, responses were thoughtful and complex, demonstrating a genuine engagement with ideas about gender equality. Some of our probing questions revealed contradictions that were informative of the struggle participants faced in undoing patriarchal ideas and adopting more progressive practices around women's empowerment. We wondered whether there were tensions among family members about their daughters/sisters learning and working, and how this conversation would unfold if we raised the topic. Observing, documenting, and participating in such conversations contributed to central narratives about the research participants. **Through them, we came to understand that looking at their lives and experiences provided a lens with which to examine poverty, patriarchy, and discrimination in Pakistan.**

The purpose of visiting trainees at their workplaces was to see them in action as young professionals. We wanted to know how workspaces shaped and informed gendered employment experiences. How conducive were they to supporting young women new to the workforce? As Ruwanpura and Hughes show in their study on a factory in Karachi that hired women through a partnership with UNDP, gender stereotypes persisted among management at the workplace despite gender promotion initiatives. Factory managers were willing to hire women because they felt they made more "malleable" employees, showing a slippage in the discourse of empowering women through work.³³ What cultures of discrimination, sexism, and oppression prevailed in offices, making it challenging for women to complete their work and maintain good mental health? What kinds of impressions did these women make on their new colleagues and managers? Here, conversational interviews with management personnel helped with understanding how beliefs around gender and class are in competition with formal commitments to gender diversity and poverty upliftment.

Alongside trainees' personal stories, this research also looks at how the program attempted to provide trainees with learning opportunities they could use toward building socioeconomic capacity. We spoke to field staff including coordinators, trainers, and community mobilizers from World Learning and its

³³ Ruwanpura, Kanchana., and Hughes, Alex. (2016). "Empowered Spaces? Management Articulations of Gendered Spaces in Karachi, Pakistan." *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*. 23:9, 1270-1285

partners. Together, they provided an understanding of what it is like on the program delivery end to enroll, provide, and support young women through training, who have grown up in impoverished, marginalized, and often restrictively patriarchal circumstances. The research team also discovered that such personnel often came from similar cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, having themselves grown up in patriarchal environments restricting their mobility and use of public space. In interviews, they shared how they had chosen vocational training careers due to a desire to, as Daharki trainer Komal put it, “bring a change in society.” We will show how trainers had an acute understanding of the restrictions and limitations trainees faced due to poverty and gender inequality, and drew from their own experience to get to know, teach, and advise trainees. This portion of fieldwork provides social context to the interviews with research participants and can be used to further understand the extent to which trainees desired - and thought themselves capable of pursuing - a different life course and socioeconomic empowerment.

The stories below are of two interwoven kinds: Our stories of meeting with research participants, and their stories of their experiences with PTS. This is a way of hearing and representing the voices of trainees, in order to understand how they learned and applied PTS trainings within the larger narratives of their lives. In an attempt to centralize their perspectives, the fieldwork and analytical approaches in this paper are informed by Chandra Mohanty’s article “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse.” It is important for efforts such as PTS to not fall into the trap of “ethnocentric universalism,” in the way that it understands “beneficiaries,” where third world women are often represented as “ignorant, poor, uneducated tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, [and] victimized,” as well as “powerless, [and] exploited”.³⁴ The stories in this paper show that the research participants are young women who on a day-to-day basis interact with, navigate, negotiate, and push back against various structures of oppression, from patriarchy to poverty and the institutionalized forms of discrimination these entail.

Trainee Stories

Learning new skills

PTS provided new educational opportunities for young women in underserved communities, and for some, this was the first time they had received such an opportunity. Trainees spoke to the research team about how taking classes had helped them come to value themselves as people who were not only deserving of learning, but capable of it. Initially, some had never heard of the vocational fields in which they were about to begin training, but were interested and excited nonetheless. Some trainees, such as Amna and Farah, described how they heard about free-of-cost educational opportunities being offered to young women in their neighborhood. It was Farah’s father who first heard about PTS in their neighborhood at a community event, told his daughter, and then went to enquire about more information so he could sign her up. Similarly, another trainee said, “As soon as I heard about [PTS], I went straight from college and signed up our [her and her sister’s] names.” When asked if they thought any improvements were needed, many trainees wished the program had been longer. It was through statements like this that trainees expressed their appreciation for such educational opportunities that are few and far between, and a hunger for learning. We begin here with three short narratives about the ways in which learning new skills stimulated an interest in learning itself. Following this section, we move to longer narratives detailing how individual research participants used trainings to problem solve employment difficulties, work toward long term goals, and navigate gendered social norms.

³⁴ Mohanty, Chandra T. (2003). *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*.

Shazia offered to show us the portfolio of graphic design work she had completed, describing each technical skill she had learned. We could tell she was proud of her work and eager for the opportunity to show us some of her accomplishments. Before the course Shazia said she hadn't even know what graphics were. Upon learning about the field, she said she was just "too excited." What had drawn her to it? It was an "attraction vali cheez [attractive thing]," she said laughing, aware of the childish honesty of her response. But it is important to take such a response seriously, as the first spark of interest in learning something new that could later become an artistic skill, creative passion, hobby, or career. In our initial meeting, Shazia said she wanted to become a human rights lawyer because she wanted to be in a profession that involved helping others. Similarly, this ambition had started off with an imaginative idea that led her to find out more. **When we asked Shazia how she first became interested in becoming a lawyer, laughing again, she said, "I saw [female] lawyers on TV -- in a Bollywood movie, I think, Govinda might have been in it. I liked their outfits!"** Her father, who she described as affectionately supportive, also found her somewhat fickle, jumping from one career idea to the next, but Shazia she said she was interested in and wants to learn about everything.

The discovery of a thing's existence in the world, such as graphic design for Shazia, was similarly eye-opening for Saira, who took a web design course. "I didn't even know how to turn a computer on before this. I was so far away from this world of the internet," she said, describing her start in the course. "My father is one of those types who doesn't believe in educating girls ... he even says boys shouldn't study," Saira explained during our first meeting. "But I see myself as different, as someone who can do the things no one believes I can. And I want to learn." Again, referring to the world, she said "hame patta bhi nahi tha, ke ham duniya me hai bhi ya nahi [we didn't even know if we are in the world or not]. Now we know the world is big, and that we can do so much in it."

"Hamein patta bhi nahi tha, ke hum duniya main hain bhi ya nahi [we didn't even know if we are in the world or not]. Now we know the world is big, and that we can do so much in it."

During her internship at the technical training college Saira went on to assist with the redesign of its website, including collecting data for course descriptions and uploading content.³⁵ She was equally surprised, yet determined in her ability to learn, as prior to training, she had never used a computer. "It was very difficult at first, but it was a dream to learn something new." Elaborating on how she came to see herself this way, despite limited and fraught support from her family, "Before, I thought about doing things but I wasn't able to. I would see things I wanted [in life], but wouldn't go after them." For both Shazia and Saira, access to learning meant access to a world of ideas. Neelum, who took a photography class in Peshawar, said she'd already completed about ten shoots since the end of training. A lot of her work came from teachers, she explained, who were looking for female photographers to cover weddings. Neelum said she drew her motivation from her teachers in the PTS program. Inspired by them, she realized that if she has a skill she should utilize it. Like a teenager, she also added that working with a camera is "cool." From feeling like an activity is "cool" can come a genuine interest in technique, technology, and editing, as one first visualizes being a skilled professional. **Here we can see the impact trainings can have on young women, allowing them to visualize what work looks and feels like, and seeing themselves in those roles.** Neelum thinking herself as cool, or Shazia wanting to emulate the dress and behavior of women lawyers are important, if nascent, ways of visualizing and furnishing dreams now and in the future.

Some trainees also expressed an interest in lengthier programming, saying they would have benefited from more knowledge in their chosen fields. When talking about how her stitching business was doing, Amna in Peshawar explained modestly that she knows simple and straightforward patterns but customers ask for specific designs that she doesn't have experience making. Unfortunately, she noted, that means those customers who want particular designs leave, "and that opportunity slips from my

³⁵ TFP internal document. (December 2017). 4th Quarterly Progress Report.

grasp.” She said that if there were more training available, she would take it and learn more to keep up with customers’ demands. It’s not a matter of difficulty learning new skills, she clarified, it is that she needs the opportunity to learn additional patterns.

The trainers all spoke about how surprised they were by how well the young women had performed, including their ability to learn quickly and apply the information they had received to assignments and projects. Neelum’s photography instructor, Saleem Afridi, said early on in his interview that “there were women in the class who had never held a camera -- especially a DSLR.” But later on he became enthusiastic about teaching because “there were at least seven to eight women who showed a lot of potential. They showed much better results than I expected.” In this way, trainers spoke of young women’s learning potential, first pointing out that trainees had no experience when they joined the program, whether it was how to use a camera, or a computer, or, as one cooking instructor in Peshawar said, how to perform basic tasks in the kitchen. But about halfway through the program, the trainers noticed that their students had picked up the required skills at a rapid rate and were also able to carry out projects independently, approaching learning with a great deal of excitement.

For committed trainers, teaching young women from underserved areas was also an interactive process. Peshawar trainer Sohail Khan Bangash talked about some of his first experiences working with underprivileged women. “I was doing enterprise development with totally illiterate women in Charsadda,” he said, recalling events from 2001. “I called a mentor of mine ... and I said ‘Madam, what do I do? They don’t understand marketing,’ and she responded by asking ‘Bangash, do they not understand or do you not understand?’” Bangash said he spent the entire night mulling over this question. In the morning he called her back to admit that he was the one who did not understand. “There are a lot of definitions in books I’ve read but I actually learned marketing from illiterate [people].” Bangash explained that despite having a theoretical knowledge of marketing, he was unable to explain it to poor women using examples from their social experiences. Working with these women, he learned how to apply the knowledge he had to their real-world settings. In this way, finding that PTS students were capable of exceeding expectations was a common theme during trainer interviews.

Self-advocating for fair treatment at work

The job market for young people from working class backgrounds in Pakistan is not easy to access or navigate. Without proficient English language skills, personal computers, or exclusive smartphones, people from this socioeconomic background do not have regular access to, nor can they comfortably use, job search sites such as Rozee.pk, or LinkedIn.pk to learn about employment openings. Despite possessing a high school or intermediary college education, underprivileged youth who are new to the workforce are structurally cut off from landing entry-level professional work opportunities that would allow them career development. A number of participants wished that life-skills training had included English language classes, showing how they understood that many kinds of jobs and professional growth were beyond their grasp. Mostly, they had heard of jobs through their own networks such as family, friends, or they had inquired in person at nearby offices and factories for available work. **For women, these social networks can be even smaller, as their friends may be married homemakers and unaware of paid labor options, as their lives are organized to meet different objectives.** At the same time, research participants explained that being **vocal about looking for work begins with a negotiation process that starts at home, where they must first seek permission from their parents, and convince them to be allowed to work.** Additionally, many workspaces are male-dominated and seen as unsuitable by the family and community for a young, unmarried woman, again narrowing her employment options.

Aware of their lack of access to social capital, PTS programming included paid internship placements, which they could use to apply skills learned during training, as well as start to develop a professional network. Upon completion of vocational training, Jennifer independently found a job as a third-grade

teacher at a low-cost private school in Korangi, close to her home. Later she became an administrative assistant, a lateral move that she was able to secure due to information technology training and a subsequent internship placement at the same organization. The story of how Jennifer acquired this new role, however, was not straightforward. We learned that her employer tried to fire her when one of her trainers approached the school and suggested her position as a teacher be folded into PTS's internship program. Her story hinted at the kind of unfairness a young person might face trying to find a supportive work environment for career growth.

The truth, Jennifer admitted, was that she didn't really like teaching and working with little kids. "Bohot tang kartay hain [they bother me a lot]," she said frankly, and laughed, as she explained that she much preferred her administrative role. In her teaching role, Jennifer had taught all the required third grade subjects in her class except Islamiyat, as she did not read Arabic. For a moment, we did not follow. "Ma'am, mai Christian hoon [I am Christian]." When we visited her home, it was evident we were in a Christian neighborhood, as entrances to homes were adorned with brightly painted crosses and rosary beads. We tried to get Jennifer and her mother to open up about what difficulties they faced as part of a minority community, but Jennifer was silent, and her mother evaded the question with "what problems? We have to make our food, we have to earn, we have to pay the rent ... even if there isn't enough money we have to pay." Most important to Jennifer and her family was that she secure a good job, "achi job milay [a good job]." Her father was suffering from hepatitis but working cleaning electronics at a clinic, and her mother did stitching work from home. They wanted Jennifer to work to be able to help support the family.

According to Jennifer, the school refused to convert her teaching role into an internship, but then took an unexpected additional step and sent her home for few days. When she inquired with her direct supervisor about when to return, she was told there was no work for her. Instead of supporting a new and young employee, with the backing of an NGO that would provide funding for her internship, the school instead reacted negatively, providing with no explanation. Jennifer had specifically picked the internship option over the entrepreneurial training because she wanted an on-the-job learning opportunity and to secure an internship certificate in order to seek further employment. Unsure of what had happened, or what to do, Jennifer phoned her trainer, and he explained that the school seemed to have responded in this manner due to the internship suggestion. "I wanted to help her out because she belongs to a minority group." Jennifer's trainer phoned the school, requesting that her employment there continue, and they acquiesced. The school claimed that the reason she was fired was because of behavioral issues.

Discrimination is a legitimate concern for Christians living in Pakistan. If they are educated and speak English they are often hired for secretarial roles, but if uneducated, employment options are limited to sanitation work. Asif Aqeel argues that the Pakistani state has pushed Christians into urban sanitation work. He writes that on more than one occasion, government departments in Pakistan have advertised sanitation jobs as only for minorities. On the basis of historic caste untouchability, Christians are predominantly seen as only qualified for sanitation work, and this means when they apply for other kinds of work they are actively discriminated against by employers.³⁶ "In vocational terms, for Pakistanis, being a Christian means being a janitor, a brick-maker, or working in sewage. They are constantly denied jobs, not based on their merit, but based on their religion."³⁷

While trying to find our way into Jennifer's school, we caught the director scolding her. He seemed to be disgruntled that we were late (there had been a transportation mix-up on our end), and blamed Jennifer for miscommunicating our arrival time. His behavior transformed immediately upon spotting

³⁶ Aqeel, Asif. (October 23, 2015). "Christians Required only as Sweepers." *The Friday Times*.
<http://www.thefridaytimes.com/tft/christians-required-only-as-sweepers/>

³⁷ Mackay, Maria. (November 22, 2006). "Employment Discrimination Against Christians Remains Chronic in Pakistan." *Christian Today*.
<https://www.christiantoday.com/article/employment.discrimination.against.christians.remains.chronic.in.pakistan/8433.htm>

us, as he switched to English to enquire about who we were. He invited us into his office; Jennifer did not follow, remaining outside in the adjacent office area. The director wanted to know if we were part of a monitoring and evaluation unit. We tried to explain that we wanted to only observe Jennifer working, and could return another day for this activity and to speak with him. He agreed, but did not keep his appointment.

Jennifer had insisted that we were welcome to visit her at work, and that her relationship with her supervisor was now repaired. But, our second visit strongly suggested she was subjected to bullying in her work environment. While she described her responsibilities in detail, including reception, administrative, and classroom supervisory work, she seemed unsure how to host us and conduct herself under the watchful eye of her supervisor, who had played a strong role in Jennifer's temporary removal. First we sat for a while and chatted. During this time, Jennifer asked more about our work, what it actually was, and why we were doing it. We asked her to show us around the school, but to do so she needed permission. Her supervisor reluctantly agreed, and secretively whispered some directions in Jennifer's ear. We weren't sure what was going on, but it seemed that she asked Jennifer to watch over her area while she showed us around. We suggested Jennifer come along for the tour too, but this was ignored.

While walking around three floors of cramped classrooms of students of different ages, the supervisor took this opportunity to complain. "While she's a good employee, she speaks like a child - too noisily - and as one might when they are speaking privately or informally." The supervisor said there were complaints from parents that Jennifer spoke inappropriately, and for this reason they moved her to the "back room." Speaking about herself and her own role in the school, the supervisor said she'd had over eight years of teaching experience and had now moved on to this position of overseeing. When we asked how the school supports its women employees, she explained that they provided breaks, and were not strict about chit-chat as long as it did not interfere in work. When I asked her to tell me more about interns at the school (we had assumed there were more), tight-lipped, she said "this has never happened before," repeating this statement at our attempts to extract more details. During these interactions we realized that Jennifer's story can be seen as an example of how a young person might need to navigate office politics, and advocate for herself, in order to maintain employment in an incomprehensibly hostile, and possibly prejudicial environment.

The first time Jennifer was sent home she had asked her supervisor for an explanation, and upon not receiving an adequate one, appealed to her trainer. This move can be seen as an example of standing up for oneself in an adverse work situation. While she was both sad and confused about what had happened, she wasn't willing to accept the turn of events. When Jennifer started to understand what was going on, she was distressed and turned to her mother for comfort. "She was crying on my shoulder, and I too began crying," her mother now said, laughing, since the worst had passed. "I had done nothing wrong, to bewaja, inhon ne mujhe kyun nikala? [why did they fire me without reason?]." Jennifer was firm in her belief that it was through no fault of hers that she was removed from her workplace. **Upon her return to work, Jennifer said she directly asked her supervisor why she was fired but still couldn't get a straight response. So she asked one of her colleagues, also a friend, and learned that her supervisor had been gossiping about her with her staff, saying she had fired Jennifer because she didn't like the way she wore her hair.**

"We wanted to teach [students] to love themselves," Nasreen, a trainer from Karachi said.

Jennifer was committed to keeping her job, a learning opportunity she believed would help her in the future. When confronted with the threat of being fired she decided to advocate for herself while using her new professional network, appealing to one of her trainers for guidance. In this way, she applied two of the important lessons from her trainings: self-belief and speaking up. Sindh and KP trainers taught trainees to speak up by encouraging in-class participation and telling them to be more vocal at home. "We wanted to teach [students] to love themselves," Nasreen, a trainer from Karachi said, pointing out that being vocal and confident were key components of self-belief. Trainers looked at

improved in-class participation and the ability to speak in front of others as signs of growing confidence. “These girls needed to be allowed to speak; they usually are not,” Nasreen said. “I counseled students to heed people’s advice and make decisions on their own, to listen to feedback but also to chuck it if they wanted.” Nasreen was speaking not only about classroom participation: she stressed the importance of being vocal in a social manner, and knowing how to handle advice from family members and colleagues. For Nasreen, these were skills trainees would take with them to workplaces and to their homes once they had completed courses. She wanted students to use these skills to advocate for themselves and deal with the problems life threw at them. “I taught them about harassment in the office, factory, and how to deal with this,” Nasreen said. Komal, a trainer from Daharki, shared a similar account. “Just to protect honor they are meant to stay quiet, and not speak if a man is around, and also to look down, not look up. So this is why they are quiet.” She explained to the trainees that by advocating for themselves at home and amongst immediate family, the girls could develop the confidence to speak in public. Here, Komal drew their attention to some of the ways that girls were being taught, and therefore learning feminized forms of docility, detrimental to their participation in both professional and private spheres. She explained to the trainees that “if you stay quiet then no one will know what is happening and they will think everything is normal.” Komal observed in the span of three months that the same girls who did not talk at first or even respond to questions, were able to present in front of the class and participate comfortably in front of others. She asked students to practice speaking up at home, as a way to develop the confidence to be vocal in professional settings, a first step in advocating for oneself.

“Just to protect their honor, [women] are meant to stay quiet and not speak if a man is around, and also to look down, not look up.”

Devising a business plan

When we met in early March, Sanobar and her elder brother had been working at the Masco industrial plant³⁸ near their home in Ibrahim Hyderi. For about four weeks they had been assembling motorbike spare parts. They were currently on unpaid leave due to a stock shortage. Weeks later, Sanobar had returned to work, she wrote over text message. When asked how she felt about this, “kam pe wapas jana chahti ho [are you in the mood to return to work]?” she responded with “mujhe kashti leni hai...kam to karna hoga [I want to buy a boat, so I have to work].” Sanobar is from a family of fishermen, both catchers and sellers. Earlier, looking out on to the jetty from her rooftop of the house her grandfather built, she recounted a more prosperous time when some members of the family even owned boats. Her father had been a small middleman, selling fish to bigger buyers, until about 5 years ago when he lost his business. Sanobar was only fifteen and her father couldn’t afford to keep sending her to school. Today, Sanobar is determined to complete school, earn the funds to buy a small fishing boat, and revive her father’s family business.

³⁸ The Masco conglomerate operates factories in over 20 countries. In Pakistan it has multiple facilities in the Korangi Industrial Area, near Ibrahim Hyderi, where the company makes energy solutions products such as solar panels and generators, automotive and machinery spare parts, as well as garment manufacturing.



The girls in Karachi trainer Sabah Khan's entrepreneurial class often wanted to start a business based on the skills they had learned so she stressed the importance of mapping out how to develop ideas into working business models. "It requires a lot of planning," she said, adding that "the bigger the project the more time you need to give to planning." Khan asked the girls to devise these plans by working in groups and splitting up tasks amongst themselves, so each aspect of the business is taken care of before it is launched. "Every group member had to take on a responsibility and explain how they will fulfil that responsibility. And then towards the last session, they [would] pitch their business plans to us," she continued. The complete process involved brainstorming marketing and advertising techniques, coming up with a name and logo for the business, calculating a budget for the launch and operations, and other such planning tasks. In this way, business training involved teaching students how to transform and expand upon vocational skills into entrepreneurial opportunities. Following business training, and equipped with new knowledge about how to store, marinate, and prepare fish dishes, a materials toolkit, and stipend to invest, Sanobar like other middlemen, took a majority of her funds and gave these to a fisherman, who would use this money for boat upkeep, including various items such as fuel, ice, and net purchasing and repair. In this way, she would finance the fisherman's vessel, the agreement being that her earnings from sales would be split with him fifty-fifty. While such trainings provided students with an understanding of start-up basics, Sanobar's story illuminates the reality of what it means to start a small business with few resources in a market with little room for competition.

The details about how Sanobar's father's business failed were vague, and her voice dropped when she

"Main kehti thi, shayad aaj khwab dekhungi aur poore nahi kar paungi to mere khwab zyada taklif denge [I used to say to myself my dreams may not come true, so it's better not to dream, because this would cause me more pain]."

told me his partner asked for his portion of the investment back when he learned the business was going under. Her father returned it, she said, because he is honest, but the business partner, she added bitterly, "is the kind of person who's with you when things are going well, and out when they're not." Today her father is a freelance photographer, a skill he taught himself, and works with local NGOs. But the work is not steady, Sanobar explained, so the household income remained irregular. During the previous five year, she tried attending government school, but hated it and left. She said there were no clean bathrooms, no fresh drinking water, and the teachers didn't show up until 10 a.m. in the morning, so there was no point in attending. "I spent five years sitting at home," Sanobar emphasized. "Then I went to

a meeting held by [PTS], and there we were asked about what our plans for our futures were. Before this [meeting] I didn't think anything was possible for me. [I thought] this is my situation, and this is how it's going to stay. I didn't think about what I wanted to do or become. Main kehti thi, shayad aaj khwab dekhungi aur poore nahi kar paungi to mere khwab zyada taklif denge [I used to say myself my dreams may not come true, so it's better not to dream, because this would cause me more pain].”

When she and her siblings were running the business, her brother would deliver the fish at home, her sister would prepare it, and Sanober would deliver meals to clients. She told us that Sanober's sister once made thirty-four orders of biryani and Sanober distributed them. Her clients were in the neighborhood community as well as at Engro. Sanober's mother sent us shrimp kebabs that she hurriedly made fresh, and then sat with us while we ate them. We asked what ingredients were in the kebabs assuming eggs and flour were used to bind them. Sanober's mother, horrified at our suggestions, described the simplicity of the recipe: only fresh shrimp, onions, and tamarind. At this point Sanober cut in and told us that as fisherfolk they know the difference between fresh seafood and frozen, that others with an unaccustomed palate would fail to detect. Unfortunately, this business arrangement only brought in about 300 to 400 rupees a day, the sea's conditions being unpredictable. Highlighting how challenging it is to generate an income from fishing, Abbas Mal, a well-known and respected fisherman in Ibrahim Hyderi said in an interview with Dawn that “a fisherman cannot even afford a 24-hour break from his only source of livelihood.”³⁹ **After a year, Sanober's initial funding ran out with no return on the investment to further sustain and grow the business. Fed-up with the middleman's lack of control in the fishing business, Sanober wants to buy her own small boat: “I'm going to get a boat. It costs a lot, but I'm going to get one.”**

Sanober's brother told us the docks are bustling with activity in the early evening when the fishermen return with their catch. Later in the day, middlemen supplying to large seafood processing factories that export the highest quality goods and sell to local hotel chains, haggle with fishermen who have just berthed their boats to get the best price. Other middlemen buy the fish here and haul it to the larger market at Karachi Port to sell. Local fishmongers, such as Sanober's brother, also come to the jetty to purchase seafood directly from the fisherfolk. For small middlemen fish sellers, “it is a very difficult business and there are a lot of risks,” said Muhammad Ali Shah, who heads the local fishermen union.⁴⁰ Sanober's brother also explained that changing water levels and visibility affect the ability to fish effectively. From environmental to market factors, the fishing business remains unpredictable for small boat and business owners. Established middlemen, however, own the larger boats and employ a number of fishermen to bring in seafood exclusively for themselves. The highest profits go to those with big wholesale clients. Then there are smaller buyers such as local Karachi seafood stores, or middlemen who sell fish at the city's large outdoor markets. With a high level of competition and established supply networks in place for many powerful buyers, new investors have to find their niche if they are to survive. Describing the usual grind, Sanober and her brother, small middlemen, said one has to work the fisherman to get the best rate – a daily ritual of haggling.

³⁹ Khan, Saman Ghani. (July 11, 2013). “No Profit in the Catch.” *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1028271>

⁴⁰ Interview with Muhammad Ali Shah



According to Sanober a small boat costs around one lakh rupees (\$870). At Masco, Sanober earns Rs. 10,000, approximately 87 USD per month. With her brother also working there, this seems like an achievable goal, but we were suspicious of the labor conditions in one of Karachi's major industrial zones. Masco was the site of an arson case following former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir's Bhutto's assassination in 2007, that brought down one of the company's garment factories and killed seven people. Indeed, as we were entering the factory compound, this was the story that Sanober's brother told us. He had to phone his supervisor for us to gain entry to the compound, and we were worried that Sanober may be reprimanded for bringing uninvited guests to her workplace. At our first meeting, when we asked Sanober what her work entailed, she described making small parts and packing, adding that "the work is difficult; it takes a lot of effort. There's a target you have to fill, and if you're short a piece they cut your pay, and you could be fired. They don't want workers like that. They want work done quickly. I manage though." The hours were long as well, 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m, five days of the week.

Onsite at the factory, Sanober's narrative changed. As we entered, an East Asian man got up from his chair inside an oblong glass cubicle to see who had arrived.⁴¹ Incurious, he sat back down. Yet Sanober seemed apprehensive about having us there, lowering her voice, and walking close to us, as we asked her to explain the factory layout. At the same time, she seemed happy and excited to show us her workstation and how the parts she makes are assembled. We waited until after we left to ask Sanober and her brother about their work experience and shared some of our understanding that managerial staff in factories were often deeply unjust in their treatment of laborers. This time, Sanober said that at this factory it was different, and that was why they wanted to work there, that her employer had explained that workers should think of their bosses and colleagues as family. She told us a story of a colleague who made a mistake while assembling a part and threw it in the trash bin. "I don't do that," she said, stressing her belief in an honest work ethic. Unlike her colleague, she said she went to her boss and showed him her error. He then sent someone to show her how to do the work correctly.

⁴¹ Sanober and her brother described the branch of the company they worked in as Chinese run, told us about one of their Pakistani colleagues whose responsibility it was to translate the Chinese language instructions of their bosses into Sindhi for all of the factory laborers.

“I’m new, so mistakes are bound to happen, but you should not lie.” When her colleague was found out, he was informed that there are cameras stationed across the factory floor.

Despite these working conditions, including irregular pay, regular surveillance, and no job security, Sanobar was determined to stick it out at the factory and make her dream of buying a boat come true. She did not want to continue her education past high school, because she felt that it is sufficient for what she wants to do with her life. Her focus for now and the long term was to revive her family fish sales business, with complete control, running it from back to front end. Sanobar tried to implement a number of these ideas learned in entrepreneurial training in her business model, and while her first attempt fizzled out, she has now gone back to the drawing board to develop and finance a new plan.

The role of social mobilizers

For Aisha, the main challenge she faced joining PTS came from her family, where her brother and father believed what the community thought of her *izzat*, her honor, was more important than her access to education. In all three locations, trainers said the main barrier for trainees began at home where girls should have a safe space in which to grow up. Often they did not, as Saira’s story of her father’s beliefs that boys and girls needn’t be educated attests, as does Amna’s story of growing up with the constant fear of domestic physical and emotional violence. Though deliberately uninvolved with their upbringing, their fathers reacted impulsively, attempting to control their daughter’s efforts to improve their lives by enrolling in PTS. **In Daharki trainer Shahzad Nazeer’s view, this restrictive environment was the main impediment for students in his classes. Their families were not supportive when it came to women continuing their education or learning new skills but, Nazeer said, “So many of them wanted to continue their education and move forward with their lives.”** While it was the trainees who attended classes, without the efforts of community mobilizers, he said, girls would not have been allowed to attend the trainings. “They were the ones who went into the field and convinced the families to allow their daughters to attend,” he said. “This was the first time many of the girls were allowed to leave their village.” Trainers and social mobilizers attempted to disseminate liberating ideas among trainees and into the community about valuing girls’ education and their right to work, to challenge longstanding, restrictive notions of honor and respectability. Below is Aisha’s story, outlining how the ideas that came through PTS’ infrastructure benefited her, inspiring her to create a home business, and in turn how she attempted to share these in her social circle.

We met with Aisha and the other field study participants, Farah, and Saira at the Technical Training College in Daharki, where they completed their training. Her mother had not been keen on Aisha getting an education nor joining PTS. Instead, she wanted to secure a good marriage for her daughter. The family had found her several suitors, but Aisha had not been willing to agree to any of them. In one case, though, it was the boy’s family that said no to the *Rishta*. This was because Aisha was educated; she had completed high school. They specifically wanted a girl who was less educated than their son. Sick with fear that a marriage like this would come to define her life, Aisha said she had wanted to kill herself, and had even tried to do so.

Rukhsana, one of the social mobilizers, accompanied us to Aisha’s house to show us the way, and we asked her to remain for a while. Aisha lived with her family on a farm in the village of Umar Daho. Rukhsana listened quietly and without expression as Aisha recounted how she came to be enrolled in PTS. In Daharki, Aisha, Farah, and Saira all spoke gratefully and fondly of their assigned social mobilizers, saying that without them they wouldn’t have been able to participate in the training. Saira’s social mobilizer and mother together had to convince her father to allow her in the program, and while he tolerated it, “*voh abhi bhi razi nahi hain* [he still has not agreed],” she said as though she expected no more of him. We anticipated more rapport between Rukhsana, Aisha and her family, but didn’t see it, and wondered why. Later, we learned that trainers and social mobilizers in the area often navigate similar gendered barriers to mobility as the trainees. We wondered if it was difficult for

Rukhsana to be present for field visits at our behest, outside of the formal requirements of the program. In 2013 a social mobilizer working with widows in the Ghotki region was abducted and killed (Memon, Sarfaraz, Tribune, 2013).

Tasked with re-educating communities about restrictive social norms, women social mobilizers themselves run the risk of gender-based violence. “NGO employees, working in crucial fields like education, health and women’s rights, are frequently denounced as ‘Western’ agents [but]... the greatest threat is to local workers who are usually not provided even a fraction of the security given to foreigners”.⁴² As we drove along a bumpy path between farm fields on the way to Aisha’s home, Rukhsana described some of the work she does that can be seen as controversial and un-Islamic by villagers. **She works with teenagers, giving sessions on puberty, reproductive health, and sexual harassment, but said it is difficult to discuss such “sensitive” topics in a society where “char diwaari [four walls] and religiosity” deeply inform social norms and practices. Her own experience as a social mobilizer allowed her to see “itni duniya hai [how much of the world there is],” she says, pointing to the fields extending endlessly into far away villages.**

Aisha’s mother wanted to know where she was going the first time she went to a neighbor’s place to learn about PTS: “Kyun ja rahe ho? [Why are you going?]”

“Koi larki aii hai, hamari friend hai, ham us say milne ja rahe hain. [A girl has come, she is our friend, we are going to meet her].”

Those who come from outside go first to this home in the community, Aisha explained. The mother of the girl who lives there put the word out to young women in the village to come and meet Rukhsana. Referring to Rukhsana as a friend, even though she hadn’t met her as yet, was Aisha’s coded way of informing her mother that she would be in a permissible and respectable space with others of the same gender. It also showed how cautious she had to be about explaining her whereabouts, having to secure permission by convincing instead of asking, even when moving within the limits of neighborhood boundaries.

Behind the mudbrick kitchen a pregnant cow was tied, separated from the other cows and water buffalo, placidly feeding and lazing in the entrance of the courtyard to Aisha’s home. At the other end, a few trees shaded a charpoy, beyond which there was a big, bright green gate, leading out to a quiet street. Aisha led us to the verandah and into the bedroom-cum-sitting room. This was where she could invite us ‘in,’ but it was darkly lit and too hot, not suitable for conducting interviews. We asked if we could sit outside instead, as the family does. As we went back outside, Aisha, wearing the same grey and pink outfit from the previous day, though this time covered in dust from farm and housework, squatted to lift a charpoy onto her shoulders and back, hauling it over, so all of us, including her father, Rukhsana, sister, and brother, could sit together comfortably. Her mother did not join us, staying in the kitchen area. Aisha told us she is very shy, but the farm animals are hers, and that she’s most happy spending her time tending to them.

⁴² Editorial. (January 2, 2013). “Killing of NGO Workers.” *Express Tribune*.
<https://tribune.com.pk/story/488061/killing-of-ngo-workers/>



After hearing about PTS, the girls in the community decided to speak with their parents and tell them about the course offerings, as they had not attended the meeting. Aisha said her mother expressed reluctance: “‘You’ve just finished school, why...how would you get involved with this now?’” Aisha then told us: “‘All the girls’ parents said no.’” Then Rukhsana came to meet her father. She met with all the girls’ fathers, and then met Aisha’s father again four or five times. Recounting how Rukhsana also changed her mother’s mind, she described her words: “‘we’ll teach your girls ... your home will become better, your neighborhood will become better. What’s the point of all these girls being educated but continuing to live in a state of illiteracy?’” Hearing this, “‘Hamara aur bhe ziyada shauk ho giya [after this our interest in joining really took hold],” said Aisha.

“The word [of PTS] spread among the girls,” said Rukhsana. When she spoke to Aisha’s father she was persistent, “‘I’m also someone’s daughter and I’m from the local area, and this course provides pick-and-drop...and shukar hai that after this... ” her voice trailed off. Aisha, translating for her father who only spoke Sindhi, explained his reaction to Rukhsana’s words. Over here, fathers have a lot of respect for *niyani*, she said, using the Sindhi word for daughters. So when Rukhsana described herself “‘as someone’s daughter, I’m not married, and if I’m someone who goes out, someone who’s this comfortable...” he listened. She said “‘then I’ll take responsibility for your daughter ... nothing will happen to your daughter ... and it’s not just me, there’s an entire team.”

“Let me tell you my story,” Rukhsana had said in the car. “‘I’m from a poor home. My brother is younger than me. My abbu was earning, then he got sick, but he wanted to put me through university, and I got in, but hamari bad-kismati [our bad luck], he became bedridden ... so I had to get a job.” Rukhsana said she taught for two years and then applied for social mobilizing work and learned how to do it on the job, and later even managed to earn her B.A. “‘While I’m from a poor home, we have the resources to visit a doctor when we’re ill, even if that might mean skipping a meal, and there is proper drainage and sewage system where we live.” But the people she helps through her work have next to nothing, she said.

“There was so much illiteracy here, we didn’t let our daughters out,” Aisha’s father lamented. “When Rukhsana came and told us all these great things [about PTS], and took us there [to TTC], we saw the environment, the classes, and the teaching, and that’s when we realized this is really what life is about. There’s no life here, what is this life here (in the village)?” He continued: “‘Before, we believed that a girl’s place is at home and their work is

to prepare roti, work the farm, and feed the cows. When I saw TTC, I realized there isn't just one doorway for girls [to the home], that that doorway [education] is also right for girls.

At first he thought the trainings were “ghalat kam, bohot ghalat kam [wrong, terribly wrong],” following the customs, the *rivaj*, of the community, but “now we know they are very useful.” Aisha, elaborating, said her father used to think that the *waderas*, powerful landlords, looked at girls with bad intentions, and for that reason, they should be kept at home. Even if he didn't actually feel this way, this is how he had to respond, because “these are our daughters, because our family's honor, and our daughter's honor is also dear to us and we were afraid about what could happen.” While Aisha's father placed blame with the customs of the community for influencing the way he once thought, he also defended the community, emphasizing that it had changed, and “used to be like this, but not anymore,” specifically asking her to make this point clear to us.

Aisha's brother also presented a similar before-and-after narrative of PTS' role in the family's life. “Baitareen [it's just the best],” her brother of her enrollment in PTS, though at first, he admitted they hadn't seen it as positive. He noticed that she was able to get out of the house, walk about independently, and that she learned how to speak to others. “Pehlay aisa mumkin nahi tha. [It wasn't possible before],” he says, for the community, or even for him to think along these lines. When we asked what changed his mind, he said it was through her sharing what she'd learned when she came home, about what the program had taught, “bohot sa lecture humein bhi mil raha tha [we were getting a lot of lectures],” he said jokingly and affectionately. Aisha said they would ask what she did there, and the entire night would go in discussion. Her brother added that before the trainings, they'd never even thought about girls leaving the home, going to the city, learning marketing, or speaking to others: “Our society was against it. But now we've learned that yeh insaniyat ka aik hissa hai [this is a part of humanity].” He explained that before this, life was just about farm work, filling their bellies, minding livestock, but now they've learned there's more to life than this for human beings.

Honor played a central role in the family's reasoning for attempting to confine Aisha to the home, and prevent her from joining PTS. Moreover the burden of protecting honor was placed squarely on Aisha. Later on, when we asked her brother about what fears there were about Aisha going out of the home, he explained that it was about others' perceptions. They would say “look, his sister is going, she will go and speak to people outside and her mind will be spoiled...before in our society a wife or a sister did not have this right,” he said, adding that “now it has become clear that this is their right.” When we asked her, Aisha too subscribed to these ideas. “We wanted to prevent people from seeing our elders in a bad light because their women work.” Women staying at home was the easiest way to safeguard the family's honor. When probed more, she added that her father was honest and straightforward and therefore many people in the village did not like him, increasing the possibility that they may target the reputation of his daughter to bring dishonor to the family. While the issue was about familial honor, or her father's reputation, the responsibility always appeared to come back to Aisha. The entire family including Aisha indicated that the issue was the mindset in their community, which believed women who left the home were immoral, and they were bound by these beliefs, but were not responsible for them.

Despite the burden of honor remaining intact, for Aisha the change following PTS was palpable, and marked by now owning a cell phone, previously an impossibility, and being able to talk and visit with friends. For Aisha, valuing her own right to education stemmed from Rukhsana, which she then shared with other young women in her neighborhood and the younger generation of school-going children. “Before they wouldn't even let us go out, but now we can ... if we want anything, we can ask for and get it. Before, it was unthinkable that a girl would have a mobile phone. Now all the girls have one, and they can contact each other... before we'd just be married off; now all the girls here are studying and teaching.” **Aisha has developed a community of friends, following PTS, including young women in the village who help her to run her tuition center.** As the afternoon progressed little kids started to show up, first in ones and twos, and then small groups. Several young women from the village also arrived. Aisha had set up the second and smaller of two rooms in her house as a classroom. Mats and brightly painted sheets covered the cement floor, where the kids assembled.

Decorating the walls were arts and crafts that Aisha's friends made by hand. About 25 students in total were in attendance, a few more boys than girls. Each teaching assistant sat with a group of a few students and reviewed their lessons from that school day.

At the end of our stay, Aisha asked us to stay a little longer. She wanted to show us the sugar cane farm that she and her family tend, rising at 5 a.m. every morning. Her brother accompanied us, as we stepped out of the large green gate, and walked a few paces on the street before turning into a neighboring home. From here, we walked through a courtyard, also full of farm animals, and then down a small alley that opened onto vast sugarcane fields. The land was organized into grids, and we walked along the edges, well-worn paths used every day. Looking at a man finishing his work for the day, Aisha told me with tears in her eyes, her voice breaking, how much people here, like him, love the land, and how it is part of them. They asked us if we had ever had fresh sugarcane before. We said yes, but never before like this. They broke off sugar cane stalks for my research partner and me and showed us how to tear off pieces with our teeth. We ripped, chewed, and spat out the husks on the ground, walking back home.

Self-worth through work

Amna lives about twenty minutes away from the training institute where she took sewing classes and business training, with which she would later open a tailoring home business. We conducted part of her interview here, where she could speak privately about her experiences in the program. For Amna, having something of her own was a means of getting away from the violence in her home that for her whole life had been chipping away at her sense of self-worth. While work did not change the situation at home or her father's behavior, about which she was clear, having work made a great difference to her personally. **"Sure, my home life hasn't improved," she said, "but internally, there have been great developments," she said, resisting the idea that stopping the violence, or reforming her father was her burden to bear. With this opportunity, Amna says her life has been "made," and that through it, she's changed a lot.** To be able to work, Amna also had to consider whether this decision would incite more of her father's irrational behavior and how she would manage it. While the focus of much life-skills training was on sexual misconduct on the street and workspaces, many trainers were acutely aware of the threat of domestic violence trainees faced, and the constraints this put on their ability to enroll in and complete training. To this end, they suggested cooperative communication tactics trainees could use to self-advocate at home, one of PTS's strategies for agency building, while maintaining some control over the reactionary responses they might face from unsupportive family members. The story below recounts the relationships Amna formed with her teachers, and her use of stitching training, and start-up funding to gain much needed autonomy in her life.



Amna's home was in a slum area of Paha Ghulam, some 45 minutes away by road from Peshawar. Like other slums, the lanes were so narrow they could only accommodate foot traffic and motorbikes. There are piles of rubbish in the lanes, lining the individually constructed shanty houses, and open sewage; the odor travelled with us on the walk. Amna's was a two-story home. Upstairs was the small tailoring studio she had set up following training. As she outlined how she came to participate in the program and described the toolkit she'd received, she changed track to talking about her sister who has a hearing impairment, cannot speak, and due to this believes she doesn't receive respect from the community. In an attempt to protect and support her, Amna also bought her sister a sewing machine from the stipend she received. Together the two of them began a tailoring business, which had been running for a month when we interviewed her. When we visited she was on holiday from school, so her routine began with stitching, followed by housework as needed, after which she again returned to stitching. Her studio was on the second floor of her house and she took clients directly there so they did not see her parents fighting.

Amna had to advocate for herself and her sister to get into PTS, but upon enrollment it was the teachers that really made a difference. She even said that it wasn't a specific interest in sewing training alone that motivated her, but rather how great the experience of being in the program was. "I've never received love before, and I used to be afraid of those older than me, but the teachers here were wonderful." "My life is hard," she said. "My parents fight a lot 'har ek baat pe ... choti choti baat pe [about anything and everything]'. It doesn't look like it [to outsiders], but I know. And I was sick of it." But with this training, "mera depression door hogya [my depression has gone]," she repeated during our interview, but it was hard to believe her. She had asked other young women in her neighborhood about what was happening at the madrassa where sign-up was taking place, but said that they deliberately kept it from her. Her belief that her peers would deliberately keep her from an

opportunity spoke to the kind of social ostracization she suffered from, and what a salve joining PTS would be.

Amna said she first wants to become a good human being, earn respect in society, and grow her business. “But,” she said, “in my home, I’m understood as weak. My father is a very good human being, but I don’t know...I don’t know why he speaks the way he does. I cry.” Amna didn’t directly identify her father’s behavior as violent and abusive, but simply called it “ajeeb [strange]”. When we asked her what she had dreamt about for her life as a child, she could not immediately answer the question. Hesitating for a moment, as if trying to make sense of her life story, she said, “during my childhood there was a lot of fighting at home. We would be outside playing or working, and we’d hear our parents, and the villagers would come tell us that our parents were fighting. We would scamper home and try to grab and separate them. “Ek fazool si zindagi guzri ... mujhe maza nahi aya ... bohot ajeeb zingadi thi [It was a useless life.... I didn’t enjoy it... it was a strange existence],” as if she couldn’t understand how or why this was her life. Before, because of how she had grown up she felt that “I couldn’t do anything; I was always filled with fear.” **Starting to run her own business and supporting her sister, however, “feels good, because I’ve become something.”**

During training, her father noticed her absence after a few days and asked where she was going and what she was doing. “Yeh kya hai [what is this]”, he said.” her tone mimicking his combative manner. Amna rightly pointed out the contradiction in his demand. Before he’d say why are you sitting at home, doing nothing “mou utha ke [not a care in the world]”. But she had a strategy: in front of her father, she’d speak to her mother about what she learned at training. This approach speaks to one that was taught in training, and that other trainees spoke about: cooperatively attempting to inform family about the content and value of training. Similarly, Sanobar had also described how she’d tell her mother about something she wanted to do, to which her mother might object. She would then drop the topic for a few days, pretending the argument had not happened at all. A few days later, she’d try again, to show her mother she hadn’t forgotten about their disagreement. Sanobar said that it was important to handle difficult situations like this, by patiently explaining your reasoning to your family. This is what she said she’d done when applying for the factory job. Sanobar’s mother, on the other hand, outright laughed when we asked if Sanobar had asked for permission to join PTS or work, as if to say, ‘are you crazy?’ “No. Sanobar just told us exactly what she was going to do and did it.” Amna, however, did not have the kind of support from her family or the close relationships that some of the other research participants did. **While sharing these stories, some of the young women’s families asked us for help, seeing us as NGO workers. Amna asked for something different: she asked us to explain the value of educating young women to her father, so that their situation at home would see some change.**

Trainers were all too familiar with the gender restrictions many of the trainees faced, and the violence that was also involved in victimizing them. In Daharki, Maria explained why it was important for trainers to counsel their students not to ignore their mothers and fathers to get what they want, because “even at home, women are not safe. There is violence at home as well.” Convincing the family was an important factor, she said. “If we tell them to fight with the people in their household, then the family will ask them to leave the house. In such situations trainers had to deal with structural limitations created by familial control over their students’ lives while also maintaining a teaching environment in which their students could safely remain. Other trainers in the program were cautious when talking to girls about problems at home, specifically asking them not to argue with family. One male trainer from Peshawar, when asked how women can overcome such restrictions, went as far as saying: “We cannot fight or speak against our parents. Even Islam does not permit this.” Despite believing in their right to work, this trainer felt that undermining the family was not permissible, highlighting a tension between creating social change for women in Pakistan and upholding cultural values that are seen as sacrosanct due to their supposed connection to religion. But at the same time he admitted that “boys are able to do this, but for girls, it’s much harder.”

Mobility and access to public space

PTS provided transportation to all trainees for the duration of all three components of training, technical, business, and life-skills. This was a practical solution for shuttling students to and from trainings, as some lived in distant locations, and the added expense was not one families could afford to bear. Another significant reason for providing transportation involved parents' beliefs that their daughters travelling independently, was not considered respectable behavior for a young, unmarried woman. Parents needed a way to mitigate community gossip that their daughters were engaging in dishonorable behavior interacting with strange men such as rickshaw or bus drivers. After the program, however, finding independent access to transportation that met both of the requirements of affordability and protection was a challenge that young women and their families had to solve on their own. The following stories show what kinds conversations took place in the family around the topic of women's use of public space, how trainers helped students and their families find transportation solutions that fell within the boundaries of social norms around women's mobility, and social norms aside, the logistical challenges young women from underserved areas faced commuting to work.

Neelum is busy when she's doing a photoshoot, leaving around 6 p.m. in the evening when wedding festivities start, and finishing late at night, sometimes 11 p.m. There are two challenges to this kind of work: one comes from the nature of the work itself, where it is difficult to get clients to pose in a style that's optimal for producing a quality photograph. Clients have their own ideas about how they want to appear in a photo, she's quickly learned. The other challenge: people in the community gossip about what her frequent late night returns might mean. She described her neighbors as "conservative," and strange, with an "ajeeb [strange] mentality." They can't seem to make sense that she's gone to work on an event, so they invent ideas – "baaten banate hain." It wasn't a matter of permission, then, to attend trainings and to work. Her parents encouraged her to do so. Her family, "obviously" stood up for her Neelum said, her trust in their belief in her unwavering. In this way, both daughters and parents pushed at some of the patriarchal boundaries that regulated their lives, but continued to reinforce honor and respectability as a legitimate measure of women's characters. Practically speaking, Neelum noted the distances to events weren't generally far, and her brother takes her on his bike, and for one appointment that was far away, her client provided conveyance.

"If families are supportive, only then will you have further education and employment opportunities," Priya, a Daharki trainer said. "But if they aren't even sending you for a course, then how will they allow you to take on a job?"

Neelum lived with her family in the Peshawar University housing area for janitorial staff. Her father had been a cleaner there for decades, and was about to retire. What troubled Neelum's father about the neighborhood gossip was not the possibility of her besmirched moral character, but that people talked about how his daughter 'had to work,' because the family was too poor to afford meals. At the university he sees boys and girls sitting together, and sees nothing wrong with it. Her brother who himself was studying, believes in furthering girls' education, and talked about his female peers in class who were studying interesting fields. Bhangash, a business trainer from Peshawar said he asked families to come in for sessions so he could convince them that trainings and education were good for their daughters and talk to them about how they could support their daughters. Again, concerns around modesty and reputation came up, with parents not wanting their daughters to go out alone or work at night. For photography students, his suggestion was that parents simply accompany their daughters. "[The parents] are not working at night. This way she can do her work and the problem the parents have is also over," he said. **Referring to Neelum, photography trainer Saleem Afridi described how despite coming from an underprivileged, Christian minority background, she was running her own business. "To do this in such a competitive market is very difficult," he said, pointing out the multiple barriers trainees faced from restrictive home environments, poverty, and social status.**

“If families are supportive, only then will you have further education and employment opportunities,” Priya, a Daharki trainer said, recounting her own story of convincing her family to allow her to pursue work. “But if they aren’t even sending you for a course, then how will they allow you to take on a job?” Priya explained that after she completed her education, her family was opposed to her getting a job. Even once she was employed, her family stopped her from attending office events such as “out of city [work] projects, parties, and dinners. “On some occasions I said no, I don’t have permission but on other occasions I convinced them to let me go,” she said. When Priya was assigned life-skills training, her parents were against her going to a new workplace further away from their home. “I told them that there are two girls from Sukkur IBA [her university], and my father knows them...and I told them about the office...there is also a lot of female staff at our office, and I insisted and said I won’t be going out anywhere, and a car will come to pick me up at a fixed time...that’s how I convinced them,” she explained. Trainers often understand, through their own lived experience, exactly what many trainees are dealing with, and with this perspective are able to suggest and advise strategies that allow the trainees to push back at some family boundaries without turning their family’s social world’s so upside down that they would restrict their daughters altogether.

Travelling to work

The driver picked us up at 7:30 a.m., close to the time that Farah would usually leave for work herself. We headed to the Sahara school entrance on the main road, just outside the Engro colony, where we picked her up from a nearby galli (lane) that led to the Jung slum. Farah’s mother and younger sister came to drop her off. We got out of the car to greet them, her mother protesting against the formality. She extended a hand and confirmed that we would be visiting the family at their home later that day. Farah was an elementary school teacher at a Sindh Education Foundation school in Ubauro, about 45 minutes away by car. She had requested her employer to provide transportation, explaining that the distance was too far for her family to manage, and that she’d have to quit, because travelling long distances is difficult, “especially for girls,” referring to gender norms rendering women’s unequal access to public space. Her employer agreed to the provision. Every day Farah’s father drives her and sister on a motorbike to the chowkh, and here the bus provided by her workplace picks her up, and her sister continues on to her school nearby.

On the way, Farah told us about how’d she’d gotten a job at the school. It was a two-part application process in which she first appeared for testing on the subjects she would be teaching as well as general knowledge. She came first and spoke of this achievement proudly. Similarly, during our first conversation, she had said “Main hamesha first ati thi, mujay pharnay ka bohot shauk tha [I always came first, I was very fond of studying].” It was her general knowledge that helped her complete the test successfully, which she had gained from watching the news regularly with her father. Despite appearing a little anxious – hands clasped, back upright, whispering prayers under her breath during silent moments – Farah spoke unselfconsciously, making conversation outside of the questions we posed. She told us that many of her students are the children of parents who have shifted here to work on road-buildings projects that are part of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), while other students’ parents are farmers, and some are from minority caste families. The first time we met Farah on our first trip to Daharki to observe a PTS mentorship session, she stayed back to shake our hands and say hello, again demonstrating the same kind of confidence.

The drive to her school was picturesque: through rural, interior Sindh, over unpaved back roads, streams and rivulets of the Indus making their way through wheat and sugarcane fields. The reality, however, is that this is a difficult road to traverse every day. Farah told us it can take two hours when the sugarcane lorries are stalled due to closed sugar mills. She told us the story of trying to find the place where she was to be interviewed for the teaching job: Her father had taken her on his bike, the road even more difficult to traverse in this way, pothole after pothole, and they simply couldn’t find it. They had no map to go by, and stopped to ask passers-by for directions. No one had even heard of the location. They learned later that the way they had been saying the town’s name was so different from its recognized pronunciation that no one had understood them. Just as her father was ready to

give up and turn around, they finally met a man who cleared up this confusion and pointed them in the right direction. It would be just a little while longer before they would reach their destination.



This story is important to note, because it shows what it means for someone like Farah to have to physically find their way through the process of applying for a job - without Google Maps, without her own vehicle, in a distant and unknown area - factors the privileged can consider in terms of convenience and weigh against the worth of a job. This was not Farah's first teaching job. She had been tutoring neighborhood children since the age of 12 and charging about 200 rupees each. "You become aware of your situation at home at a very young age." She had wanted to support her family even more than this, and her father in particular, who had supported her education, but prior to PTS had not received such an opportunity.

The "right" kind of job

PTS supported some trainees with setting up home-based income generating opportunities. This approach was useful for someone like Aisha, who was severely restricted from leaving the home. In one conversation, she directly referred to her dwelling as a jail, and the advent of PTS as a long-sought freedom. For many families, the possibility of their daughter's proximity to the opposite sex signified morally dubious behavior. Such ideas enforced limitations on research participants' access to public space, which PTS sought to circumvent by encouraging trainees to set up home businesses so they could engage in income generating activities. This is, on the one hand, a valuable strategy, as Aisha's story shows, creating the space for her to engage in non-domestic labor that gave her a sense of individual self-worth. But it is important to note that this approach also reinforces the idea that honorable women remain at home, and paid work for women is only respectable if conducted within the boundaries of the home, which can have the effect of further limiting women's independent mobility and access to public space. These notions also limit women's occupational choices to trades such as stitching or running a beauty salon, which also only attract female clientele and are therefore considered permissible. Trainees such as photography freelancer Neelum whose chosen vocation necessitated travel outside the home then bear the added responsibility of ensuring their actions are not perceived as immoral.

In the following story, we see how Farah challenges the idea that women's jobs must be "respectable," but also feels the pressure of having to make "suitable" choices that are governed by this notion. While she discussed the rationale behind some of her decision-making, her mother interjected to disagree

with more liberal ideas about contemporary women's empowerment. In this way, we participated in and observed a conversation between a mother and daughter expressing competing views on the societal construction of gender inequality.

When we arrived at the gate to the Jung colony for the second time, Farah's mother and father greeted and walked us to their home. We wondered why Farah had not accompanied them, but later pieced together that she didn't walk through the community unescorted, nor without her abaya. The Jung colony was bustling with activity. Through one entrance, there were small shops selling everyday goods. Sewage flowed in the thin canals that lined the sidewalks, the odor and buzzing flies noticeable. The entrance that was closer to their home opened onto a more residential area, with a wide and sandy, dusty path. Shanty houses lined each side of the alley leading to Farah's home, some without doors. Faded, weathered chadars instead cover their thresholds.

First, they wanted us to see where their original home had been, which had fallen apart due to disrepair. Piles of bricks lay in the alley, purchased, but unused, as at this stage they did not possess the funds needed for additional construction materials, nor a laborer. Although this was the property

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they owned, they were currently living across the alley in a rented space. In the latter space, the bathroom was not in working order, so they returned here daily to bathe. Later we entered the courtyard to their current home, and Farah greeted me as we walked toward the indoor portion. She was wearing a bright orange shalwar kameez with a dupatta loosely covering her head. This was in sharp contrast to the abaya she had worn to work, and a deep red lipstick her only accessory. Now in the comfort of her home, she was not careful about covering her head. We sat together to begin the interview on crisp checkered cotton chadars, freshly laid on the charpoys in their one-room home.



"They *don't* say don't educate [your daughter], but they *do* say, how will you do this work alone?" says Farah's mother. The neighboring women didn't pass judgement directly, but they made suggestions such as, "You're alone, you have daughters, what's the point of educating them? You're going to have to marry them off anyway, and you're getting old before your time. They should support you instead."

Farah's mother worked as a housekeeper for a family living on the Engro compound. While Farah was grateful to her father who supported her further studies, it was her mother who faced the neighborhood commentary. She told them, "What I haven't done, I want my daughters to do. What I have done, I don't want my daughters to do. That is why I am educating them." This kind of conversation took place as Farah's mother met neighboring women in the streets of the colony - where she was shamed for the choices she made in support of her daughter. Hearing about these incidents, Farah was more determined to further her education, become a mechanical engineer, get a job in that field at Engro, and in the meantime support her family by teaching elementary school.

Previously, Farah's parents explained they had lived in an area with a strong class divide where people in their community worked for powerful landlords and were only seen as part of a servant class. They decided to leave their hometown and came to Daharki, believing it was a more educated society where they would be able to provide better opportunities for their children. But Farah's mother doesn't want her daughter working in the Engro compound as a servant, even though there are lots of girls her age who do. "This too is a kind of ghulami [servitude]" she says, similar to where they had lived before. At 10, Farah's mother left her hometown for Karachi to work as a servant. "I was like Farah; I wanted to support my parents," she says, but this is not the life she wanted for her daughters. "As a housekeeper, say I forget to dust a side table or a dressing table. The next day, the baaji will take me by the hand and show me my mistake. What I have to do, what I have to listen to - I don't want my daughters to have to listen to this, and nor do I want them to have to do this work." Most of all, Farah's mother wanted her daughters to be on equal footing with others. "We are humans, we are Muslims, and we want that right too. We'll do what we can for ourselves by educating our children, so why should we remain behind others?"

During our first meeting we had talked a little about how there are different societal expectations for girls in terms of both behavior and work choices. That day, Farah had said that only some jobs are considered appropriate for women, such as teaching. She admitted that that was one of her reasons for teaching as it is seen as a respectable profession for women in her community. But, she said, if a young woman takes an office position, people gossip about who she might be associating with. **She felt this was wrong, and that everyone**

"Women can work
shoulder to
shoulder to men.
This is also right."

should have equal rights when it came to professional choices. Similarly, she said girls are taught to remain quiet, and if they say or do anything in a way that's considered unladylike, they are reprimanded. We revisited this conversation with her parents and this time she mentioned a job she'd considered with NADRA. "I talked to my father about it, but he said, teaching se zyada izzat millay gi [teaching is a more respectful job]". The problem, Farah says, is people will think, "Where is she going ... men will be there ... and if I'm sitting in the NADRA⁴³ office, every single second there will be a new person, and from there people will take ideas even further. No matter how much you try, you remain connected to society ... so that's why I turned this offer down." Going back on her earlier statements, she now claimed this decision was right for her age, as a young unmarried woman, and that teaching was a more suitable choice.

Involvement with PTS opened up opportunities for young women to think about, discuss, and push patriarchal boundaries, so they could access educational and work opportunities. Sometimes these conversations contained contradictions, as the young women and their families weighed and tried to balance individual choice against familial and societal pressure and gendered ideas about what is acceptable for men. "No, now women stand up equally beside men," Farah's mother said, giving the example of a woman she saw working at a security check post. "This is also her work, she's brave,

⁴³ NADRA is the National Database and Registration Authority, a government agency, with offices around the country, where people go to have their national identity card made, a document essential for opening a bank account, buying plane tickets, getting any other government documents such as a passport or driving license, voting, owning property and much more.

and she's on the main road, and this work seemed good to her. That's why she's there; maybe it was her interest, her passion, her compulsion." Then citing a societal reason, she said, "Women are moving forward, and the police have a use for her, given today's world," she said following this up with a firmer statement about gender equality. "Women can work shoulder to shoulder to men. This is also right." Disagreeing with Farah, she continued: "Sure, you have to pay attention to society, but you also have to do what you want to do...there are so many women in the army, women as rangers, security, pilots, climbing mountains. Now women have the right to get out, to do things, and they don't have to be considered beneath men. If you have the facilities [to move forward], then you should." They walked us out and Farah accompanied us part way, then stopped and asked her mother if this was far enough. Farah's mother escorted us all the way to our car.

Conclusions and Recommendations for PTS' Improvement

In centralizing the stories of trainees, we have shown how increased access to knowledge, skills trainings, employment opportunities and gender awareness have allowed them to navigate some of the power imbalances that structure their lives, and create a degree of individual agency for themselves. As outlined in the TAAP toolkit, one of the objectives of World Learning's programs is to reduce barriers to agency as a means to create inclusive development. TAAP's focus on a structural and intersectional understanding of marginalization provides a useful framework for organizations working in complex social environments to bring about socioeconomic change. With respect to PTS, the research team found that in order to do this, it is essential to dismantle oppressive ideas that tie honor and respectability to women's bodies and character. Such ideas limit girls and women from being understood as individuals with a right to education and employment. A mere twenty-two percent of Pakistani women are involved in economic activity.⁴⁴ At schools, there is a 10-15 percent difference in enrollment for boys and girls depending on the year of study.⁴⁵ During interviews with a number of research participants it was noted that their understanding of women's equal access to public space, on the street and at work, was deeply informed by notions of morality. This included the belief, such as Aisha's, that outside the home she, as a daughter, was responsible for protecting her father's honor. While PTS directly addressed structural barriers in training enrollment and completion – in particular transportation provision, information and educational sessions and meetings for families, linkages with local technical training facilities, and stipends for business start-up costs – the larger social narratives that prevent access to the former remain intact, meaning women continue to live in a world governed by restrictive ideas inscribed on their bodies.

When ideas such as honor are used as a measure of women's behavior they significantly compromise the space for agency building. A particularly stirring news report by Samaa TV told the story of an unmarked grave site on the outskirts of Ghotki where over 450 women are buried after being killed in the name of honor. In reference to the new laws, the article quotes a local rights activist: "They are still killing women by declaring them kari [blackened, as in dishonorable] but are now burying them in the common graveyards instead of the separate ones." This is a deliberate move to discipline women into patriarchally sanctioned roles as mothers, daughters, and wives, and out of public space. Figures gathered from the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan show that in 2017 there were 376 recorded cases of women killed in the name of honor across the country. While these numbers represent the

⁴⁴ Patchmuthu, I & Grown, C. (Feb. 17, 2017). "Women in the Workforce." *Business Recorder*. <https://fp.brecorder.com/2017/02/20170217142782/>

⁴⁵ Pakistan Education Statistics 2016-2016.

<http://library.aepam.edu.pk/Books/Pakistan%20Education%20Statistics%202015-16.pdf>

extreme end of gender violence, related ideas around morality underpin motivations for honor killings and inform women's day-to-day experiences. For some women such as Farah, notions of respectability informed which jobs they felt were gender appropriate for their age. An administrative role, which would involve customer service, was instead seen as comprising inappropriate interactions with strange men, and unsuitable for an unmarried young woman in late adolescence. She and her mother, however, rightly pointed out that such ideas limit women from pursuing professions they are genuinely interested in and ought to have an equal right to pursue. Though Hadia Majid is writing about educated Pakistani women, the following analysis is relevant for understanding how gender stereotypes curtail women's career choices. She writes: "It is vital that we note the cultural context within which Pakistan's labor market is situated. Legally, there is no industry that is closed to women. However, in practice, certain professions see higher concentrations of female workers, especially in teaching and medicine-related vocations. Both can easily be viewed as extensions of women's caregiving roles and so, socially, considered more appropriate for women's employment."⁴⁶

For other women, respectability problematically informed how they understood victimization by sexual harassment. Shazia was more concerned about protecting her reputation, as we will detail below, and demonstrated less understanding about the physical and mental health costs of such incidents. This is unsurprising as the Pakistani Stop Harassment Website for sexual harassment awareness and reporting notes that it is a pervasive belief "that if a woman is being sexually harassed, it is her own fault".⁴⁷ On the one hand, participants indicated they had learned a lot about sexual harassment including how to recognize and identify misconduct and refer to anti-harassment laws, the central content of sexual harassment training in life-skills manuals.⁴⁸ On the other, while they understood that sexual misconduct and harassment were the inappropriate behavior of men, they also saw such behavior as actions they were personally responsible for preventing. The reason Shazia provided for the importance of standing up to harassment was that if others noticed women didn't do anything to reject harassment and abusive behavior, that meant they were, in a way, asking for it. Resolutely, she said this was important to do, so that people couldn't say she hadn't done anything to resist the inappropriate advances. "If someone is bothering us and we ignore them, and if they keep on bothering us, then others will say look she didn't do anything to stop it." She also described and agreed with training content on young women's professional conduct that advised that because she works outside of the home, wearing makeup would attract unwanted attention from boys and "passing comments." and for this reason it was important to be "decent." Together, these views show that one of the greater fears of harassment is that one's reputation could become tarnished.

Instead of learning to espouse such ideas, however, trainees can benefit from a greater awareness and education about the problematic, commonly held patriarchal views. As feminist columnist Bina Shah puts it, "Pakistani women are [seen as] responsible for their own harassment or assault."⁴⁹ This can start with educational information on the pervasiveness of sexual harassment in the workplace, and how women are disproportionately targeted. A 2002 study from the Alliance Against Sexual Harassment found that 80% of women across the formal and informal sectors in Pakistan have experienced sexual harassment. Eight years later, despite the passing of The Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act in 2010, feminists and lawyers such as Rafia Zakaria argue not much has changed and cultures of misogyny persist in workplaces. For example, she writes that few employers are even aware that the law requires the display of anti-sexual harassment policies in employee common areas.⁵⁰ While referring to the law and launching formal complaints is a useful means for self-advocating, the reality of dealing with sexual harassment is far more complex, socially

⁴⁶ Majid, Hadia. (January 23, 2017). "Where are the Women?" *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1310070>

⁴⁷ <http://stopharassmentnow.org/workplace-harassment-in-pakistan/>

⁴⁸ See PTS sexual harassment awareness training in the Life-Skills Based Education Manual, April 2017

⁴⁹ Shah, Bina. (2015). "How Social Media is Failing Pakistan's Women." *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/10/social-media-failing-pakistan-women-151011072105188.html>

⁵⁰ Zakaria, Rafia. (February 10, 2016). "The Hell of Harassment." *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1238495>

and psychologically speaking, as Shazia's response shows. When women come forward about sexual harassment, misconduct, or abuse, they are rarely supported, and instead vilified and shamed, as became evident recently in actor Misha Shafi's allegations against fellow actor and colleague Ali Zafar, Pakistan's first high-profile #metoo case.⁵¹ Amongst the vulnerable, who have far less access to rights, legal options, support networks, mental healthcare, and progressive feminist thought, the costs of a tarnished reputation are far greater. They can face familial and social ostracization; if they go public, or threaten to, victims are also later killed by their assailants,⁵² and there are cases where victims kill themselves.⁵³

A more complex understanding of how and why gender discrimination and sexual harassment work to exclude women from work and public spaces can help trainees deal with such experience if they are victimized. Global discourse and awareness around the physical, psychological, and social costs of gender-based violence are changing, and reducing gender-based violence is a major focus in the UN's sustainable development goals. In Pakistan as well, there is a shift in understanding that holds perpetrators accountable for their behavior, and is critical of rhetoric that blames women victims. There is much writing about the misogyny behind blame-the-victim rhetoric, which says women are too "sensitive" to male jokes, while also highlighting the power dynamics that often necessitate women to put up with harassment so that they don't lose their jobs.⁵⁴ This includes contemporary feminist thought from within Pakistan that stresses the importance of recognizing that have women have historically been excluded from public and work spaces, and that they are threatened with abuse and harassment when entering what have come to be seen as male-only spaces. In life-skills trainings, an emphasis can instead be laid on developing a better language for working class women to navigate, stand-up to, and call out misogyny, and demand fair treatment that does not involve victim blaming and shaming of their peers or themselves.

Key Learning: One way to do this would be for World Learning, or similar organizations working on skills building and social change projects, to involve and liaise with existing Pakistani women's rights organizations in the training process. Groups such as the Women's Action Forum and the Aurat Foundation can discuss the vibrant history of women challenging dictatorship and authoritarianism in Pakistan and how they challenged the implementation of Zia era anti-women laws. Such organizations can also speak to the long history of women's struggles in Pakistan and teach girls that their fight to rights to work and to public space is not a new phenomenon. Groups such as these have a localized understanding of how dismantling notions of honor "needs a feminism that elegantly marries both strands of feminism, secular and Islamic ... that is how Pakistan was formed-on both Islamic and secular principles."⁵⁵ Finally, engaging with newer, younger feminist collectives such as Girls at Dhabas can demonstrate how gender equality movements are playing out in Pakistan's urban centers, and can bring underserved women into contact with progressive and liberating ideas that do not normally reach them. Collaborating with such organizations would be beneficial for both the girls enrolled in the program as well as the trainers, particularly in terms of providing an understanding of feminism that has emerged and evolved in Pakistan for all women.

⁵¹ #metoo movement is an international women's movement against sexual harassment, misconduct, and abuse that began on social media in October 2017 following public revelations by a number of women accusing prominent Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein of sexual assault and harassment. The movement went global after women in a number of countries began using the hashtag "metoo" to document and reveal their own experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace.

⁵² Jafri, Owais. (2014). "Woman gang raped, hanged from tree in Layyah." *The Express Tribune*. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/724886/woman-gang-raped-hanged-from-tree-in-layyah/>

⁵³ Salam, Ghausia. (2014). It's Your Fault - A Pakistani Guide to Rape Culture. <http://bolobhi.org/its-your-fault-a-pakistani-guide-to-rape-culture/>

⁵⁴ Jajja, Nadia. (September 18, 2017). "Women and Sexual Harassment at the Workplace." *Herald*. <https://herald.dawn.com/news/1153846>

⁵⁵ Shah, Bina quoted in Owais, Mehreen. (2014). "Feminism in Pakistan: A Brief History." *The Express Tribune*. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/764036/feminism-in-pakistan-a-brief-history/>

Key Learning: A support network of friends and colleagues in which women can interact with one another and share their experiences is another initiative that could come out of this program. A number of women interviewed for this paper said they did not confide in or share experiences with friends for fear of having secrets revealed in their communities. Sanobar, for example, primarily confided in her father, who she saw as a friend, but she also did not want to discuss personal matters with friends lest these spread as gossip. Instead, women's closest relationships were inside their own homes, which meant they had nowhere to discuss problems that took place in the home itself. At the same time, life-skills trainers talked about how, after a few weeks of classes, women began to open up and talk about their personal lives, worries, and ambitions in the classes. It would therefore be useful to also create a space, alongside training, for women to share their stories with one another and develop relationships around their experiences in the program, the workplace, and gender related struggles. Some women such as Aisha, had already started to do this: she invited a number of women to help run classes in her tuition center. The tuition center has become a space for women to not only teach young kids in the village who have few learning options, but also to work together. The program could initiate a friend and colleague network, which the trainees could continue after the close of the program. This would provide a continued safe space in which to talk, develop ideas – both personal and professional – and create solidarities around gender equality.

Key Learning: Finally, we believe that more progressive ideas around women's rights to mobility, access to public space, and the right to work, need to be promoted by implementing partners, including field coordinators, trainers, and social mobilizers. While we understand the program operates within certain societal restrictions, care needs to be taken not to reinforce their underlying ideas, and to actively disrupt them. Here we discuss some of the patriarchal attitudes and norms we encountered during fieldwork that held back PTS' broader gender equality objectives. "Women want to leave their homes," said a Daharki trainer. "They all say, 'We want to get out and get jobs.'" She added that there is a significant difference between women who are kept at home and those who are exposed to the outside world: the latter demonstrate a greater sense of empowerment. "But even the women who leave the house have to deal with society and people saying she is bad," she said, mentioning that those involved with training and educating women sometimes share such views. We also found this to be the case during fieldwork, but often in a contradictory manner where women were being simultaneously taught about their right to work and to public space but also being told not to invite societal and familial ire. Our recommendation is that women-focused vocational training programs need to thoroughly interview and screen trainers to ensure that their views on gender-rights are progressive and demonstrate an unambiguous commitment to gender equality. **At the same time, the program would need to develop a centralized training manual and sessions including a well-researched approach on how to teach gender equality as part of vocational, business, and life skill education.** These materials could teach both trainers and trainees how to recognize patriarchal social norms, include effective strategies for breaking down such practices, for example in their familial and social circles, as well as ideas for building greater gender inclusivity in their lives.

One Karachi trainer shared her own life story of coming from a working class family. Her father was a bank peon, and she and her sister had studied in only a street school where they lived in the Baloch colony in Malir and went on to teach there as an adult. This was how she had become involved in social empowerment work, later moving to Balochistan for gender rights work. Describing her community's response to her choice to move and work she said, "They were not supportive. They used to judge us for working but our baba used to tell us to be thankful to them for their bad words. He told us we'll get the courage to face them then." The aforementioned trainer then narrated a story of a student who wanted to become a mechanic. Because trainees had rarely spoken to their families about their dreams, she encouraged the trainee to speak to her father about this wish. "The father did not scold her but, shut down the idea saying that I want you to do as you wish but that society is zaalim [cruel]," she said, adding this was the first time the trainee had shared something with her father. Here, the trainer also specified that this was the response she was hoping for and wanted it to come from the father. Troublingly, the trainer relied on existing coercive patriarchal social relations to help her discipline a trainee out of a career choice and into upholding notions of respectability that

see some jobs as “wrong” for women. These helped to express her own disapproval of and discomfort with the trainee’s occupation choice couched within a larger idea that Pakistani society is not ready for such radical change. “We say to the girls that don’t cross boundaries: Ask why people stop you - ‘kyun ke taraf dekho’[recognize the limitations in your path]. Seek your rights but practice some restraint,” she concluded.

Despite this trainer’s having encountered, recognized, and defied restrictive social norms in order to pursue a career, notions about certain types of jobs being suitable for specific genders persisted in her training approach. Women are often asked and taught to compromise on their dreams in favor of restrictive social norms, thereby impeding their individual agency. “Most families think going out is a bad thing, that it will lead to the wrong path,” the same trainer also said, however. Explaining families’ fears about how being in public space leads to the “wrong path,” the trainer continued, “Girls are warned against the wrong path. If they go to university, they are warned against boys. In factories, they are warned ke yeh hoga wo hoga. If they work or study, they have to stay in burkha.” Despite the critique of this line of thinking, apparent in her voice and in her teaching approach, the trainer said, “We had to make sure not to break outside these boundaries either because this is not possible. We had to work with them within these lines, and make them polish themselves within the boundaries they exist in.” Similarly, one of the male trainers from Peshawar reinforced the importance of marriage when one of his students became very vocal about her career. “One girl told me when she becomes a businesswoman, she will only do business. People laughed. Then I told her that you forgot one thing: You also have to get married.” He also told her she would receive more marriage proposals now that she was going to be a businesswoman. Two factors are important to note in this example: first, the trainer shamed a girl for talking about her dedication to work, stressing that domestic roles for women are more desirable. Second, he remembered that students laughed when she said this, but he did not use this as a teaching opportunity to help them think differently about women’s social roles and support their peers. **Key Learning: When students speak-up or confide in trainers, the latter need to be able provide women with greater awareness about their social settings and how these are the cause of restrictions, instead of questioning the decisions trainees want to make. Therefore, additional work with the trainers may be required to be built into the design of similar programs.**

Key Learning: The trainee responses documented in this paper strongly show that PTS had a positive impact in their lives, allowing them to further their education, build employment and business opportunities, and improve the quality of their lives as young women. At the same time, trainees, their families, trainers, and program administrators, expressed views that indicate social norms and practices that reproduce gender inequality cannot - and at times should not - be challenged or dismantled. **Comprehensive TVET programs such as PTS, which in addition to trades training also include life-skills instruction have the potential to challenge and eradicate pervasive notions of honor and respectability that prevent and restrict young women from access to education, employment, and better quality of life.** This is doubly important because, as Kalpana Wilson shows, if such structures are not dismantled, they have the ability to deepen gender inequalities. Using the example of microfinance, Wilson argues that the ways in which lenders refer to women as “better borrowers” than men reinscribes patriarchal social constructions of women as “‘good’ wives/mothers/daughters/ daughters-in-law as those who ‘make sacrifices’ for their families.” Wilson contends the structural limitations faced by women actually make them more appealing for lenders because restrictions on spatial mobility mean they cannot simply disappear to avoid payments.⁵⁶ This is an example of development initiatives directly benefiting from gender inequality, while simultaneously financing the empowerment of individual women. **Key Learning: TVET initiatives such as PTS are different because they are not built on a loan repayment model, but they continue to leave oppressive structures in place that eventually are the biggest impediment to gender parity. Addressing this**

⁵⁶ Wilson, Kalpana. (2015). “Towards a Radical Re-Appropriation: Gender, Development, and Neoliberal Feminism. *Development and Change*. 46(4), 803-832.

drawback could move the impact of such programs beyond individual economic upliftment to affecting actual change for young, working class women, allowing them to openly pursue career ambitions and lifelong dreams.

Note from the Research Team

What moved the research team the most during fieldwork for this project was the case study participants' openness and willingness to share their stories. It was through their responses that we learned how PTS intersected with the broader trajectory of their lives, and how important it was to them to make the most of this educational opportunity to further build their lives, and support their families. Based on their conversations with us, there are a number of questions we believe need to be the subject of further research. Foremost amongst these is:

- Researching models for communicating gender progressive ideas to people who harbor deeply held and hard-to-shift values that men and women belong in different and unequal roles. As mentioned throughout this paper, family and community were significant barriers to women's individual freedom, and ideas such as honor and respectability are sensitive topics that need to be handled with care. Such a research study could explore ways to generate more support for women entering training and education programs.
- Research on young women in Pakistan from low-income backgrounds who have independently chosen to leave their homes for urban centers to make a living. What kinds of gender-based social norms have they defied; what social costs do they pay having done so; what freedoms have they gained; and how do they benefit financially from this decision? Such research would shed light on shifting norms around women's participation in the workforce, providing locally-informed understandings of, and strategies for overcoming, gender barriers.
- Research on current levels of gender mainstreaming in Pakistani workspaces could provide a program such as PTS a better understanding of the cultures of discrimination and misogyny that underprivileged women often face when participating in the workforce. Based on this understanding, appropriate strategies could be developed to prepare women for surviving and challenging institutionalized forms of sexism and discrimination.