

## ABSTRACT

Informal participation of women workers plays a significant role in the household finance as well as in the economy of a developing country like Pakistan. Sindh, one of the provinces of Pakistan, carries an extended industrial sector which is further diversified by formal and informal as well as participation by male and female. Handicraft industry, in general in Pakistan, but particularly in Sindh is suffering with informal structure in terms of market links. This industry is concentrated in Dadu district of Sindh and its four administrative units called Talukas having high poverty index as well as very low literacy rate and lack of employment opportunities especially among females. In this context, this study aims to identify the market links and further researched to explore the challenges and opportunities found by female entrepreneurs, who have skill level i.e Stanching, Dress Making, Rope making, Sindhi Topi & embroidery and having enough finance to start their own work. In the conceptual-theoretical framework, market links are classified based on their formal/informal and based on their direction as forward/backward. Four types of links are investigated through an in-depth qualitative field survey, comprised of three months. An extensive survey conducted with a response of 65 women entrepreneur, 21 formal interviews were conducted with the actors of the market structure of these industry i.e. middle men, representative of Chamber of Commerce and Industry, SMEDA officials. This research has identified backward-informal links as the one that are difficult to control and resolve by government which is associated with social norms and values of women workers that did not allow a woman to communicate with any actor of market structure. While a ray off hope can be identified with forward-formal links with the existing market structure provided by Small and Medium Industrial Corporations. For the SME policy of handicraft industry, it is highly recommended that this industry can be upgraded through the development of backward and forward links simultaneously especially through the accessibility of women to market. and is located in the Johi, Sindh.

**Keywords:** Handicraft industry, Women entrepreneurs, opportunities, challenges, forward and backward market links, Dadu Sindh.