# The Gendered Academy: Women's Career Progression in Pakistani Universities

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## Abstract

Academy in Pakistan is a gendered space that manifests and nurtures various forms of inequalities. This paper examines women's experiences of working in Pakistani academies focusing primarily on factors influencing their career progression. Data for this paper is drawn from larger qualitative research on the experiences of women in the academy. Phenomenological interviews were carried out with fourteen participants including professors, associate professors, assistant professors, and lecturers from two Public universities in Pakistan. The paper unveils the struggles of women academics in sustaining in the academy due to prevailing gender norms. Several organizational challenges were narrated by the participants including; difficulties in conducting and publishing academic research, discrimination in appointments and promotion practices, workplace favoritism, lack of networking opportunities, and absence of mentors for junior faculty. Resultantly, women professors, irrespective of their ranks, qualifications, skills, and confidence, feel frustrated and find it difficult to contribute effectively to teaching and research. The paper contributes to the global debates on gender inequalities experienced by women in the academy. These findings call for the need for a more gender balanced approach in the academy to include women as equal stakeholders.

**Keywords:** *Women academics; Faculty Hiring; Pakistani Higher Education; Workload; Career Promotion; Work-Family Conflict; Phenomenological interviews*

## 1. Introduction

Gender discrimination at workplaces across societies is well documented in academic research (De Paola, & Scoppa, 2015; Satos & Van Phu, 2019; Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017), yet it continues to be a pervasive problem that needs the attention of social science research. Working women around the world often experience workplace inequalities such as discrimination during the hiring process, promotion and salary issues, access to leadership positions, and work-family conflict among others (Cuadrado et al., 2012; Gregory, 2003; Lee & Won, 2014; Luke, 2000; Onsongo, 2004). These obstacles are diverse and differ across institutions. The experience of Pakistani women in the labor force has not been very different from their counterparts in the rest of the world (e.g. Authors, 2021; Fazal et al., 2019; Taj, 2016).

Pakistan, with a population of 220 million, is the 5th most populated country in the world. The literacy rates for men and women are 66% and 40% respectively (Pakistan, 2018-19) and discrimination against women persists in all walks of life (UNICEF, 2006). Women in Pakistan constitute 25% of the labor force (Labour Force Survey, 2017) and they experience low social

status compared to their male counterparts who remain the gatekeepers and the custodian of power. Several religious and cultural factors restrict women's participation in the labor market. For example, women are often expected to practice a certain code of modesty for instance by limiting their mobility and refraining from interaction with males in public spaces (Hussain, 2009). Those who are willing to work, encounter several challenges in gaining access to employment and progressing in their career.

This paper focuses on gender discrimination in the academy. Considering the low position of Pakistan in Global Gender Inequality Index (World Economic Forum 2017), and the widespread gender discrimination in the society rooted in male dominance, gender inequality in academia is not an exception. Scholarship from Pakistan has addressed women's representation in academic leadership positions particularly focusing on challenges and constraints (Authors, 2021; Johnson, 2018; Taj, 2016; Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). There are few studies that address the issue of work-family conflict and highlight the struggles of women academics in fulfilling their responsibilities as professionals while also juggling their responsibilities of care and domestic chores (e.g. Fazal, et al. 2019). However, further research is needed to understand the complex structural and personal factors that are the root cause of such inequalities in academic spaces.

Hence, this paper is an attempt to contribute to the growing body of scholarly work on women in the academy. Considering the gender inequalities in the Pakistani workforce it aims to examine the experience of working women in Pakistani universities. Do women have equal access to promotions? What kinds of constraints do they encounter in the academic spaces on daily basis? These are some of the questions that remain at the heart of the paper. Hence, this paper will contribute to understanding the working conditions, the challenges, and possible instances of gender bias in Pakistani academia, which remains under-researched. It may help identify new strategies for framing policies that may facilitate women in gaining access to equal resources in the academy. The findings may also offer insight to women who aspire to join the academy in the future and those who are in early career may be exposed to challenges they may expect in the future.

## 2. Literature Review

At the time of its independence in 1947 the State of Pakistan had only one university and that too was in deplorable condition as the professors who were predominantly Hindu migrated to India. At present, the country has 214 (88 Public and 35 Private) Universities according to the Higher Education Commission (HEC), (2020), which is an autonomous body established in 2002 for the improvement of higher education research and development in the country. However, higher education has been criticized widely due to a lack of qualified and well-trained faculty, student body, funding, and its failure to impart quality education (Hoodbhoy, 2009) resulting in a lack of critical thinking among youth. Government funding has always remained inadequate for Pakistani universities but at present, it is facing a major crisis as the budget was reduced from the US $300 to the US $189 in 2019 (Khan, 2019, June 14).

Though gender equality is a contested issue in the country yet the participation of young women in higher education has increased gradually over the years. The numbers of women enrolled in Pakistani universities in Postgraduate Diploma, Bachelors, Masters, MPhil, and Ph.D. programs have been reported to have increased from 101770 to 178723 for women. While the statistics for men have increased from 174504 to 244513 men (Batool, Sajid & Shaheen, 2013). More recently, this has translated into the participation of women in the workforce which was an area previously discouraged (Taj, 2016). Nevertheless, as stated above women experience low social status in the country and are discriminated against at the workplace due to strong masculine hegemony.

The higher education in Pakistan is inspired by the North American System of education and it commences after completion of High School (locally known as intermediate) and is followed by four years of bachelor education. The graduate programs include MS/MPhil and Ph.D. MS/MPhil is of two years' duration and often includes research as an important component. For those who aspire to pursue Ph.D. MS/MPhil is followed by five years of further study including one-year course work (18 Credit Hours), comprehensive examination, and 2 – 4 years of research. Publication of at least one paper in the HEC recognized/indexed journal is a compulsory component of a Ph.D.

Pakistani universities offer two parallel systems of hiring i.e. Tenure Track System (TTS) and the conventional Basic Pay Scale (BPS). Both have advantages and disadvantages. The BPS has a weak appraisal system as there is no penalty or reward for active or non-active researchers and promotions are appointment based. However, BPS is considered more desirable due to its security and offers benefits such as gratuity/pension/house requisition and better leave policy.

The Tenure Track System (TTS)positions in Pakistan closely resembles the North American and Canadian Tenure Track positions where a professor enters as an Assistant Professor after completing a Ph.D. and after 6 years of service, is reviewed for tenure in terms of contribution to research, teaching, and service to the university. Once tenure is awarded they are promoted to the position of Associate Professors. This new system was introduced in the country in 2004 by the HEC to upgrade the research environment in universities but has failed miserably due to a lack of proper implementation (Khan & Jabeen, 2019). In contrast to being secure and prestigious as the case in North America, TTS is considered contractual and most insecure employment in Pakistan. There are issues related to salary revisions, increments, and endorsement at the time of tenure.

Data on the number of men and women faculty on BPS and TTS in Pakistani universities are not available but in general, women occupy very few shares of academic jobs in the country, remain underrepresented in leadership positions, and experience discrimination in selection and promotion processes. Research conducted by Batool et al., (2013) shows that women professors in the country constitute 8.5% against 91.5% men, Associate professors include 8.6% against 91.4% men while Lecturers include 16% women against 84% men (p. 26). This shows the bleak picture of women's representation in the academy and the dismal state of affairs that needs urgent attention.

Scholarly work about women in academia has highlighted organizational, societal and personal factors that potentially challenge working women's career progression by creating obstacles for their advancement in their academic path (Baker, 2003; Santos & Van Phu, 2019). Several

organizational constraints have been argued to hamper women's progression in the academy such as male domination in the workplace, promotion issues, limited mentoring and networking opportunities, and lack of special facilities for females. Mentoring is believed to contribute to the growth of academics and its impact varies with gender. It may be formal or informal. Informal mentoring can be gained through working with people of different grades, participation in different tasks and meetings involving in discussions, and so on (Patterson, 2006).  A study conducted by Batool & Sajid (2013) in Pakistan highlighted the absence of mentors as a key barrier by a majority of women managers. This has been identified as an issue since it is argued that men who are in mentoring capacity prefer to mentor men instead of women to avoid getting into scandals of sexual harassment.

Despite the importance of networking in promoting career progression, it remains a challenge for women to break into male networks (Broughton & Miller, 2009). Due to cultural restrictions, some women find it hard to socialize with male colleagues at work. Women tend to feel uneasy with men due to their style of communication including humor and jokes. This excludes women to be part of male networks which is a source of bonding among them (Luke, 2000). Moreover, there is a lack of senior women willing to provide a mentoring facility to younger women and the existing community-based female networks remain nonfunctional proving little help to young women entering the academy (Broughton & Miller, 2009).

Lack of special facilities and policies for women such as inappropriate childcare facilities, lack of restrooms to feed young babies, and maternity leave, have been main challenges for working women (Luke, 2000). In a study conducted in the north of England, 35% of the participants reported daycare being a major hurdle in the way of their career progress (Green, Moore, Easton & Heggie, 2004). The participants in this study were concerned about the quality of care provided in the child care facilities. A study by Blau and Currie (2006) reports the cost of child care as a challenge for working mothers. Likewise, the study of Ruhm (1998) in his study in nine EU countries reports maternity leaves greatly influence employment and wages.

It has also been reported in the literature that women are discriminated against in the academies for recruitment, appointment, and promotion practices (Luke, 2000; Onsongo, 2004). This has largely been argued to be due to the criteria of promotion, inadequate information, and unequal workload distribution (Batool & Sajid, 2013). Furthermore, often male academics are believed to be promoted to higher ranks without merit (Broughton & Miller, 2009; Ely, Stone & Ammerman, 2014; Hamel, 2009; Patterson, 2006; Sabharwal, 2013). Women in initial ranks (i.e. Lecturers, Assistant Lecturers, Teaching Assistants, Research Associates) spend more time in teaching and teaching-related activities and are promoted late in their careers (Santos & Van Phu, 2019).

Additionally, women's progress at work is also restricted due to social factors. Women in academia experience gender stereotyping (Keating, 2015), and socio-cultural norms often de-motivate the career inspiration and self-confidence of women (Jamali, 2009). Being the primary figure to look after the elderly and children in the house, women face constraints in managing their household responsibilities along with the career demands (Wallance & Jovanovic, 2011). Besides, breaks for childbearing and for looking after children and the elderly often halt women's advancement (Green

et al, 2004; Luke, 2000; Schwanke, 2013). Women academics in Pakistan are unable to give quality time to their research-related activities due to family restrictions, consequently leading to slow progress in their careers (Batool & Sajid, 2013; Sabharwal, 2013). Likewise, various personal challenges hamper women's work productivity (Almaki et al., 2016; Giugno, 2015). For example, lack of confidence has been an issue that often restrains otherwise competent females to get hold of administration and leadership positions in academia (Broughton & Miller, 2009).

## 3. Methodology

This study takes an interpretive approach and empirical data was collected through qualitative research design (Creswell, 2014) from two public sector universities in Islamabad city, in Pakistan. Both universities are prestigious and are listed in the approved list of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan and offer co-education. The names of the universities are not being disclosed here to maintain the confidentiality of the participants.

### *3.1 Research Methods*

Phenomenology was well suited for data collection in this research as it is a method of understanding the lived experiences of individuals as social actors. It aims to describe the phenomenon as it is lived and experienced by the participants (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020). In this study, it guided us to understand the knowledge provided by women academic (Smith, 2005) and allowed us to enter deep into their lives to be able to make sense of their social world (Creswell, 2014).

### *3.2 Recruitment of Participants*

Phenomenological interviews were conducted with 14 women academics including professors (3), associate professors (3), assistant professors (4), and lecturers (4), working on BPS in two universities in Islamabad, the capital city of Pakistan. The sample was limited to only those women who had five or more years of experience in the current rank (Patton, 2002) and the majority had entered the academy before getting married. The respondents who met the criteria were invited through emails and those who were willing to participate in this study were interviewed. The positionality of the first author played a key role in selecting the participants as she works in the federal capital and has networking. Moreover, the experience of sharing common space with the research participants enabled us to analyze their narratives and the meanings they attributed to their day to day interactions in the academic spaces.

All participants were married and the majority had 2-4 children. The lecturers and Assistant Professors had children who attended elementary schools while the children of Associates and Professors were mostly in High schools and universities. All participants had Ph.D. degrees from universities in Pakistan except four lecturers who were pursuing their PhDs in local universities. The participants belonged to Social Sciences, Arabic, and Sciences disciplines.

### 3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

An open-ended interview guide was used for data collection. It included questions about the participants' experiences in academies including pieces of training, research publications, teaching load, child care facilities, networks, and promotions. Social responsibilities were also examined such as familial role and work-life balance. The participants were encouraged to speak in-depth about their experiences by giving relevant examples from their daily lives. All questions were posed neutrally so that they could choose to focus on constraints or accomplishments. However, in almost all cases the participants mostly related to the barriers they were facing in regards to their career progression.

The process of data collection was a challenging task. The informants were identified and approached by the first author while the second author conducted the majority of the interviews. The academic leaders follow a strict schedule where they have to meet daily targets like teaching, attending meetings, supervision, etc. This made it difficult for them to be available at the given time and date. Hence, the interview scheduled had to be often changed to facilitate the women leaders. The interviews were conducted in English and were later transcribed. Each interview took 40-60 minutes.

The data so obtained were analyzed using thematic analysis. The thematic analysis provides a comprehensive and complex account of patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Taking a constructionist lens the focus of the analysis was on the latent level to look for underlying ideas, meaning, assumptions, conceptualizations, and ideologies that inform and shape the semantic content of the data (Burr, 1995). The six steps of thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke, (2006) were used to analyze the data. The analysis process started by identifying patterns and meanings from the data set. During the data immersion stage, the recorded data were transcribed verbatim by the first and second researchers. During stage 2 initial codes were developed. The data was organized into meaningful groups. Since we intended to develop data-driven themes so coding was done accordingly. Coding was done manually and memos were written where required. At stage 3 the analysis was at a broader level where codes were sorted into common categories and through these larger themes evolved. It was during this stage that the relationship between codes and themes (Braun & Wilkinson, 2003) was established. At stage 4 themes were revisited, reviewed, and refined. At stage 5 the themes were named and defined and the final stage included the final write-up of the themes. The entire analysis involved moving iteratively between the data, the coded extracts, and the analysis that is generated in the form of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### 3.4 Validity

Measures were taken to maintain the validity of the data and the research process. For this purpose respondent validation was employed. The transcribed and coded data were cross-checked with the women leaders and they were given the choice to add or delete data they may not want to be shared after the data was transcribed. This was a useful process since many leaders used this opportunity to add things they may have missed during the interview. Hence, the findings were constructed in

an interactive process where member checking played a key role in making sense of the data. During the interviewing stage probing strategy was used to maintain the authenticity and credibility of the data. Moreover, the process of transcribing and the use of excerpts from the participants was useful to maintain creditability (Kushner, 2005).

### *3.5 Ethical Concerns*
For ensuring ethical measures the participants were fully briefed about the purpose of research during the first visit. Participant sheet was shared with them and their consent was taken to participate in this research and informed consent of the women was taken before the interviews (Silverman, 2001). Moreover, to ensure the confidentiality of the respondents (Patton, 2002) the names of universities and names of participants have not been identified in this paper, and instead, pseudonyms have been used.

## 4. Results
The findings illustrate that Pakistani women academics encountered several organizational constraints in their career progression within the academy. These included constraints in publishing and promotions, lack of facilities for child care, and lack of networking opportunities. The following sections elaborate on these barriers.

### *4.1 Publishing and Promotions*
Studies in the west have established a positive association between publishing and higher ranks (e.g. Huang et al., 2020; Hunt, 2020; Santos & Van Phu, 2019). Men publish more scholarly papers while women publish less and hence remain in lower ranks for longer durations (Hanscock, Baum & Breuning, 2013). Women in lower ranks also spend a higher percentage of their working time on teaching and teaching-related activities than men (Santos & Van Phu, 2019). In this study it was acknowledged by the participants that publishing was a time-consuming task and the inability to publish was a major hindrance against the promotion process.

Women academics' time at work was largely consumed in teaching and performing the administrative tasks assigned by the heads of departments. While at home women prioritized their family and household chores. Almost all participants agreed that women publish less than men largely due to dual responsibilities. Additionally, the process of publication was considered to lack transparency and women encountered difficulties due to their absence of being part of networks. One of the participants said that Editors often do not respond to the emails and those who do reject the papers without even giving the chance to be reviewed. My male colleagues who completed PhDs in the last 2 to 3 years have already published several papers in local journals in Pakistan and have been promoted while I am still an Assistant professor for a year. (Shazia, Assistant Professor, University 2).

Keeping in view these difficulties, they argued that promotion/selection should not be based on publications alone and that the amount of teaching, the number of students supervised, the number of courses taught, contribution to course evaluation, course revision, and administrative tasks

should also be valued since women spend several hours doing these invisible tasks. At present these are not valued at the time of selection boards for the next cadre for faculty on BPS while for TTS these services matter. This was also supported by a woman academic working in an administrative position as Dean. She stated; "I feel that departmental contributions should also be considered for promotions besides publications." (Alizai, Professor, University 2).

The women academics at entry-level (Lecturers/Assistant Professors) in this study seemed to be overburdened due to work-load which hampered their ability to work towards promotion. They were expected to perform multiple tasks including teaching, supervision, duties in exams, time table management, hiring of new staff, guiding the visiting faculty, student counseling, problems related to administration of department, admission, coordinating courses, and participating in different committees due to shortage of faculty in universities and supporting staff in departments. One participant explained. "You are bound to do these tasks and the fatigue you suffer minimize your ability to do any work". Others narrated that workload prevented them to give quality time to research as Salma states; "We have to improve our qualifications and research but because of having work-load we can't give time to these activities" (Salma, Lecturer, University 1). Work-load was an issue for women in both universities in this study.

The participants in this study lamented a lack of opportunities regarding training and educational opportunities for enhancing their careers. It was argued that getting grants was difficult and most women were not favored, as the provision of such opportunities was gender-biased. This was more so in university 2. One of the respondents shared her views on this as follows. My male colleague and I had applied for a fellowship offered a few years back. We were both selected. However, the department could only send one, as per their rule. My male colleague was sent because he enjoyed better relations with the Chairman and Dean. (Shazia, Assistant Professor, University 2). The participants from university 2 were of the view that gaining access to foreign opportunities was gender-biased. This clearly illustrates a lack of organizational support for female academics, and inadequate training and higher education opportunities for them.

In university 1, organizational opportunities were experienced similarly, yet the women academics in this university seemed to be more aware of external opportunities and utilized them well. The following excerpt explains this well; I have never looked towards my university for any funding. Since I am an alumnus of a German University, I have ample opportunities for training and projects through the German exchange program and other external sources. (Hira, Assistant Professor, University 1).

This illustrates that even if the organizational practices do not favor women academics they may take personal initiatives for advancing their career.

### 4.2 Facilities for Women in Universities
Attention was drawn towards inadequate childcare facilities on the university campuses by all participants. There was a sense of dissatisfaction regarding day-care facilities and the provision of trained caregivers for children on university campuses. Rooms in the daycare centers were believed

to be unclean and unhygienic for young children and the rules were not very helpful. This issue was more serious for those in university 2. The following excerpt explains this well.

Honestly, I wouldn't choose it (the daycare) for my children. The carpets have not been washed for years, and the building is old and worn out it needs serious maintenance. They also need more staff out there to improve quality. (Razia, Assistant Professor, University 2)

The caregivers were believed to be untrained in University 2. Personal hygiene of the daycare was a serious issue highlighted by some participants. As one stated; I saw infants co-sleeping and crawling on the floor where the caregivers walked with their shoes. Some children were put to sleep with pillows on their heads. (Haleema, Associate Professor, University 2).

Additionally, the official timings of the daycare centers were from 8 AM to 4 PM in the universities and those mothers who took evening classes or who wanted to stay and work for late hours were not allowed to leave their children in the daycare after 4:00 PM. Alternately they had to look for other arrangements such as hiring baby sitters at home or leaving the kids with relatives. This issue greatly influenced women's productivity at work including the quality of teaching and publications. They were in a hurry to return home and look after the children.

In university 1, most of the academics kept their children at home with baby sitters since they enjoyed accommodations on university campuses. However, one participant in this study had a son who had lived in the daycare. She explained that though the university daycare is not the best option yet she took this decision to keep her child here considering her circumstances as a single mother. Besides, care for older children was an issue for women academics living in nuclear families. Hence, daycare facilities were essential for women who had no other choices whether they were single mothers or they lived in nuclear families.

## 4.3 Networking & Mentoring

The study revealed that formal and informal networks are important in the career development of individuals in higher education institutions. The informants believed that formal and informal networks benefit in enhancing the position of academics in several ways. On the positive side, the networks may facilitate the process of promotions and several other benefits such as participation in training and conferences where nomination from higher authorities is required. Networking allows academics to interact with each other and get access to authorities in power in the organization. This was believed to facilitate promotions and appointments on key positions within the organization. One of the participants who were also the HOD of a department in University 1 argued; "Networking increases the exposure of individuals. When you meet with people having diverse experience, you get to learn from them," (Rubab, Associate Professor). Hence, networks were believed to be beneficial in many ways.

However, for women, it is harder to be part of male networks as they find it challenging to mingle with male colleagues due to the cultural restrictions, familial responsibilities, and workload which restricted them to departmental activities. One of the women academics explained; "My life as an academic is not easy. I simply have no time to attend gatherings, meet people so how can I be part of networks?" (Jahan, Lecturer, University 2).

Besides the male networks, it was found in University 1, that there were some women networks too that operated in closed groups. These were largely formed based on personal affiliations and friendships. These groups didn't welcome all women academics to be part of them. In University 2, the women networks operated within faculties and there was one particularly active network. However, one of the participants of this study who belonged to this network explained that she had not seen any benefit from this network. She shared her experience as follows; When I was having issues with my promotion from Assistant to Associate Professor, I approached them several times. However, I was not assisted in any way. My HOD had evaluated my ACR as unsatisfactory and despite having publications and experience I was not selected in Selection Board in the first attempt. (Shiza Associate Professor, University 1).

Others from University 2 reported that there was a lack of organizational support for women and opportunities for networking were rare which restricted women within their own offices and classrooms. Mentoring is also believed to play a significant role in the career progression of women in academia (Oforiwaa, & Broni, 2013). Despite its importance, there seemed to be a lack of mentoring opportunities for women academics in the universities in this study. One of the participants explained: There is a dearth of formal networking in academia in Pakistan. Unfortunately, we mic culture where no senior has time for juniors. When young people join academia they are expected to learn on their own. (Razia, Assistant Professor, University 2)

These views were endorsed by all participants from both universities. Hence, the need to institutionalize mentoring was emphasized by the participants for better performance of young faculty.

Despite the constraints, the women's academics cherished their work and felt thankful to be able to be earning members of their families. The majority was also proud of their accomplishments such as having the ability to complete their PhDs but since they had been in their current positions for several years they seemed to be frustrated and dissatisfied with their performance. Nevertheless, they did not consider themselves as failures. They were very clear that what they were experiencing was due to circumstances beyond their control. In addition to the above constraints, several social issues hindered women's career progression. For example, they were unable to travel for conferences due to the responsibilities of child care. Career breaks for reproduction and taking care of the elderly and children interrupted their careers. Unfortunately, women did not in positions where they could negotiate this with their families. This inability to negotiate their desire for further training as well as performing academic services other than teaching, by the women is largely rooted in the socialization process. Females are trained to be less assertive and this puts them in a position where they are not able to negotiate their wishes with their families (Hussain et al, 2015).

## 5. Discussion

The above themes unveiled the experiences of women in the academy. A key finding highlighted by the participants was the constraints related to publishing and promotions. Previous literature has found that men publish more due to their access to different professional networks and collaborations (Burt, 2004; Nakhaie, 2002). It has also been argued that though the promotion of

faculty is based on similar criteria yet males get preference during the promotion process largely due to policies of institutions thus putting women in a disadvantaged position (Oforiwaa & Broni, 2013). Likewise, the findings on research vs teaching also related with previous scholarship where it has been argued that research is preferred for promotion against teaching (Remler & Perma, 2009; Roberts, 2002).

The workload was considered an issue that restricted women's autonomy to work on their publications. This was experienced by the younger faculty who were reported to be given more tasks at the departmental level (Schiebinger & Gilmartin, 2010). Likewise, career breaks were considered as barriers to getting access to further promotions in the academies. This also co-relates with previous researches. For example, having a child is believed to negatively impact the career of a woman (Oforiwaa & Broni, 2013; Mason & Goulden, 2002).

In light of these findings, it is suggested that women need support to progress in their academic careers. It is important to keep a balance between research and teaching and for doing this attempts may be taken to reduce their workload (Oforiwaa & Broni, 2013). Flexible working hours may be provided to women in universities to allow them space to think about personal projects and publications. Paid semester breaks from teachings may be allowed to promote research culture and to motivate women to publish. Job training could be provided to update their knowledge and skills. Though all these incentives are equally important for men, yet women deserve these more as they are giving extra share within the household.

Further, women academics worked in a predominantly male-dominated work environment where they found it difficult to become part of a professional network and to attain and maintain leadership positions. There seemed to be a lack of a mechanism for formal mentoring and informal mentoring was largely absent. This correlates with previous studies in Pakistan which report lack of mentoring facilities for women leaders in academia (Batool & Sajid, 2013). To overcome this women, need encouragement and motivation from senior academics. But since there are no incentives for an informal mentoring facility hence, universities may consider introducing formal mentoring programs for young academics to gain benefits from the expertise of seniors in such a way that the mentors are motivated to participate willingly.

Importantly, women were deeply concerned about the inadequate facilities for their children. Since the daycares available on university campuses were not well maintained and overcrowded the majority did not prefer to keep their children at the facility. As a result, they found themselves on the run between work, school, and home. They also found it difficult to deal with their dual roles and unsupportive environment at home. To deal with such challenges, women's dual roles should be considered while making policies. Measures should be made to relieve them of the concerns related to child care so that they could make better use of their abilities in the workplace. This may be done by providing child care facilities, formal mentoring facilities, and acknowledging and rewarding them for their work other than publications.

## 6. Conclusion and Implications

The study highlights that significant challenges are encountered by women academics in the selected Pakistani universities. These problems are rooted in organizational practices as well as the familial responsibilities of women academics. This reflects the power of patriarchy which is institutionalized through educational institutions and family.

Academia, as with other sectors, values work that delivers results and impact. These high-value outputs namely published research in high-ranking journals and winning funding for research resulting in more publications in high-ranking journals depend on having a strong network of mutual support from academics both within their university and across different institutions. However, as this study reveals women academics often have fewer opportunities for publications and research-related activities and are more involved in teaching and other mundane activities inside their departments.

The findings from this study have enhanced our understanding of the experiences of women in Pakistani universities in a detailed and nuanced way. The data contributes to the existing scholarly work on women academics and leadership worldwide by adding the perspective from Pakistan. The findings have implications for university administration and the policymaking process. The study highlights the need to understand women's perspective in making policies for academics since women constitute an important component of academia and for universities to progress there is a need to provide opportunities for women to grow and to contribute.

Some of the areas that need urgent attention at the policy level and in practice include introducing formal mentoring programs and encouraging women to participate in such programs; promoting a space where women feel comfortable in being part of male networks and benefit from them professionally; attention to daycare facilities to allow women to work with peace of mind; reducing the workload and encouraging women to apply for grants and paying attention to personal projects and publications and finally the timely promotion of those women who fulfill the criteria but remain in the same positions due to gender discrimination in organizations.

## 7. Limitations

This study was limited only to two public sector universities in Islamabad offering co-education and the sample size was small. Hence, the findings may not be generalized to other universities e.g. women-only universities or universities in other contexts. However, since the aim was to examine experiences of married women academics about their career progression in Pakistan, this paper contributes to our understanding of the struggles they make in surviving in academic spaces despite challenges and dilemmas.

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