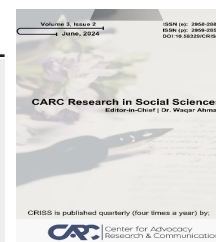




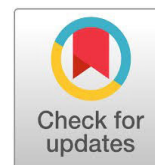
Content list available at:
<https://journals.carc.com.pk/index.php/CRISS/issue/view/9>

CARC Research in Social Sciences

Journal homepage : journals.carc.com.pk



Women Academic Leaders' Experiences in Private and Public Universities of Pakistan



Faisal Amjad^{1*}, Dr. Muhammad Amin², Sundas Zahra Kayfi³, Humera Amin⁴ & Muhammad Naseem Abid⁵

¹PhD Scholar (Special Education), Department of Special Education, Division of Education, University of Education, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

²Associate Professor, Department of ELPS, Division of Education, University of Education, Lahore

³PhD Scholar (ELPS), Department of ELPS, Division of Education, University of Education, Lahore

⁴Lecturer, Department of ELPS, Division of Education, University of Education, Lahore

⁵PhD Scholar (Education), School of Education, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Wuhan, China

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: May 29, 2024

Revised: June 10, 2024

Accepted: June 14, 2024

Published: June 30, 2024

Keywords:

Challenges

Gender

Leadership

Supportive factors

Women leaders

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study has investigated the experiences of women who hold academic leadership positions at Pakistani public and private universities in Lahore. With reference to society, organizations, families, and personal lives, it sought to examine the difficulties and sources of support faced by female academic leaders in Pakistani institutions. Semi structured interviews were conducted for data collection by using convenient sampling technique. Thematic analysis has been used to examine the qualitative data. The major conclusions pointed to a range of obstacles and enablers that impact the leadership of female academics. The main obstacles that hinder female academic leaders are personal ones, such as their upbringing, lack of confidence, availability of resources and the ability to manage their time. The second most challenging collection of issues was social in nature and included unjust judgment and gender biasness, while institutional issues included politics inside the organization, favoritism, and jealousy. The support that women who hold academic leadership positions receive from higher authorities and faculty members in private v/s public colleges, however, is a significant difference between their experiences. As per the participants, private institutions offer equal opportunities for male and female students to develop as leaders, while public universities tend to give greater opportunities to males. The assistance faculty members of private colleges to their female leaders, who are comparatively more numerous and cooperative than the faculty members of public institutions, was another obvious distinction between their experiences. Faculty members, both male and female, appreciate the judgment of the female leader and follow her instructions just as they would that of the male leader. Compared to women leaders in public institutions, this is one of the main causes of the superior experiences that female academic leaders have in securing and carrying out leadership positions at private universities.

Copyright © 2024 CARC Research in Social Sciences. Published by Center for Advocacy Research & Communication – Pakistan. This is an open access article licensed under CC BY:

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)

1. INTRODUCTION

Women's efforts during World War II were crucial to the conflict because they filled the voids left by males who were serving overseas. After the soldiers from the war returned home, women were forced to resume their jobs. After World War II, the UN acknowledged that discrimination

based on gender was forbidden under the charter (Jaquette & Summerfield, 2006). The Women's Movement improved salaries, increased the number of women enrolled in post-secondary education, and opened up new markets and industries that had previously been inaccessible to women by the 1960s and 1970s. The challenges facing women were elevated in large part due to the United Nations. To win their rights, women had to fight hard in the higher education and trade unions. To obtain greater compensation, they also became members of trade unions. Since African-American women were often limited to specific jobs with lower pay packages, they fought for employment disparities on their own behalf. This disparity in employment tended to increase when men were included (Dickerson, 2006).

Higher education institutions have multiplied dramatically in recent years, which has fueled the concepts of gender parity and feminization in academia. As a

*Corresponding author:

Faisal Amjad, Department of Special Education, Division of Education, University of Education, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
 e-mail: amjadfaisal40@gmail.com

How to Cite:

Amjad, F., Amin, M., Kayfi, S. Z., Amin, H., & Abid, M. N. (2024). Women Academic Leaders' Experiences in Private and Public Universities of Pakistan. *CARC Research in Social Sciences*, 3(2), 146–155.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58329/criss.v3i2.146>

result, many women joined academic groups; yet, Cook (2012), DeFrank-Cole et al. (2014) state that women are underrepresented in leadership roles in higher education. Moreover, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership roles in higher education even though they hold a greater number of bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees than males. Diehl (2014), Lennon et al. (2013), Gallant (2014), and DeFrank-Cole et al. (2014). In the past, men have occupied the most senior professor positions in higher education. However, the number of women in academia has increased somewhat. Wenniger and Conroy (2002) assert that the percentage of female academics working full-time rose from 19% to 24% between 1925 and 2000. Moreover, the percentage of academics with tenure increased from 22% in 1989 to 26% in 1998. The data indicates that wealthy countries such as the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom are placing a high priority on increasing the proportion of women enrolled in higher education. Owing to tensions between "equal chances rules and practices and the patriarchal framework on which Higher education institutions are founded," women may not be overrepresented in academic leadership roles. As stated by Kennedy (1995) and Jackson (2002).

Female academic administrators have risen to higher positions of importance in higher education institutions. Because of this, over the past 20 years, a large number of academics have concentrated on the administrative and leadership positions that women hold in higher education. Writing from the past has a tendency to highlight men in leadership positions while ignoring the opinions of women in leadership. Since women have been marginalized in the study of leadership, Klenke (1996, p. 15) claims that the majority of what we know about leadership derives from male academics' descriptions and evaluations of successful men. Before the 1980s, men conducted almost all of the research on leadership, with a primary concentration on male leaders. Leadership and men have always been associated.

The growing need for specialized laborers has led to a positive recognition of women's contributions to education in many developed countries. Research indicates that the proportion of female academics is rapidly rising in economically and technologically advanced societies, including China, Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, and some Islamic republic's (Handelman, 2000; Jayaweera, 1997; Sidani, 2005). Numerous additional researches also revealed similar conclusions regarding women in educational institutions in wealthy nations. Su et al. (2000) reported that 13% of women are college presidents in China, 14% of women held leadership roles in Korean institutions, and the majority of school heads in Singapore are female.

Furthermore, in developing Muslim countries such as Pakistan and Turkey, women hold administrative positions at universities (Celikten, 2005; Kirk, 2004). However, in Pakistan, men still hold the most powerful positions in academic administration and make up the majority of selection committee members (Kirk, 2004). A prior study on female leadership in a worldwide setting found that women are actively advancing educational institutions and are encouraged to participate in academia. However, because of the prevalence of masculine ideas in these societies, they

are not viewed in prominent leadership roles. The position of women in senior leadership is rapidly changing in both developed and developing nations.

Women are underrepresented in academic organizations and hold prominent positions in different academic fields including the natural sciences and humanities in Pakistani society. Higher education institutions have multiplied dramatically in recent years, which have fueled the concepts of gender parity and feminization in academia. Women managers and business owners have been the subject of the majority of management and leadership studies conducted in Pakistan to date (Alam, 2009; Manzoor, 2015; Rehman&Roomi, 2012). Studies that particularly examined the constraints and leadership styles of college and school principals are scarce, let alone those that focus on the experiences of women leaders in academia. These female principals operate in distinct organizational structures and cultures since the bulk of these institutes have gender-segregated policies (Bana& Khaki, 2015; Jehan, 2015; Shah, 2009; Shah & Shah, 2012; Tahir, 2019; Taj, 2016). A survey of the literature finds a dearth of scholarly research on the topic, despite the fact that women are increasingly occupying key administrative roles in Pakistani higher education institutions (Ahmad, 2016; Qureshi et al., 2011; Shaikh, 2014).

Leadership is a multifaceted process, and in Pakistani society, women's access to high leadership positions is limited by norms about leadership that are repeatedly and discursively formed. "Academic leadership" has been used in this study to refer to individuals who hold managerial or administrative responsibilities. The purpose of this study is to explain the real-world experiences of Pakistani female academic leaders at both public and private institutions in Lahore. Globally, women are becoming more and more involved in academic institutions as leaders, researchers, and scholars. Over the past 20 years, a lot of scholarly work has been done to address gender disparities in higher education (World Bank, 2011).

Furthermore, wealthy and developing countries alike have acknowledged the value of the contributions made by women in academia. Women continue to be underrepresented in senior executive roles in higher education institutions, even in spite of their success in obtaining doctorate and postdoctoral degrees (DeFrank-Cole, 2014; Gallant, 2014; Teague, 2015). Women occupy less than one-third of the senior leadership positions at public colleges (Cook, 2012; Gallant, 2014). It illustrates the prejudices that exist against women who aspire to hold high leadership positions and succeed in doing so, particularly in public institutions. Diversity in senior leadership positions is crucial in public higher education institutions to guarantee the success of individuals, departments, and the academic community at large (Kim & Cook, 2012; Sheikh, 2014; Taj, 2016).

Numerous scholars have noted that compared to public universities, a greater proportion of women hold senior leadership positions in private universities (Diehl, 2014; Jarboe, 2013; Tahir, 2019). It is evident that businesses and society at large gain from having more women in senior leadership positions, in addition to the women who

occupy them. Researchers claim that persistent informal discrimination, hardship, and restrictions prevent women from holding prominent positions in academia (Nguyen, 2012; Morley & Crossouard, 2016; Taj, 2016). Selection committees, which are primarily composed of men, are impacted by the highly professional and political male networks (Ehrenberg & Main, 2009; Murniati, 2012). The executive position selection processes of such male networks often exclude women and other minorities. According to Konrad et al. (2008), a significant proportion of women ought to occupy senior leadership positions, as a small proportion of women could not be enough to capitalize on the prevalent gender disparities in leadership inside firms.

According to Cubillo and Brown (2003), placing women in these roles is the issue. Glass ceilings rarely appear to be falling around us, even as more women than ever are gradually overcoming the barrier to assume leadership positions. The chronic underrepresentation of women in senior leadership roles is a result of a multitude of factors, including preconceived opinions, a lack of female mentors and networks, and challenges in balancing work and personal life (Cook & Glass, 2014; Ely et al., 2011; Gallant, 2014; Manzoor, 2015). Furthermore, the policies and practices of institutions that contribute to the “ivory tower” effect and maintain women in lower leadership and teaching positions (DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014). Madsen (2008) presented evidence that, even in democratic nations around the world, women’s multiple responsibilities as parents and workers pose a substantial barrier to their advancement to high leadership posts.

Society as a whole puts pressure on women to juggle their many responsibilities. However, few women are able to secure positions as vice chancellors (VC), directors, deans, and chairs, among other high academic leadership positions in university settings (Lie & Malik, 2014). Morley (2013) also noted that, despite the fact that women are clever, competent, and capable of successfully managing and regulating the key situations at the institutes, their male coworkers often criticize the judgments and decisions made by women at the executive levels. Despite the fact that women are seen as appropriate for authoritative roles, Eagly and Carli (2007) noted that male standards frequently hinder women’s professional advancement and restrict their capacity to exercise executive leadership in institutions. This is a major contributing reason to the persistent underrepresentation of women in positions of leadership across all societal domains (Ballenger, 2010; Barnes, 2017; Morley, 2013). The difficulties experienced by women in senior administrative positions have also been highlighted by Asian leadership studies (Ahmad, 2016; Morley & Crossouard, 2016; Murniati, 2012; Oplatka, 2006; Shaikh, 2014). In order to sustain their standing as formidable figures in their industry, female CEOs face numerous societal constraints. Asian cultural norms have placed constraints on women in the workforce, forcing them to reconcile the demands of the job with the notions of what makes a “good woman.” Women are expected to work and behave appropriately, which includes avoiding close proximity to their subordinates and dressing in business-casual attire.

Because of their work, they frequently have to stay

late to complete tasks, but society doesn’t appreciate their efforts and frequently questions the moral character of women who put up with this (Morley & Crossouard, 2016; Oplatka, 2006). Women’s skills are wasted and the gender leadership gap in academia is exacerbated when their leadership potential is unrealized (Blackmore, 2014; Bell & Yates, 2014). David, 2015; Evers & Sieverding, 2015). Despite recent scholarly efforts to offer equal possibilities for everyone, gender prejudice “operates through human interaction, evaluation procedures, and Organizational customs to quietly still, thoroughly restrict job development of women” (Carnes et al., 2015). As per Fritsch’s (2015) findings, women perceive leadership roles as “undesirable,” “unrealistic,” and “unattractive” because of obstacles identified in past research that are presumed to be well-established within the educational system (Evers & Siegerding, 2015).

The academic setting has a distinct past, even though there might be comparable gender differences in the workplace (Ecklund and colleagues, 2012; Bagilhole & White, 2008). Pakistan must allow everyone a chance to participate in the national interest, as other countries do. Rules are put in place at public institutions to control their operations and provide equal opportunity for men and women to pursue careers in higher education. This is merely because the organization was unable to operate efficiently up until the point where the combination of two disparate concepts did not yield an improved outcome. Men and women handle situations differently and have distinct perspectives.

According to Drury, Siy, and Cheryan (2011), women are generally perceived as possessing remarkable leadership abilities and utilizing these aptitudes to positively influence the surroundings. People in society create and employ the dominant discourse, according to Foucault (2002), to comprehend their own daily acts and behavior as well as its hidden meanings. In the academic discourse of leadership, men are permitted to establish and maintain the dominant discourses in administration. Nonetheless, in order to comprehend women’s everyday perspectives and experiences, sociological analysis of their particular points of view is necessary.

Leaders are trailblazers who impact and sway the public; consequent to their prominence, they are bestowed with both official and informal authority (Heifetz, 1951:13). They must also possess charisma, integrity, physical and moral courage, a strong desire to serve the public, and the capacity for wise decision-making (Phneah, 2013). In Pakistani societies where traditional structures are still in place, women are not treated equally when it comes to decision-making and management. Due to their active participation in management, they continue to experience severe discrimination in Pakistan. In part, this is because women are thought to be more focused on the close relationships within the family.

It also examined the strategies used by female academic leaders to become successful and remain there, as well as their individual experiences. The consequences of strong discourses that uphold hegemonic masculinities and put obstacles in the way of women achieving high leadership positions in academia were also examined in the current

study. Even though it is everyone's dream that gender discrimination does not exist in the modern world, women continue to underparticipate in many areas of life for a variety of reasons. In addition, a few female leaders made an attempt to lead by example pave the way for others to follow, and enhance their output.

It follows that homes are thought to be the places where they would proliferate. Gender-specific responsibilities are expected of both men and women in traditional male-dominated societies in order to prevent societal disapproval. In traditional nations, women are typically barred from assuming any kind of social or financial responsibility. Both leadership positions and public spaces are perceived as belonging to men. It is not beneficial for women to hold positions of leadership. Their involvement is seen as a disgrace to the family's and the community's reputations. Women are not allowed to take positions of leadership, judgment, sovereignty, or public responsibility because of these traditions and norms. Women are consequently shut out of numerous prominent roles in society.

The work of feminist researchers in several countries has led to a shift in the traditional gender roles in higher education. Although women's status in Pakistani culture is still relatively low, their presence in prominent leadership positions is rarely acknowledged because of the country's traditional society and dominantly masculine ideologies. As a result, this study significantly advances our understanding of the factors that both enable and constrain female academic leaders. It also examines how women ascend to the top leadership positions by optimizing the resources that are now available to them.

Research Questions

- What challenges women academic leaders face in Govt. universities?
- What are the factors that support women academic leaders in Govt. universities?
- What challenges women academic leaders face in private universities?
- What are the factors that support women academic leaders in private universities?

2. METHODOLOGY

An interpretive paradigm was followed to conduct this research which results in deeper, context-related variables and features with more concentration. The qualitative approach was used to conduct study due to best suited for the current study because the researcher's goal was to investigate the actual experiences of women leaders who hold academic leadership positions in universities. To obtain sufficient data regarding women's real-life experiences with academic leadership, female leaders in administrative positions at Superior University and University of Education have been considered as the target population. Convenient sampling was employed in this investigation for several reasons. First, utilizing an easy selection strategy, researcher was able to choose the most

significant responders because this study is qualitative in nature. Secondly, women were underrepresented in leadership positions in Lahore's universities. The researcher conducted in-person interviews to gain insight into the real-life experiences of female leaders.

Open-ended questions were provided in the interview guide to allow participants to elaborate on their experiences serving as university administrators. While the majority of participants did not consent to having their interviews recorded, some were, so the researcher took careful notes, followed up with questions to make sure about the understanding of the participant's response, and clarified the notes from the potential participants to avoid misunderstandings and filling in any gaps in the data. I also took paper field notes during the audio interviews. After that, each interview's transcript was added to a Microsoft Word document. Data was analyzed by using thematic analysis technique for analyzing qualitative data is defined. It provides academics with a subjective yet objective view of social reality.

The researchers email an informed consent request form to the participants before setting up an interview. In order to familiarize themselves with the basics of my research, participants were offered the opportunity to read the inform consent request form. They were notified about the purpose of the study by this form. They get information about the study's purpose, the researcher, and the title from this form. The form makes it clear that participation in the study is voluntary, but you have the option to withdraw at any time with no explanation. Respondents found it useful in making their decision to join or not. In addition, every other ethical factor was taken into account when planning and carrying out the interviews.

3. DATA PRESENTATION & FINDINGS

Q1: What challenges women academic leaders face in Govt. universities?

Family Values

Family values are the fundamental ideas that guide a group of individuals in their daily lives as a family. Every family has values, whether or not they are offered. Families model these values for their children through their nonverbal teachings, interactions with others, and behavior at home. Regardless of whether or not these ideals are advantageous to everyone, some families always uphold them.

The families of both my mother and father are devout and traditionalist. Since women in our family were not permitted to pursue higher education at universities, my late mother's strong character encouraged me to focus on my career by boosting my self-confidence. She shadowed me and I was the only self-assured lady in my family. My mother has always fought for my legal rights.

Resources

A middle-class participant described how her tight

budget hindered her capacity to exercise effective leadership. In response, she said:

We had to make the most of our limited resources to meet our requirements because we are a middle-class household. My father used to tutor us at home because he had a college degree and we went to public schools.

Lack of Confidence

It's common for women to hear that projecting confidence will help them advance in their jobs and perform better at work. Self-help books advise women to “fake it ‘til they make it,” “lean in” to accomplish their goals, “stand their ground,” maintain intense eye contact, and modify their voices, postures, and gestures to come across as more assertive. Women have to strike a balance between all of this and still be warm, kind, and forceful while projecting an air of dominance. Although confidence seems to be a gender-neutral notion, our research shows that it is actually a weapon against women. Managers typically point the finger of guilt at women's lack of confidence when they fail to meet their goals.

Because of the male-oriented culture in my family, women were never let to make their own decisions, therefore I frequently feel insecure about the choices I make. It has an impact on my capacity to lead academically.

Gender Biasness

Gender differences in top academic positions persist. The issue of the gender gap in senior academic jobs is one that moves slowly. Several studies show that gender prejudice, in its various forms, has a major role in the persistent underrepresentation of women in leadership roles in academia. Numerous studies have found that unfair peer review processes make it more difficult for female academics to advance and obtain permanent positions. There are others who argue that the persistent disparity between men and women in high-level academic jobs is due to past discrepancies in academic careers and educational attainment, and that this gap will close when women overtake men in these areas. Human rights laws forbid discrimination on the basis of gender almost universally.

It's not an easy job for me to be a leader in a place of business where men rule. They are given authority by society, and restrictions are placed on women's decision-making abilities within their departments and their access to senior positions.

Q2: What are the factors that support women academic leaders in Govt. universities?

Personal Qualities

Cooperation, group dynamics, connection building, and day-to-day interactions with coworkers, superiors, or individuals all depend on certain personal attributes. Your personality plays a big part in how much of an influence you have on your subordinate in any organization you work in. As this was going on, the respondents discussed the

personal qualities that enabled them to carry out their roles as female academic leaders.

In my opinion, personality is the most crucial component of leadership. I consider leadership to be more of a responsibility than a hobby. It entails taking the lead by putting forth more effort than others, taking on more responsibilities, and becoming an inspiration to others.

Team Work

Respondents' and other people's comments highlight how important collaboration is to leadership. They put a lot of effort into building exceptional teamwork with their coworkers and valued the efforts of every employee. They were also supposed to consider plausible explanations for effective work management offered by their staff. Throughout our talk, it was evident that they never skimmed on the caliber of their job; hence, they only utilized harshness when they thought it was appropriate. Members never tolerated false justifications and instead offered to assist reluctant members in learning new responsibilities. They believed that everyone was accountable for the current duty.

Because I think my team is my strength, I prefer working in groups. Being selfless, in my opinion, is essential for leadership roles. On sometimes, I have to help people complete their tasks, and it feels wonderful for me personally. However, when things are out of balance, I also tend to get a little rough. In my opinion, a leader can never win over everyone. So, I believe that in order to manage well, leaders occasionally need to be firm.

Positive Mindset

A positive leader approaches the work with anticipation and the intention of demonstrating mental flexibility. They are driven to succeed for the good of their team, and through their excellent leadership, they encourage others to approach their work in a same manner.

Positive interactions, in my opinion, are necessary to initiate change. The greatest way to handle any situation is to be positive. Engaging in heartfelt interactions and listening to others is the key to success.

Diversity Skills

Diversity in team composition and encouragement can enhance an organization's overall effectiveness, morals, and culture. A diverse staff can help firms generate innovative ideas and make informed strategic decisions. If you understand the advantages that a varied workforce with a range of experiences and abilities may bring to your company, you may be able to locate and recognize such people. One of our participants shared her thoughts with us regarding diversity in the workplace, saying as much:

My ability to work with varied groups is my greatest asset as a leader since, in my opinion; good leadership entails interacting with a wide range of individuals with unique traits and using a variety of abilities to achieve desired outcomes.

Supportive Peers

Even though most people like helping their peers,

support isn't always given. Encouraging peers can create a positive work environment, boost their peers' career development, and increase their colleagues' job happiness. Reminding others how to behave at work, strengthening interpersonal ties, and improving workplace culture can all be achieved by being a supportive coworker. Based on the data collected, it appears that female leaders require peer support to achieve success. Most of the respondents said that their male coworkers were first unwilling to support the female boss and were still eager to do so. Some participants, meanwhile, thought that without the encouragement of their peers, women leaders could not have achieved such success.

Although my peers at work made me experience this challenge, I acknowledge that it can be difficult for non-teaching staff and peers to adjust to a new leader, especially one who is a woman. At first, they were reluctant to interact with the new female leader because they felt more comfortable with their male superiors. However, over time, things changed.

Q3: What challenges women academic leaders face in private universities?

Institutional Politics

Organizations are aware that work satisfaction can be adversely affected by the phenomenon known as organizational politics. Workplace politics negatively affect an organization's environment, culture, and actions. Through the practice of organizational politics, people can accomplish goals beyond the boundaries set forth. Whether political acts help or hinder the organization depends on how well an individual's objectives line up with those of the organization. Favoritism and jealousy are the two subthemes that the researcher further separated out of this main topic.

Favoritism

The study found that employees from elite backgrounds and those with personal connections to higher authorities were more likely to be promoted into leadership positions. They also encounter fewer obstacles in their pursuit of their professional objectives since they receive regular assistance from higher authorities. According to the participants, having a sufficient socioeconomic background aided them in obtaining and maintaining a leadership position in academia. Women were also better equipped to handle threats and criticism since women had greater familial support in their careers.

Some institution workers have advantages from their affluent upbringing. Because their family has a larger social influence and supports them in making rapid job advancement, they feel safe.

Jealousy

Individuals in a company dominated by men, where there is gender inequality and stereotypes, are more accountable for their personal interests than the organization's overall

goals.

Despite the jealousy component, few female CEOs have cooperative team members. If not, this element is present in every organization. My coworkers put pressure on me because, although I have more professional experience than they do, some of them are envious of my advancement and have acquired more degrees than I have.

Inequality

Most respondents contended that judging someone else's abilities only on the basis of how they see themselves isn't always accurate. Men and women choose to fight against gender-based inequity and prejudice worldwide.

People's assumptions about women are a result of gender bias. Stereo typists typically use a microscope to assess the efficacy of female leaders by scrutinizing their behaviors and abilities. If they found any mistakes, they openly denounced it. I occasionally felt nervous and hesitant to talk to my male coworkers because of gender preconceptions.

Time Management

Today's women have come a long way. These days, they also possess strength, financial independence, the capacity to manage responsibilities outside the home, education, and a sense of fulfillment. They still possess traits like love, purity, compassion, and a nurturing nature, nevertheless. A working woman faces daily challenges and is responsible for more than just household chores. Women in the workforce need to be adept at time management. Additionally, our participants said that managing their time was a challenging issue in their leadership experiences. Among them, one said:

Time management is the biggest obstacle I encounter as an academic leader because I'm a working woman. Women must properly combine their personal and professional lives, which can make it exhausting at times.

Q4:What are the factors that support women academic leaders in private universities?

Family Support

Being surrounded by family is crucial for providing support and direction throughout both happy and sad moments. According to studies, having close family ties strengthens our mental health and serves as a powerful barrier against any threats. The lady handles many roles in the family at once. She can perform in any capacity more successfully if her family is behind her.

My father was an army commander, and my mother taught. Owing to my fortunate upbringing and solid financial background, I have never had any difficulties finding a job. My experiences helped me more easily adjust to a competitive environment and take on new social duties.

Leadership Abilities

Women naturally acquire leadership skills, which they use to achieve their objectives. They have the ability to bond with their peers and don't hesitate to express their emotions. Additionally, women are naturally adept at empathizing with others. Because they have the ability to connect emotionally, they are often very good leaders. These leadership qualities enable women leaders to advance in their careers and carry out their duties more successfully. Three subthemes were identified by the researcher within this theme (planning and problem resolution).

Planning

Planning for the long-term and strategic objectives of your company is crucial to its success, particularly since leaders turn ideas into reality, failures into lessons learned, and problems into solutions. According to perceived evidence, those who plan more tend to achieve more. Their leadership experiences were enhanced by preparation. One of the attendees expressed her opinion:

I think that if you have good planning skills, you can handle any challenges that come up at work when you hold a leadership position. You may lead effectively without straining yourself by allowing yourself enough time to plan.

Problem Solving

Problem-solving skills are critical for leaders in all domains. They give leaders the capacity to anticipate issues and identify solutions, boost output, encourage teamwork, encourage creativity and innovation, and manage risk. Many of our participants found that their ability to solve problems allowed them to keep their leadership roles. Each individual approaches the issue in a different way, as demonstrated by the following:

If my department's other members ever give me any trouble. For the most part, that works well for me because I listen to them and give them the authority to repair it.

4. MAIN FINDINGS

- In the world of men, women usually strive to work more and have a better reputation in order to be regarded seriously.
- It has been noted that female leaders leverage their unique leadership qualities to take on and maintain leadership roles.
- Women in leadership need a broad network of allies, including family, friends, and domestic help, to overcome obstacles.
- Senior and junior employees as well as peers are more likely to verbally and nonverbally discriminate against women in leadership roles.
- Men rule almost every aspect of society, and women are viewed as inferior.
- Because they have to balance managing their careers and households, Pakistani women find it more difficult to achieve and hold high leadership positions in this

sociocultural setting.

- To achieve their organizational objectives, most women employ team-based leadership approaches that are cooperative and helpful.
- Women's perspectives on their personal leadership experiences demonstrated that they had some traits in common that made their leadership philosophies distinct.
- All women wanted to be recognized as powerful leaders with their feminine qualities, not condemned by prevailing masculine standards.
- Because firmness is more closely associated with societal norms that are geared toward men, women have had to become more assertive in order to lead effectively.
- Some workers in the company benefited from coming from well-connected families. Since their family has greater social power and has aided in their rapid professional advancement, they feel comfortable.
- Men are more likely to be in positions of control in academic groups, and stereotypes reinforce these prevalently male viewpoints.
- Workers who have personal relationships to higher authorities receive regular assistance from those authorities in order to accomplish their work objectives.
- Women are putting in a lot of time and effort to attain a work-life balance and to be acknowledged as successful academic leaders in society.
- Stereotypes about women include their inability to achieve, lack of confidence, lack of professionalism, and unfitness for positions of leadership.
- The women never sought assistance from the organization in handling such individuals since they were able to deal with such behaviors right away.
- No laws or policies support the advancement of women into leadership roles.
- It was difficult for men to accept women as their leader because having a female leader goes against their egoistic character.
- In this environment of gender inequality, women have faced severe discrimination. Participants in this study employed several strategies, such as problem-solving and planning, to handle obstacles and conflicts.
- A significant contributing factor to gender inequality is society. There are cultural norms that confine women to taking care of the home alone.
- Women's leadership was influenced by their families either directly or indirectly.
- They frequently lack trust in their decisions because of my family's history.
- There are other supportive elements as well, such as the personal traits, leadership abilities, and familial support that certain women leaders receive, that have an impact

on their leadership experiences.

- The experiences of female leaders at public and private colleges are essentially the same; they face the same obstacles posed by a culture dominated by men.

Discussion

In this qualitative study, the researcher looked at the actual experiences of women who hold leadership positions in colleges. Its objective is to raise awareness of the institutional, societal, and personal barriers that prevent women from achieving and holding leadership positions in academia. The goal of this research is to fully comprehend how female leaders used their own assets and skills to overcome obstacles in both their personal and professional life (Fazal et al., 2020). According to the majority of women leaders, women leaders deal with more issues than males do. This belief is in line with other research findings. These challenges stem from the way a culture dominated by men perceives women's capacity for leadership, regardless of whether these issues are caused by their families, cultural norms, or personal issues. The gender bias in society presents a number of challenges for women leaders (Islam et al., 2022).

The findings of feminist theories by women indicate that feminists want the same degree of participation as men do. This is supported by the most recent study, which also shows that women's leadership contributions in the contemporary world have a good impact on organizations by bringing fresh perspectives on how to affect them. Leaders who are female feel that they should be treated with the same dignity as men (Fotaki & Pullen, 2024). They said that women ought to be able to assume leadership roles with the same opportunities that men do. Data show that prejudice is faced by female leaders in public universities from both superiors and lower-level staff. Since they are never regarded as capable of leadership, they find it more difficult to communicate their point of view to the other male members. The results are consistent with the previous literature once more (Lashari, 2023).

Several researchers found that the personal traits of women had a greater impact on their leadership responsibilities. Because of their capacity for teamwork, they were accepted by the predominantly male community and made their coworkers feel more at ease. The data analysis indicates that women typically approach their profession with optimism. Women, as the leaders, can only aim for achievement. Our data indicates that women leaders are more able to collaborate with various groups than men, in line with earlier research. Women naturally fit into every setting and may blend in (Setia, 2021). The findings align with prior research as the issue raised by the respondents is supported by other studies. The findings suggest that, due to cultural and societal norms, especially in Muslim countries, female executives face similar challenges when working at managerial levels. The majority of women found the conservative cultural norms and attitudes to be problematic, according to the results of the current poll. Women are also prevented from assuming leadership roles independently by cultural conventions (Muhammad &

Smith, 2023).

5. CONCLUSION

Education is one of the main pillars of society, yet historically, women have been underrepresented in this sector. Over the past few decades, women's employment and education have been given priority by globalization. The recent modifications to academic systems have made women more visible in all spheres of life. Although more women are employed by academic institutions, they are still underrepresented in positions of high leadership. There haven't been many studies done on women's involvement in higher education management in Asia, especially in Pakistan (Morley & Crossouard, 2016; Murniati, 2012; Oplatka, 2006). The assistance that female leaders got and the challenges they encountered in their leadership positions are the main topics of this study. Its goal was to raise awareness of the institutional, sociocultural, and personal factors that either facilitated or hindered women's ability to rise to and hold senior leadership roles in higher education. Additionally, it looked into a number of professional life-related strategies. Women often adopt a supportive and communicative team-based leadership strategy to achieve their corporate goals.

The prevailing narrative on leadership, which places a strong emphasis on assertiveness and firmness and contributes to the development of more significant issues for women, is shown to be at odds with these ideas of women's leadership. However, diversity is acknowledged as a successful tactic employed by women to swiftly resolve issues since it permits in-depth understanding and examination of the issues. It also keeps them apart from the problems, allowing for more effective dispute resolution. Women leaders encounter greater difficulties managing particular and significant leadership tasks because of conventionally skewed socialization and the absence of official leadership training programs. To become more autonomous, women need to put in more effort to take on leadership roles through their own experience and exposure, as well as with support from society and their peers.

More important are the fundamental preconceptions that perpetuate the strong male standards that are prevalent in Pakistani society. It also gives men permission to harass female academic leaders. Particularly single women experience higher rates of verbal and nonverbal harassment at work. How women handle leadership positions and wield authority within businesses is also influenced by long-standing gender and age stereotypes in Pakistani society. Young women encounter additional challenges in achieving their career aspirations because of the opposition from their male coworkers and managers. Males in our culture subtly convey these unconscious views on female leaders through their body language, gestures, and speech. They have a direct or indirect impact on women.

Apart from the plethora of obstacles encountered by female leaders in higher education, there exist supportive options that aid in maintaining their inspiration and

motivation while they strive towards their career goals. It has been demonstrated that family support is crucial for preserving work-life balance and combating unfavorable views that are prevalent in the neighborhood and at colleges. It is evident that administrative responsibilities place limitations on women's domestic lives. Nonetheless, their wives, close family, and housemaids provide invaluable support by handling the household chores. The findings demonstrated that Pakistani women academic leaders confront several obstacles and make an effort to maintain their unique feminism through a variety of tactics. They are eager to make a positive impact on the traditional leadership discourse and are putting a lot of effort into maintaining their leadership position, which presents them with many opportunities.

Recommendations

The research's findings lead to the following suggestions being made:

- It is recommended that chances for women-only leadership development be provided in order to overcome the dearth of early leadership training and, more crucially, the restricted access to training that women leaders have. The ladies must be involved from the beginning of the planning process in order for them to feel a sense of ownership over the training. It is advised that authorities take action to increase societal awareness of women's education.
- Institutions ought to set up support networks so that women can speak more openly about the challenges they encounter in their roles as academic leaders.
- Policies should be created to provide women academic leaders at the university and other levels with additional chances.
- Establishing formal and informal networks that facilitate open communication for women attending institutions. Through these networks, women can establish connections with other female professionals in related professions, share knowledge and experiences, debate and evaluate problems, and offer solutions.
- Because the study concentrated on the difficulties experienced by women in leadership positions at universities, it may be replicated in other educational settings in the future.

Conflict interests

The authors has declared that no competing interests exist.

References

- Alam, M. F. (2009). Learning organization and development of woman managers in Pakistan. *Human Resource Development International*, 12(1), 105-114.
- Bagilhole, B., & White, K. (2008). Towards a gendered skills analysis of senior management positions in UK and Australian universities. *Tertiary education and management*, 14(1), 1-12.
- Ballenger, J. (2010). Women's Access to Higher Education Leadership: Cultural and Structural Barriers. In *Forum on public policy online* (Vol. 2010, No. 5). Oxford Round Table. 406 West Florida Avenue, Urbana, IL 61801.
- Bana, Z., & Khaki, J. E. A. (2015). Exploring leadership practices of principals of government elementary colleges of education in Pakistan. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 18(4), 464-486.
- Carnes, M., Devine, P. G., Manwell, L. B., Byars-Winston, A., Fine, E., Ford, C. E., ...& Sheridan, J. (2015). The effect of an intervention to break the gender bias habit for faculty at one institution: a cluster randomized, controlled trial. *Academic Medicine*, 90(2), 221-230.
- Dickerson, N. T. (2006). "We are a force to be reckoned with": Black and Latina women's leadership in the contemporary US labor movement. *WorkingUSA*, 9(3), 293-313.
- Diehl, A. B. (2014). Making meaning of barriers and adversity: Experiences of women leaders in higher education. *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal*, 34, 54-63.
- Eagly, A. H. (2007). Female leadership advantage and disadvantage: Resolving the contradictions. *Psychology of women quarterly*, 31(1), 1-12.
- Ehrenberg, R. G., & Main, J. B. (2009). Females on academic boards of trustees: Slow but steady progress. *Trusteeship*, 17(2), 34-35.
- Fazal, F., Serfraz, A., Saleem, H., Mehta, A. M., & Naqvi, F. N. (2020). Women leadership & organizational barriers: A socio-economic and ethical point of view. *J. Legal Ethical & Regul. Issues*, 23, 1.
- Fotaki, M., & Pullen, A. (2024). Feminist theories and activist practices in organization studies. *Organization Studies*, 45(4), 593-616.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality* vol. I.
- Gallant, A. (2014). Symbolic interactions and the development of women leaders in higher education. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 21(3), 203-216.
- Handelman, H. (1996). *The challenge of third world development*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Islam, M. A., Jantan, A. H., Hunt, A., Hashim, H., & Chong, C. W. (2022). Exploring barriers faced by women leaders in accessing and holding leadership positions in public universities in an emerging country. *International Journal of Business Innovation and Research*, 27(1), 121-142.
- Kim, S., & Kim, E. P. (2005). Profiles of school administrators in South Korea: A comparative perspective. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 33(3), 289-310.
- Lashari, M. N. (2023). Through the labyrinth: women in the public universities of Pakistan. *SN Social Sciences*, 3(5), 79.
- Manzoor, S. (2015). The impact of indigenous culture on female leadership in Pakistan. *International Journal of Organizational Leadership*, 4, 414-429.
- Morley, L., & Crossouard, B. (2016). Women's leadership in the Asian Century: does expansion mean inclusion?. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(5), 801-814.
- Muhammad, N., Ullah, F., & Smith, R. (2023). The influence of cultural constraints on entrepreneurial motivations:

- Exploring the experiences of Muslim women entrepreneurs in Pakistan. *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, 14657503231221691.
- Oplatka, I. (2006). Women in educational administration within developing countries: Towards a new international research agenda. *Journal of educational administration*, 44(6), 604-624.
- Rahman, M. A., & Islam, M. J. (2019). THE EFFECT OF GENDER STEREOTYPE AND GLASS CEILING ON THE CAREER ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN ACADEMICS: A STUDY ON PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES OF BANGLADESH. *Daffodil International University Journal of Business and Entrepreneurship*, 12(1), 1-14.
- Setia, D. P. B. (2021). The influence of women leaders and their leadership style on employee engagement through talent management as mediating variable. *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education (TURCOMAT)*, 12(3), 3377-3388.
- Shah, S. (2001). Tertiary colleges in Pakistan: Gender and equality. *School Field*, 12(3/4), 49-70.
- Shaikh, E. K. Z. (2014). *Women participation at academic & management levels in public higher education institutions of Pakistan: A case study of universities in Sindh* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Sindh, Jamshoro).
- Tahir, K. (2019). Navigating through the first-year principalship: an autoethnography in the Pakistani college context. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 22(1), 77-90.
- Taj, S. (2016). *Challenges to female educational leaders in KyberPakhtunkhwa, Pakistan*. The University of Iowa.