

## CHAPTER 5

# GENDER INEQUALITY AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN PAKISTANI HIGHER EDUCATION

Zainab Fakhr and Hazel Messenger

### ABSTRACT

*Academic freedom and the right to express one's views in higher education (HE) are important for faculty and students alike, so enabling intellectual integrity and professional autonomy. However, this might not be the case for female academics in countries where females are marginalised, and their opinions are dominated and limited by the society and culture. Gender inequality and how it negatively influences the opportunities available for females to progress is a universal issue; however, although initiatives designed to tackle this problem are being seen to result in gradual improvement internationally, particularly in industrial countries, the situation in developing countries remains a concern. In developing countries, women tend to be either absent from many organisations or exist at the margins of organisational life with the result that they have fewer opportunities for development or career progression. This has a negative impact on the growth and development of a country at national level, particularly when there has been investment in female education from an earlier stage. It would seem that this certainly is the case in Pakistan where cultural norms intertwine with organisational politics thus militating against female employees. The experiences and issues discussed in this chapter highlight the social barriers faced by female academics in HE that have a significant impact on their academic freedom and expression.*

---

Faculty and Student Research in Practicing Academic Freedom  
Innovations in Higher Education Teaching and Learning, Volume 31, 67–84  
Copyright © 2020 by Emerald Publishing Limited  
All rights of reproduction in any form reserved  
ISSN: 2055-3641/doi:10.1108/S2055-364120200000031016

**Keywords:** Academic freedom; female academics in higher education in Pakistan; women experiences; social and cultural barriers for women; women career progression; gender inequality; patriarchal society; women's participation in the workforce; oppression of women; social injustice

## INTRODUCTION

Academic freedom allows free speech that is informed with reasoned argument and is intellectually driven and knowledge based. Knowledge, democracy and the common good are protected and promoted when there is academic freedom and progress of critical thinking and rigorous education (Scott, 2018). According to the report by Policy Exchange (2019) about the academic freedom in the UK, there is a concern for the culture of conformity and lack of free debate and discovery in British universities. The report also suggested that the significance of context and the value of free speech are important aspects of academic freedom. This can be linked to the Pakistani context as well, where the oppressed and less significant gender [*sic.*], despite being in an academic position, feel constrained and restricted to express views and confines academic freedom of expression if it does not conform to the societal and cultural norms.

Gender equality is vital in ensuring the full development and appropriate positioning of half of the world's total talent pool, which has an immense impact on the growth and development of world economies especially in developing countries where pool of educated and skilled personnel is so urgently needed. The Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2018) focuses on four dimensions: Economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. In 2018, this report placed Pakistan in 148th position out of 149 countries. However, despite this low ranking, Pakistan is a country riddled with paradoxes with some significant 'highs' in gender equality as well as disappointing lows. For example, while only 58% population is estimated to be literate, over 20% of parliamentarians are female, which places Pakistan in 97th position out of 149 countries. There is a similar positive picture in higher education (HE) with 46% of students being female and a very credible 30% of academic staff being female (AEPAM, 2018). This somewhat optimistic picture would suggest that gender equality for women is moving in a positive direction in HE in Pakistan; however, this is not the full story.

The issues of the right to HE and the right to work as academics for women do not just depend on government and institutional strategic plans and supportive policies for females, but also on the socio-cultural and economic norms of the country. Because traditionally Pakistan is a patriarchal society, women academics experience widespread gender discrimination and many find themselves marginalised, discriminated against, or existing at the periphery of organisational life (Shah & Shah, 2012). However, this situation in Pakistan is not unique, but

is similar to other developing and patriarchal societies where although women's participation in the workforce is improving and policies are changing, there is a long way to go before equality of opportunity is achieved.

This chapter relates to an investigation of the experiences of female academic staff in HE institutions in Pakistan. It provides context and background of Pakistan and women's position in Pakistani society including factors like education, family, work and societal and cultural expectations. It also focuses on HE in Pakistan, the methodology used, and the findings of the research in detail. It is envisaged that the detailed narrative from the participating academics may go on to provide direction for Pakistan university policy-makers and leaders in addressing female inequalities, which will contribute to the empowerment of women. It is also suggested that this investigation may contribute to the enhancement of the experiences of female academics in other developing countries with patriarchal societies. The research findings suggest that Pakistani society like other South Asian and developing countries is going through transition and change, and female and male roles are being redefined in the changing cultural and socio-religious discourse. However, it seems that despite the gender equality policies in Pakistan HE, which appear in rhetoric at least to be supportive of women, there is concern about lack of implementation at ground level. This situation may be similar to other developing countries where although women's participation in the workforce has increased, there is also wide-scale inequality due to patriarchal societies influenced by religious, socio-cultural and economic norms. This research on women academics in Pakistan HE indicates that they often experience marginalisation, and a lack of career development opportunities, thus finding themselves at the periphery of the organisational life. The study also showed that female staff were often faced with a myriad of challenges on a daily basis. For example, young mothers faced difficulties because of a lack of childcare facilities, resulting in a negative impact on their careers. Effects included being denied promotion, being kept uninformed about opportunities by various male gatekeepers, being prevented from attending conferences, having less support from the management, and experiencing sexist innuendoes on a daily basis. Their academic roles were further exacerbated by family expectations and the domestic roles that they were expected to fulfil.

## **BACKGROUND TO PAKISTAN AND WOMEN'S POSITION WITHIN SOCIETY**

Pakistan emerged as a nation after the end of colonial rule of India by Britain in 1947. The logic behind the division of the sub-continent was that areas with a majority Muslim population would become Pakistan, whereas the remaining areas would be India. Pakistan's literacy rate, though having improved marginally over the years, at 58% remains considerably short of the Millennium Development Goals' target of 88% by 2015. A closer look reveals large gender, rural and urban disparities (United Nations Development Programme, 2015). The literacy rate for

women (ages 15 and over) was a disappointing 43% in 2015 (World Bank, 2015). Similarly, the enrolment rates for girls in primary education are among the lowest in the world, and girls also face much higher drop-out rates compared to boys. These statistics are largely explained by the fact that parents are usually less interested in their daughters' education, and investment in their education is not seen as a priority, as women are commonly married off when they come of age and are therefore seen as the responsibility of their husbands.

From its independence to now, Pakistan remains predominantly Muslim, with this group representing 97% of a population of over 220 million. Islamic values form the core of the country's rules, regulations and laws; however, it is also widely acknowledged that Pakistan practices some customs that contradict Islamic laws (Kirmani, 2016). Therefore, even though Islamic laws give legal and religious rights that should be enjoyed by all Pakistanis, cultural norms result in denial of certain rights to women, especially those at the lower rungs of society (Zaman, 2015). Islamic law is often misconstrued by historic customs and cultural practices resulting in a denial of women's rights (Ibrahim, 2005). A study by Shah and Shah (2012) of women heads of colleges in Pakistan also concluded that the cultural and religious belief system plays an important role in shaping the discourse, practices and concepts, which are often mixed with religious interpretations. This, they argue, puts women in an awkward position as role socialisation and expectations for women are based on factors that pose a stressful environment for the female heads in academic institutions, which results in male dominance along with the cultural and social aspects, which further depower women. We argue that having female staff in senior positions has to be celebrated, and yet also recognise that having a woman in senior position is no guarantee that they will be sympathetic to promoting the female cause. This has been described as a classic 'queen bee syndrome', that is, they have made it and don't care about the rest (Mavin, 2006). The optimists may see this as a positive development since women have made it to senior positions. We would argue that these managers who have 'made it' ought to shoulder their burden of responsibility by fighting for the female cause.

It may be argued that despite the remarkable achievements and struggles of women throughout the last decade, a woman's status in the Pakistani culture and society vis-à-vis men is one of systemic subordination, determined by the forces of patriarchy. These forces result in women being viewed as homemakers, responsible for looking after the household and its ménage, often leading a life of physical hardship, which involves long hours of tedious chores at home, which receive neither compensation nor recognition (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987). In fact, this gendered role is emphasised to girls from a very young age, and they are socialised to cook, clean and manage the household. They are brought up to be good mothers, sisters and wives. They are not allowed to go out unnecessarily, but if they do, they need to be accompanied by a male member of family, that is, brother, father, or husband to chaperon them. Therefore, in a society, where one's own family and friends become shackles, breaking free is a tremendously difficult task.

The above view about women's status is supported by Wronka (2016) who argues that it has been one long struggle for women in the West too, and they also have had to fight for basic human rights just like their Eastern sisters. He goes on to question that in a society, where women are not only seen as the lesser-able and dependent gender, but also where all opportunities are tailored to be inherently discriminatory in nature towards them, how can it be expected that women will stand shoulder to shoulder with men? It would seem that whilst women in the West have won many battles for equality, the war for equality in developing countries, especially Muslim ones, is far from being won. This may seem ridiculous in today's modern world, and yet despite the endless ink, words and sweat, it would seem we still have a long way to go in Pakistan.

The oppression of women in Pakistan can be described as social constructs, which were artificially created, and now are a kind of 'male truth', which is used to subjugate and oppress women using a 'cultural equation of mind' (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, p. 99). Techniques, rather conveniently, perfected over many centuries have been used to reinforce the gendered power relationships where the women are perceived negatively. Culture has sanctioned female oppression, and women have been enculturated into cultural passivity. However, as the old adage goes where there is oppression there is also resistance, and the female struggle for equality tells us about the many battles where women have fought back and have come out winning. It would seem that gendered roles are entrenched in human societies, but have an enhanced impact in patriarchal societies. These societies force women into places of invisibility and limit women within the boundaries of domesticity. This role specification is transferred from the domestic sphere to professional work context, and if women get into educational leadership roles, it becomes unacceptable and a challenge for the men (Shah, 2009). We would argue that in some cultures it becomes a more dominant phenomenon due to the gendered role expectations, cultural and belief system (Shah, 2018).

In order to understand this situation in the Pakistani context, one needs to look at disparities in the literacy rate between rural and urban populations. For instance, a World Bank (2016) report noted that the problems run deep due to over 61% people living in rural, and 39% living in urban areas. This results in disparity in the educational opportunities for women as a result of disproportionate socio-economic development in rural areas and the effect of tribal, feudal and social formations on the day-to-day lives of women. It is hardly surprising that a recent Global Gender Report (2017) placed Pakistan in the lower quartile and called for major improvements in women's education. It would seem that the situation is improving in the urban areas where due to access to HE facilities, parents are also providing HE to girls just like their sons as a reflection of their economic status.

Despite there being academic and political debate around gender equality claims, there is still discrimination and suppression of women around the globe in both domestic and professional fronts (Kenschaft, Clark, & Ciambone, 2015). In Pakistan, despite male domination in various fields, a small number of women have developed successful careers in various fields despite the odds. The most

notable political figure being Benazir Bhutto, who was elected as the first female Prime Minister of Pakistan, and the first in the Muslim world, a milestone that not even United States of America has achieved. It seems that Pakistan, a country, which otherwise finds itself dominated by patriarchy, is famous for being among the few countries to trust a woman with the highest political power.

## HE IN PAKISTAN

All HE in Pakistan is managed by the Higher Education Commission (HEC), which is an independent and constitutionally established institution. It was formed in 2002, and is responsible for overseeing, regulating and accrediting the HE efforts in Pakistan. HEC manages the development of HE, thus playing a vital role in establishing a knowledge-based economy in the country (HEC, 2017). In addition to regulating, overseeing the management, and encouraging the development of the HE sector, the HEC also works towards upgrading the universities to meet national need and international standards. In its policy statement, the HEC also states that it is committed to providing equal opportunities to female staff, and there is a strong stance against women's harassment (HEC, 2017).

Pakistan has come a long way from the time the country gained independence (1947) when it inherited just two universities, and like other developing countries is now rapidly increasing its HE provision. HEC is responsible for degree awarding of 185 universities, out of which 110 are public sector, and 75 are private sector universities across all provinces (HEC, 2018). Around seven of the universities are for female students only. A growing population and an increasing number of HE providers has resulted in more middle-class female students entering HE, which has resulted in over 30% of academic staff in Pakistani universities being female (HEC, 2017). It is hard to find the number of female academics in the recent data in HEC, as numbers are not given on the basis of gender. According to the Academy of Educational Planning and Management Pakistan's (AEPAM, 2018) Education Statistics report for 2016–2017, there were 69% male academics in HE in Pakistan's 185 universities and 31% female academics (AEPAM, 2018). Similarly, if we take out the junior entry-level positions, that is, lecturers, there remain 1,841 women who make 18%, whereas over 30% of male faculty members were on the senior level, that is, assistant professors, associate professors and professors (Rab, 2014). It has also been noted that there is little data on female-related issues, such as the number of PhDs or the number of female academics at provincial level (Morley & Crossouard, 2015). HEC (2017) also recognised that there were only 18 female Vice Chancellors across 185 universities in Pakistan.

Looking at the number of female academics that have entered Pakistan HE, it appears that the system is still very much gendered according to societal norms, and these academics have restricted opportunities for career progression and top management positions (Shah, 2018). When analysing female representation in senior positions in another Muslim society, the Middle East, it would seem that strong masculine culture in academia still prevails as it does in society at large

(Tlaiss, 2015). Therefore, despite some optimism in terms of number of women academic staff entering the teaching profession, gender inequality at all levels in academia still remains in Pakistan (Shah & Shah, 2012). This state of affairs reflects a broader societal problem, which is prevalent in Pakistan due to cultural and religious norms.

Gender inequality associated with career progression in academia is not an unusual feature of HE internationally. It has also been noted that the organisational culture of the HE institutions in the West is also 'unfriendly' and 'unaccommodating' for women especially towards their journey leading to higher positions (McGregor, 2010). For example, in the UK, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data for 2017–2018 indicates that 46% of academic staff were female. However, a closer review of contractual detail shows that although 56% of all academic staff earned more than £44,000 per annum, only 23% (approximately) of the staff earning over £60,000 per annum were women (HESA, 2018). These higher earners would include the professoriate and other senior academics, but only 26% of all professorial contracts and 36% of other senior contracts were held by women. The particular nature of academic work and opportunities for career progression highlight important factors associated with the gendered nature of work more generally. For example, women also constitute the highest number of academic, part-time staff in the UK. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2017, 2019) have criticised the UK for this more generally, because of the influence part-time working has on later career development, meaning women remain in lower paid, lower status jobs in their chosen professions. Progression in academic work often involves pursuing opportunities nationally and internationally, but the ability for women to make these types of career decisions is influenced by many 'pull' factors, often related to caring for others and putting another's needs first (Powell & Mainiero, 1992).

When societal expectations of women, like those in Pakistan and other Muslim cultures also come into the equation, the opportunities for female academics to progress in the careers become even more limited. This view strikes resonance with the views expressed by Shah and Shah (2012) in an earlier study, which looked at women, educational leadership and societal culture in Malaysia. They concluded that women's participation in public, and their access to senior leadership positions is defined by cultural and belief systems in a society. The value of female academics in Pakistan is defined not only by the nature of their work roles but also by how they are characterised by the societal, cultural and religious norms, which are conservative and genderised (Fakhr, 2018).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity and management in organisations has been highlighted by a number of academics. For instance, Tlaiss (2015) argues that HE, especially in developing countries, is characterised by male traits, which tends to militate against the female career development. In an earlier study of 400 women in Lebanon, Tlaiss and Kauser (2010, p. 527) concluded that women managers experienced 'gender-based discrimination in recruitment, promotion, performance appraisal, and training and development opportunities'. A more recent study by Shah (2018) of Muslim academics in three Malaysian

universities concluded that Muslim societies were characterised by feudal patriarchal structures, and interpretations of religion were used to reinforce male domination and authority over women in education. This led Shah (2018) to conclude that gender equality was a complex phenomenon, and despite institutional policy, implementation was often lacking. She challenged those who claimed that 'gender equality is won' (p. 299) and argued that the female suffering in terms of discrimination at professional and domestic levels was all too common in Muslim societies.

In order to explore the concept of organisational masculinity in relation to the experiences of female academic staff in developing countries, we shall turn to an historical quote from Quinlan (1999, p. 32), which we argue is as relevant today as it was then 30 years ago:

[...] academic women experience greater isolation, higher levels of stress, a lower sense of self-efficacy, and self-confidence and more difficulty in establishing relationships with colleagues, a feeling of being an outsider in a masculine culture ...

Women's status in Pakistan has always been subordinated to males in all spheres of employment, whether private organisations or educational institutions (Ali, 2013; Shaukat & Pell, 2016). The degree of dominance is different depending on the socio-economic factors, urban and rural divide, regions or traditions to which they belong (the tribal and feudal system), and the level of education or literacy, which is different among all four provinces (Shaukat, Siddiquah, & Pell, 2014). For instance, in Punjab province, where over 40% of the national population is to be found, there is a much higher level of education provision than for instance in Balouchistan or Khyber Pakhtoonkhawa (KPK). Furthermore, there is a significant difference between rural and urban areas in terms of education provision.

## METHODOLOGY

In this qualitative research, in-depth interviews were used, employing an interpretivist approach and using multiple case studies to provide a rich account of the subjects' personal, cultural and institutional experiences.

Our research approach was influenced by feminist researchers like Sandra Harding, Donna Haraway, bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins, who considered face-to-face or woman-to-woman interaction involving personal, emotional and experiential aspects essential for the production of knowledge. Thus by adopting qualitative method we were able to explore issues, which were sensitive to discuss, including personal observations and life histories, in order to explicitly reveal personal experiences and contexts. An understanding of feminist methodology and female standpoints generated valuable and in-depth accounts of the female academic experience.

The authors being women, with personal experiences of being academics as well, put us in a unique position to explore the experiences of female academic staff in Pakistan, keeping in view the cultural and societal context and differences.

The experience of teaching in Pakistani HE as an ‘insider’ and then as an ‘outsider’ working in the HE in UK is particularly relevant to this research.

In the present research, a total of 16 in-depth interviews were conducted from a number of female university academics throughout Pakistan. Data were derived from across four provinces in Pakistan, namely Punjab, KPK, Sind and Balouchistan. All the participating staff had a postgraduate degree, and a significant number had obtained their doctorates from outside of Pakistan such as Norway, UK, New Zealand and the United States.

## **FINDINGS**

The findings that emerged from thematic analysis of the in-depth interviews from the Pakistani female academics show three main areas emerging as significant to their ability to develop their careers: cultural and social experiences, career journey in relation to their institutional experience, and lastly their coping strategies.

### **CULTURAL AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCES FOR FEMALE ACADEMICS**

There was a general overview among respondents that they needed to overcome a number of cultural and social obstacles that prevented them in developing a successful academic career. These related to family circumstances, husband and family support, number and age of children, cultural norms and religious values. This is despite the principle of gender equality in Pakistan, which is enshrined in the national constitution and various laws. It would seem that the cultural norms and religious beliefs are taken out of context and used as exploitative tools to subjugate women. This is similar to the experience of Malaysian academics (Shah, 2018), which suggested that in Muslim countries, gender discrimination and lack of equal opportunities become a more dominant phenomenon due to gendered role expectations, cultural and belief systems. In this study, all respondents agreed that ‘backward’ cultural or religious practices need to be weeded out in the twenty-first century since the manipulators (male managers) tried to justify female subjugation by referring to the cultural and religious norms.

One of the interesting findings from the research is that the age and marital status of female academics defines how women are viewed in the workplace. This is a new finding and cannot be related to any existing research. Some of the respondents were married with children and their husbands were in professional jobs, whereas some were single, and a few were divorced. The interviews showed that women who were married felt more secure and were ‘respected’ at work, whereas those who were single experienced the challenge of being stigmatised for being unmarried while commanding a certain respect for their academic achievements. They indicated that it became difficult for them to find a suitable marriage partner, as there was a perception in society that having been abroad to study and having attended conferences, made them liberal minded, which is seen

as a sign of decadence. Therefore, these females were faced with two problems: being too educated and likely to have confrontational attitudes, and being past the traditional age for marriage, which society and culture regard to be between 21 and 25.

There was an overwhelming viewpoint among the respondents that children were socialised from a very early age as to how they should fit in society, so women in Pakistan experienced expectations that restricted their mental and physical boundaries. As a patriarchal society, Pakistan defines a 'good woman' as one who stays within the walls, and this sounds similar to the 'respectable femininity' concept, a set of behavioural norms commonly linked to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Ansari, 2016; Fernando & Cohen, 2014). This 'good woman' spends most of her time at home, especially after giving birth to children, resulting in a reduction of educational and work opportunities. The female respondents who participated in the research were clear exceptions who bucked the trend by acquiring HE, and then entering the world of work with the support of their families.

The significance of work–life conflict and multiple identities were consistently pointed out by all of the respondents. The problem appeared to be more acute in cases where the women were married and had children, with the societal expectation for extensive domestic responsibilities. These findings coincide with McIntosh, McQuaid, Munro, and Dabir-Alai (2012), in their study of Western women, where they observed that family life had a major negative impact on female careers. However, we argue that there is even greater demand on the Pakistani females in terms of time and commitment to fulfil the role of being an academic, and more so if she is a mother, due to little support being provided. Pakistani female academics experiences fall in line with all patriarchal societies, especially in developing countries, whereby a married woman coming back from work is expected to carry on performing (or having to organise) household duties such as cooking, feeding and cleaning the house while her husband rests. This would suggest that being a university lecturer does not give a female academic that much free time at home as she needs to prepare for the next-day lectures, research, do marking or carry out other administrative duties. Our findings suggest that whether a woman is a mother, a wife, or a daughter, she is expected to take care of the household responsibilities, which has a negative effect on her career, which leads to a high level of stress. While this may not be so different to women's experience in the West, in Pakistan, family often means a large extended family, hence a lot of family commitments. Therefore, the argument here is that support from the family is essential in order to achieve a balance between competing roles of the two-earning couples, even though it may be challenging especially for the career-minded women, as men's careers are more likely to be prioritised due to the cultural and religious norms (Tlaiss, 2015).

The findings also suggest that in some instances women are forced to abandon or shelve their academic careers at the point of getting married and become homemakers due to pressure from husband or his immediate family, as well as perceptions from broader society. Husbands and the family, into which the women marry, prefer a woman not to work outside of their homes, especially in

the early years of the marriage. There is a concern that women who are effectively being forced to 'withdraw from work' deprive institutions of valuable intellectual raw material and knowledge gained over many years being lost. Furthermore, it leads to female marginalisation and devaluation of the female career aspiration, which is good neither for the women nor for the society.

## **CAREER JOURNEY AND INSTITUTIONAL EXPERIENCE**

On a general level, all respondents in the research were committed to their profession and the academic life since it gave them 'a sense of freedom', which resulted in personal satisfaction as well as provided them financial independence in what they described as a 'male dominated and conservative society'.

Respondents expressed concern that in many instances men were preferred for the job as young women were likely to have child rearing and other responsibilities, which are taken negatively whilst hiring people. The respondents had a concern that if they took longer maternity leave or became unwell, they might lose their job.

The research suggests that women in order to be successful in their careers tend to continuously make personal sacrifices, and constantly need to juggle and balance work, and personal life. In particular, motherhood and career progression appear closely interlinked especially with extremely limited opportunities available for women. Problems included opportunities for progression, training and childcare facilities. There are few childcare centres in the universities in Pakistan and little flexibility in working hours. Similarly, maternity leave is only granted for three months and the female academic is expected to be performing and contributing a hundred per cent on returning to work with very little support when rejoining the institution after maternity leave. The findings coincide with a study of parenthood and its negative impact on female career progression by McIntosh et al. (2012) and Tlaiss (2015). They concluded that motherhood has a negative impact on the career of a female as compared to a male due to the institutional failure to give career breaks and reducing working hours for women with young children. In Pakistan, having a child often means an end of a career for many women, since the concept of maternity leave is a relatively new one, and career break often means 'end of a career' since re-entry into the profession is not always assured. When faced with limited childcare facilities, women had to make a difficult choice. These findings are consistent with Longhurst's (2012) and Probert's (2005) findings of Western women who were also faced with difficult choices, that is, whether to return to work or stay at home to look after their children.

There is a further support for female institutional inequality by the work of Ali (2013) in Pakistan, who concluded that the primary role of women in patriarchic societies is that of a home-maker, therefore they are considered as 'inferior employees' or less competent. There was a view among many of the respondents that men are considered to be the breadwinners in family settings since they

were expected to financially support not only their immediate family, but also their parents and younger siblings. This somewhat devalues the working female's role to being less important than a man's role, which poses a major problem in that either the women are excluded from work due to negative cultural and religious norms, or due to bad employment practices. Therefore, the question of how young women are treated is more relevant in a country like Pakistan since it shows that there is a long way to go in the quest for gender equality. This places a significant amount of responsibility on the shoulders of the 'responsible' managers to ensure that young female academics are given the opportunity to have a career after becoming mothers.

Management in Pakistani universities is largely male, and it seems that when the issue of gender equality is discussed at institutional level it often relates to women's mistreatment, that is, harassment, rather than equality in terms of employment practices (Morley & Crossouard, 2015). The findings suggest that while challenging harassment is essential, equality has to include all issues that lead to female discrimination. This requires a fundamental shift in institutional thinking, starting with recognition that masculine behaviour by management is unacceptable. The elitist nature of HE in Pakistan means that opportunities for women to enter as students or staff have been limited, and that when men become managers they exercise their authority to maintain the status quo, which they have been trained for from an early age. Universities in Pakistan, like many other organisations in the country, are masculine by nature, which limits the career progression opportunities of female academic staff. We should not be surprised by this, since HE institutions have been shaped by men; therefore, their main purpose has been to essentially serve the perceived societal needs, which were determined by men. This historical development of HE is true for all societies as articulated by Caplan and Caplan (2009) and Agarwala (2015). This leads to organisational cultures with a lack of opportunity for adequate female networks, female mentors and role models, and work and family imbalances. The research findings demonstrate that gender-based discrimination in recruitment, promotion, performance appraisal and training and development opportunities to be common practice in Pakistani HE institutions. This endorses the patriarchal and masculine nature of society where traditional ideologies of male domination prevail, whereby men pursue careers while most of the women are expected to play a domestic role.

For the respondents, their overwhelming experience was one of male authority, suppression and 'women in academia were effectively outsiders', underrepresented and invisible, which is supported by the Kemp, Angell, and McLoughlin (2015) study about workplace identity of women in academia. The findings also show that many Pakistani female academics exist below the organisational radar screen by often keeping silent in meetings. Actively contributing in meetings would challenge the status quo, effectively meaning that they would be labelled as 'trouble makers', which could further curtail their career from progressing. In extreme situations, the result would be victimisation by their male managers. This practice in Pakistan is possibly more acute due to the patriarchic nature of society as well as the general conservatism, which is a hallmark of most Muslim societies (Shah, 2018).

Another negative aspect of career experience was to do with women being unable to socialise with their male colleagues away from their immediate work environment. This was due to religious as well as cultural norms, and the perception that it may lead to promiscuous behaviour. The result of not socialising was that women were also excluded from social networking in their work environment. We argue that working especially in societies where there were few job opportunities is important in all work environments but perhaps more so in HE, where at times classes were sometimes co-taught, research articles needed to be co-authored, and national as well as international conferences attended. Furthermore, it is through networking that job opportunities were availed or promotions discussed by managers, and failing to network effectively left the female academic staff uninformed.

The research findings suggest that many young female academics in Pakistan experience restrictions at work, further enforcing conservative behaviour legitimised by religion. For instance, there is a strict code of dress at work, and male and female managers expect female staff to dress conservatively, that is, no tight jeans, having scarves, etc. While this may sound reasonable for many, it also sends a message to the female staff that they have to conform to societal values, which are conservative. It seems that institutional management, both male and female, is actively promoting behavioural norms in the workplace, which are endorsed by society.

A surprising finding of the study related to how female managers prevented other females from getting into senior management positions, an example of the 'Queen Bee' syndrome (Mavin, 2006, 2008). Some of the junior lecturers in the research pointed out that these women managers were part of the problem, since they did not stand up to fight for the rights of all of the female staff. Respondents felt the 'Queen Bee' was reinforcing genderised and conservative societal values, which militated against their own 'kind'. Support for the 'Queen Bee' syndrome was provided by a female professor who was instrumental in hiring of staff in a prestigious university when she stated that 'there were many reasons for hiring men' and 'men communicate better and can spend more time in office'. She later went on to contradict herself by saying that women did not face a 'glass ceiling' but 'a thick layer of men' and argued for 'zero tolerance policy' on gender issues. However, she did not elaborate whether she was talking about equality issues or female harassment.

It is interesting to note that female academics that were willing to stand up against repressive customs and practices that were being promoted by the fundamentalists were always fearful of the religious lobby that was to be found in most institutions. Religion is often used by these figures especially when they use out of context quotes from the *Quran* and *Hadith* to legitimise their anti-women views. For instance, out of context Islamic quotes related to 'sex, chastity, morality, and code of conduct to control women' (Shah & Shah, 2012, p. 38) in relation of women's position in society was a common mistake made by those who wanted vent their own anti-Islamic agenda. What they fail to understand is that women before the advent of Islam were abused with little rights; therefore, what Islam introduced was truly revolutionary and supportive. It emphasises the findings of

Shah (1999) who notes that in Muslim societies the discourses are produced and manipulated through self-acquired power of interpretation of religion by those in authority who are men.

There was a total agreement among the respondents that there was a need in Pakistan to challenge the conservatives and fundamentalists who violated female equality rights in all sectors of society. They argued that HE is an important battleground due to its liberal environment where women have an opportunity to challenge many of the oppressive male attitudes despite some hurdles they are being currently faced with. This may require forming alliances with the liberal minded men to move the equality agenda forward. This viewpoint was acknowledged by all respondents who recognised the importance of support from liberal male academics in institutions; however, the respondents were also keen to point out that these individuals should not sit on the fence but actively support women's quest for equality. This approach, however, was not necessarily regarded positively by other academics. It was argued that male staff who were sympathetic to the discrimination of female colleagues were often hesitant and unable to take sides openly, since they feared the repercussions from senior managers or even other colleagues. These liberal minded colleagues were described as being 'silent allies', which was deemed to be useful since the daily teaching and research activities necessitated this.

We fully support the view of many of the respondents who acknowledged that highly educated male and female academics should form think tanks for promoting a progressive agenda in Pakistan, and thus work together to bringing about equality for all oppressed groups in society. This view is supported by the Mavin, Bryans, and Waring (2004) study of British Business and Management Schools. They found that universities were uniquely placed in society to challenge their own unequal practices as well as provide direction for change in broader society.

## COPING STRATEGIES

It seems that many of the female academics were aware of their rights and willing to challenge male hegemony. While some respondents respected authority, perhaps an expression of their socialisation and cultural upbringing, there were also those who were quite bold and ready for challenging male supremacy. This change in attitude was driven by their oppression, so despite coming from a male-dominated household, many women were willing to stand up in the face of male authority even though this was often outside of the institution. This leads us to conclude that resistance is a major coping strategy for many female academics as they move from passivity towards assertiveness. Once again, the conservatism being displayed by Pakistan female academics is consistent with the study of Malaysian female academics (Shah, 2018).

While opposing female oppression, there was also a certain realism among female academics that they existed in institutions where men had absolute control. And therefore, they had to protect themselves since open resistance within the institutions could potentially lead to victimisation, or at worst, end their careers. Open revolt against gender-related oppressive practices may sound like a way forward;

however, resistance can take many forms especially given the conservative, gendered and religious nature of Pakistani society (Badran, 2013; Jamal, 2005). Liberal thinkers may argue that women should stand up and fight for their rights at work and in society; however, those who argue for this position do not really understand the Pakistani culture or societal pressures. We would argue that women's aspirations and hopes are curtailed by cultural and family/extended family constraints, which set boundaries in terms of what can be said openly. Therefore, the struggle for change is going to be a long one. This certainly is the view of all the respondents who acknowledged that it may take several decades to change the mindset of society to treat its women as equals. This may sound negative; however, we firmly believe that change will come since masses of women are entering HE as students, and they are not going to accept what some described as a 'raw deal' for women.

Quite encouragingly, there is also a polarisation of subjects being studied by young females entering universities despite pressure from the families that their daughter should only be a doctor or gain a school teaching qualification. This broadening of curriculum was quite noticeable in the research, which identified that many of the respondents had moved away from traditional subjects towards social science degrees, which allow for a broader debate outside of formal curriculum. Many of these women studying social sciences had become torchbearers for equality especially those who experienced HE from overseas. This may be considered as quite a revolutionary step in the conservative culture where female silence and conformity are the norm. However, the drive and progression towards truth and equality had equally necessitated these women adopting tools of resistance (Belenky et al., 1986; Harding, 2004). So, rather than becoming passive and depressed, or adopting the cloak of a victim, many of the respondents had learnt to fight back by organising and sharing their knowledge by various tools at their disposal, such as social media, and sharing of research via publication. A number of academics were actively using blogs to share their thoughts with a wider audience, while others used publications and conferences to spread their message of equality and resistance. The blogs are interesting since ideas can be shared very quickly, making it less likely for the authors to be victimised. It shows that social media is going to become a weapon of choice for women since it allows ideas to be shared seamlessly across the country as well as continents. Maybe Pakistani women or a woman of Pakistani Diaspora working overseas will find a common agenda, which the oppressor, be it men in organisations or fundamentalists who use religion to keep women subjugated, will not be able to control. These female academics will highlight the injustices they have to endure by coming together to fight for equality of all women and change attitudes towards women within their institutions and in broader society.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Academic freedom not only requires individual academics the freedom of speech and ideas but also institutional autonomy is an important aspects as universities should be allowed to take initiatives that best suit the academic and intellectual standing without social pressures.

Universities continuously interact and impact the wider societies and restricting freedom of speech and expression would result in the impoverished and intellectually disadvantaged societies. The government, civil society and the universities need to work together to support and institutionalise academic freedom to harbour intellectual debate and freedom and expression. Another important aspect is that academic freedom should not be mixed up with equality and diversity as equality caters to the right of individuals from different back grounds to learning and teaching without discrimination whereas the later leads to pursuit of truth.

## CONCLUSIONS

At institutional level, we would argue that there needs to be a clearer redefining of equal opportunities at national level, via HEC, and a roadmap of action plans that would look at the position of women at institutional level in relation to appointment and progression of these staff. Institutions need to move away from rhetoric towards working goals. This needs to be encompassed by target setting so that gender disparities can be addressed in terms of achieving a gender-balanced workforce. We argue that HEC needs to implement training programmes to educate male staff about the importance of female position and role in society; this includes senior managers' inputs as well, as it requires the change of mindsets to be more supportive of the female workforce. One hopes that this 'cleansing of the male mindset' will lead senior management to support their female staff, so that they can develop their skills in order to move into senior management positions.

On a positive note there appears to be an increasing number of women in Pakistan entering HE as students as well as staff. It may be for this reason that despite the problems the women academics faced, they showed character and strength in the face of adversity using tools such as informal gatherings at work, and social media, to voice their unequal treatment at a personal level as well as inequality in broader society. As the saying goes 'where there is oppression there is also resistance' and Pakistani females are no exception.

## REFERENCES

- Academy of Educational Planning and Management Pakistan (AEPAM). (2018). *Pakistan Education-Statistics, 2010–2011*. Islamabad. Retrieved from <http://library.aepam.edu.pk/Books/Pakistan%20Education%20Statistics%202016-17.pdf>. Accessed on April 16, 2019.
- Agarwala, T. (2015). Gender hierarchy to gender equality: An agenda for transition in higher education. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 30(5), 338–342.
- Ali, F. (2013). A multi-level perspective on equal employment opportunity for women in Pakistan. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 32(3), 289–309.
- Ansari, N. (2016). Respectable femininity: A significant panel of glass ceiling for career women. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 31(8), 528–541.
- Badran, M. (2013). *Feminism in Islam: Secular and religious convergences*. London: Oneworld Publications.
- Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N. R., & Tarule, J. M. (1986). *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind* (Vol. 15). New York, NY: Basic books.

- Caplan, P. J., & Caplan, J. (2009). *Thinking critically about research on sex and gender: Exam copy*. New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Fakhr, Z. (2018) Exploration of female academic staff experiences in a conservative and gendered society: A case study of selected universities in Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.755808>. Accessed on July 10, 2019.
- Fernando, W. D. A., & Cohen, L. (2014). Respectable femininity and career agency: Exploring paradoxical imperatives. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 21(2), 149–164.
- Harding, S. G. (2004) *The feminist standpoint theory reader: Intellectual and political controversies*. London: Routledge.
- HESA. (2018). *Higher education staff statistics 2017/18*. London: The Higher Education Statistics Agency. Retrieved from <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/24-01-2019/sb253-higher-education-staff-statistics>. Accessed on May 31, 2019.
- Higher Education Commission Pakistan (HEC). (2017). HEC stresses women empowerment. Retrieved from <http://hec.gov.pk/english/news/news/Pages/HEC-Stresses-Women-Empowerment.aspx>. Accessed on April 27, 2019.
- Higher Education Commission Pakistan (HEC). (2018). HEC recognised universities and degree awarding institutions. Retrieved from <http://hec.gov.pk/english/universities/pages/recognised.aspx#k>. Accessed on April 27, 2018.
- Ibrahim, F. (2005). *Honour killings under the rule of law in Pakistan*. Master of Laws thesis, McGill University, Montreal. Retrieved from [http://digitool.library.mcgill.ca/R/?func=dbin-jump-full&object\\_id=83953&local\\_base=GEN01-MCG02](http://digitool.library.mcgill.ca/R/?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=83953&local_base=GEN01-MCG02). Accessed on July 3, 2019.
- Jamal, A. (2005). Feminist 'selves' and feminism's 'others': Feminist representations of Jamaat-e-Islami women in Pakistan. *Feminist Review*, 81(1), 52–73.
- Kemp, L. J., Angell, L., & McLoughlin, L. (2015). The symbolic meaning of artifacts for the workplace identity of women in academia. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 30(5), 379–396.
- Kenschaft, L., Clark, R., & Ciambrone, D. (2015). *Gender inequality in our changing world: A comparative approach*. London: Routledge.
- Kirmani, N. (2016). *Questioning the 'Muslim Woman': Identity and insecurity in an urban Indian locality*. Ghaziabad: Routledge.
- Longhurst, R. (2012). *Maternities: Gender, bodies and space*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Mavin, S. (2006). Venus envy 2: Sisterhood, queen bees and female misogyny in management. *Women in Management Review*, 21(5), 349–364.
- Mavin, S. (2008). Queen bees, wannabees and afraid to bees: No more 'best enemies' for women in management?. *British Journal of Management*, 19, S75–S84.
- Mavin, S., Bryans, P., & Waring, T. (2004). Gender on the agenda 2: Unlearning gender blindness in management education. *Women in Management Review*, 19(6), 293–303.
- McGregor, J. (2010). Who needs gender research and what is its role in the twenty-first century? A personal reflection. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 25(4), 269–274.
- McIntosh, B., McQuaid, R., Munro, A., & Dabir-Alai, P. (2012). Motherhood and its impact on career progression. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 27(5), 346–364.
- Morley, L., & Crossouard, B. (2015). *Women in higher education leadership in South Asia: Rejection, refusal, reluctance, revisioning*. Brighton: British Council, University of Sussex.
- Mumtaz, K., & Shaheed, F. (1987). *Women of Pakistan: Two steps forward, one step back*. Lahore: Vanguard Book Pvt. Ltd.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2017). *The pursuit of gender equality: An uphill battle*. OECD. Retrieved from [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/the-pursuit-of-gender-equality\\_9789264281318-en#page4](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/the-pursuit-of-gender-equality_9789264281318-en#page4). Accessed on May 31, 2019.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2019). *LMF1.6 Gender differences in employment*. OECD Family Policy Division. Retrieved from [http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/LMF\\_1\\_6\\_Gender\\_differences\\_in\\_employment\\_outcomes.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/LMF_1_6_Gender_differences_in_employment_outcomes.pdf). Accessed on May 31, 2019.
- Policy Exchange. (2019). Retrieved from <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Academic-freedom-in-the-UK.pdf>. Accessed on February 2, 2020.
- Powell, G. N., & Mainiero, L. A. (1992). Cross-currents in the river of time: Conceptualizing the complexities of women's careers. *Journal of Management*, 18(2), 215–237.

- Probert, B. (2005). 'I just couldn't fit it in': Gender and unequal outcomes in academic careers. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 12(1), 50–72.
- Quinlan, K. M. (1999). Enhancing mentoring and networking of junior academic women: What, why, and how? *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 21(1), 31–42.
- Rab, M. (2014). British Council, Pakistan - What higher education reforms have done for Pakistans women. Retrieved from <https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/2014/03/16/what-higher-education-reforms-have-done-for-pakistans-women>. Accessed on April 20, 2018.
- Scott, J. W. (2018). How the right weaponized free speech. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 7.
- Shah, S. (1999). Feminist Perspectives on Leadership. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(2), 23–30.
- Shah, S. (2009). *Women and educational leadership in a Muslim Society: A study of women college heads in Pakistan* (pp. 344–381). Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Shah, S. (2018). 'We are equals'; datum or delusion: perceptions of Muslim women academics in three Malaysian universities. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 39(3), 299–315.
- Shah, S., & Shah, U. (2012). Women, educational leadership and societal culture. *Education Sciences*, 2(1), 33–44.
- Shaukat, S., & Pell, W. (2016). Gender inequity at workplace in Pakistani higher education Institutions. *Bahria Journal of Professional Psychology*, 15(1), 49–65.
- Shaukat, S., Siddiquah, A., & Pell, A. W. (2014). Gender discrimination in higher education in Pakistan: A survey of university faculty. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 56(1), 109–126.
- Tlairs, H. (2015). Neither-nor: Career success of women in an Arab Middle Eastern context. *Employee Relations*, 37(5), 525–546.
- Tlairs, H., & Kauser, S. (2010). Perceived organizational barriers to women's career advancement in Lebanon. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 25(6), 462–496.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2015). Aser Pakistan. Retrieved from [http://www.aser-pakistan.org/document/learning\\_resources/2014/Post\\_2015\\_Agenda/MDGs%20&%20EFA%20Goals.pdf](http://www.aser-pakistan.org/document/learning_resources/2014/Post_2015_Agenda/MDGs%20&%20EFA%20Goals.pdf). Accessed on April 12, 2019.
- World Bank. (2015). Rural population (% of total population). Retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?locations=PK>. Accessed on July 12, 2019.
- World Bank. (2016). World Bank Data Pakistan. Retrieved from [www.worldbank.org/en/country/pakistan](http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/pakistan). Accessed on March 10, 2019.
- World Economic Forum. (2018). Global gender gap report. Retrieved from [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2018.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf). Accessed on March 8, 2019.
- Wronka, J. (2016). *Human rights and social justice: Social action and service for the helping and health professions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Zaman, S. (2015). Forced marriages and inheritance deprivation, A research study exploring substantive, structural gaps in the implementation of the anti-women practices [Criminal Law Amendment] Act, 2011 in six select districts of Pakistan. *Aurat Foundation (2014)*. Retrieved from [www.af.org.pk](http://www.af.org.pk). Accessed on May 30, 2019.