



Breaking Barriers: The Opportunities and Challenges of Women in Educational Leadership in Balochistan

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Abstract: *These days, when we are heading to the 21st century, in the era of globalization and the world changing drastically, women are also playing their role in every sphere of life and making their place in society. Pakistani women also take positions in every area of work, like health, politics, and education, as well as higher-level administrative and leadership positions. This study focuses on the opportunities and challenges faced by women leaders at the Higher Educational Institutes (HEIs) in Quetta. It is primarily exploratory and descriptive, utilizing the qualitative approach. In-depth individual interviews were used to collect the data for this research, followed by semi-structured interview patterns using a purposive sampling technique from women leaders of HEIs in Quetta City. Family, education, societal, and organizational culture were discussed to highlight the challenges, opportunities, and barriers to women leaders. Hence, the primary target of this research is to document the lived experiences of women leaders, emphasizing the distinguished sociocultural challenges that women leaders face in Quetta and the way they can overcome them and achieve their leadership positions in this male-dominating society. Conclusions drawn from this study are in a storyline article with circumstantial explanations and direct quotes from research participants. Findings are pivotal for women seeking academic careers to pave their way toward senior leadership positions and increase their representation in academic management.*

Keywords: *Women leaders, challenges, opportunities, family, education, organizational and societal culture.*

Introduction

Despite progress toward gender equality, workplace prejudice remains a significant issue. A recent report (GEM, 2022) highlights the persistent gender gap, noting that even as women gain financial independence through businesses or reputable jobs, they remain underrepresented. Although the number of educated and skilled women has grown worldwide, their presence in leadership remains minimal (Koburtay & Syed, 2019). Society undervalues women's leadership due to stereotypes that label women as less confident, aggressive, and rational. This entrenched gender discrimination perpetuates these harmful ideologies across generations.

Pakistan is a developing country with an estimated population of 207 million in 2017; women make up 49%. Regrettably, only (28.85%) of women are formerly educated with very little (1.18%) attained higher education (Nasir et al., 2019). Pakistan ranked third worst country, in terms of gender equality, globally. The World Economic Forum (WEF) ranked

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Pakistan 151st out of 153 countries on the gender parity index. This marks a significant decline from 112th in 2006 to 151st in 2020, trailing far behind Bangladesh and India, which scored 72.6 and 112, respectively (Hinduja et al., 2023). Gender disparity adversely affects the growth of a nation and increases poverty (Rehman et al., 2018).

Pakistani culture is rooted in a patriarchal framework that restricts women's roles to the domestic, sphere, limiting their access to formal education and workforce participation (Amjad & Danish., 2024). Women are often seen as passive and dependent while men are viewed as strong, and rational (Mehmood & Kausar, 2019). Cultural beliefs, traditions, and religious customs create significant barriers to women's leadership roles, contributing to the imbalance in their representation in positions of power.

Balochistan, a province of Pakistan, has seen women contribute significantly to various fields for the city's development (Amjad, 2024). However, their participation in leadership positions, particularly in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs), remains low compared to their male counterparts. Despite many mature women being part of the workforce and handling domestic responsibilities, their representation in managerial is minimal. Factors such as limited access to media and information and social and cultural barriers hinder their progress. Additionally, women face personal challenges that exacerbate gender disparity and limit their leadership opportunities in HEIs.

Contemporary trends have seen a notable increase in women's participation at the lower and middle management levels within HEIs. However, women continue to be significantly underrepresented in senior leadership roles and experience sluggish professional advancement (Hinduja et al., 2023). It is well established that women surpass men in both enrollment and performance across various natural and social science disciplines at the university level, earning 50% of doctoral degrees (Jhonson, 2017). Although the number of women employees in higher education institutions (HEIs) exceeds that of men, why women still do not hold or share an equal number of top management positions remains unanswered, given their relatively small representation in leadership roles.

Women are often hired based on their professional achievement while men are typically recruited for their potential. Despite this, the unemployment rate among female graduates remains high (Aun, 2020). Research by Eagly & Karau (2002) and Jeong & Harrison (2017) indicates that women are underrepresented in leadership positions due to prevailing gender stereotypes. Prejudice arises when women are assessed based on these stereotypes rather than their skills and abilities. Factors contributing to gender inequalities in academia include cultural norms, biased attitudes toward women, and a widespread lack of confidence in their leadership capabilities (Miller & Roksa, 2020).

This study aimed to determine the determinants restricting women in leadership positions, to assess the extent of gender disparity in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Balochistan, exploring why women have limited career opportunities and are often excluded from managerial and administrative roles.

Research Objectives

1. To find out the determinants restricting women in leadership positions.
2. To find out gender disparity in career-related opportunities in Higher educational institutes.
3. To examine the gender disparity in managerial and administrative opportunities available to women leaders in higher education institutions compared to their male counterparts.

This study attempts to explore the leadership opportunities available to women and the challenges faced by women leaders while attaining and holding their leadership positions. The interview results appear to indicate that support from family is an important contribution, and their internal motivation and confidence helped women leaders a lot to stand as a role model for others.

The manuscript is structured as follows: Section 2 discusses the literature review, and Section 3 presents the methods describing the research design and procedures adopted. Section 4 presents the results and findings of the study, in narrative with real-life experiences of the respondents. Lastly, section 5 concludes the study.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on the theories of Michel Foucault and Raewyn Connell. They argue that power structures are created and maintained by organizations through knowledge, which shapes societal discourses and reinforces power dynamics. Foucault posits that these structures influence individual behavior across social institutions, defining one's role within power relations. In this context, women's academics are often shaped by dominant masculine discourses in patriarchal higher education institutions, which regulate their behavior.

To better understand the underrepresentation of women in academic leadership, it's essential to consider critiques from feminist scholars like Tisdall (1998), Collins (2014), and Connell and Messerschmidt (2005). They challenge the traditional male-centric views on this issue and discuss leadership as an interplay between men and women, highlighting male dominance in leadership discourse (Weiler, 2008). Connell's concept of "hegemonic masculinity" is particularly relevant for examining women's leadership in Pakistan. He notes that societal norms favor men, limiting women's roles in management. These institutional structures are influenced by hegemonic masculinity, creating barriers that restrict women from attaining senior managerial positions. Women who do succeed in these roles often face significant challenges within a male-dominated organizational and cultural context (Connell, 2014).

Women leadership

Someone being a leader either men or women needs some necessary skills as a leader, these skills may be learned or inherent. As it is explained by the author in his book, leadership is not the genetic and innate quality to lead but it can be obtained through training and proper education (Piperpopoulos, 2013). "Leadership is a purposeful relationship that unfolds episodically among participants, where individuals use their influence skills to drive transformative change (Vasilescu,2019).

By 'women in leadership' we mean, women either in senior positions in the institutional hierarchy or having significant roles in terms of institutional change processes. It has been noticed that through different research women's leadership has been appreciated, because of some natural female skills. One school of thought advocates that women leaders have some such distinctive leadership traits that make them better in their leadership style as compared to men. These characteristics involve self-governing, more participatory encouragement, and concern, they have an admirable clash between managing and interpersonal talents.

Women are often perceived as caring, tolerant, emotional, intuitive, gentle, and inclined towards collaboration, empowerment, and teamwork" (Kretz,2020). They get more

benefits than male leaders as superb spectators who view broad-mindedness and empathy as guidance. Women are also noticed to work from behind rather than front due to their nature (Syahrul Zarizi, 2020). Generally, women are expected to be kind, concerned for others, helpful, warm, and gentle and people mostly expect women to be communal but male agentic, confident, aggressive and have self-direction (Mariam & Ghaffar, 2021).

Women have demonstrated their success as leaders in both politics and various organizations. Today, women are actively contributing across various fields, including education, politics, media, arts and culture, the service sector, science, technology, and more. Women's approaches to public progress are often described as more "holistic" and "comprehensive" (WHO, 2017). Research has shown that when women hold leadership positions and make up the majority of board members, their progress efforts tend to be more inclusive and thorough compared to male-dominated groups (Gittel et al., 1994).

Women's participation in leadership differs extensively from state to state, and in malevolence nationalized disparity, women's membership is considerable at two-thirds that of men, these outcomes put forward that females are prejudiced by various of the same issues that distress men when making loads of leadership judgment. On the other hand, the systematic lower rate of women's contribution points out that some dissimilarity also survives. Unluckily, the natural world and foundation for this differentiation are not entirely unstated (Minniti & Arenius, 2013).

Devineau, (2018) in his study reported, that women leaders face challenges at their place of work by retaining a leadership position, they are not given enough place on leadership responsibility in educational institutes, they are not treated equitable, and they face gender biases in promotions in leadership positions. They have been excluded from key areas such as decision-making, policy formulation, professional development, and academic affairs, even though they have fulfilled the required criteria in comparison to their counterparts 'employees. Karadag, (2018) added that workplace practices, organizational culture, behaviors of male coworkers in leadership positions, and social bias make women difficult to perform their leadership roles effectively. Sikuku, (2019) identified in his study, that women had to face male criticism of their work responsibilities continuously, male coworkers were always in search of any weakness in female work responsibility, they felt uncomfortable seeing a woman in a leadership position and were very uncomfortable to obey a women leader instruction.

Generally, the world is a male-dominated society, and very few opportunities are there for women to place themselves in this gender disparity (Doob, 2015). Gender disparity lies in each sector and every country as well as in Pakistan, particularly in the educational sector of Pakistan (Khalid, 2011). Women have very low representation in positions of power, and with lowest quotas e.g., in the province of Punjab, Pakistan and the position of other provinces are worst. Women's quota has increased from 5% to 15% in 2016 (Ali et al., 2023). A research study by Batool and Sajid, (2013) revealed that structural factors like mentoring, networking opportunities, selection and promotion practices, and gender biases are the main hazards to the career progression of women, in HEIs in Pakistan.

Leadership is associated with power, authority, and influence (Peng et al., 2020), as a result when women are deprived of top management and leadership, they are refused power and could not be able to contribute to society. However, women in educational leadership roles serve as role models, inspiring greater student retention among young girls (Gonzalez et al., 2020).

Women Leaders in Higher Educational Institutes

Women remain underrepresented in leadership roles, despite increased participation in higher education (Xiang et al., 2017). Although 40% of students in higher educational institutions (HEIs) in Pakistan are women, only 22% of these graduates enter the workforce (International Labor Organization, 2020). This indicates that 75% of degree-holding Pakistani women choose to remain at home (Field & Vyborny, 2016).

Women leadership positions enhance gender equity, their personal experiences may yield useful insights into the challenges facing women leaders in higher education, several women made intentional decisions to pursue academic careers, building a research profile through PhDs, publishing, and expanding professional networks, which earned them recognition both nationally and internationally. They understood and acknowledged that this pathway was how the university rewarded academic achievement and supported career advancement within academia. However, for many, this required taking time off from other commitments, demonstrating the discipline to prioritize their qualifications and the recognition that followed. This approach, however, was less viable for women with family responsibilities. Women's unequivocal commitment to and excitement for training has in some occurrences resulted in an assured quantity of disagreement regarding the managerial situation.

Traditionally, universities are known for their position in education, information invention, and educational studies. Globally, advanced education reshuffle has been distinguished by alterations that reveal a change in the direction of a universal information financial system. The demand for social justice and democratization of all facets of society is linked to the imperative for femininity fairness. Restriction in advanced education and challenge are mortal ready to tackle unbalanced female representation but this portion, like several other sides of the trouble, leftovers keen transversely regulation and in many universities on the continent (Teferra and Altback, 2004).

Education is a necessary tool to be a good leader, and the development of future women's leadership is dependent on it (Moldoveanu & Narayandas, 2019). Women with the necessary education and skills can be able to enhance their teaching and research which will enable them to offer effective academic leadership. Harvard Business Review, 97(2), 40-48., reported that women feel confident that they have the requisite skills and are well-placed to take on and carry out the responsibilities of the positions they have moved into.

Women's Leadership in Pakistan

The operational settings of females in Pakistan reproduce the complex interchange of scores of features that fall into two necessary classes. The initial is prepared of societal, civilizing, habitual, and spiritual rudiments, which is a commentator in the patriarchal coordination and undoubtedly apparent in the inferior position of women. The subsequent collection of reasons is a legal arrangement, strategy papers, authoritarian preparations, and organizational instruments.

In Pakistan, as in several other underdeveloped states, women are handicapped in civilization (Ahamed, 2002). For that reason, they face countless disputes, as they do not take pleasure in the same prospect as men. They are not only destitute of monetary capital but are short of admittance to essential requirements, such as schooling and physical condition. Restricted access to fundamentals of life weakens their abilities, confines their talent to protect useful employment, and domino effect on revenue, scarcity, and shared keeping out. Where women are often confined to the home and household duties, which limits their access to education, employment, training opportunities, and social activities, their aim and target

are concealed. Difficulties exist that hamper the leading of women to guidance or any salaried service. It has been agreed that women face more hurdles in the way of being a leader than men.

Gender discrimination also affects women, as they are hindered from holding leadership positions. However, these gender differences and difficult circumstances can help develop women's leadership by creating a more cooperative and flexible model (Syahrul Zarizi, 2020).

Dashper, (2020) eliminates these blockages are not only necessary to shift towards superior femininity but also to construct financial logic to accomplish deficiency lessening and sustain money-making enlargement. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Pakistan's GDP could be increased by one-third if women's labor force participation matched that of men, and if Pakistan reduced the gender gap in women's participation by 25%, its GDP could be increased by 9% (ILO,2020). This study therefore recognizes limitations, that should be concentrated on and changes that need to be shaped to move ahead women as selected and employees and develop in general improvement (Larossi & Clark, 2011).

Opportunities and Challenges (Family, Education, and Culture)

Organizing the load together to effort and ancestors is an ongoing dispute for best female leaders, even as earlier investigations papers that women's skills are more inconsistency among work and family positions than men's (Alam, 2022) and the uncooperative effect of this argument on the wellbeing of the women (Hammer, 2004). It is squabbling that explanatory work and family clash is a significant situation for expansion in women headship.

Pakistan in general and Balochistan in particular is a male-dominated society, and due to the prevalence of patriarchal norms and tribal setup, there are rarely very few women leaders. The subject reveals that there are many challenges, opportunities as well as fears for women as a leader in Quetta City. The main challenges for them are deficiency of education, technological limitations, security problems, societal issues, and both household and a working woman. These are fueling an unfriendly environment in which women leaders found themselves to prosper, despite having clear motivations and goals.

In Balochistan family is a necessary and major risk as well as chance for women. If the family allows her to be an effective woman, then only she can be able to upgrade her professional status, these women are tied to strong family obligations, they have no separate identities, and they are known through their family, which holds traditional values and norms, which tends to have a restricted control upon and approach to education, knowledge, mobility, independence, and resources. Family concepts, that confined women to homes are linked to social prestige and male domination, which limits the occupational choices of women. Women working outside is socially undesirable (Teixeira et al., 2020). Throughout their lives, they are discouraged from doing things of their own and do not sustain women to work separately and liberally.

Education and knowledge in its broadest, common intellect are the way the behavior of persons live. In its slender, technological reason, education is the official procedure by which culture purposely broadcasts its build-up facts, abilities, traditions, and principles from one age group to more (Hewett, 2022). Education is necessary as well as considered an essential part of a good career in any field, that's why females also prefer to be educated in a competitive environment. It also has been admitted by society that education can give proper support and guidance to females to get leadership positions, and many female leaders have been supported by their families to get higher education for better career development even in

tribal areas (Alotaibi, 2020; Cubillo & Brown, 2003). However, the phenomenon is that females are virtually excluded from the higher level of educational leadership at local and federal levels, they are only representative of the lower level (Park et al., 2022).

Balochistan is a tribal area, that holds traditional values and norms and observes early marriage and low levels of women's education, which ultimately constrains any gainful employment and restricts their independence. The lower level of female education led the majority of males to higher teaching positions, the future of women leaders can be bright on attainment of higher education.

Societal issues, religious beliefs, and cultural barriers also outline the development of women in their careers. Any of these situations slow down women's leadership and offer realistic techniques to look after the leadership probable of women in an Islamic society (Roomi & Parrott, 2008).

All of these topics are interconnected with one another and in many ways, hazard, and occasion for working women. Principle systems, which are controlled by women and men into rigid sexual category functions are altering, in all but the most fundamentalists and tremendous backgrounds; only if receipts for women to meet the terms of many conventional male roles in companies, political affairs, faith, and the social order, in addition to chances for men to travel around conventional feminine roles and tasks such as childcare (e.g through paid paternity leave). Alterations in these responsibilities and actions of women and men are a result of tutoring varying ethics and money matters requirements.

Methodology

Research Design

Since this research aims to search for Opportunities and Challenges for women leaders, therefore it is primarily exploratory, utilizing the qualitative approach. This study adopts a phenomenological research design, as it will explore the common experiences of individuals. The theoretical viewpoint often linked with qualitative researchers is phenomenology (Williams, 2021). Researchers use the phenomenological method to uncover and understand the meaning behind human actions and interactions. The context of the situation plays a crucial role in interpreting the data. This approach requires the researcher to understand how individuals perceive and give meaning to their experiences. Data was collected through in-depth individual interviews, followed by semi-structured interview formats. Peterson, (2019) explains that qualitative interviewing aims to gain access to another person's perspective, which is assumed to be meaningful, knowable, and accessible. He argues that since we cannot directly observe internal experiences such as feelings, thoughts, intentions, behaviors, and their meanings, it is essential to ask questions to understand these aspects. This study implies inductive reasoning as it concludes specific to general, comprises of building a theory from the conclusions drawn. A sample of 05 respondents employed in various higher educational institutes in Quetta city were interviewed by following the purposive sampling technique, allowing choosing cases suitable to achieving research goals. As in purposive sampling, the researcher relies on his /her judgment to choose the sample from the population which provides more usable and relevant information. The purposive sampling technique provides a deeper insight into a particular subject or phenomenon with a smaller number of participants. Interviewing techniques are also applied to a smaller number of participants to gauge their personal experiences, which is not possible in a larger sample.

Participants' characteristics and interview procedure

The target population for this study consists of women employed in higher education institutes in leadership positions (department heads, Deans, VCs, and women holding senior positions in administrative posts in Higher education institutes of Quetta). Five women leaders employed in HEIs in Balochistan were interviewed, and these selected women leaders have been in educational management for at least 10 years.

The researcher safeguarded the ethical decorum that was implemented throughout the research procedure. Before interviewing the respondent were contacted for their consent, and they were informed about the purpose of the research and objectives. The respondent names are kept confidential and only pseudonyms are used.

An interview protocol that comprises semi-structured open-ended questions was used to ensure consistency across interviews. This interview guide allowed the researcher to ask similar questions to all participants. The primary purpose of using in-depth interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. According to Peterson, (20129), "the researcher wants to find out what is in and on someone else's mind". The interview guide consists of a semi-structured questionnaire which was used to gauge the perceptions of participants. This interview guide comprises two major sections: section one comprises the questions relating the demographic information (Age, Education, Experience Sector of Employment, etc.) and the second section contains the questions that were asked by the researcher in pursuance of the interview.

Table 1. Participants' characteristics

Participants	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Age	45	48	53	45	51
Marital Status	Single	Married	Widow	Divorced	Married
Education	Ph.D.	Ph.D.	MPhil	MS	Ph.D.
Designation	Dean	Registrar	VC	HOD	Dean
Total Work Experience	18 years	15 years	22 years	13 years	16years
Current Job Experience	4 years	5 years	4 years	3 years	2 years

Results

Demographics expresses the characteristics of the human populace like gender, race, age, income, education etc. In this research, researchers take age, total work experience, current job experience, and marital status. Whereas gender is only women as the topic is exhaustively on women leaders. The researcher focuses on the education of the woman leaders of Quetta city, the findings reveal that it shows an increasing rate. The researcher targeted the education, educational facilities provided to the women of Quetta city, and the training facilities provided to the upcoming women leaders in educational institutes. The responses reveal that the quality of education provided in Quetta city in the past was not good enough as compared to other cities but now with the establishment of new universities; women can get quality education in a good environment. The training facilities provided to the upcoming women in educational institutes are also increasing.

Data was analyzed as the researcher asked broad general questions from the participants, collected the detailed view of the participants in words and audio tape recordings, and analyzed the information for description and themes, by a procedure of coding, summarizing the codes, and demonstrating the data in tables and dialog, in direction to find the logic of what has been erudite. From this information, the researcher deduces the meaning of the facts providing the personal thoughts and past research and deduces outcomes in a narrative report with relative explanation and direct quotes from research participants. Each interview lasted, on average, 60 minutes.

Table 2. Thematic Content Analysis

Theme 1. Opportunities & Challenges

Theme 2. Gender Stereotyping

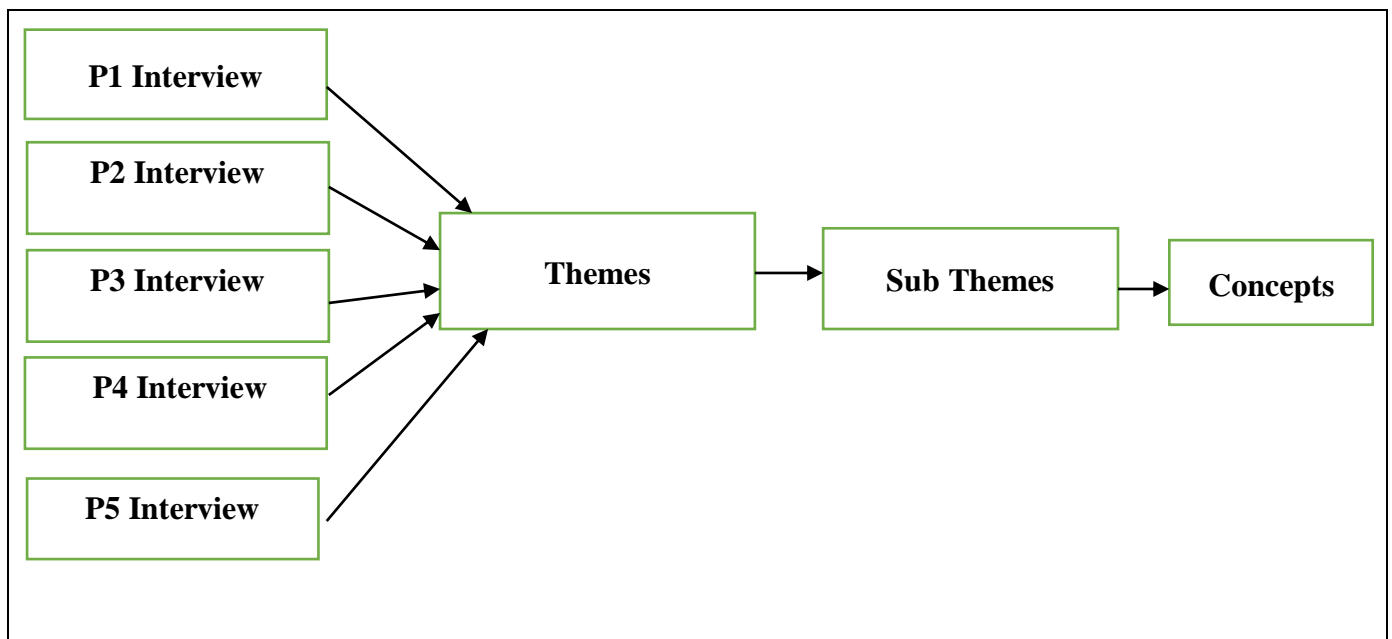


Table 3. Thematic Content Analysis of Theme 1.

Themes	Sub-themes	Concepts
Opportunities & Challenges	Education	Availability of Higher Education
	Family	Family & Husband attitudes, Work-Life Balance
	Culture & Society	Supportive or not

Table 4. Thematic Content Analysis of Theme 2.

Themes	Sub-themes	Concepts
Gender Stereotyping	Social Coping strategies	Societal and organizational cultures
	Professional coping strategies	Own Potential, faith, career performance, passion about career.

Findings and Discussion

Theme 1. Opportunities & Challenges

The narratives of participants in this study highlight the multi-dimensional challenges these women face both within and outside the workplace. Despite encountering various barriers, a common thread in most interviews is their optimistic attitude toward career and life, faith in their abilities, and concern towards the organization. A recurring theme in the participants' narratives was their belief that career advancement and opportunities largely depended on performance. They encounter cultural, economic and social obstacles in their public roles, and in many cases, overcoming these challenges becomes a source of inspiration for them.

Women are “passionate” regarding public improvement work. Their contribution and care for the public often stem from a deep sense of responsibility. Key motivations for pursuing leadership roles include the desire to help the public, improve living standards, a sense of religious calling, and the drive to give back to society. As expressed by one of the participants....

“This is my dream. Since secondary school, I have wanted to pursue higher education and get a respectable job in a leadership post. This was my motivation.... (P1).

Educating girls is crucial for raising morally responsible daughters, dedicated wives, and capable mothers who can balance both work and family life when needed. In the past, many believed that investing in a daughter's higher education was wasteful, as it did not provide immediate returns for the parents. Given their limited financial resources, parents often prioritized using their money for dowries instead (Fakhar & Messenger, 2020; Qureshi, 2012). It was also evident that due to the co-education system for higher studies was discouraged by parents. However, this mindset has gradually shifted. As said by respondent....

“Today we have many colleges and universities (especially for women), at times we were studying, we don't have such facility, to study in co-education system was not allowed by families, and this was the reason for not perusing higher education” (P4).

The question about family allowing women to act as leaders liberally and independently reveals that now family support is available to many women as they pursue their careers. As narrated by the participants....

“I am fully supported by my family and husband; they are the backbone of my success” (P1).

“My mother and father are the primary reason for my career and success, without their support, I cannot be able to make this achievement” (P2).

The findings of this study are aligned with the study of Esen et al. (2019), which also reported that parental and family support is instrumental in the upbringing of daughters and in shaping their perceptions of gender roles.

Work-life balance is a major challenge that impacts women's ability to meet their various commitments in life. Failing to maintain a work-life balance, women often withdraw from the workforce, leading to a decline in female participation and limiting opportunities for women to take on managerial roles.

The results reveal that married women, in particular, experience cultural conflict between their domestic and public responsibilities. Work-life balance is the biggest problem for them; they have to look after the family, and children, and do home chores. As narrated by the participants, work and family roles are.....

“The biggest challenge for a married female employee is balancing two jobs. When both husband and wife return home from work, the husband typically relaxes, while the wife, after setting down her bag, heads straight to the kitchen to continue her domestic responsibilities.” (P3).

“I think the biggest challenge is childcare. At times, I consider leaving my job due to the lack of on-site daycare facilities, especially when I have family or kids to take care of. This is a significant concern” (P5).

“Women must balance their roles as mothers, wives, and housekeepers with their responsibilities at work.” (P2).

Studies by Farooq et al. (2020) and Bhattia and Ali (2020) revealed the same results as the participants of this study stated. Women have to balance family and work to be in a leadership position.

The findings of Cho et al. (2017b) and Shah et al. (2020) noted that work-life balance is important for women and that Asian women, in particular, tend to prioritize family over other areas of life

As narrated by one of the participants....

“When women face increased job demands, they become in a conflicting situation, between family and career and this affects their career performance, some cope successfully with the support of husband and family, and enjoy opportunities to improve their careers, while many choose to retire or resign at a young age” (P1).

The present study also highlights how the sociocultural practice of gender segregation impacts the career opportunities and occupational mobility of female employees. Culture and society's effect on acting as a woman leader reveal that society is not helpful for women to act as leaders This is reflected in the following quote from a participant working in the education sector.

“I believe women face more challenges outside the organization than inside. I could be transferred to a better position because I have a Doctoral degree, but I chose not to because this is my hometown. If I worked elsewhere, outside of town, I wouldn't know how I would manage.” (P1).

Theme 2. Gender Stereotyping

Women revealed that there is gender disparity, and their male colleagues are biased in giving any managerial responsibility and position to women. They further said males are always in grouping and use management powers in their favor and sometimes against women colleagues. As disclosed by one of the participants about gender disparity.....

“I found many difficulties and obstacles while performing my job responsibilities, as my male colleagues never want a female in a powerful position, their mindset of male dominancy never let them obey a female head.” (P5)

Studies by Mehmood and Kausar (2019) and Sultan et al. (2019) reported similar forms of hidden oppression and marginalization faced by women in leadership positions, though they presented these issues in different ways.

A culture of negative attitudes and stereotypes towards women in leadership positions exists both within organizations and in society. The belief that men are more suited for leadership roles is another significant barrier preventing women from occupying such positions, as told by one of the respondents...

“Gender discrimination is a major barrier to women's leadership, as they often have to work harder than men to prove their capability as leaders”. (P5)

The findings indicate that women are often employed in lower-level positions, but advancing within the organization is difficult. While participants acknowledged being treated equally during recruitment, they also reported facing obstacles regarding promotions. As stated by a participant.....

“Women are receiving more opportunities today and are obtaining better education. However, female employees face challenges at higher and managerial levels. If these issues

are addressed, I believe employment opportunities for women will increase.” (P3). They pointed to the glass ceiling at the workplace.

Cullen and Murphy (2018) highlighted similar inequalities in organizational policies between women and men in their research study. The findings of the present research align with those of Abdullah and Jibai (2020), who similarly concluded that women are disproportionately underrepresented in leadership roles owing to prevailing stereotypical perceptions of their capabilities.

However, upon further inquiry, it was revealed that many female employees were facing issues such as sexual harassment, the glass ceiling, and income disparities within the organization.

As expressed by a respondent....

“Women face many challenges while working with men, they face difficulties in self-protection, workplace harassment. The working environment is not suitable for females in a male-dominated society” (P5).

The results are aligned with the results of the studies conducted by Salman et al. (2016) and Yasmeen (2018) who reported that Pakistani women face such harassment experiences in the workplace and many times stay silent and such incidents were under-reported.

The significant challenge women face in formal organizations in Balochistan is limited career growth. The participants generally agreed that women in Balochistan struggle to remain career-focused due to their social (family-oriented) roles. The participants typically reported that factors such as their identity, gender, age, family, and marital status, as well as their skills, played a crucial role in shaping their career prospects. Besides keeping up an adaptable work atmosphere that allows women to balance both their job and family roles and creates a culture with zero tolerance for discrimination and pestering. By increased awareness, cultural change, and official observing and monitoring, more women will be encouraged to engage in proper occupation. Government and private organizations both need to play their role.

Conclusion

Starting from Connell's (2000) theoretical contribution, this study states that hegemonic masculinity exists in Pakistani academia and operates in institutional structures. Power structures also develop leadership norms to control women's participation in such power positions. The lived experiences of women academic leaders in this study provide a space to critique the existing hegemonic structure of society, which discriminates women from hierarchical organizations through biased recruitment, and promotions where men are preferred over women and gender disparities are evident.

It is also evident that women face more hurdles than men in maintaining their leadership roles due to a clash between domestic and professional commitments. They are challenging stereotypical gender roles, societal and cultural norms, and conservative religious beliefs and striving to create a safe space for themselves. A notable figure of the women working as leaders in educational institutes in Quetta city. The study gives us a clear view of women leaders, their challenges, and opportunities though, it is a big problem in Balochistan. For women leaders, the main challenges are security problems, societal issues, and both household and a working woman. These are fueling an unfriendly environment in which women leaders found themselves to prosper, despite having clear motivations and goals.

The study's results identified key factors that limit women's participation in leadership positions, and organizational and personal determinants include a male-dominated culture, the glass ceiling, gender bias, leadership style, lack of clear support, heavy domestic

responsibilities, cultural and social attitudes toward women's leadership, and limited opportunities for social networking.

The opportunities through which women can lead are family support, education, and training which can help very much in their career development. This research recommends that women leaders be provided with managerial and administrative opportunities and be supported and encouraged in fulfilling their leadership roles. Promoting gender equality in career opportunities can serve as a motivational factor, particularly in increasing female participation in higher educational institutes. Pakistan will only be able to utilize its human capital fully if women are given an equal opportunity to grow and release their potential to benefit society as a whole.

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