



Listening to the Whispers: Female Faculty and Work Environment in Universities of Southern Punjab, Pakistan

Vol. IV, No. III (Summer 2019) | Page: 446 – 455 | DOI: 10.31703/grr.2019(IV-III).49

p- ISSN: 2616-955X | e-ISSN: 2663-7030 | ISSN-L: 2616-955X

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Abstract

This research explored the experiences of female university teachers regarding the culture of work environment in public sector universities of Southern Punjab, Pakistan. Findings are drawn through the questionnaire including six main dimensions of the workplace. The respondents ranked the factors under each dimension. The analyses of calculated ranks for factors lead to identify two main categories: tangible and intangible or elusive factors. The higher ranks for the tangible factors are indicators of the priorities of female university teachers while the lower ranks of the intangible factors exhibit the discomfort of female teachers. The female university teachers face conservative gender norms, male dominance, obstacles to be self-reliant and limited opportunities for active participation in research, academic, administrative activities. The results do not completely validate the prevailed impression of the exhortative work environment for female university teachers.

Key Words: Work Environment, Sex-Role Stereotypes, Awareness of Rights, Collaboration and Support, and Capacity Building.

Introduction

Work environment, the vital aspect of the jobs especially for women, includes all arrangements describing the responsibilities of every employee, the facilities provided to accomplish the tasks, the provision to access to the management and the level of support for the completion of tasks (Mutia & Sikalieh, 2014). Public and private are two main employment sectors that have specific characteristics with respect to the opportunities and facilities. It is generally accepted perception that working conditions in public sector are more advantageous for the females as compared to private sector that includes job security, relatively less stress, more leave benefits, flexible working hours, etc. (Okun et al., 2007). However, some additional facilities are needed by women like daycare center at workplace, better transport and on-job safety, better attitude of colleagues especially the males and supporting attitude of their immediate heads otherwise they have to face hardships to reconcile their professional and domestic responsibilities (Cook, 2009).

In Pakistani perspective, a paradigm shift towards the employment of females is seen in the society but with maintaining the status quo of traditional gender role of women which dictates that female should perform all the household routine tasks supposed to be her obligation and, hence, working women understand they she is going to undertake three-fold burden of performing professional, domestic and reproductive responsibilities (Moser, 1993; "Women's triple role," n.d.). Any conflict during performing multiple-natured roles by a working woman badly affects her mental and physical health that, in turn, confines her capabilities to perform her duties efficiently (Siddiqui, 2007). A convenient and supportive work-environment contributes a lot in reducing those factors that contribute to lower the performance and increase the obstructive circumstances.

In Pakistan, women prefer to get employment in education and related organizations. Universities being apex institutes of learning and thought to have favourable work-environment are considered prestigious organizations where females face least resistance for employment from their families. Almost all the teaching and administrative staffs are highly qualified having been studied abroad, availing the opportunities of experiencing modern established system, attitudes of people and ways of interpersonal interaction to run the organizations.

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However, the influence of the socio-cultural norms, values and traditions of a society is a significant factor in designing the persons' behaviours and attitudes that ultimately contribute to developing a particular environment within an organization. Therefore, this research studies explored the state of affairs of work-environment of universities in views of female faculty keeping into consideration the previously mentioned aspects that make the universities prestigious organizations not only with respect to high-end education but also as an environment supposed to be conducive for female employees.

Review of Literature

The social and cultural norms and practices have a great influence in shaping the work environment. Shostak (2000) states that "in overwhelming majority of societies, women have a lower status than men...and their activities are less highly valued than men' activities" (P.213). This is unfavourable for women at the levels of interpersonal interaction (Carli, 1999). The vulnerable position of women makes them the easy targets of uncivilized behavior and harassment at workplaces (Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2004). This situation confines female workers to the limited degrees of functionality which, in turn, impairs their efficiency. If a female worker, fortunately, does not personally experience hostility, harassment or other abuses at her work place, she may be worried about by hearing the stories of other female coworkers (Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2004). Career progress of women officials is affected by inadequate policies adopted by the organizations for training programs, work assignments, and evaluation of the performances of employees (Jurik, 1985). The environment at workplace for women may restrict their integration and access to opportunities. That is why "the environment that people work in can have a significant impact on their ability to undertake their tasks, and can lead to their being either productive or unproductive" (Mutia & Sikalieh, 2014, P.84).

The female to male population ratio in Pakistan is 0.95 (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2017) which is 48.5 % of the total population (The World Bank, 2017). This significant fraction of women population is in the firm grasp of predominantly patriarchal norms (UNICEF, 2012) where men determine the status of women and greatly influence every aspect of their lives. The social norms project men's roles who decide what is appropriate for women and restrict their "access to resources and opportunities" (UNICEF, 2012, P. xv).

Platt (2011) points out that women have succeeded to achieve professional jobs later than men in the timeline. This may be one of the reasons that the ratio of their participation in different professions has been less than men. What did cause their belated participation? There may be different reasons for different societies. In Pakistani society, the sex-role stereotypes about women are under the strong religio-cultural practices which support restricting women within men's defined boundaries. These gender-based stereotypes always resist the change. "The social and cultural restrictions limit women's chances to compete for resources in the public arena" (Asian Development Bank, 2000, P.2). Therefore, Pakistani women have insufficient powers or authority to deviate from the roles assigned by the male-dominant society. Social norms narrow the choices of females whether they can work; and where they can work.

The global gender gap index number for Pakistani at 143 out of 144 countries in 2017 indicates an extremely critical situation (World Economic Forum, 2017). This comparison strengthens the perception that Pakistani society designates home as the "women's legitimate ideological and physical space, while the man dominates the world outside the home" (Asian Development Bank, 2000, P.2). However, women in Pakistan are struggling a lot to prove their capabilities in various fields and, thus, successfully bringing about proofs to invalidate the traditional conceptions about the role of women. Now, they have strong motivation and enthusiasm to make progress and live a quality life.

Pakistani women are struggling considerably to put their share in the job market despite limited occupational choices, gender discrimination in the job market, and unavailability of facilities like transport, accommodation, help in case of emergency, child care, etc. The number of working women has been increasing in almost every sector with the passage of time. Table 1 shows the progressive increase of the female labour force in Pakistan.

Table 1. Year Wise Female Percentage of Total Labor Force in Pakistan

Country	Years									
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Female workforce % Pakistan	19.3	19.8	20.7	21.6	21.8	21.8	21.8	21.9	22.1	22.2

Source: (The World Bank, 2016)

Despite the increasing participation of females in work force, the social attitudes towards women workers in Pakistan “have seemingly not shifted much in the last 25 years even as more women enter the urban and rural workspace” (Rehman et al., 2007). Unfortunately, Pakistan is enlisted in those countries where women are kept deliberately away from the process of policymaking. They are not considered on merit.

The above brief account gives an idea of hardships Pakistani women face right from taking permissions to enter a job and then working under the man-dominant work environment where the overriding majority of males have the conservatively formulaic orientation about the role of women. The structural and functional conditions of the organizations in Pakistan do not encourage female employees to participate in their total enthusiasm. Organizational models are mostly male-oriented and fail to discern the biases against women; and, therefore, result in demotivation of female workers.

The preceding discussion is an overview of the women’s work environment. However, the work-environment understudy is specifically concerned with Pakistani universities. Two reasons delineate the specificity of work environment in universities. First, the highest qualifications of nearly all the people working in universities, and reasonable numbers of them are also foreign qualified. These people are considered as leaders of the education system. Second, the universities are recognized as prime educational institutions and the instruments of progressive changes in society.

Objectives

1. To provide an understanding of work-environment in Pakistani universities in the views of female university teachers. This is consequential because the female university teachers’ viewpoints refer to the situations which they experience in this highly educated work-environment.
2. To probe the question if there exists any revisionist approach towards the role of the female professional in work-environment of the universities.
3. To elaborate different dimensions of work environment regarding university female faculty.
4. To explore information regarding various aspects of the organizational structure which need to be reviewed so as to take measures in the development of policies for a stress-free work place for female university teachers in Pakistan.

Research Methodology

This is a descriptive study in which questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire consisted of six constructs or dimensions covering various aspects of work-environment in Pakistani universities. The researcher personally visited the campuses of the selected two public sector universities for the administration of questionnaires to the female faculty members-the population of this study. The female teachers of two public sector universities of Southern Punjab were the population of study. Websites of these universities were searched to count the total number of female teachers. Convenient Sampling Technique was applied to reach a maximum number of female teachers. A pilot study was conducted by administering ten questionnaires. In the light of data collected through these questionnaires, the required changes were incorporated in the final version of the questionnaire. Total of 150 questionnaires were distributed; 137 of those were returned which was 91% turnout. The respondents were required to rank the given factors (or questions) under each dimension. Garret ranking technique was used to find out the order of preferences among the factors by using the following formula:

$$\text{Percent position} = \frac{100 (R_{ij} - 0.5)}{N_j}$$

The percent position of each of the five ranks for each factor thus calculated by using the above formula is used to identify its respective value given in the table developed by Henry Garrett. This Garrett value is multiplied by the number of respondents who selected that rank to obtain the score. These scores are added up and then divided by the total number of respondents for whom the scores are calculated; the output of which is the mean score for that factor. The relative values of these average scores determine the ranks of these factors.

Analysis of Data

Six dimensions were selected to assess work environment of female university teachers. The computed mean scores from Garrett Ranking statistics indicate the preferences of the factors. The first rank indicates the highest position; the second rank refers to the second place, and so on. The analysis of data on these dimensions is given in the following.

Fair and Appropriate Compensation

The table-2 presents the calculated ranks of six factors to represent different aspects of this dimension. The highest calculated rank for factor 3 is the indication that promotion is awarded based on the performance rather than any political maneuvering. Factor 4, i.e., the ‘existence of a systematic process for performance evaluation’ of teachers is at the second-highest place. However, factor 5 of ‘fairness in annual appraisal’ of the teachers’ performance is at the second last position among the list of calculated ranks of factors; and mentions the dissatisfaction level of the female university teachers regarding the fairness in assessing the performance of teachers. The computed rank for the factor 6, which states the presence of an adequate reward or performance recognition system, is the lowest one, and highlights the lack of the appreciation of those who perform better.

Table 2. Fair and Appropriate Compensation

S. N	Response Preference Order		I	II	III	IV	V	Total Score	Mean Score	Ranks
	Garrett Ranking Conversion (x) *	Score	77	63	54	46	37			
1	Factors Difference in salary based on gender	fx*	308	126	5184	1380	185	7183	52.43	4
	Enough	fx	308	2835	3294	138	888	7463		
2	promotion opportunities in the job	f	4	45	61	3	24	137	54.47	3
3	performance rather than political manipulation for promotion	fx	1232	1953	3132	414	851	7582		
	Existence of systematic process for performance evaluation	f	16	31	58	9	23	137	55.34	1
4	Fairness in annual appraisal	fx	385	2961	3132	138	888	7504		
		f	05	47	58	3	24	137	54.77	2
5		fx	462	1890	2592	460	1591	6995		
		f	06	30	48	10	43	137	51.05	5

	presence of an adequate reward	fx	00	1386	3834	690	1073	6983		
6	/performance recognition system	f	00	22	71	15	29	137	50.97	6

* x = Garrett Ranking Conversion Score, f = number of respondents, fx = score

The analysis of viewpoints of female university teachers indicates that the in-service promotion is awarded based on the performance, and there exists a 'systematic process of performance evaluation' of teachers. However, the calculated lowest ranks for the factors of 'fairness in annual evaluation' and the 'presence of an adequate reward/performance recognition system' reveal that despite the presence of systematic procedure to assess the performance of teachers, the validity and credibility (fairness) of the performance assessment keep nagging doubts. It implies that the evaluation of the performance of teachers does not hold the confidence of female university teachers.

Working Condition

The dimension of 'working conditions' at the workplace includes five factors. Table-3 contains the calculated ranks of these factors. The factor 5, Satisfaction with the Workload Distribution, is at the highest calculated rank. Workload distribution includes teaching and related activities, e.g., practical work.

The responses of Pakistani female university teachers show their satisfaction with the suitability of physical facilities at their workplaces. This factor 3 concerning proper 'Physical facilities at workplace' (e.g., space, light, furniture, and level of noise, etc.) is at second-place in the calculated list of ranked factors. The factor 2 at rank third is 'the measures taken by the administration to ensure stress-free environment'.

The factor 4 concerning the offensive-free work environment and factor 1 related to the presence of unbiased environment at workplace are at fourth and fifth ranks respectively that are the lowest positions under this dimension. These conditions explain the perspective where the female university teachers confront with unhealthy attitudes like offensive language and visual annoyance.

Table 3. Working Conditions

S. No	Factors	Mean Score	Ranks
1	Unbiased (with respect to gender, social status, political connections, etc.) environment at my workplace.	50.18	5
2	Departmental Administration takes measures to ensure stress-free environment	52.58	3
3	Physical facilities at workplace (e.g. space, light, furniture and noise, etc.) meet my working needs.	53.35	2
4	Environment at workplace is free from Offensive language, visual annoyance and other unhealthy attitude.	51.83	4
5	Satisfaction with the workload distribution	53.45	1

The calculated higher ranks for the tangible factors like 'distribution of workload' and the 'availability of physical facilities at workplace' show the satisfaction of female university teachers with these factors. However, the status of the intangible factors as indicated by the ranks for factors 4 and 5 in the table above refer to the presence of unhealthy elements at the workplace. The Pakistani female university teachers faced offensive language, visual annoyance, biases concerning their gender, importance given to social status and the political connections.

Collaboration and Support

Table-4 includes the factors under the dimension of 'collaboration and support' and their calculated ranks. Three

(at S # 1, 2, and 4) factors out of five are gender specific. Factor 4 is at rank first which refers to the pressing need of female university teachers for the help of male colleagues to deal with the official matters in university. The factor 2 ranked at second place relates to the acknowledgment of female teachers for the support of male colleagues. These aspects show that environment at the workplace is gender specific, i.e., male oriented. The factor 3 pertaining to the satisfaction of female university teachers with the support of the head of the department and cooperation of office staff is at place third in the order of ranking. However, the factor 5 regarding ‘encouragement of colleagues for professional development’ and the factor 1 that relates to the involvement of female teachers in decision-making are at the lowest ranks of fourth and fifth respectively in this dimension.

Table 4. Collaboration and Support

S. No	Factors	Mean score	Ranks
1	I am involved in decision making process without any prejudice.	48.66	5
2	I am content with the level of support from male colleagues.	51.55	2
3	I am satisfied with the support of Head and co-operation of office staff in dealing with my job-related matters.	51.22	3
4	I ever need help from male colleagues to deal with my matters at different offices (treasurer, establishment, etc.) of the university.	52.35	1
5	I am encouraged by my colleagues for my professional development.	51.21	4

The interpretation of data under this dimension reveals that the work environment in universities which are highest seats of learning did not qualify the approval of female teachers. The female teachers believed that work environment did not support their independence and, therefore, they ran into complexities in pursuing their matters without the help of males in different offices of the universities, which gave some thought to the perception of female university teachers who did not feel comfortable with the environment in the university offices where they were given less importance. However, female university teachers appreciated the level of support of their male colleagues.

On the other hand, the lowest ranks of the factors of ‘support of colleagues and encouragement for their professional development’ and female teachers’ ‘involvement in the process of decision making’ ascertained the presence of the unaccommodating professional environment for female teachers in universities.

Capacity Building

Table-5 includes the data about the viewpoints of female university teachers on the dimension of capacity building. The first rank of factor 3 shows that majority of female university teachers considered universities a ‘best platform where they could utilize their capacities’. The response ratio of female teachers about the ‘adequate facilities in universities for undertaking research’ placed it in the second position in order of ranking. The bottom-line factor 1 speaks of the access to equal opportunities for female teachers to avail research and training facilities as compared to male colleagues signifies that the female university teachers were less satisfied with the situation mentioned in this factor.

Table 5. Capacity Building

S. No	Factors	Mean score	Ranks
1	I have equal opportunities and access to research and training facilities as compared to male counterparts.	34.32	3
2	University has adequate facilities (Library, laboratory, and infrastructure) for undertaking research.	36.49	2

3	University as the best platform where they could utilize their capacities	40.67	1
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Social Environment of the Universities

The universities as being the prime educational institutions are believed to produce the far-reaching impact on society. Therefore, social environment in the universities is highly valuable in describing the conditions of the workplace for female teachers. How did the female university teachers see the social environment within the universities is the concern of this dimension? The table-6 provides relevant data.

Table 6. Social Environment of the Universities

S.No	Factors	Mean score	Ranks
1	There exists gender disparity.	58.83	3
2	University is socially accepted workplace for women.	61.70	1
3	I see my secured future in university service.	56.27	5
4	There exists conducive environment while working with male members.	53.47	6
5	People do not keep eyes on me and watch my activities. I have not to take special care to manage my movements and activities.	58.23	4
6	Use of decent language and well-mannered attitude are always kept in mind while talking to females.	61.40	2

The responses of female university teachers mirrored the impression of society about universities as socially accepted workplaces for women, verified by the rank first secured by factor 2, where people feel comfortable to send females for employment. This aspect gets strengthened because the responses of female university teachers reiterated that 'decent language and well-mannered attitude are always kept in mind while talking to females'. The factor 6 at rank 2 calls attention to the decent attitude of males in the presence of females in a formal setting.

However, the female teachers pointed out some critical zones of the social environment of the universities. The factor 1 related to the 'existence of gender disparity' is at third rank while gender biased attitude of 'watching the activities of females' as mentioned in factor 5 is at fourth rank. The female university teachers seemed skeptical about their future in university service, indicated by factor 3 that secures the second last position in the ranking list. The lowest most rank of 6 goes to the factor 4 that represents the discomfort of female university teachers about 'the conducive environment while working with males' in the universities is the point of serious consideration in an environment where almost all the male counterparts are highly educated; and shows some obscured aspects.

The social environment of universities in the eyes of female university teachers seems to be divided into aspects: a foreground where female university teachers experience decent behavior and honour, and a background in which they feel uneasiness and shaky while working with male members. This context becomes more vivid when read with factor 5 in table-6 which says that the activities of female teachers are watched; and, therefore, they have to take special care to manage their activities.

Awareness of Rights

The attitudes of persons dominantly influence in establishing a certain environment at the workplace. Their ideas, behaviors, and personalities define the nature of overall working conditions. However, the awareness of rights is the key factor to deal various matters at a workplace and to protect the person from being exploited. This becomes more important for females in Pakistani perspective. Table-7 represents this dimension in the light of the responses of female university teachers related to its various aspects. The data describes the understanding of female teachers that they have sufficient information about the service-related rules and regulations as shown by factor 1 which is at rank first. The second to it is factor 3 that universities provide freedom of expression irrespective of the gender of a person. Factor 2 at rank third explains the perception of female teachers that they

knew the procedure and process of how to initiate and pursue to get the solution of their problems. The lastly ranked factor 4 highlights the dissatisfaction of the female teachers with the narrative that their problems about any gender prejudice are dealt with immediately.

Table 7. Awareness of Rights

S.No	Factors	Mean Score	Ranks
1	I have enough information about service rules and regulations to regulate and monitor my interest.	43.50	1
2	I know the procedure and relevant bodies/authorities so to process my problems and issues to be addressed.	41.66	3
3	Universities provide freedom of expression to female faculty members without any gender discrimination.	42.04	2
4	Any problem of sensitive nature about any gender prejudices is dealt immediately without any delay and tried to be resolved.	40.67	4

The data in table-7 shows that the female university teachers were well aware of the service rules and regulations; and also acquainted with procedure of how to proceed and pursue their matters. The female university teachers’ claim of knowing the required information about the service rules and procedural mechanism to get their problem solved; nevertheless, they felt helpless to play their role independently as are explained in previous tables.

Conclusion

The participation of women has been fully recognized in the progress of society in the present times. If a society requires benefiting from women's capability, then their proportionate participation must be assured at every level in the working hierarchy. For this, a conducive, gender friendly and unbiased work environment will have to be ensured for female workers.

In Pakistan, educational institutions, especially the universities, are considered the most suitable workplaces for females due to the environment supposed to encourage female employees. However, what do Pakistani female university teachers think about their work environment is explored in this study?

The analysis of data leads to group the factors included to investigate the workplace of the female university teacher into two domains- tangible factor that are apparent and can be directly observed and intangible or elusive factors that work covertly and whose impact can be indirectly observed. The comparison of tangible and intangible or elusive factors according to their ranking positions is given in table-8.

The higher ranks of tangible and intangible factors point out the levels of priorities attached to these factors by female university teachers that define their level of satisfaction or un-satisfaction according to the nature of factors. The provision of positive tangible and intangible factors ensures a comfortable work environment. However, the intangible factors also play the vital roles in providing confidence, mental satisfaction, an unbiased and secure work environment. It is important to note that the lower ranks of the intangible factors of work environment do not refer to their less importance. In fact, the lower ranks of intangible factors indicate either comfort or discomfort of female university teachers. For example, the computed rank one (1) for tangible factor “Satisfaction with the workload distribution” under the dimension “working conditions” refers to the high comfort level of female teachers. However, the rank five (5) of the intangible factor “Unbiased environment at my workplace” under the same dimension of “working conditions” shows discomfort or very low level of comfort of female teacher with this factor in the working environment because the statements of these factors describe positive aspects. The lower ranks of these factors indicate the existence of the contrary situation which confines the activities of female teachers.

This study divulges that the work environment in Pakistani universities under study is also suffering from almost the same indecent factors prevailing in other sectors of the society against females. Female university teachers do not feel free to take bold decisions needed for their progress. They face many obstacles at each step.

Conservative societal norms, male chauvinistic attitude, underestimating the capabilities of women, and limited opportunities for women's participation are some prominent issues. Female university teachers realized that they were under continuous observation which restricted their independence, and ultimately their active involvement in research, academic or administrative activities.

Universities are the institutions that hold a leading role in any society. These institutions not only provide highly educated workforce for every other institution of the society but also enjoys a prestigious position in the eyes of people of the society. This means that the universities have a direct or indirect influence on society. Therefore, universities should play such a role to help bring positive changes in the society. If the environment in universities is just the reflection of society, then the leading role of universities will be under serious question. The harder side of this aspect is that there exists no realization in the concerned policy-making authorities to address whether the universities are contributing effectively to change the social attitude of people towards the role of females. It demands serious consideration from officials to pave the way for effective, efficient and fearless participation of women in public sector universities of Pakistan.

Table 8. Comparison of tangible and intangible or elusive factors according to their rank positions

Dimensions	Tangible factors (ranks)	Intangible or Elusive factors (ranks)
Fair & appropriate compensation (out of 6 Ranks)	Performance based promotion (1) Existence of systematic process of performance evaluation (2)	Fairness in annual evaluation (5) Presence of an adequate reward /performance recognition system (6)
Working Conditions (out of 5 Ranks)	Satisfaction with the workload distribution (1) Physical facilities at workplace (e.g. space, light, furniture and noise, etc.) meet my working needs (2)	Environment at workplace is free from Offensive language, visual annoyance and other unhealthy attitudes (4) Unbiased (with respect to gender, social status, political connections, etc.) environment at my workplace (5)
Collaboration and Support (out of 5 Ranks)	I ever need help of male colleagues to deal with my matters at different offices (treasurer, establishment, etc.) of the university (1) I am content with the level of support from male colleagues (2)	I am encouraged by my colleagues for my professional development (4) I am involved in decision making process without any prejudice (5)
Capacity Building (out of 3 Ranks)	University as the best platform where they could utilize their capacities (1) University has adequate facilities (Library, laboratory, and infrastructure) for undertaking research. (2)	I have equal opportunities and access to research and training facilities as compared to male counterparts. (3)
Social Environment of the Universities (out of 6 Ranks)	Use of decent language and well-mannered attitude is always kept in mind while talking to females. (2)	University is a socially accepted work place for women. (1) I see my secured future in university service. (5) There exists conducive environment while working with male members (6)
Awareness of rights (out of 4 Ranks)		Any problem of sensitive nature regarding gender prejudice is dealt immediately without any delay and tried to be resolved. (4)

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