
**Women Employees Status in the Pakistani Workplace:
Women's Narratives on Stigma, Outcomes, and
Coping Strategies and Policy Making, Islamic Legal and
Sociological Dimensions**

Syeda Mina Faisal

Assistant Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Lahore, Pakistan

Dr. Syed Shameel Ahmed Quadri

Assistant Professor, Political Science, University of Karachi

Dr. Raheeq Ahmad Abbasi

President British Institute of Islamic Studies, UK

Muhammad Sharif

PhD Scholar, People's Friendship University, Moscow

Dr. Mazhar Hussain

Assistant Professor, Islamic Studies, University of Narowal, Pakistan

Dr. Talib Ali Awan

Assistant Professor, MY University, Islamabad, Pakistan

Lamia Chiha

Faculty of Arts & Humanities, University of Kairoun, Tunisia

Abstract / Introduction

In the context of Pakistan, similar to numerous other regions globally, there has been a consistent upward trend in the involvement of women in the labor force during recent decades. Notwithstanding the advancements, women in Pakistan persistently encounter various obstacles and societal disapproval within professional settings, exerting a substantial influence on their work experiences, professional



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achievements, and overall welfare (Zia, Batool, & Yasin, 2016). The primary objective of this study is to investigate the position of female employees within the workplace in Pakistan. The research seeks to provide insight into the personal accounts of women, focusing on the challenges they experience due to societal disapproval, the consequences they encounter, and the methods they employ to manage these difficulties.

To gain insight into the present condition of female workers within the Pakistani labor force, it is imperative to acknowledge the historical backdrop encompassing gender roles and societal conventions. Historically, Pakistani culture has been distinguished by robust patriarchal systems that have constrained women to domestic spheres, thereby restricting their educational attainment and economic prospects (Jafree, 2017). Nevertheless, as a result of the emergence of modernization and the growing recognition of gender equality, there has been a gradual transformation in the societal framework, increasing the level of female engagement in the workforce (Sarwar & Abbasi, 2013).

Despite the growing representation of women in the professional sphere, female individuals in Pakistan frequently face a range of stigmatization and discriminatory practices. The persistence of gender-based prejudices is evident in various forms, including stereotyping women's abilities, skepticism regarding their work commitment due to familial obligations, and the perception that they are not as appropriate for specific job roles. In addition, subtle presumptions and insults can give rise to unwelcoming work environments that hinder women's professional development and career progress (Ali & Syed, 2017).

The workplace stigmatization and discrimination experienced by women carry substantial ramifications for their professional trajectories. Research has indicated a notable disparity in the representation of women in leadership roles, with a tendency for them to be underrepresented. Additionally, women often experience a discrepancy in compensation, receiving lower pay than their male coworkers despite engaging in similar work. The absence of prospects for skill enhancement and professional advancement further intensifies gender inequality in the workplace (Saleem, Ali, Ashiq, & Rehman, 2021).

Women employees in Pakistan have devised various coping mechanisms to effectively navigate the complex professional environment, despite encountering numerous challenges. Individuals can employ potential strategies, including establishing support networks with colleagues, pursuing mentorship from accomplished women within the industry, and active engagement in initiatives to empower women. Moreover, women may employ strategies such as modifying their communication styles, attire, or conduct to mitigate the effects of gender bias and stereotypes.

Gaining insight into women's narratives regarding stigma, outcomes, and coping mechanisms is paramount in enhancing workplace environments and promoting empowerment. Moreover, an examination of the autonomy of women within the Islamic faith offers valuable insights into the cultural milieu. It illuminates the intricate relationship between religious convictions and societal expectations regarding gender roles. The primary objective of this study is to conduct a comprehensive examination of these issues and ascertain practical implications that can be implemented to improve gender equality within the workforce of Pakistan.

Keywords: Women Employees, Status, Pakistani Workplace, Women's Narratives, Outcomes, Coping Strategies, Policy Making, Islamic Legal, Sociological Dimensions

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation for the empowerment of women in the context of Islam and the status of women employees in the workplace in Pakistan can be comprehended by examining the viewpoints of renowned Islamic and social philosophers who have made significant contributions to the discourse on gender parity and the rights of women. The ideas put forth by these philosophers provide significant insights into the convergence of Islamic instructions, societal conventions, and women's experiences, thereby influencing the theoretical comprehension of this research.

Aisha Lemu, a highly regarded Islamic scholar, underscored the significance of knowledge and education in fostering women's empowerment. She posited that Islamic doctrines promote the pursuit of

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education among women and their active engagement in societal affairs. Lemu argues that providing knowledge to women would empower them, enabling them to question and challenge conventional stereotypes, thereby making valuable contributions to their respective communities and professional environments (Fahm, 2017). Fatima Mernissi, a Moroccan sociologist and Islamic feminist, analysed the historical backdrop surrounding the societal position of women within Islamic societies. She emphasised the necessity of reinterpreting religious texts and questioning gender biased interpretations that have imposed constraints on women's privileges and possibilities. Mernissi's scholarly contributions shed light on how Islamic feminism can effectively facilitate women's empowerment and serve as a catalyst for challenging gender discrimination within professional environments (Mernissi, 1996).

The discourse surrounding workplace gender inequality has garnered significant attention from social philosophers. Simone de Beauvoir, a renowned philosopher in the existentialist tradition, conducted an in-depth examination of the notion of "Otherness" as a means to elucidate the historical treatment of women as the marginalised "Other" within societal structures, consequently resulting in their subjugation (Tidd, 2004). His ideas offer valuable perspectives on the underlying factors contributing to workplace stigmatisation and discrimination experienced by female employees in Pakistan and the imperative of confronting and questioning these prevailing social norms.

Nancy Fraser, an American critical theorist, is credited with introducing the concept of "recognition" to tackle matters pertaining to identity and the misrecognition thereof. By employing her theoretical framework within the workplace context, an examination can be conducted to assess the frequent misrecognition of women's identities. This misrecognition subsequently results in the imposition of gender-based stigmatisation, thereby impeding the advancement of women in their professional endeavours (Fraser, 2017).

The concept of intersectionality and its relationship with gender roles has been highlighted by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an esteemed legal scholar and critical race theorist. He is credited with the introduction of the

groundbreaking concept of intersectionality. Crenshaw's work provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics between gender, race, and other social identities, enabling a deeper understanding of the distinct obstacles women employees encounter in Pakistan, particularly those in marginalised communities (Crenshaw, 2013).

The amalgamation of viewpoints from Islamic and social philosophers contributes to the development of a holistic theoretical framework that facilitates the comprehension of women's empowerment within the context of Islam, as well as their position as employees in the workplace of Pakistan. This framework underscores the importance of education, the reinterpretation of religious texts, the questioning of patriarchal norms, and the recognition of intersectional identities to advance gender equality and empower women employees. It draws upon insights from Islamic feminism, social justice, and intersectionality.

This study illuminates the underlying factors contributing to stigma and discrimination against women in the workplace and the various coping mechanisms they employ. Furthermore, it advocates for implementing policy reforms to foster inclusive and equitable work environments.

Incorporating the perspectives of renowned Islamic and social philosophers, the theoretical framework offers a comprehensive approach to tackling the intricate issues surrounding women's empowerment in Islam and the experiences of female employees in the workplace of Pakistan. It facilitates a more profound comprehension of the obstacles encountered by women and provides avenues for substantial advancements in gender equality and empowerment.

Objectives of Study

- a. To examine the narratives of female employees within the Pakistani workplace, with a specific focus on their encounters with stigma, discrimination, and various challenges.
- b. To examine the effects of workplace stigmatisation and discrimination on the career outcomes and growth opportunities of women.

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- c. To ascertain the coping strategies female employees employ to overcome workplace challenges and sustain their professional advancement.
- d. To explore the notion of women's empowerment within the context of Islam and its impact on their position within the professional sphere.
- e. To present practical recommendations that improve equal opportunity for women and foster women's empowerment within the workforce of Pakistan.

Methodology

The researchers would employ qualitative methodology for data collection and analysis. This approach would contribute to the acquisition of more comprehensive and robust data, thereby bolstering the researcher's level of confidence in the findings and facilitating the identification and comprehension of any potential contradiction (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). The sample would be drawn from a diverse population of women employed in various workplaces and organisations. The fundamental principles and techniques of research methodology can be outlined in the following manner:

Research Design: This study will employ a qualitative research approach, utilising extensive interviews and focus groups as data collection methods. These methods are chosen to gather comprehensive and detailed information.

Participants: The research will encompass female employees in various sectors and industries across Pakistan. Islamic scholars and experts will be included to examine the Islamic viewpoint.

Sampling: The purpose of sampling is to guarantee adequate representation across diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Data Collection: Data will be collected through the utilisation of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, which will provide participants with the opportunity to express their narratives in an unrestricted manner.

Data Analysis: The research methodology will utilise thematic analysis to identify prevalent themes and patterns within the collected data.

Research Instruments

The primary method of data collection for this research will involve conducting in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews offer a qualitative approach that enables participants to articulate their thoughts, emotions freely, and personal encounters, facilitating extensive knowledge of the phenomena under investigation. The study will employ a purposive sampling methodology to select participants who are women working in different sectors across Pakistan, ensuring a diverse representation in terms of backgrounds, experiences, and levels of empowerment.

- i. Interview guide: The comprehensive interview guide will be developed to encompass a variety of subjects about women's empowerment within the context of Islam, as well as their encounters within the workplace in Pakistan. The guide will comprise a series of open-ended inquiries designed to prompt participants to openly discuss their narratives, emotions, and perspectives, facilitating a more profound comprehension of their lived experiences. The interview guide will be organised into distinct sections that will centre on:
 - a. Women's perception of empowerment within Islam.
 - b. Examining personal experiences about stigmatisation and the various challenges encountered within the professional environment.
 - c. Determining the effects of stigmatisation on women's professional advancement, job contentment, and overall welfare.

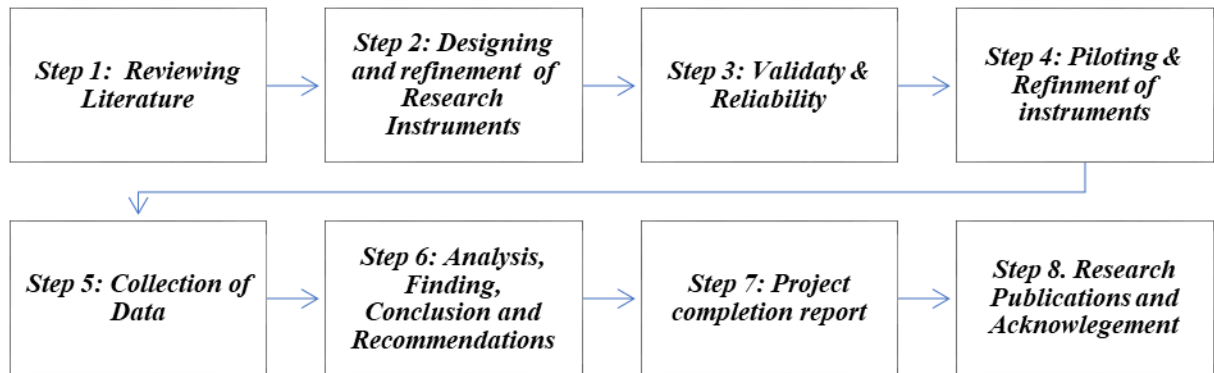
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- d. The utilisation of coping strategies and support mechanisms by women to successfully deal with workplace challenges.
 - e. Recommendations for enhancing women's empowerment and fostering gender equality within Islamic societies and professional environments.
- ii. Focus Group Discussion Guide:

In order to optimise the efficacy and pertinence of the focus group discussions, a purposive sampling method will be employed to select participants who encompass a wide range of age groups, educational backgrounds, occupational sectors, and experiences. The facilitation of discussions will be overseen by a proficient moderator, ensuring that all participants are accorded respect, dignity, and confidentiality.

- iii. Women Empowerment Questionnaire:

The collection of this data can be facilitated through the execution of a questionnaire to women employed across various sectors and occupying diverse positions. The questionnaire may request information about respondents' age, familial background, motivations for employment, and workplace experiences, among other factors. The questionnaire development can be facilitated by referring to the HEC proforma for the "Capacity Building Programme for Emerging Women Leaders". Including data obtained from the questionnaire would serve as a valuable supplement to the interviews, contributing to a comprehensive comprehension of the process and essential prerequisites for women's empowerment across various levels, with a particular focus on employment.



Significance of Study with Practical Implications for Pakistan

The societal position of women has been a topic of extensive discourse and apprehension for a considerable duration. The examination of women's empowerment in Islam and their experiences as employees in the workplace holds significant importance in Pakistan, a country where traditional gender norms have historically imposed limitations on women's opportunities and participation in the workforce. This research study is of great importance as it provides insights into the obstacles encountered by women, their accounts of stigma, the resulting consequences, and the coping mechanisms employed. Furthermore, it offers practical implications for Pakistan in terms of advancing gender equality and empowering women.

Exploring the Divide: A Comprehensive Analysis of Women's Empowerment within the Context of Islam

In the context of Islamic societies, such as Pakistan, the roles and rights of women are frequently influenced by religious beliefs and cultural practises. This research study examines the Islamic viewpoints regarding women's empowerment, aiming to reconsider religious texts and question patriarchal interpretations restricting women's prospects. This study would aid in exploring the concept of Islamic feminism and its influence

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on the social standing of women. Also, it will establish a connection between religious doctrines and the advancement of gender parity, with the ultimate goal of cultivating a more inclusive and empowering society.

Examining Gender Dynamics in the Workplace: An Analysis of Women's Experiences

The workplace serves as a significant domain in which the assessment of women's empowerment and gender equality takes place. This study will be providing a comprehensive analysis of the distinct challenges encountered by female employees in Pakistan through an examination of women's narratives pertaining to stigma, discrimination, and coping mechanisms. Comprehending these dynamics will facilitate the identification of the fundamental factors contributing to workplace inequality, thereby empowering policymakers, organisations, and society to confront and redress these disparities effectively.

The Concept of Intersectionality and its Relationship with Marginalisation

A crucial element of this research study involves acknowledging the concept of intersectionality concerning women's identities, encompassing factors such as religion, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity, and exploring the influence of these intersecting identities on their workplace experiences. Examining the intersecting difficulties encountered by marginalised groups of women contributes to a more profound comprehension of the diverse elements that contribute to workplace discrimination. This, in turn, facilitates the development of focused policies and support structures that address these individuals' unique requirements effectively.

By employing empowerment strategies

Empowerment strategies and coping mechanisms are essential components in addressing various challenges and adversities individuals encounter in their lives. These strategies and mechanisms aim to enhance individuals' sense of agency, resilience, and ability to navigate through difficult circumstances. Through an analysis of the coping strategies

utilised by women when confronted with workplace challenges, this study identifies the presence of resilience and resourcefulness that can be effectively utilised for broader empowerment endeavours. The comprehension of women's strategies for navigating workplace stigma and discrimination facilitates the creation of support mechanisms and mentorship initiatives aimed at empowering women and cultivating a work environment that is more inclusive and supportive.

Practical Implications for Pakistan:

The research findings can provide evidence-based guidance for policymakers in formulating and executing gender-sensitive policies. These policies may include affirmative action and equal salary regulations, which aim to foster workplace equality and enhance women's empowerment. This research has the potential to make a valuable contribution toward questioning and contesting the deeply ingrained traditional gender norms and stereotypes that are pervasive within Pakistani society. Advocating for a broader comprehension of women's roles and capacities can facilitate a societal transformation towards enhanced gender parity and the recognition of women's authoritative positions across diverse domains. The act of empowering women within the workplace has been shown to have a positive impact on the development of human capital and the overall productivity of organisations. The augmentation of women's engagement in the labour force can exert a favourable influence on Pakistan's economic growth and development. Organisations have the opportunity to utilise the findings of this study to effectively implement diversity and inclusion initiatives, mentorship programmes, and flexible work arrangements. By doing so, they can establish a work environment that fosters women's career progression and overall well-being. This study can make a scholarly contribution by increasing awareness regarding the various challenges female employees encounter in Pakistan. Drawing attention to these concerns fosters discourse and collaborative efforts to tackle gender inequalities and advance the cause of women's rights.

Month Wise Research Plan

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Time Period for each activity	Activities
1 st month	Refinement of Topic and Reviewing Related Literature
2 nd month	Designing and Refinement of Research Instruments and scale
3 rd month	Validating and piloting research instruments
4 th month	Analysis of Piloting, modification, and refinement of instruments
5 th to 7 th month	Data collection from Working women
8 th to 9 th month	Tabulation & Analysis of data
10 th to 11 th month	Finding, Conclusion and Recommendations
12 th month	Project Completion Report and Follow up
12 month and onward	Research Paper publication with due acknowledgment

Gantt Chart

Sr. No.	Activities	Timeline (by month)										
		1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th -7 th	8 th -9 th	10 th -11 th	12 th	12 th onwards	and	
1	Refinement of the Topic and Reviewing Related Literature											
2	Designing and Refinement of Research Instruments											

	and scale								
3	Validating and piloting of scale								
4	Analysis of Piloting, modification and refinement of instruments								
5	Data collection from working women								
6	Tabulation & Analysis of data								
7	Finding, Conclusion and Recommendations								
8	Project Completion Report and Follow up								
9	Research Paper publication with due acknowledgment								

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