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## Professional challenges and coping strategies of female faculty in public sector colleges: A phenomenological study in District Bhakkar

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### Abstract

*This thesis addresses the issue of professional well-being and coping methods of women faculty members in the District Bhakkar, Pakistan in the field of higher education in the public sector colleges. It is dealing with gender disparity in academic institutions with respect to the implications of institutional constraints, cultural expectations, and resource shortages in female lecturers. The thesis introduces the potential conflicting demand between personal and professional roles and focuses on the problems that women have to encounter regarding the solution to maintaining both personal and professional responsibilities and following the culturally defined gender roles. It adopted a qualitative research design, a phenomenological approach in order to have research on lived experiences of female lecturers. The interviews of 13 female faculty members in government colleges in Bhakkar were semi structured. The analysis included identification of main challenges, coping strategies, and institutional restraints that can affect their professional life using the thematic approach. The results indicate that female lecturers have to cope with serious barriers that include classrooms that are extremely crowded, lack of facilities and gender expectations. Also, they feel unsupported by the institution especially when it comes to receiving professional education, childcare, and safe transportation. Amid the coping strategies, there is self-strength, the unofficial support system, as well as implicit resistance to institutional constraints as used by the participants. The thesis explains the implications to these findings in context of the gendered power structure in academia. It utilizes the Academic Job Demands Theory (AJDT) and the Socialist Feminist Theory to describe the influence of structural inequalities in the field of higher learning on professional development of female faculty members. The research points at the necessity of institutional change so that gender equity was encouraged and female lecturers experience an improved working environment.*

**Key Words:** Challenges, Coping Strategies, District Bhakkar, Female faculty, Public Sector Colleges.

## Introduction

Gender equity in the academic process is traditionally considered through the lens of equal opportunities and outcomes of men and women, such as the employment rate, the number of leadership positions, salary, professional growth, and the inability to intimidate (Aiston & Fo, 2020). In this view, the success is mostly gauged by the measure of success, which includes the academic performance including publications, funded research project and most ambitious research studies (Mason & Goulden, 2004). But these measures do not take into careful consideration the fact that many women have burdens which they may be individually faced with, that even hold them back in their careers; childcare and family commitment are the major ones. To get a larger concept of gender equity, it is important that the intersection of these personal and professional worlds in shaping women with their academic careers is also taken into consideration. Quite a number of studies indicate that female academics who have care responsibilities tend to be plagued with the notion of guilt on not being able to do everything to satisfy their roles at home. They often have to face the clash of professional and personal life needs and it is difficult to accommodate both of them (Toffoletti & Starr, 2016; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). There are also concerns on gender gap in academia where women fail to occupy high-profile positions in academia (Herbst, 2020). Through different sectors and organizations, women are faced with a number of barriers to their career advancement process (Jalilianhasanpour et al., 2020).

The activity of the women in economic processes in the world is slowly growing. Some of the women are also challenging the conventional cultural arrangements of becoming house wives and entering into workforce in countries such as Pakistan too. But entering into the field of employment is not a simple and easy task of women compared to men. The reason is that women within the circumstance of patriarchal sexual archetypes are supposed to look after home, and it becomes hard to them to go ahead with their professional affairs. Women in academia are still impacted by gender biases and stereotypes affecting their experience and reducing the opportunity available to them (Iloakasia, 2024). Research singles out that female patients are usually treated unequally to male patients as well as there are elevated expectations and biased assessments of women patients in comparison to men (Debruijn, 2020). Case in point, female lecturers are more often required to comply with higher standards and are questioned about their competency that can negatively influence receiving research financing, publishing papers, and becoming leaders (Cecchini et al., 2019).

Several researchers conducted their investigations in Pakistan to learn about the difficulties of the work to life balance, social obstacles, family problems faced by working women (Bashir & Khan, 2022; Fatima & Sahibzada, 2012; Shakir & Noorani, 2014). Nonetheless, there is no research that is undertaken to discover the professional problems and coping skills of female lecturers in the colleges. The professional relationships in the research of the preceding studies are concentrated on the females who work at universities in Pakistan (Ali et al., 2022; Fakhr, 2018; Sadaf et al., 2024; Shaukat & Pell, 2016).

It is against this background that the study was undertaken to find out, first, the professional issues, facing the female lecturers in the government sector colleges of district Bhakkar and, second, the coping mechanisms, maintained by such women to overcome the obstacles. The significance of this consideration is that women cannot gain employment in the professional sector in case their issues bound to their gender roles are not raised and subsequently dealt with by structural interventions.

- To analyze the impact of workload, institutional constraints, and lack of institutional facilities on women lecturers' performance.
- To assess the effectiveness of existing institutional policies in addressing participants' challenges.
- To explore the coping techniques adopted by participants to manage challenges.

## Methodology

The women selected as research participants were those employed in teaching jobs at college level. In selection of the participants to be used in the research, these aim to match with the objectives and questions of the research. The respondents were women who work at the college level as teachers in Bhakkar district of Punjab, in Pakistan. The women who took part in the research worked in colleges on full-time teaching jobs as this experience as a teacher is the main aspect of the research as well.

The size of the sample was calculated in regard to the ideas of data saturation. Saturation is referred to as the point at which data collection does not present any new or meaningful data (Dworkin, 2012). One pilot interview was carried before carrying out the main study in an aim to determine the possible change needed on the research instrument and data collection procedures. The first interview was carried out with the participant who was also a gatekeeper in to contact other lecturers. The pilot interview was a success and it was concluded that there is no need of making a change in the research instrument. A total of 13 participants were interviewed.

The information was noted down in voice recordings in the mobile of the researcher. The researcher would listen to audio and continue to translate the information in English language and record it using a laptop. After being finished with the transcription, the researcher addressed the issue of data analysis. It analytically examined the data manually through the thematic analysis technique. The use of quotations from responses of the participants was used in the provision of contextual information of findings of the study. Data was placed in order and evaluated using the method of thematic analysis proceeded by Braun and Clarke (2006). Step one would be to get acquainted with the data. The data was read and re-read in detail after the transcription process was carried out. Subsequently, preliminary codes were made out of the transcripts. These codes were then merged into themes and all the information pertaining to a specific theme was merged in a systematic manner. In the following step, themes were examined in greater detail in order to discuss their compatibility with the coded excerpts followed by defining and labelling of the themes through formulating of specific definitions. In the last process, all the data analyzed was networked to the research questions and objectives as well as the existing literature which was followed by a generation of a final analysis report.

**Results and Discussion**

**Table 1: Thematic Analysis**

Category	Sub-Categories
High Workloads and Resources Denial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Classrooms Crammed and unsafe.</li> <li>➤ Poor Facilities and makeshift Education.</li> <li>➤ Forced Falsity of attendance and enrolment fraud.</li> </ul>
Neglect and Gendered Discrimination in Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Injustices of Transportation Inequities.</li> <li>➤ Inadequate Support Facilities (daycare, prayer area and health support).</li> <li>➤ Rejection of Safety and Health Issues.</li> </ul>
Impediments to Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Deprived of the Chances to Receive Further Education.</li> <li>➤ No Training of Curriculum Change.</li> </ul>
Defense Mechanisms and Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Secret Resistance.</li> <li>➤ Self Stress Coping.</li> <li>➤ Strategic encoding of Demands.</li> </ul>

### **High Workloads and Resources Denial**

The first big theme that is coming out of the research is the heavy workloads and the restrictions in institutions that burden female lecturers. To these teachers, there is systematic overloading of teaching jobs as these teachers are expected to teach three times the number mentioned in the policy that they need to teach in large classes with all these administrative work without due support. The resource scarcity has reached such degree that there are outdated libraries, laboratory environment unsafe or, disregarding it, the unavailability of the tools of the most basic of teaching process and the improvised alternatives provided by the lecturers are needed. Bias along the gender lines is another contribution to such hardships since their male counterparts are usually in a better position with fewer groups in the so-called VIP classes and better-equipped facilities. This theme reflects the Academic Job Demands Theory that reveals the correlation between a high job demand and lack of comparable resources which, correspondingly, leads to the development of such syndrome as burnout and the Socialist Feminist Theory that reveals how the patriarchal organization steals unpaid labor by women and fails to provide them with equal access to resources. This is well described with the poignant words of one of the interviewees that she goes home at night after the interviewee to get engaged with grading papers because she has the desire to provide the students with the quality feedback they deserve and gets administrators, all men, to brush her efforts away as some sort of inherent female tolerance.

### **Classrooms Crammed and Unsafe**

The participant 1 talked about the extreme overcrowding present in her classes: "Per section I have 90 students or three times policy limit. Pupils in the classroom are too cramped to the point that girls are sitting on window lips due to lack of chairs. Giving personal care is not an option. I grade the essays till 2 AM on the weekends when I assign them. However, these girls need comments. The irony? We are often reminded by the officers who visit our college that women are naturally tolerant of crowds. So, it should not bother us how big the class is."

This assertion demonstrates overcrowding in terms of both physical and emotional circumstance. The willingness of the participant to share her experience with the feedback serves in contrast with indifference of the institutions in which male administrators refuse to recognize the problem by referring to the female patience as essential. Inequity is reflected in the difference in the size of classes that male and female instructors have.

Participant 2 underlined the hazards of congested labs: "I have a lab with 80 girls that should have 30. The joke is to be safe. Last month one of the students spilled acid as we shared equipment. When I asked for smaller sizes the lab assistant in charge, who was a boy, answered: Boys colleges cope with it, why can you not do so? They are however well ventilated and PPE. In this case we could get make shift gloves using dupattas. It is the main bragging in the school the principal talks about the girls who excel in science and nothing is provided to us concerning the labs." Crowding does not only impact on the quality of teaching but also presents grave safety hazards especially in labs. Indicatively, when asked how she worked under hazardous conditions, Participant 5 explained how they used dupatta as a makeshift glove in experiments to reveal how the working of such hazardous conditions is normalized. Participant 6 dissected smuggled chicken liver in the market base since cadavers are prohibited by the administration. Girls call mitochondria by the name, Allah dots- that is how we can make the gap between science and survival."

The absence of rudimental laboratory protection proves the institutional carelessness. The reference point of boy's college illuminates the gender inequality in the resources provided that the girls students are the ones expected to deliver without any form of assistance.

### **Poor Facilities and Makeshift Education**

Participant 3 mentioned that she had no basic teaching tools: “A collection of books 30 in number, half of which are rusty textbooks of the 1980s, occupies a cupboard, which they call library. I bring my own copies of books home, but last month the clerk had an admonition to me: It was: Madam, these feminist poets will spoil the girls. In the meantime, there is digital library in the college of the boys. When I asked them to get me a single computer to get research done, the response was that at my age, I should be retiring at this age and not demanding new gadgets. The attempt of the participant to augment the insufficient resources was combated with opposition, placed within the concept of being morally corrupting. The ageism goes generally with gender discrimination whereby old women are not allowed to use technology.”

Participant 5 explained how ridiculous sport venues were: “Our sports complex consists of a concrete courtyard though there is one badminton net, which is broken. The trustee told me when I asked that we should have some of the simplest equipment, girls needed no hard exercise, too much was masculine. The comment made by the trustee on the Last Sports Day is full of stereotypical notions of gender that hamper the growth of girls in terms of physical activity. Such inadequacy leads to carrying out with crude equipment which further confirms that female athletics are less significant.”

### **Forced Falsity of Attendance and Enrollment Fraud**

The pressure to falsify records was explained by participant 6: “There are more than 70 students in a section, and following up on the attendance is a nightmare. The manual records are faulty and last month, one of the students’ father complained that I was not justifying him by marking his daughter absent. To do this, I needed to dig in cans full of papers to demonstrate that my records were accurate. That is disheartening, I am lying to cover a system that is failing these girls.” The scam of attendance illustrates corruption in institutions in which the size of enrollment is more important than the process of learning. The moral injury measure concerns the participant as a complicit subject of a broken system. Corruption in the institution compels female lecturers to lead compromised lives.

### **Neglect and Gendered Discrimination in Institutions**

The institutionalized ignorance and gender-based discriminations are retained to seep through the professional life of the female faculty members. The indifference of the structural kind could manifest itself in such issues like unsafe transportation: women workers may spend the entire working day in non-air-conditioned vans, and their male colleagues enjoy fuel allowances in driving their own cars. Necessities like day care centers are not included and those who are breastfeeding have to make do on their own where women only prayers areas are no match to what men get. The problem of safety in laboratories is habitually ignored by fatalistic assertions and the injury policies peers to come through a different attitude in the way they handle male personnel more favorably when they encounter similar or lesser health issues. It can be considered such institutional carelessness as widespread patriarchal norms that accommodate women needs and health conditions at the expense of the perspective of Socialist Feminist Theory, which allows us to observe how the capitalist-patriarchal machine wraps gender inequality into the delusional norm as tradition or expediency.

### **Injustices of Transportation Inequities**

The transportation system of the college was not only unsatisfactory according to Participant 1, but downright discriminative to the point that they may not have a transportation system at all: “The college van is a 20-year-old mini-bus with no air conditioning. Sometime last summer, one of the students was taken out unconscious by heatstroke during an evening trip. and when I asked to be repaired or decently ventilated, the transport major grinned and told me, 'Women never stop carping over such little inconveniences.' In the meantime, male professors are getting fuel allowances on their own cars and

even taxis during times when they have to work late. I was discouraged when I offered to go on my own motorcycle because it was not permitted that a woman could ride a motorcycle. The point is straightforward: we are not cared about being comfortable and safe.”

The same theme of gendered neglect was reported by the participant 7: “The schedule of the van does not change- it leaves at 3 PM sharp; it does not consider labs or meetings to be late. I have been left back once, having to supervise during a research project of a student. The administration gave me the excuse of, when I requested to be transported by another means, the administration told me, that I should have planned better. I spent Rs. 800 I earned on a single day on an individual taxi the same day, which was obviously a considerable amount of my daily salary. The following week, one of my male colleagues has remained behind the van since he was engaging in what was termed as networking with the authorities. Not only his taxi fare was refunded but also he was complemented on his dedication.”

When this participant 11 asked simple accommodations related with mobility, she was mocked: “I have to walk three kilometers to college daily as the van service has been taken away on the reason of being a senior staff. Upon asking to be given a bicycle to make commute comfortable, the trustee laughed and remarked, Women who are widows riding bicycles? What next tanks?’ In the intervening time, male university members can use motorcycles that are available in the college. The first time was when I was caught by heatstroke as I was walking last summer. The reaction by the principal? probably early retirement is the way to go should you be unable to cope with the commute.”

These testimonies indicate a culture of institutional outright discriminations against females in transportation assistance as they are not provided with basic safety assurances like functional air conditioning, or timely schedules in college-owned conveyances. In cases where they are forced to take alternative means of transport, they are also forced to meet the cost of hiring a taxi at their own expense, a great strain to their wages whereas their counterparts get reimbursements when they are in the same predicament. When in need they make some self-efforts but this is ridiculed and disapproved of, when one explains that she goes to work on a motor cycle or that she uses bicycle it is greeted with laughter and reproach and the inhibition of self-sufficiency because of gender is strengthened. This huge difference in transport coverage does not only threaten the health and wellbeing of women; it significantly constrains their professional mobility, with the male faculties negotiating their workday commutes without encountering the same obstacles and judgment. The disregard of the mobility needs of female lecturers by the institution can be seen as a part of the greater trends of discriminating against them as a gendered group in their professional activities and welfare.

#### **Inadequate Support Facilities (Daycare, Prayer Area and Health Support)**

Participant 1 on the lack of daycare: “In my case, we are in a broom closet where I was breastfeeding my baby because there is no daycare. In the meantime, male employees can take their children to campus and do so without restrictions- their children can attend lectures or play in courtyard. This is hypocritical in its magnitude. Her infant needs are described as a distraction, whereas her kids are her inspirations.”

The absence of personal counseling rooms was explained by Participant 4: “Not confidentiality, when the girls have to tell their trauma with low voices in the corner of the crowded library. There was a time when a student had confessed to me that she had been sexually abused, and before I could say anything a fellow student interrupted me and spread sexual gossip. When I asked them about a curtain of partition, the administrator would call me out and tell me that I am teaching some shameful things.”

This can be seen as a deep seated institutional neglect of several critical needs, as there are no necessary facilities. It is working mothers who are the victims of this neglect as working mothers have to choose between their childcare needs and work because of the unavailability of day care centers. The

institution also cannot offer adequate mental healthcare services and the counseling is usually held in lit open areas where the privacy of students is easily breached and their weak moments revealed. There is, also, the egregious disparity between religious accommodations, with the prayer rooms of the female contingent of employees constricted to attics and storage-lots, and the males being allowed the luxury of mosques. This is how the spiritual needs of women are shown to hold a secondary status. The combined effect of the said institutional omissions is the generation of a culture of resignation to suffering, where female faculty and students will have to face discomfort and a lack of equity without protest, leading to the formation of systemic discrimination against women on both policy and practice grounds.

### **Rejection of Safety and Health Issues**

Participant 2 on lab hazards: "We do not have fume hoods and fire extinguishers in our so-called lab, and we do not even have running water. One of the students spilled some nitric acid in the last semester with which we had to rinse her arm with the bottled water. The physics lecturer even laughed at me saying, ladies worry too much when I quoted the norms of safety during one of the staff meetings. The answer of the principal was? 'Allah protects.' To male teachers he would not have said that, you see. The boys' college got complete upgrading of its laboratories this year and we are told to make do."

Participant 12 on occupational accidents: "I was teaching two weeks with a broken wrist because the principal told me, women healed quicker. It hurt so much and taking unpaid leave was out of the question. In the meantime, one of his male co-workers went out on a month-long injury leave, with full salary, after spraining his ankle. When I confronted the accountant he shrugged and said, His contract is different. Different how? The qualification levels and workload are equal to us."

The rejection of safety and health issues demonstrates a troubling institutional tendency destroying women health systematically. Gendered gas lighting first occurs when the real risk becomes invalid since women are considered to be experiencing "female hysteria." Second, religious fatalism is a practical means of not taking any actions, where such slogans as Allah protects are a substitute of actual safety precautions and improvements of the infrastructure. Third, punitive surveillance is acted upon through moralistic fictions such that female faculty and students go through grossly biased attention regarding their clothes and movements especially during exercise classes. All of these practices together establish a climate of uncritically-evaluative practices in which real hazards are unopposed, which puts the life of both staff and students in danger whilst also strengthening the mechanisms of patriarchal social control. By denying the possibility of safety considerations, the institution does not only fail to ensure physical wellbeing; it is also a potent mechanism of keeping gendered relations of power generalized patterns of crediting and silencing female opinions regarding health and security issues.

### **Impediments to Professional Development**

The opportunity to study further also is lost and opportunities of male to be issued with no-objection certificate to study doctoral is higher than the probability of female studying doctoral as they will be advised to focus on teaching rather than degrees. These barriers in the institutions are also heightened in the families where they have reported cases of parent-in-laws taking laptops with the aim of stopping online education. As the curriculum changes, men staff are getting a good training workshop and the female lecturers are in a sorry state and have no other option other than training themselves with inadequate resources like YouTube video subscriptions. Soon, new methods of teaching worked out by women are commonly punished in the aspect of being subversive and this brings to play a professional environment of choking creativity and innovations. These kinds of inhibitors keep women faculty in lower positions, hence reflecting on the intersection of institutional policy and patriarchal families that collude to limit the career of a women, which can be effectively dealt by the Socialist Feminist Theory because

of its interpretive capacity to speak about the interrelated problem of economic and cultural subordination.

### **Deprived of the Chances to Receive Further Education**

Participant 8 on blocked PhD plans: “I was selected in a doctoral course in a foreign country, but the principal declined to grant me a No-Objection Certificate, because as he said, who will take your classes? My male counterpart, who has a half as much teaching experience as I do, got his NOC on the day that he applied. He is in PhD program at a German university already and I am here, cracking decrypting of nanotechnology on YouTube videos.”

The experience of Participant 6 about familial and institutional barriers: “My in-laws took away my laptop and they quoted, screens corrupt women. I have attempted to register into online courses on my phone, yet the loading lasts hours. The principal responded to me, when I requested the office to have improved access to internet, by saying that 'Don not worry about the internet, just concentrate on teaching, degrees will not make you a bigger wife'. In comparison the male lecturers are obliged to invest in their career path which forces them to study higher degrees.”

The discussion exposes the way female lecturers challenge multiple issues to advance their careers systematically. Gatekeeping activities at institutional level favor male faculty members who get instant support and no-objection certificates to undertake higher studies and their female counterparts are deliberately blocked and discouraged. Such institutional discrimination is coupled with repressive family units as the patriarchal rules put forward the educational ambitions of women as a form of defiance instead of career formation. The two barriers combined form a vicious cycle that traps women in low-grade academic roles effectively shortening their career lives and entrenching gender disparities in the profession. The institutional and domestic oppression feeds off each other and ensure remainders of the status quo in which women still have potential not fulfilled, as a result of systems inequalities and not individual hindrances.

### **No Training of Curriculum Change**

Participant 2 on the adjusting of new STEM curriculums: “In the case of the introduction of nanotechnology modules in Punjab, an example of male teachers was observed in the 3-day workshop organized. The provincial coordinator sent us a 10-minute You Tube. During Eid holidays, I would educate myself by going over courses through MIT Open Courseware, but the girls are my victims of knowledge deficiencies. The response of the coordinator? At least you are not rotting their brains with the laboratory.”

Participant 13 about not teaching econometrics with tools: “I interpret statistical models through tennis and bowl scores as we do not have any programs. The girls have now been interpreting gender pay gaps into what they call market failures which is an innovation on their part. The principal warned me of the danger of the political indoctrination when he heard about it.”

The acute absence of professional development in female lecturers induces a series of negative impacts that upholds structural inequalities. Institutions therefore impose self-education unpaid hours on women by denying them access to ideal workshops and other development programs; which they are already required to work to exhaustion. Such faculty undertraining is not only undermining the faculty affecting them negatively: it is affecting students directly, creating a knowledge gap between those students with faculty who lack sufficient training due to under-resourcing, and those with properly-trained male faculty. Worst of all, the system promotes the idea of pedagogical innovation as subversion in the case of women, thus penalizing imaginative teaching skills that would prove useful to the students and rewarding orthodox styles of teaching. This process does not only suffocate educational development but further strongly supports gender institutions, set up by this dynamic, which place

women in the role of implementer, not innovator in the academic field. These effects extend to the whole educational ecosystem as they create chains of inequality which may impact not only the learners, but also teachers throughout generations.

### **Defense Mechanisms and Strategies**

The final theme talks about the strategies of survival and protests that female lecturers had adopted about these oppressing structures. One can find such examples of concealed educative initiatives as underground STEM clubs behind the crust of Gender Studies-disguised home economics classes or radical feminist novels reading and discussion by pretending being religious courses as a creative response to restrictions. Personal stress management tactics involve activities like writing poetry and burning the same, or praying breaks where the individual has to pray but s/he has to do it discretely. The other step in bureaucratic maneuvers is the art of getting the requests through the language of the administration, who is interested in the business, and whereby the prescription of the needed safety equipment has been placed into a more relevant context of liability rather than the wellbeing of the worker. Such resistance mechanisms reveal how female teachers are extremely powerful and how being a teacher and a hacker of the institution is frightening at the same time. On the one hand, they are conditional solutions that introduce changes that could be experienced on the psychological level, whereas, on the other hand, they express the systemic failure to accommodate female faculty as a whole, and that is why structural changes are inevitable, rather than coming up with individual methods and means of adaptation to inherent hierarchies of inequality.

### **Secret Resistance**

Participant 2 explained how she managed to run a clandestine STEM club: "I also conduct experiments after official hours as I get students to gather in one of the unutilized storage rooms. We make do with baking soda, vinegar and food coloring. In the previous month, we made a home-made pH indicator using red cabbage. The girls were excited, and I would be fired with reason such as unauthorized activities in case the principal discovered it. On one occasion, he threatened to beat me saying that girls do not need laboratories but skills on how to be married. so we call at twilight, and we conceal our messages in home economics books."

Participant 9 had a club on Feminist Books that was coded as religious study: "We talk about the work of Fatima Merissa but we describe the sessions as the Islamist Political Theory. When the father of one of the students saw a highlighted line about the right of women, he claimed that we were corrupting them with western ideas. Today we speak the coded language-justice instead of feminism, the companions of the prophet instead of female leaders. It gets tiring but the girls end up begging me to keep on going."

The overview indicates that there is a complicated circle of these secret education developments. The situation of female lecturers encompasses a risk and reward equation that can potentially lead to dire consequences whether they organically succeed in imparting quality education to the students as these women put a great risk to their career in general either by termination or some other disciplinary action, but on the other hand provide students with access to the knowledge otherwise denied to one systematically. Such subterranean education system flourishes due to the extraordinary student collusion involved as girls make it very clear that they are more than willing to take part in the ruse by concealing materials and using code in order to show that they are so desperate to get a real education experience to an extent that the formal system cannot offer. Even the fact that there exists this shadow education system that thrives on a mutual sharing of risk between teachers and students is a condemnation in itself of the institutional failures and the lengths to which both ends of the pedagogical see-saw will go to escape the systemic oppression on the path to knowledge.

### **Self-Stress Coping**

Participant 1 was a burner of poems: "I use my anger in writing when I talk of chained birds and closed doors. It is like a release of the toxins of the college to burn them. One day my husband discovered a page half-burn: how is it that you spend your time on this? he said. He never knows that when I fail to scream on paper, I will scream in the class."

A shadow alliance with junior staff was formed by participant 3: "We are known as the broken chalk collective. Within closed doors we give out medicines, lesson plans and snake signs on inspections. In my last semester, the clerk warned me of an upcoming audit, hence I placed my feminist poetry books in the janitor closet. These gestures of solidarity make us sane."

The analysis reveals a complicated survival mechanism made by women faculty members to address the state of concern. The marginalized lecturers have created secondary structures of sharing resources and exchange of information without institutional support, or in other words, they have established parallel systems to cope with the administrative failures. These networks also exhibit astounding intergenerational solidarity where the older and the younger teachers transform cross-level barriers to defend each other against institutional subjection. Nonetheless, all these initiatives cannot change the fact that stress management is still an individual process and many women are forced to use individual coping strategies that give evidence to the lack of appropriate support systems. Religion, in turn, has quite a complex role in the matter, as it is both a spiritual escape and a kind of shield against the suffering of a woman which enables her to divert her plight behind socially acceptable medications she can express her spiritual faith, whereas simultaneously expressing her distress. These patterns together show the strategies by which female faculty ward off an oppressive system both through collective action and individual endurance, maintaining a continuous process of risking and survival in an institutional support that shows little institutional concern.

### **Strategic Encoding of Demands**

Equipment requests were reframed by participant 12: "Rather than arguing, can we get some fire extinguishers, I had argued, it can cause scandals and lawsuits in case of an accident in the lab. Someone even dropped two expired extinguishers on us suddenly, one does not know where they appeared from but at least we have something. It can be summed up like this: The major factor is using their language: reputation and money."

Participant 13 concealed feminism economics as pragmatism: "I give wage gap analysis as resource misallocation and microcredit as Islamic charity efficiency. The men trustees cabin the male approvingly, but they are unaware of the sub-text. The girls wink their fingers at me-- they understand."

One of them, participant 10, had a smile file: "I save thank-you letters, trophies and even old-style pictures of damaged hardware. When the principal says, you are exaggerating the leaks I tell him to look at the resulting mold growing on the lab manuals of the previous year. Evidence is something he cannot argue with."

The resisting tactics by the female lecturers demonstrated in their analysis are intricate resistance approaches that are used to defy and go around circumstantial oppression. Faculty counter-surveillance countermeasures such as those outlined here systematically write up institutional neglect to forestall the gas lighting that otherwise most often follows their reporting structural issues or safety concerns. Personal equipment in the age of digital revolution becomes a tool of revolt, allowing the instructors in the entire field to go around the institutional breakdowns, keeping sensitive contents and storing encrypted lists not available in the institution network. The women turn out to be extremely adept at the manipulation of the bureaucratic apparatus, making such requests as to take advantage of the scandalous or liability fears of the administrators to gain the most viable concessions from such a

reluctant system. Maybe most brilliant of all either way, they make up coded pedagogy, which is the subversive content hidden in standard, state-approved form--in which unofficial pedagogy takes the form of an official pedagogy, thus covering subversive lessons under the cloak of the orthodox. These complex forms of resistance emphasize the ingenuity of oppressed teachers, on the one hand, and the wearisome nature of daily work in the profession since the simplest teaching duties become an obstacle course involving multiple levels of strategic positioning to avoid institutional obstacles that serve to uphold the status quo.

### **Conclusion**

This thesis has given a detailed insight of professional problems that female lectures in the public sector colleges in Bhakkar, Pakistani go through and also the way they cope with it. The results indicate a highly dynamic interactional combination of institutional impediments, social requirements, and individual strength that determines the experiences of females in the university setting in this particular provincial setting. The words of the respondents have brought to light both the evident and the hidden challenges that they faced on a daily basis and provided a keen understanding of the gendered situations surrounding academic labor in rural Pakistan.

Among the most notable recurrent themes identified in this study, the triumphant imbalance of professional commitments with domestic and care giving obligations is among the most eminent. Women lecturers outlined a tiring routine as starting off in the morning with household chores before having to leave to go to work to complete teaching and administrative duties only to get back home and start yet another shift of unpaid labor. All this dual burden does not allow much time to research or professional growth or personal wellness. These difficulties are further tabled by lack of institutional assistance in terms of childcare services, or work flexibility which compels these women to resort to family support or make harsh sacrificing their dissatisfying choices between career and family. Widowed participants had even harder time, as they had to sail through financial constraints and stigmatization in society, all battling to hold on to their professional lives.

Institutional environment by itself creates serious obstacles to gender equity. The female lecturers complained that they were under higher expectations when compared to the male lecturers, especially in the classroom performance and administrative compliance. The students and other workmates often challenge their authority because society holds some biased assumptions about the position of women in the university. The criteria by which promotion is made seem to be biased towards male career patterns, i.e. administrative profession rather than teaching quality and unable to consider a career interruption caused by family priorities. Most of the female professors over the age of 60 spoke about what they refer to as a glass ceiling; that is, that they could go no further up the ranks with the result that they could hardly be promoted to higher statuses no matter how much qualified they were and no matter how much experience they had gained.

Workload became another burning subject, as female lecturers, in most cases, received more teaching loads and the involvement in the administrative work than their male peers. These strains are aggravated by recurrent shortages and understaffing in rural colleges, which give women no time to conduct research or pursue career development. These demands had physical and emotional repercussions whose evidence was seen through the narration by the participants of stress related health complications, such as chronic fatigue, anxiety, among other psychosomatic effects. In spite of all this, there is no institutional acknowledgment of these struggles and some participants have also reported that there are repercussions associated with the essential sick leaves.

The embraced coping strategies by the lecturers demonstrate strength and weakness of coping styles according to their personal means to solve the systemic issues. Faculty members that were

younger usually resorted to online peer networks as a help whereas older participants were more drawn to religious beliefs and family cohesion. Still, these individual approaches are not sufficient to cover the lack of institutional policies bringing up gender-specific issues. Strict schedules, strict leave arrangements and lack of work-life balance programs continue to add to the challenges of female lecturers, serving as an additional aspect of the importance of structural changes.

Rural-urban gap is also a major factor in such experiences. In the small urban colleges in Bhakkar, lecturers described slight improvement in resources but increased questioning of their mobility and related social life. Rural faculty members on the contrary had to struggle with poor infrastructure e.g., inconsistent power and internet connectivity that created an additional level of complexity in their professional life. A large number of respondents in the countryside complained of severe professional isolation with restrictions imposed by family on their movements to allow them attendance in conferences or other forms of networking. It restricts their chances in career advancement and continues giving them marginality in the academic world.

It is against the background of such challenges that the study also revealed shreds of strength and resolve into the participants. Several female lecturers developed ductile mechanisms to cope with their workloads which ranged between careful time management to creation of informal care groups with other lecturers. Others showed interest in having some kind of mass action and advocacy, but institutional push back and fear of pushback was often a hindrance to such movements. The difference in attitude and coping between generations means that younger faculty might be more willing to subvert the traditional values other than by total revolution, implying that a transformation of cultural attitudes might occur over time.

Some of the most important areas of intervention according to the study findings include; To begin with, institutions should carry out gender auditing to observe and fix imbalance in workload distribution where teaching and administrative work should be shared equally. Second, having childcare centers on the college grounds would also relieve a very big burden among female faculty members so that they could be able to concentrate more on their duties. Third, anti-discriminatory and anti-harassment policies that can be enforced are necessary to the establishment of a safe and more equitable working climate based on gender. Fourth, the criteria used in promotions are supposed to be reviewed to acknowledge various career orientations such as ones that can allow break in career progression to suit family needs.

It can also be really effective: flexible work arrangements, mentorship programs, and development opportunities that may be provided with the consideration of women needs. Moreover, dedicated technological education will also fill the generational divide in digital literacy so that all of the faculty members are capable of adjusting to the changing requirements of teaching practices. Lastly, introduction of gender quotas in leadership roles may assist in destroying the patriarch system that has so far hindered the growth of women in academics.

This study reveals a strong need of changes concerning the entire system, which will bring the academic setting in which female lecturers feel suitable. Institutional reforms that aim at curbing the causes of gender inequality cannot be replaced by the resilience and individual coping abilities. The examples of women lecturers of Bhakkar bring to the fore the issues that could still be addressed and the benefits that can be reaped as a guideline to policy changes that have the capacity of making the university system a more representative and fair place. This study thus helps in widening the debate on gender justice in the academic field, not only in Pakistan, but across the globe in similar cultures.

This can involve serious engagement of the policymakers, leaders of institutions as well as the society in general to disrupt ingrained norms and take practical steps that would facilitate professional

development of women. The success and the fortitude of the female lecturers in this study are a strong reminder of the potential of what would be attainable without the obstacles in systems. Their lives are not only narrations of hardship but also explanations of the possibility of transformation, of transformation that must start with awareness of these problems and a have-dexterity to handle them.

### **Recommendations**

The present qualitative analysis of professional challenges and coping strategies of female lecturers working in colleges of the public sector in the city of Bhakkar in Pakistan is both practical and theoretically useful. But just as every research, it also has several limitations which need to be noticed so as to inform future research.

### **Policy and Institutional Reforms**

The results indicate that there is an imminent necessity of having policy interventions to work on gender differences in academics. Gender-sensitive workload allocation should also be adopted in institutions to avoid overworking of the female lecturer in terms of teaching and other administrative works. Audits on workload may guarantee equality and openness on the task given. On top of this, the colleges need to implement supporting systems including on campus childcare services, part time working schedules and parental leave to enable the women juggle between domestic and professional life.

The criteria of promotions should also be reformed to appreciate teaching excellence as well as administrative positions, where taking care of family should not be used against the female, tenured faculty. The glass ceiling in higher positions of administration could be broken by the introduction of gender quotas in the position of leadership. Lastly, transparent anti-harassment policies, in which reports could stay anonymous, are the key to establishing a safer working environment.

### **Social and Cultural Changes**

The research highlights the strong patriarchal principles that inform the lives of women in the academe. Although it is more important to have the institutional changes, the general attitude within the society should change as well. The awareness program with the help of media and gender sensitization seminars to faculties, students, and the administrators may diffuse the stereotype and lessen prejudices against women in high positions. It would be helpful to include the male faculty in the division of administrative and mentoring tasks in order to cultivate a more inclusive academic culture.

### **Support and Development Networks Professional**

The rural female lecturers lack the opportunities to develop their professional profiles and find themselves isolated due to the lack of access to professional development opportunities and academic network. The mentoring programs between senior and junior female faculty are to be encouraged by the institution policies and such areas as granting finances to attend conferences and collaborate on researches. Online communities may go a long way in transcending geographical distances between women in distant colleges and the rest of the academic world.

### **Future Research Directions**

This study brings about a scope of future research such as studies comparing urban and rural colleges, longitudinal study of the career progression hindrances aspect and studies on how well the policies are changing the situation. A comparison between the lives of women in the humanities and in STEM may also give domain-specific answers.

**Note:** This research article has been derived from my M.Phil. research thesis titled "Professional challenges and coping strategies of female faculty in public sector colleges: A phenomenological study in District Bhakkar".

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