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Lived Experiences of Women Deans in Pakistani Universities – A Phenomenological Perspective

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Abstract: *In the democratic Islamic Republic of Pakistan, everyone has the right to equality, regardless of ethnicity, gender, creed, or belief system. However, the ongoing gender discrepancy in leadership roles at HEIs undermines the status of women in leadership. The primary goal of this phenomenological research was to explore the realities and obstacles that Women faculty deans experience in higher education institutions. The information was acquired through an interview process with eight Women school deans at three distinct educational institutions in Lahore, Pakistan. NVIVO 11+ was then used to conduct a theme analysis. According to an inquiry into interview data, women at Pakistani universities encounter hurdles such as the selection process, gender stereotypes, a lack of support, networking opportunities, and mentors as they strive to become university leaders. Participants stated that in order to overcome the obstacles they experience, Women leaders should devote resources to personal growth, seek help from others, organise mentoring efforts networking platforms, and conduct research.*

Key Words: Women Leadership, Feminism, Higher Education, Gender Disparity, Women Deans

Introduction

Gender disparities in executive-level jobs continue to exist at Pakistan's higher education institutions (HEIs). According to Ali et al. (2022), the gender gap in leadership roles remains owing to the barriers and problems that women continue to face in contrast to males. Women are underrepresented in positions of responsibility in Pakistan's academic administration at the moment. This sort of image, according to Zaidi (2022), illustrates that not even a well-acclaimed democracy like Pakistan has achieved gender equality, particularly at the highest levels of governance. Despite the increased number of women in deanships and related posts, there has been no obvious shift in other kinds of upper-level administration (Covert, 2023). To demonstrate, Zaidi (2022) reports that just five of Pakistan's twenty-six universities have appointed Women vice-chancellors. A more thorough knowledge of the experiences of Women leaders in Pakistani higher education institutions may be gained by investigating the current conditions surrounding the limits and obstacles that these women face. Furthermore, stakeholders may get recommendations for improving the position of women in Pakistan's tertiary education system.

Pan et al. (2024) define leadership as contextual and situational. The growth of academic meritocracy is a big setback for women seeking leadership positions at colleges. Ashiq et al. (2021) and Halkio et al. (2023) found that women have unique leadership characteristics and skills. On the contrary, they encounter unique constraints that limit their potential to be effective. According to some scholars, more study is needed to understand what characteristics help or hinder women's chances of achieving

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leadership roles. Despite the fact that many studies are Western-centric, the popularity of this conversation about women in leadership roles fails to account for socioeconomic class disparities such as race and religion. This field of research has been impacted by Western hegemonic classification, construction, and theory. Western leadership techniques in emerging nations contribute to women's subordination by suppressing and marginalising them. As a result, including a broader range of opinions from developing nations would contribute to the rising discussion over women's participation in university management.

This research aims to address the reasons and implications of women's underrepresentation in leadership positions in Pakistani universities. This study is motivated by the drastic change that is occurring in many Pakistani institutions, with an increasing number of women assuming positions of essential leadership, such as department heads, deans, and vice-chancellors. Educational institutions' efforts to foster gender equity in upper-level administration are in the early stages. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan provides equal rights, and the chapter on Principles of Policy underlines the principle of equal rights and equal treatment to all citizens/ persons, without any distinction, including on the basis of sex, advocate for a gender-neutral selection process (Women Development Department, n.d.). Consequently, this study offers valuable findings about how women leaders' personal encounters shape the contexts in which they operate. This is a fresh method to gender studies, where patriarchy reigns supreme at work. Current approaches incorporate more inclusive and pluralistic leadership styles (Poe, 2023). As a result, the study's main purpose is to document the difficulties encountered by women pursuing leadership positions at certain colleges.

Literature Review

A wide range of impediments inhibit the advancement of women to head positions in academia. Some of these challenges include management styles, workplace dynamics, gender stereotypes, internal motivation, conflicts over lifestyle choices, and selection methods (Nabhan, 2021).

Process of Selection

The selection process is a frequent barrier to advancement in a corporate hierarchy. Organisations favour male candidates over women candidates for management roles, regardless of credentials, due to a preference for masculine characteristics (Baksh, 2024). Despite the government's persistent attempts to foster a climate conducive to fair recruiting standards, women continue to be underrepresented in university administration in Pakistan. Women are underrepresented in positions of control and influence within higher education (Wakjira & Ibrahim, 2024). There is a claim that the scarcity of qualified women for executive roles diminished participants the possibility of women being promoted to those positions. Another research finds that, while universities have a large number of skilled women, their presence in leadership roles is insufficient. Consider Pakistan, where the percentage of Women university students reaches 50%. Despite the fact that women account for a larger share of college students, more women representation in positions of responsibility does not follow from this imbalance. Nabukeera (2018) found that a significant number of talented women are overlooked for positions of power in academic institutions. An alternate hypothesis is that because males make up the vast majority of university leadership roles, they are more inclined to promote other guys with comparable traits (Mabaso, 2023).

Organisational Culture

The organisational culture is another barrier to women's promotion to senior positions in Pakistani organisations. According to Burmicky (2024), the problems that Women administrators encounter are typically deeply embedded in organisational culture. Males' perceptions of the attributes that characterise a good manager have a significant impact on the cultures of many businesses. According to Riaz (2020), the prevalence of males in positions of power and influence at universities explains why campus culture favours male norms. As a result, cultural norms serve as structural hurdles inside organisations, hindering women's rise to executive leadership positions in academic institutions. Traditional patriarchal dynamics dominate most social and occupational relationships in Pakistan (Nichols, 2023). Furthermore, rivalries



among co-workers impede women from ascending to managerial roles at institutions. These connections may exist among Women co-workers, bosses, or mentors.

According to Macfarlane et al. (2024), the majority of employees form close-knit organisations based on similar interests. Because males have traditionally controlled university administration, it is difficult for women to locate a female mentor who can help them prepare for a leadership role within an institution. Many people find it advantageous to have mentors of the same gender because they can understand the specific issues that women and girls confront. Similarly, men and women have different expectations of mentors (Cheatham, 2023). Male mentors, on the other hand, are less likely to mentor women due to preconceived views that connect women with lower problem-solving abilities, heightened susceptibility to emotional manipulation, and higher vulnerability to workplace sexual harassment (Bigirimana & Masanga, 2024).

Managerial Styles Based on Genders

Gender-based management style disparities limit women's advancement to prominent management roles in universities and other organisations. In line with previous research into the glass ceiling and its impact on organisations' efforts to advance women's capabilities, Shoukat et al. (2024) discovered that 96% of Women managers believe that adopting a male management style facilitates women's advancement to senior management roles. As a result, women will be less likely to seek leadership posts. Women are typically required to adapt to male-dominated cultures and management methods (Kleinschafer et al., 2023). Women are not picked for or granted positions of power as a result of their failure to conform to the biased and macho management style.

Despite the distinct contributions that women bring to the table, male-dominated management methods continue to result in a disproportionate representation of women in higher education leadership roles (Ali et al., 2022; Constantinou, 2024; Nabukeera, 2018). For example, in universities dominated by men, management is usually dictatorial and politically ineffective. That portion of the organisation where the VC has major sway over hiring and firing decisions. The understanding that their opportunities for growth are limited contributes to women's lack of drive. One element contributing to women's reluctance to take up leadership roles is a lack of intrinsic desire. Many women lose their intrinsic passion to succeed when pursuing leadership roles due to multiple challenges. Horton et al. (2023) found a variety of barriers, including parental duties, a lack of opportunities, prejudice, and discrimination.

Work-Family Balance

Lifestyle conflicts have also been linked to women's underrepresentation in high-management roles. This challenge, often known as work-family conflict, is exacerbated by women's conflicting work and family duties (Kleinschafer et al., 2023). According to several studies, after getting a promotion, women usually prioritise their families above their jobs when faced with the increased importance of professional commitments and time restrictions. While flexibility is commonly acknowledged as a key aspect of good management, Ndungu et al. (2024) observed that work-family or lifestyle conflicts had a negative impact on women's flexibility.

Gender stereotypes

Gender biases make it difficult for women to advance in managerial roles. Gender stereotypes are the source of normative conceptions about men's and women's anticipated societal roles (Halkiyo et al., 2023). According to (Wakjira & Ibrahim, 2024), these views may have stemmed from the gendered societal division of employment. Gender stereotypes are cognitive frameworks that systematically undermine women's worth in a variety of contexts (Garvis & Black, 2018). Gender stereotypes in society have led to the evolution of normative ideas about the unique duties of men and women (Amin et al., 2021). These normative dogmas evolved, maybe as a result of the societal division of work along sexual lines. Patriarchal customs, which affected many countries, are commonly used as the foundation for workplace gender discrimination. Similar to past epochs, modern and industrial civilization has resulted in changes in social roles and individual experiences (Ndulaka, 2022).

Mentors

The paucity of example persons to imitate is one barrier that women pursuing leadership roles in higher education administration face. (Mabaso, [2023](#)) discovered that males in authoritative positions in the academic environment are hesitant to give female colleagues mentorship chances. The need to prepare women for leadership roles in upper management emphasises the importance of mentoring efforts for women. (Blumenau, [2021](#)) lists a number of organisational, social, and psychological variables that contribute to women's underrepresentation in senior management roles at universities. As a result, women require proper mentorship to boost their goals, self-assurance, and confidence, driving them to advance to the most senior management positions (Epperson et al., [2020](#)).

Advancements in the Representation of Women

Despite the enactment of numerous laws and executive orders, a dire dearth of Women's representation in positions of authority persists. Scholars and policymakers have engaged in deliberations regarding potential remedies that could aid women in surmounting the aforementioned obstacles (Gandhi & Sen, [2021](#)). This may demonstrate that laws and regulations are insufficient to close the current gender disparity in influential and powerful positions. Capacity-building initiatives that highlight leadership development are one of the most efficacious methods, according to Ahmed et al. ([2023](#)), of assisting women in their early academic years and preparing them for executive-level positions. The academic literature is replete with case studies of nations that effectively executed capacity-building initiatives to promote the progress of women in academia.

An illustration can be found in the developmental initiatives undertaken by the University Grants Commission in India, which seek to enable women to assume leadership roles within the realm of higher education. By participating in leadership development programs administered by the Higher Education Resource Services (HERS) and the Inclusive Excellence Group of the Office of Women in Higher Education, American women in administrative and instructional roles can enhance their professional growth (Zamakda Allison, [2021](#)). Pakistan, through its New Generation of Academics Programme, provides recently graduated scholars with the necessary resources to excel and assist in their placement in permanent positions at universities (Vogel & Alhudithi, [2023](#)).

Women in leadership positions must face several hurdles. One of these variables is the underrepresentation of women in executive roles; research is expected to help address and mitigate this problem (Chance, [2022](#)). With a well-defined research goal, gender statistics in leadership positions in Pakistani higher education may be explored more closely. Furthermore, establishing a measure for monitoring and assessing trends related to the number of women in leadership positions would be extremely advantageous.

According to (Islam et al., [2023](#)), research makes it easier to identify "hidden" barriers to women's promotion to the highest levels of management. Researchers can perform systematic examinations into the elements that enable or impede women's involvement in top administrative posts at institutions. This would enable the creation of a framework based on both theory and empirical evidence (Nindie, [2022](#)).

Methodology

This study used a phenomenological technique since it focused mostly on the first-hand experiences of Women deans. Using a qualitative study technique, the barriers faced by women seeking leadership positions in Pakistan's higher education sector were studied. To obtain insight into the individuals' lived experiences, the researcher used a phenomenological study approach. An interview was held with six Women faculty deans to discuss the hurdles they experienced when taking on leadership roles. This study's data was acquired using organised interviews, which were then analysed thematically. The study's eligible participants were selected using a purposive sampling approach. The participants were Women deans of universities in Lahore who had served for at least five years.

The study was conducted at three universities in Punjab province, Pakistan. Males dominated positions of leadership and administration at all three universities polled. Every participant was asked to reply to questions in a setting that matched their comfort level.



The research methodologies used in this phenomenological case study were in-person interviews and direct participant observation. Phenomenology is a way to study people's seemingly everyday actions. It is used in scientific research to assess subjective judgments of a subject or phenomenon as experienced by an individual or group of people. Phenomenological scholars are interested in perceptual phenomena (Creswell et al., 2007). The phenomenological research technique was chosen because it enables respondents to dive deeper into the substance of their experiences due to its flexibility (Duffy & Chenail, 2009). Phenomenological research, known for soliciting participant perspectives, was chosen for this study because of its dedication to disclosing the realities faced by women in administrative positions at Pakistani universities in terms of the glass ceiling.

Researchers used a hybrid technique to conduct this research, combining convenience and deliberate sampling methodologies (Moeller et al., 2021). Deans of colleges and universities from Pakistan's Lahore Province took part. Deans were chosen as the researchers' main topic because they represent the pinnacle of administrative advancement for women. After that, it became increasingly difficult to locate women in positions higher than dean. All participants were required to be women and have at least five years of experience as faculty deans.

Data was collected between June and September of 2023. The interview procedure was planned to run no more than an hour for each participant. The participants were asked to share their experiences with the problems they faced when pursuing leadership roles, as well as any potential solutions they may give to these concerns. Furthermore, the interview focused on the deans' actual experiences, particularly their leadership responsibilities and how they were directed or guided in a mostly male workplace. The interviews included topics outside academia, such as the respondents' personal experiences and the treatment they get in professional settings. Data was processed by transcribing the interviews conducted with the participants through electronic devices.

Ensuring participant confidentiality was critical in order to follow established participant field standards. The use of aliases rather than true identities enabled this occurrence. As a result, the researchers can be confident that the identities of all participants stayed hidden. In addition, the researchers investigated participants' privacy concerns, informed consent, and voluntary participation decisions.

Findings

To enhance interpretation, thematic analysis was used after collecting data through in-depth interviews. Creswell (2007) describes thematic analysis requires explicit coding. To clarify the links between the study objectives and the conclusions, the unprocessed data were reduced into concise data forms. The data was examined using the following six steps:

(1) Becoming acquainted with the data by reading it again and transcribing it; (2) Creating codes or developing systematic coding characteristics in order to address the research questions and find connections; finding themes and gathering relevant codes from the text; (3) Performing a suitability evaluation of the topics and creating a thematic map; (4) Concluding the work by choosing pertinent extracts from the themes and developing connections.

The findings show that women seeking leadership roles in Pakistan's higher education sector face several difficulties. Six faculty deans from Lahore Province actively participated in this study, offering their practical expertise to help identify these determinants. According to participant data, the following are some of the challenges that women in Pakistani universities face on their route to leadership posts.

Challenges Faced by Women Deans

Process of Selection: Three of the six women criticised the dean's process of selection, claiming it was biased against them. This is demonstrated by Participant A's comments, in which the participant admits to having faced problems. *“Males make up the bulk of administrative professionals at colleges and universities, which impacts my hiring decisions. Obtaining this post was a huge task. After years of unsuccessful applications, I was appointed as faculty dean.”*

Participant D's critique of the selection methods is echoed by her assessment that it has a bias towards men, who appear to have successful outcomes. Simply put, the participant meant that regardless of the cost, men will always find a way to get what they want.

"The bulk of powerful figures in academia are men, and there appears to be a widespread expectation that activities follow a precise pattern in order to conform. I do not relate to the stereotypical male figures and characteristics connected with leadership selection and qualification as a woman." The findings above are consistent with previous research, which shows that selection methods conceptualised primarily by men usually disfavour women.

Work-Life Balance: One additional challenge: managing both work and personal duties, was also mentioned by the participants. As participant A stated in her response, handling both professional and family duties is a big hurdle that may hamper growth into a senior management position.

Even Participant E admitted that the participant faced difficulties. The participant emphasised that in order to be a leader, you must be available outside of work hours, *"Engaging in this activity will make people believe you are more devoted to your professional responsibilities. Work, parenting, marriage, and daughterhood all interfere with this."*

Women in leadership positions frequently experience work-life conflict. This issue arises when women, particularly in Pakistani settings, face the tough dilemma of balancing employment and household duties (Zamakda Allison, 2021). This is supported by the remarks of three participants who admitted challenges in balancing professional and personal life.

Women in leadership positions frequently experience work-life conflict. In many Pakistani situations, women are expected to balance career and household duties, resulting in tension between the two (Alrowwad et al., 2020). This is corroborated by the perspectives of two women who admitted to having trouble reconciling their duties as deans and husbands. Participant C, as an unmarried woman, had more control over her time management than the women the participant had watched struggle to juggle job and home responsibilities. In addition, Participant B reported directly to a female deputy chancellor, whereas Faith and Sihle both reported to male deputy chancellors. Participant B, unlike the other two women, may have been able to create a good professional connection with her Women boss without prejudices based on gender and authority.

Participant A believes that balancing personal and professional duties concurrently is one of the most significant impediments to advancement in management, *"Maintaining a work-life balance has proven to be a difficult task for me. Unexpected meetings jeopardise my family's efforts, as I am also responsible for teaching my children the importance of family values."*

Discrimination: All of the Women respondents reported experiencing discrimination or prejudice. This is demonstrated by Participant C's statement, in which the participant revealed that the participant had received criticism for her leadership abilities. The participant also addressed the common misconception that women have lesser leadership talents and must work twice as hard to distinguish themselves. Her remark, shown below, implies the following:

"Finally, there are engrained stereotypes that women must work more than males to achieve leadership positions, and that they are weak and ineffectual. Sivuno regretted seeing instances of gender prejudice at meetings, such as when her point of view was not given the same weight as those presented by men." C's focus was on specific situations in which gender operates as a barrier to women taking leadership roles. The participant also mentioned that reporting to a male boss might be difficult owing to the pressure of conventional gender standards that govern correct behaviour. The participant aimed to portray an authoritarian manner of contact in which the participant is expected to provide feedback while assuming a lower level of involvement. In her statement, participant F highlights gender stereotypes as a significant barrier for women worldwide, *"When you indicate a desire to be a leader or admit that you are currently a leader, male colleagues may criticise you unfairly. It is difficult to report to a male boss because of his machismo-based demands."*



Participant D also understood that the participant had faced a considerable number of trials. However, the participant did say that while the problems themselves may go unnoticed by others, the effects of such challenges are obvious. The participant claimed that, *"it was hard to quantify the most important problems I faced. This is regulated by the environment itself rather than a set of restrictions. The bulk of powerful figures in academia are men, and there appears to be a widespread expectation that activities follow a precise pattern in order to conform."*

Five of the six women who participated in this poll stated that they have experienced prejudice in some kind. In contrast to male colleagues' acknowledgment and appreciation for Women meeting contributions, women are marginalised in decision-making procedures that necessitate their attendance, all of which demonstrate discriminatory behaviours and stereotypes. Gandhi and Sen (2020) revealed that bias remains a barrier for women in all occupations; this study backs up their claim.

Need of Support: Furthermore, the Women deans described a variety of situations in which they feel unsupported. This is proved by analysing the women's comments which follow.

Participant B claims the participant was denied the necessary help from her mentors and co-workers in order to achieve her objectives and aspirations: *"As a woman striving to climb to the position of dean at a higher education institution, I faced racial discrimination, gender stereotypes, and a lack of professional networks."*

Participant E claimed that *"lack of financial resources and absence of relationships"* were two serious hurdles the participant faced while serving as dean.

According to the women's claims, there is a lack of mentors (who can inspire and guide), resources (including financial and non-financial aid), and professional networks (from whom they may acquire task-related support). According to (Bui et al., 2022), women frequently mention a lack of support as a barrier to reaching their leadership ambitions. Despite the concerted efforts of local and international authorities, women continue to face a shortage of employment aid.

Strategies to Overcome Challenges Faced by Women Leaders in Pakistan Universities

Furthermore, women were encouraged to provide their thoughts on potential ways for women in leadership roles in higher education to overcome these obstacles. The comments made by the participants revealed some repeating themes.

Mentoring: Mentors or mentoring initiatives can help women in leadership positions overcome hurdles, according to three out of six women surveyed. As Participant B stated, having a mentor who can provide encouragement and guidance is incredibly beneficial, *"a mentor who is well-versed in effective ways for dealing with specific leadership issues and has been through similar experiences would be a good match."*

Mentoring has been shown to be an effective way to help women in university leadership roles overcome some of the problems they confront. (Hickey et al., 2022). This Strategy is critical because it allows more experienced leaders to share their knowledge with newer employees.

Building Networks: Mentors or mentoring efforts may help women in leadership positions overcome hurdles, according to three out of six women surveyed. As Participant E stated, having a mentor who provides support and guidance has proven to be tremendously valuable in aiding me to overcome problems, *"a mentor with extensive expertise of how to effectively manage unique leadership issues and who has personally experienced all I am now going through would be a great fit."*

According to research, mentoring is a realistic technique for assisting women in leadership roles at universities in overcoming particular problems (Hessami & da Fonseca, 2020). This Strategy is critical because it allows more experienced leaders to share their expertise with newer employees. Participant D demonstrated that the participant had successfully overcome hurdles by leveraging networks. Women's prospects of achieving leadership roles may improve if they create professional contacts and accumulate social capital (Blumenau, 2021). To the best of her knowledge, the participant maintains professional contacts with other prominent women in academia and beyond. According to her account, the participant actively seeks networking opportunities with other distinguished participants persons in academia and

related fields; during these contacts, the participant shares experiences, opinions, and strategies for overcoming the challenges that academic leaders face.

Support: The presence of support is beneficial in overcoming problems, as two of the Women participants in this study highlighted. When asked how the participant managed to maintain a work-life balance, Participant F explained that her family's support was critical, *“my family's support has allowed me to effectively manage the obstacles that come with work-family conflicts.”*

According to Participant C, having the support of other women has helped her retain her composure and overcome the problems the participant confronts as a woman. The participant added that this has also helped her overcome the challenges the participant experiences.

Personal Development: Two of the women who replied to the study reported that self-improvement helped them overcome hurdles. This is very clear in E's response: *“I am now more proficient at managing the problems that come with my job as a leader, having expanded my knowledge and learned new abilities. With my arsenal of talents and knowledge expanded, I am now more skilled at interpreting my environment and handling any obstacles that may emerge. Furthermore, the chances provided by education have allowed me to demonstrate that women are just as capable of completing duties as males, so contributing to the decrease of gender prejudice.”*

Participant B went on to say that learning new talents has been beneficial. Participating in leadership seminars, workshops, and literary studies has been effective. Aside from that, *“I have been working hard to develop practical knowledge and abilities, and my efforts have been successful. As a consequence, my talents were evaluated independent of my gender.”*

Discussion

Challenges Faced by Women Deans: In Pakistani universities, the selection process may impede the advancement of women to management positions, according to the data. The Women deans who participated in this study noted that, given the preponderance of male senior management in Pakistani universities, the selection criteria are tailored to male candidates. Furthermore, the women emphasised that the leadership selection process and the qualities expected of leaders are predominantly male-centric, despite the fact that some women do possess these qualities. This aligns with existing literature that indicates selection methods have a bias towards males and consistently fall short in developing a systemic approach that is advantageous for both women and men (Gandhi & Sen, 2020).

Additionally, the study discovered that work-life conflicts reduce the likelihood that women attending universities in Pakistan will advance to executive positions. In order to manage the responsibilities of executive positions, a considerable number of women opt for professions that enable them to balance work and family obligations. According to the women, balancing professional and familial obligations is a significant barrier to career advancement. To exemplify the challenges associated with achieving a work-life balance, the women recounted instances where they were required to exceed their designated work hours as a sign of their commitment to the organisation. The traditional roles that women are expected to play at home, where they are expected to be spouses and mothers, are in opposition to this, however. Furthermore, the results support the conclusions of a previous study that found work-life conflict to be common among women in leadership positions. According to the research, women face the challenge of managing work and familial responsibilities, especially in African contexts, which could impede their aspirations for leadership positions (Zulfqar, 2017).

According to the findings of the study, prejudice has also hampered women's rise to senior managerial positions at Pakistani universities. Five of the six academic deans who participated in the interview reported encountering prejudice when pursuing administrative posts. Gender-based stereotyping as weak and defenseless was one kind of sexism. As a result, women faced twice as much pressure to demonstrate their ability as males, limiting their chances of entering leadership roles.

Women typically feel discouragement and a reluctance to take on positions of leadership due to the inherent bias that exists against them. According to the women's testimony, acquaintances, family, and co-workers tried to dissuade them from obtaining deanships. Furthermore, reporting to a male supervisor



increases the risk of facing discrimination, according to the study. Clearly, the deans encounter discrimination in their work as a result of social construction issues such as sexism, patriarchal views, and gender roles. This issue can be due to the assumption that Women subordinates emulate their male bosses' typically masculine behaviour.

Furthermore, the prevalence of male leadership at Pakistani universities has a tremendous impact on moral assessments, creating a difficult barrier for women aspiring to leadership posts. Finally, ethnic and gender prejudices prevent women from pursuing leadership roles. Gandhi and Sen (2020) observed that gender-based bias continues to afflict women in numerous professions and social strata, which supports their findings.

Women faculty deans have reported that a lack of mentoring and collegial support has made it difficult for women to take on leadership posts. Certain respondents stated that obtaining the deanship post at the institution was difficult owing to a lack of necessary professional ties and networks. Despite not having the authority to assign staff, the deans maintained that their assistance was required when submitting a promotion request.

Certain women are hesitant to take on leadership roles at universities due to inadequate financial resources and institutional networks. Males have more established participant networks within administration and abundant financial resources, giving them a better opportunity to pursue leadership roles on college campuses than women. This confirms Mabaso's (2023) conclusion that leaders have considerable obstacles in attaining their objectives in the absence of sufficient support.

Strategies to Overcome Challenges Faced by Women Leaders in Pakistan Universities: Based on the available evidence, the study indicates that mentoring ambitious Women leaders can help women overcome hurdles. As other deans have stated, the presence of mentors who give encouragement and support has proven beneficial in overcoming hurdles; consequently, this conclusion is based on their own experiences. A subset of the women has been able to lessen the consequences of the problems they face by seeking advice and support from other women who have previously navigated the system. Zaidi (2022) found that mentorship can help women pursuing higher education overcome some of the barriers associated with leadership. This supports our own results that mentorship might be good for ambitious Women leaders. This Strategy is critical because it allows more experienced leaders to share their expertise with newer employees.

The study found that networking is an effective method for women in leadership positions to overcome obstacles. According to the data, Women deans in higher education were able to overcome hurdles thanks to their networks. Making ties with other important women in academics and outside helped enhance my career. The introduction of internet platforms that encourage networking among women in leadership positions has shown to be an effective strategy to overcoming these obstacles, allowing them to exchange tales, perspectives, and potential solutions to the academic leadership issue. Ezzani et al. (2023) discovered that networking can help women develop their leadership potential by providing access to knowledge, connections, and social capital.

Furthermore, the study revealed that Women individuals aspiring to leadership positions in academic environments face unique challenges; thus, it is critical to provide them with appropriate assistance, such as resources that promote their professional development and various forms of aid. A few deans are grateful to their families and other professionals for their support. Few women said that their families helped them resolve conflicts between their professional and home commitments, but others said that the support of other women helped them overcome the everyday problems they faced as leaders. However, it was agreed that more efforts are needed to guarantee that the amount of support, particularly financial help, is appropriately increased. A dearth of Women's leadership in academia contributes to women's feelings of invisibility, marginalisation, and isolation. This study's findings support Jones' (2023) statement that increasing women's access to resources would improve their chances of achieving leadership positions.

Finally, the study found that women who aspire to leadership positions can reduce the consequences of difficulties via personal growth. Two of the participating deans believe that personal development has

been critical in overcoming problems. To alleviate the effects of adversity, the women revealed that they had continued their schooling and learned new talents. This included visiting leadership-focused conferences and workshops, as well as reading relevant literature. Furthermore, the findings of an associated research project conducted by Riaz (2020) provide additional support for the idea that women in leadership positions can overcome obstacles by acquiring new knowledge and skills through self-improvement.

Conclusion and Recommendations

To conclude, activities such as mentorship, self-improvement, networking, and assistance can be used to overcome challenges that prevent women from obtaining executive roles at Pakistani universities. The data given here corroborate Horton et al. (2023) conclusion that mentorship, networking platforms, and personal development activities can help women in leadership roles overcome the hurdles they face. According to the study's findings, Women leadership aspirants might benefit from mentorship initiatives and, if given the opportunity, participate in formal training. This phenomenon will help a greater number of women overcome problems caused by a lack of mentors. Ashiq et al. (2021) recommend that women aspiring to senior management roles network with other women who share their interests and responsibilities in order to overcome difficulties in higher education. A new technique will be offered to change the power dynamic between the genders, as the existing method "disrupts long-standing patterns of social connectivity in the workplace that have benefitted males" (Burmicky, 2024). It is recommended that women in poor nations interact with their Women counterparts in affluent countries such as Sweden, where the number of women in administrative roles at universities has increased significantly (Pan et al., 2024). According to Gandhi and Sen (2021), aspirants could learn about women's roles in higher education administration, improve their decision-making skills, discover ways to balance their professional and personal lives, and connect with like-minded individuals to combat exclusion and provide mutual support. Subsequent studies should entail gathering data from women who are now employed as deans as well as those who desire to be leaders.

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