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WOMEN ACADEMIC LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN: PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE STUDENTS ENROLLED IN HIGHER EDUCATION DEGREES

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Abstract

The number of women joining the teaching profession has risen in general. In addition, the number of women academics in other faculties and departments in universities has gone up as Pakistan has opened new women-only universities, some having women Vice Chancellors. However, women are generally absent from higher-up and decision-making positions in higher education, and the current paper investigates this issue. Although several researchers have earlier explored this phenomenon, this study attempts to assess it from the students' perspective. Therefore, the question of women as managers in higher education was placed before sixty female students enrolled in postgraduate programmes of four private and two public sector universities. Each research participant was provided enough time to consider and answer the query "why are there no women in higher leadership positions in universities in Pakistan in co-education set-ups?" Each of the in-depth discussion sessions, moderated by the researcher, resulted in creating rich data, which helps in comprehending why academically qualified women are not able to break the glass ceiling and move upward in their professional careers.

Keywords

Women educators, higher education, academic leaders, women's leadership roles

Introduction

The latest statistics by the Academy of Educational Planning and Management, a body working under the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, Government of Pakistan, show that the number of female teachers working in the education sector, up to degree-level colleges, both in the private and public sector, is higher than that of male teachers. There are 59% female teachers and 41% male teachers while the ratio of male and female students studying up to degree-level colleges is 56% and 44% (Academy of Educational Planning and Management 2017). This imbalance between the number of female and male students continues in higher education institutes (HEI), from undergraduate to postgraduate levels. The latest data compiled in 2014-2015 and placed on the Higher Education Commission's (HEC) website show a gap of 10% between female and male students enrolled in different programmes across Pakistan in various universities, both public and private. This data shows 10% more male students as compared to female students enrolled in universities and its affiliated colleges (Higher Education Commission 2015). The number of female teachers working in the HEI was unknown until today. Available data differentiates the faculty into two groups, those holding a PhD degree and those without it, but it does not disaggregate them into female and male faculty.

Thus, the number of female faculty and women working as Chairpersons of various Departments, Deans of Faculties, Directors of Research Centres and Vice Chancellors in HEI is insignificant as compared to the number of their male counterparts. The World Economic Forum (2017) in its latest report ranked Pakistan as the second worst country on the Gender Inequality Index (GII). Other South Asian countries have performed better on the GII: India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh were ranked 108, 109 and 47 respectively. This paper looks at the low female presence in senior management and leadership positions.

Research Methodology

This study uses Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) as a research method. It is considered suitable for subjective interpretation of "text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh and Shannon 2005, 1278). The data was gathered using a focus group discussion (FGD) strategy. To interpret this data, QCA was selected as the most suitable method as Schreier (2012) says it is "a method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative data" (p. 1). Also, qualitative

methods of research, with an interpretive approach, are successful especially where possible interpretations must be drawn from the data.

This study used a focus group discussion (FGD) method to collect data from research participants (female students) enrolled in different Masters-and-above level programmes in six HEIs, four private and two public sector HEIs: four located in Lahore, one in Islamabad and one in Karachi. The FGD sessions were held during the spring and summer 2017 semesters. Some of those who participated in this study had completed two years bachelor's degree while some had completed four years' bachelor degree. The participants were approached through the faculty of their respective HEIs. To ensure active participation in focus group discussions, the ten research participants from each HEI were divided into two small groups.

There were 12 focus groups and each focus group was made up of five participants. Each focus group session started by introducing the purpose of this research to the research participants, followed by a brief introduction by the participants. The researcher moderated the session, which was recorded with the permission of the participants. Data from the HEC and from the Government of Pakistan regarding the number of male and female students studying at different educational levels, and the number of male and female teachers working at different levels was shared with them. The focus group discussed two questions: (1) what is/are the cause/causes for low levels of participation by female faculty at the top managerial and administrative levels in HEI, and (2) what could be done to assure more women chairpersons, deans, directors and vice chancellors at HEIs? Each session lasted for about an hour. The conversations in FGD were held in an informal setting and it was ensured that the participants were comfortable. This environment of comfort and the absence of any of their teachers and research supervisors encouraged the participants to speak without any fear and intimidation. This step was necessary to minimize influence that their teachers and research supervisors might have on participants' thinking and what they might say or not say during the discussions.

A data classification sheet was developed with two sections: Causes and Suggestions. The Causes part of the data sheet was further divided into two parts, noting how many times participants mentioned a cause during the focus group discussion, highlighting the weightage attached to each cause. Later it was connected with the suggestions given by the participants to find out how many suggestions could be linked with each of the given causes. The participants were asked to list the names of successful women in different faculties and departments who are leaders in both administration and teaching. The research participants could name only a few and most of them happened to be in all-female education settings or from the humanities, arts and social science faculties. Not a single name from the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)

faculties was mentioned. The second part of this exercise was to list the causes of having so few women in leadership roles and positions. The group members in their small groups (minimum 5 members) listed the reasons and arranged them in higher to lower frequency of occurrence. They started discussing these one by one according to the frequency of each cause, starting from the cause mentioned most to that mentioned the least by the group.

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method has four elements: organised discussion (Kitzinger 1994a, 1994b), collective activity (Powell and Single 1996) social event (Goss and Leinbach 1996) and interaction (Kitzinger 1995). Powell and Single defined FGD as "a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of research (1996, 499). The FGD interview is actually a discussion between the moderator and the participants and among the participants as well, but these discussions rely on and remain confined to the questions supplied by the researcher (Morgan 1997).

The FGD provides the researcher with a lot of relevant and significant information in the shortest possible time, containing multiple views and emotions within the group. The conversations explore the participants' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions. (Morgan and Krueger 1993) believe that FGD is significantly useful in research sites where the participants feel the impact of power difference through different decisions made by the decision-makers and where the extent of agreement or disagreement is explored.

Ethical Consideration

It was ensured during the FGD sessions that the participants felt comfortable; steps were taken to avoid any possible embarrassment and risks for those participants who expressed an opinion contested by other group members. The participants were informed of their rights, such as not needing to answer every question or being able to stop participating in the ongoing discussion if they feel uncomfortable. Group members were given a red page and told to raise it in case they wanted the group discussion to stop or they wanted to leave the group. They were also informed about the steps taken to protect the personal information shared by them with the researcher and to keep their shared and recorded information secret until the publication of this paper or presentation at a national or an international conference. The researcher will keep the participants informed about the publication process. The recordings and transcripts of the group discussion, and the notes taken by the researcher, will be destroyed once a journal has accepted this paper for publication. The participants will be informed about the details of the journal and the possible year and month of publication. This paper was shared with all the participants though email and the researcher asked for their feedback about findings of the paper. The

participants found that the paper does not disclose their personal information or identities to readers.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher plays an important role in any interpretative study as s/he contributes immensely, being the primary and major contributor in this research. The researcher began with a set of beliefs, perceptions and opinions, and there is no doubt that these might have influenced the interpretation of the data. The acquired set of beliefs came from the researcher's social, cultural, religious and educational background, and from the research and readings that contributed to developing the concepts of this study. To minimize the influence of the researcher's beliefs, perception and opinions, the researcher used open-ended questions and let the participants lead the discussion. The researcher only spoke when the discussion became irrelevant and then reminded the participants of the question they were discussing. The researcher also ensured at the writing phase of the paper that his personal beliefs, opinions and perceptions did not interfere with the inferences drawn from the data by visiting, revisiting, checking and rechecking the data and the inferences from it.

Literature Review

The Millennium Development Goal made gender equality an important area to work on, suggesting different goals for different parts of the world. The latest UNESCO (2018) report looked at women's empowerment in different parts of the world. The developed countries and the underdeveloped countries stand at opposite ends, while the emerging economies lie between these two extremes. The developed world, especially countries in North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand are working on reducing the gender gap at the highest level of the job market while third-world countries are still working on ensuring access to education and basic health for women. The countries called newly-developed countries and emerging economies are working on equal access to employment opportunities for women and other issues such as safe and secure work environments and reducing the wage gap between men and women. The UNESCO report on Gender and EFA 2000-2015 (2015) noticed significant improvement around the world, especially regarding girls in schools. The report also highlighted the fact that with all the efforts to enrol girls in schools, there are still more girls than boys who fall into the category of out-of-schoolchildren. UNESCO (2018) reported a decreasing trend in gender disparity but also highlighted areas that many countries still need to work on: especially issues such as better work environments and reducing wage disparity, which could contribute to reducing gender disparity at all levels.

Fitzgerald (2014a) in her book on women in higher education argues that women must negotiate and re-negotiate their identities in a mostly male culture, which is the hardest challenge they face. As they do so, they sometimes internalize leadership traits considered masculine (the rules of the game, winning and losing, punishment, boys' club, blokes and queen bee) and thus women leaders are punished for fully following these unwritten and unspoken rules which require negating feminine traits (care, compassion, love, charity, forgiveness). She foresees five challenges: (a) fracturing the gendered structural and cultural barriers, (b) retaining women in middle leadership positions, (c) elevating the contradictory effects created by women in senior leadership, (d) interrogating the white culture dominance, and (e) locating a theoretical tool for negotiating complexities and dimensions of female leadership which she believes should be worked on to ensure the presence of more women at higher level leadership positions in HEI.

The image of a successful manager and the characteristics of a successful organization (strength, aggressiveness, and competitiveness) are inherently masculine. These traits are associated with higher status (Berger, Conner, and Fisek, 1982) which is assigned to man, leading to their higher chances of selection and promotion at managerial levels. This stereotyping of what a male can do and a female cannot do, is a well-documented fact (Lühe, 2014) and continuously stands as a barrier to women's rise to higher-level academic and administrative positions, in both public and private sector HEIs. This situation results in women's under-representation in Pakistani HEIs and in turn reinforces erroneous discourse around meritocracy, which creates a significant impact on recruitment, service and promotion structures built by men, where research, writing and publication of papers are the norm (Remler and Pema 2009; van den Brink, Benschop, and Jansen, 2010). This structure reinforces the idea that women lack competence in all academic areas. Some researchers call it an effort by men to keep power themselves (Bombuwela and Chamaru 2013; Batool, Sajid, and Shaheen, 2013). Moreover, many women prefer their domestic roles (childcare, housework and care for the elders in the family) as suggested by Side and Robbins (2007) and Robbins and Simpson (2009), and therefore do not aim for senior positions.

It is true that the number of women working in the middle management tier is increasing as reported by UNESCO (2018), but this increase still has not made inroads at the top-level educational management positions in HEIs across the world, in both developed and underdeveloped countries. The number of women graduating in STEM areas is small as compared to social sciences and arts. UNESCO presented this fact in a cartoon in their latest report (2018).

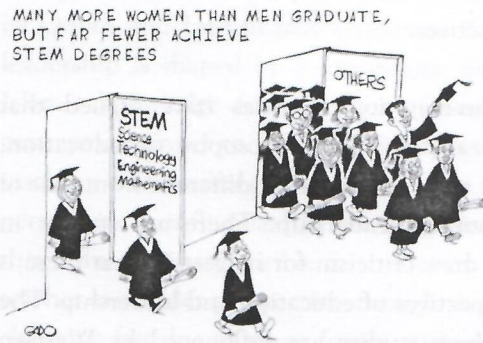


Image 1~UNESCO's representation of male and female graduates from a university(UNESCO 2018)

Studies around the world (Fitzgerald 2014b; Singh, Jasbir 2008; Morley, 2014) have shown a mix of results; for example, the ratio of females joining higher management- levels positions is increasing in Scandinavian countries where it is higher than in many other countries in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. The number is increasing but does not reflect the number of women graduating and joining the workforce, especially in the STEM sector. There are many reasons given for this number; for example, some argue that women have alternate professional choices (Khazan, 2018), while others argue that top management jobs are usually not advertised. Head hunters usually tend to find fewer women and more men out in the field and accordingly choose men to lead organizations at top management levels. The other reason as Fitzgerald (2014a) explains is the difficult shift of women from the mentoring and mothering function of their female peers to changing jobs and taking up t top-level management positions. She finds in her research that the myth of equal opportunities and equality has positioned women as both the problem and the solution; that is, women need to find the solution for themselves if they want to increase their share in higher leadership positions in HEIs.

A study by Hofstede (2001) finds that the culture of the leaders and the led influences their mutual relationship. The leadership style of a manager is reflective of his/her beliefs, which are formed by dominant societal influences. The idea of community influencing the leadership style of both the leader and the followers is also highlighted (Dimmock 2002; Dimmock and Walker, 2003) as it is pointed out that educational leadership practices are formulated by the values, ideology and patterns of behaviour of a community. For example, the concept of leadership and practices in the Asian context are derived from social harmony(Walker 2002; Tung, 2003). Leadership activities in an educational setting too are based on transmitted knowledge, as well as cultural and ideological knowledge. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) call it 'habitus' and Polanyi

(2009) considers the absence of this knowledge as creating a gap of 'tacit knowledge' of leadership and acceptable leadership roles and practices.

Research studies undertaken in Muslim-majority countries have argued that Islamic teachings and religious texts advocate a particular philosophy of education; Muslims all across the world consider the Islamic ideal of education different from that of Western/secular ideas of education and educational leadership. There are studies in Pakistan (Nayyar and Salim 2005 and 2006) that drew criticism for suggesting that there is no difference between Western and Islamic perspectives of education and leadership. The scholars criticizing this research propose that these studies are influenced by Western knowledge and patronage. This debate heightened the 'legitimization crisis' (Babermas, 1976; Giddens, 1990) faced by education and curriculum policies in Pakistan at the implementation stage, especially of curriculum policies and curriculum leadership.

The Quran states in various passages (3:7-8; 6:105; 22:55; 24:6; 58:11) that Allah (Arabic word for God) elevates to leadership roles those who have greater knowledge as their deeper understanding has equipped them with the knowledge and skills to lead the Muslims. The prophets were ordinary men, but their status was raised to that of leaders because of the knowledge they possessed (Quran 27:15; 2:247). The prophets are called teachers and leaders who not only taught men and women but also became their political leaders (Al-Hibri 1982; Mernissi 1991). An educational leader is given different roles to perform in the Islamic concept of leadership, as suggested by Shah (2006a), including teaching, guidance and care. Islam places on them the responsibility of building a Muslim community in the light of Islamic teachings assigning them the role of mentor (spiritual, moral and academic). The latter part of this paper, the discussion section, offers more on this theme.

Education Policies in Pakistan

The education policies formed by successive governments in Pakistan focused on two different purposes of education for men and women. For the latter, the purpose was to prepare them for their primary role, the family role, and preparing them to take up traditional women-only professions, mainly teaching and medicine (nursing and medical doctor). In 1998 and later in 2009, education policies showed a slight change as women being treated as equal to men were extended opportunities, thus opening new avenues of education for women in Pakistan (Farah and Shera 2007; Ashraf 2010; Huma 2016). The latest education policy that came out in 2017 sees both men and women as equally important for the development of Pakistan (Government of Pakistan 2017).

Pakistan is an Islamic Republic and all knowledge and practices are to be informed by Quran and Hadith (the sayings of Prophet Mohammad). The concept of educational leadership is shaped by a continuous discourse and interplay of Islam as a religion and Islamic knowledge (derived from Quran and Hadith) as noted by Shah (1999). This concept continues to influence the discourse on leadership roles and practices. Islam views teaching and learning as a sacred duty. The discourse on leadership within an Islamic perspective is influenced by the religious emphasis on teaching, learning and knowledge; this influence is still visible in studies on leadership in Islamic countries (Shah 1999). The teacher-as-a-leader perspective, though shared by many faiths and communities, however, is changing fast due to many forces, such as globalization, internationalization of technology and educational tools, market pressures and educational reorganization. Now teacher-as-manager (managing the school and resources) and teachers as leader (managing the teaching/learning experiences) is distinctly visible.

The overall number of females in the workforce in Pakistan is the lowest in the South Asian region and is only above that of Afghanistan. The ratio of the female workforce to the male workforce is 22% and 67.8% respectively (Patchamuthu and Grown 2017). The number of women working in schools has risen over the years, but this increase is not proportionate to their number in HEIs. There are still fewer women working in different positions in HEIs. Some of these women have reached top managerial positions as Vice Chancellors, Heads of Departments and Directors/Heads of different administrative departments. This increase, however, is more visible in women-only HEIs. Patchamuthu and Grown (2017) argue that the low participation of women in certain sectors is because of a low demand for the female workforce in these sectors. The female faculty has increased, but this increase is at the lower hierarchical level. Patchamuthu and Grown (2017) state that the World Bank is working with the Government of Pakistan to appoint more women to “higher quality” jobs in Pakistan, what they call a “smart development” strategy that Pakistan should adopt so that all its members can participate in the development process.

There are more females working as teaching faculty in the arts, humanities, social sciences and natural sciences but only a few are in STEM areas. This trend exists all over the world including Pakistan. The number of women studying medicine in co-educational medical colleges as compared to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) is high. A study by Huma (2016) presented the participation of men and women at different stages of tertiary education in Pakistan. This study was supported by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan and most of the HEIs which participated in this study had arts, humanities, social science and natural science faculties.

The ratio of participation of men and women in different stages of tertiary education is summarized in Table 1. The study shows that the gap at 14 years bachelors' and 16 years masters' is 4% and 10% respectively. This gap increases as there are more men (twice the number of women) studying in MS/Phil/PhD programmes. Huma (2016) has attributed the main reason for this gap as lack of access to HEIs. The distance between home and HEI, lack of security and societal and family pressures keep women bound to their homes, but men are allowed to travel to other cities to study. This report and similar other studies do not have accurate data about women studying in STEM areas, as many HEIs offering higher STEM degrees, both public and private HEIs, did not share data with the researcher.

Table 1 - Enrolments by gender in different programmes offered by universities

Level of study	Male %	Female %
14 years bachelors	48	52
16 years bachelors	68	32
16 years maers	45	55
MS/MPhil programme	62	38
PhD programme	64	36

A study (Moss-Racusin, Corinne A, Dovidio et al. 2012) highlighted how the process of recruitment contributes to maintaining the existing participation level by women in leadership positions. The selection committees, from the onset of the selection process, believe that women are less competent as compared to their male counterparts. Thus, women's chances of promotion are fewer also because of less publication, which is an important criterion for promotion (Fox 2010). Women's promotion to higher managerial positions in science, engineering and technology sectors (West et al. 2013) remains low as these are male-dominated research areas. In Pakistan, there is not a single renowned woman scientist/researcher. Editorial boards whose members are mostly men manage all academic journals in these areas. The few women working in these areas often find themselves working in an all-male institutional culture and have fewer role models to look up to and seek help from in their careers (Nazemi, Mortazavi, and Borjalilou 2012).

Discussion

As noted earlier, the FGD exercises took place at six research sites and 60 postgraduate female students participated in this research. The participants were from the arts, humanities, social sciences and natural sciences faculties as these HEIs did not have any engineering departments. All 12FGD groups gave the following reasons: (i) leadership as a

male dominant factor in Muslim societies (ii) lack of interest by HEI management (iii) and lack of role models and research mentors.

The research participants were convinced that leadership is an all-male domain. Muslim societies divide men and women into separate groups, each with a different set of capabilities. A person in a leadership position works with all members of his/her team. The participants were of the opinion that men consider it against their 'izzat' (Urdu word for honour) to obey a woman's orders, unless she is in a top position due to some political and economic hierarchical structure. Women are NOT supposed to be in a male domain and that is the only way to protect their honour. Their colleagues and subordinates also use the sex-segregation in Pakistan to protect female honour and for character assassination.

The participants were aware of what Islam has said about women and men and their rights and privileges as they have watched many programmes on television on this topic. "Islam has given equal rights to men and women as claimed by Islamic scholars and a woman also shares equal space with a man in and outside a household" (quote from the discussion). Almost all the participants agreed with the view expressed by a participant in one of the FGDs: "what my role could be and what could I achieve is decided by the men in my family, mostly husbands and in-laws" (quote from the discussion). Another participant shared her story of trying to convince her in-laws to let her move to another city to become a Principal of a girl's degree college, but they refused as the husband would not join her there. She believed that her in-laws allowed her to enrol in the PhD programme to compensate for her earlier loss, the departmental promotion. She believed, and many participants agreed with her, that if she had to travel to another city for higher studies, either she would have been asked to stop thinking about it, or if she had insisted, a male member from her in-law's family would accompany her every time she left home to come to the university.

Participants highlighted an existing contradiction in the country about women's position in society and their place. Religious leaders preach at all platforms (print and electronic) that women are equal to men in all respects and enjoy equal rights and privileges. Men and women both can become teacher-leaders and leaders of educational institutions. However, in reality, more men are appointed as compared to women at the highest administrative and academic positions. This point came out in discussion as group members found that in their universities they have seen women leading the Social Sciences faculty and a few departments associated with it, which is just one faculty and few departments. The other faculties and departments are led by men, although there are many women teaching in those faculties and departments.

Participants consider society as a primary force that made them believe that the family, including the extended family, household chores and children are women's primary responsibilities, not outside jobs. This attitude has made them lose interest in having high ambition in their careers, thus making them invisible in the all-male domain of HEI leadership (Siddiqi 1996, Al Rawaf and Simmons 1991; Al-Hariri 1987; Afshar 1987). Women are considered a threat to male dominance as the majority of the FGD participants said. For them, men fear that women will introduce and promote liberal policies, which will further encourage more promotion of women, and more women-oriented tasks and work. The teaching profession has become a tool to sustain and promote professional rivalry as observed by Abbas, Zeeshan and Kwond(2017) and Leathwood and Read (2013) in their studies. The idea that men and women could be professional workers and share workspace is missing in the Pakistani leadership context. Men regulate the profession, as well as professional activities, and form professional excellence criteria (Batool, Sajid, and Shaheen 2013; Shah and Shah 2012; Shah 2006b).

A woman heading an HEI or any department interacts more with men because often there are more men working under her. There is always a fear that interaction with men, who fall into the category of men with whom contacts are not permissible by the Islamic jurisprudence, might be viewed as immoral contacts. "Though the Islamic scholars have argued that Islam has the same moral standards for men and women but women are supposed to observe them all as compared to men," said one of the participants. It was shocking to see several of the research participants expressing an apprehension that leadership roles would make it difficult for them to find a suitable match for themselves. They felt that both prospective husbands and their immediate families do not like to have brides who are in leadership roles; they prefer submissive and obedient wives. As all of them wished to marry and did not want to risk their marriage prospects, they choose to go after jobs and positions that do not fall in the leadership cadre. The only way to combine a successful married life with career success is to stay within all-female HEIs rather than join co-educational HEIs. The latter are more in number than the former which also discourages women from showing any interest.

The number of all-female colleges and universities is going up, but still they are a very small number compared with all-male colleges and co-educational HEIs. The participants believed that first they have to find a life partner and have children; otherwise they will be considered failures in society. Some of the participants shared stories where working women did not marry and their neighbours looked at them as women with physical (cannot bear a child) and psychological problems (cannot live with a man). This attitude leads to the stereotypical roles of women in Pakistan, which dictate that they should marry, have children, do household chores, and look after the family. This belief is created by the cultural, social and religious structures existing in Pakistani society. Muslim

societies, including Pakistan's, consider motherhood as the ultimate goal that a woman must achieve.

The participants were of the opinion that they might not have met or heard of any woman heading co-education HEIs, except for the recently established University of Education, Lahore. They were aware that there were few women Deans and Heads of Departments in different public and private HEIs. Men receive preferential treatment when it comes to appointments on all important administrative and leadership positions (vice chancellors, deans of a faculty, heads of departments, director/heads of some administrative departments). The only exception is the education faculties and department where women are appointed as deans and heads but their number is very small. Because of the lack of role models, the participants were not ambitious. They argued that the best option for women in Pakistan is to opt for a higher degree in arts, education, humanities and social sciences faculties, as there are chances of becoming head of a department, dean of a faculty, or director of a centre.

There is no data available at either the federal or the provincial level about women's participation in HEIs. The research participants called it 'a tool used by men heading the federal and provincial departments to keep women in the dark about how many there are and how many of them are in leadership positions' (quote from the discussion). Research is considered long hours away from home either in the library or in the HEIs; staying away late from home is considered a bad practice for women as they are supposed to come back home before it is dark (Yousaf and Schmiede 2017; Ali, Khan, and Munaf 2013). The "restrictions on when to leave home and when to come back, whom to go with and whom not to go with" (FGD quote) have restricted the research potential of women who are already in HEIs, and it still will be affecting them as they plan to join HEIs. This environment of fear and harassment has resulted in fewer women researchers. A recent study conducted on this topic was by Singh (2008) and the following information are extracted from that study.

Table 2 - Females in HEI

Executive heads	5%
Female heads and directors	20.9%
Female deans;	8.5%
Female professors	19.7%

Some participants believed that there were more women working at different leadership positions in the HEIs than they could list. They could not list their names, as they had not heard about them during their academic and professional careers. The sources of information of HEIs, such as their websites and newsletters, do not highlight women's

contributions in academic excellence and research, as this space is occupied by men. Women academics, administrators and researchers remained least reported in different academic discussions and discourses reported by different electronic and print media. They agreed that there were not many women in HEIs offering STEM higher degrees though there must be many in the arts, humanities and education faculties. The number of women academics is increasing because of new steps taken by international scholarship organizations, such as USAID, Australia Awards, European Union, and many corporations under their social corporate responsibility schemes.

The reasons shared by participants for the low participation of women at leadership positions in HEIs are based on their experiences and observations. None of the participants had read any of the studies on this topic before the FGD session. The reasons and suggestions given by participants are already well studied by different researchers, such as Huma (2016), Morley and Crossouard (2015) and Singh (2008). These studies support what the participants said in the FGD sessions regarding reasons for low participation and also suggestions to increase women's participation at higher leadership positions in HEIs.

To conclude this fruitful discussion, the last question raised in the FGD was to find out a way forward for women to become visible in management and leadership positions in HEIs. Following are some of the suggestions made by the participants.

- * The participants argued that the first and foremost thing needed to bring more women to leadership roles, not only in HEIs but in other work areas as well, is that social, cultural and familial structures must change to become receptive to women.
- * The male-dominated research culture should make space for women researchers by considering them for positions as lead researchers, whether advertised or not advertised.
- * Women themselves have to shift from professions assigned to them by male members of the society and join the science, technology, mathematics, engineering and ICT areas as well.
- * Women should also work with all the leaders, including religious leaders, at all platforms (tehsil, district, provincial, national), the provincial and national legislative assemblies, and the Council of Islamic Ideology, while discussing and deciding matters related to women such as what they can do, what they cannot do, and what they should and should not do.
- * The participants did not “expect secular west type emancipation” (quotation from the discussion) but more “freedom to make choices” (quotation from the discussion) in their lives, about their lives and about their professional careers.

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