Lived Experiences of Women Academicians in Higher Education Institutions of Azad Jammu and Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

Studies in different socio-cultural contexts have found that women academics face structural and cultural obstacles and barriers. Less is known about the lived experiences of women academics in the context of Azad Jammu and Kashmir. This study explores the lived experiences of women academicians in coeducation higher education institutions (HEIs) / universites of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Pakistan. The main objective of the study was to know the working relationships and interactions between women academicians with their men colleagues and students. We also attempted to unpack how women academicians manage their families and academic responsibilities. The data for the study come from sixteen in-depth interviews with women academicians in two public sector coeducation universities/ HEIs of AJK. The respondents were selected with the help of purposive sampling technique. We processed and analyzed the collected data inline with the qualitative data analysis technique. We enagegd Walby's (1990) concept of pubic and private patriarchy. Our study findings/results unpacked the explicit and implicit disparities and discrimination faced by women academicians in the prevailing patriarchal structure of higher education institutions of AJK. The findings advance and further the existing debate on the lived experiences of women academicians in HEIs with new insights from the specific context of AJK.

Key Words: **Higher education, Women, Gender, Patriarchal, Feminine.**

Introduction

Research on women academicians has been conducted in higher education settings across the globe (Altbach, Gumport, & Berdahl, 2011; Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2019; Becker et al., 2017; Bhatti & Ali, 2021; Endeley & Ngaling, 2007; Maher & Tetreault, 2001; Shoaib & Ullah, 2021b). These studies showed that women academicians did not experience higher education positions equal to their men counterparts. Studies also revealed women academicians' ways of navigating academic careers, reaching senior academic and administrative positions, and unpacking supportive factors for their careers in higher education. It is inferred that higher education has been male-centric (Ullah, 2007, 2012). Research revealed the factors that support women academicians to progress in

higher education like men (Akala, 2018; Alexander, 2010). Further, these studies also pointed out elements that support women to grow in academia. Thus, researchers have given little attention to exploring the lived experiences of women academicians in HEIs of Pakistan and AJK. Exploring the relevant studies on the issue, we concluded that a few studies have been conducted on women's discrimination, academic career, and leadership positions in Pakistan, i.e. (Batool, Sajid, & Shaheen, 2013; Bhatti & Ali, 2020, 2021; Mansoor & Bano, 2022; Shoaib & Ullah, 2021a). However, literature is scarce on women academicians in higher education of AJK (Batool et al., 2013). It is pertinent to mention that lived experiences of women academicians remained an ignored area of research in the context of AJK. The lack of literature on the issues coupled with our experiences in higher education attracted our attention to explore and document the lived experiences of women academicians in AJK. The main questions that guided our study were: How do women academicians explain their working relations with male colleagues and administrative staff? How do they experience interaction with men colleagues and students and identify their identity as a teacher? How do women academicians manage family and academic work and do they have equal opportunities? This qualitative study contributes to the existing debate on women academicians' experiences in the local, regional, and global contexts.

Considerable research has been conducted on the rise of female students in higher education for the last few decades the world over (Christman, 2003; Deem, 2020; Dua, 2007; Ullah, Ali, & Ahmad, 2018; Ullah & Khan, 2018). This swift increase in girls' education in academia has further shaped the argument that higher education is turning into a feminist sphere (Gardner, 2013; Hart, 2006). Nonetheless, researchers from feminist schools affirmed that the rise in the number of female students does not represent women academicians in academic positions in higher education (Martin, 2011; Meyers, 2013; Morley, 2005, 2011). A similar picture of women academicians' disproportion is painted in Pakistan and AJK (Batool et al., 2013; Bhatti & Ali, 2020; Mansoor & Bano, 2022). Here, increase in the number of female students and women academics is not similar across HEIs, region, and subject wise (Bhatti & Ali, 2021). Therefore, the claim of women's participation in public spheres including higher education is falsified (Morley & Crossouard, 2015, 2016). Although, today, a considerable number of women attend universities and earn degrees (Prah, 2002). However, their presence in higher education career is significantly low in comparison to men (Odhiambo, 2011). Likewise, women's number in academic positions is also lower than men's (Ogbogu, 2011). Besides the increase in the number of women students in HEIs, it is important to note and study women academicians number on academic positions to know and address their issues. To overcome this, this study is informed by the feminist theoretical lens, we used the notion of public patriarchy of Walby (1990) to study the women academicians lived experiences in HEIs of AJK. Walby differentiated between private and public patriarchy. She asserted that patriarchy prevents women from taking part in public discourse as men dominate, oppress,

and exploit women (1990). Similarly, patriarchs (men) dominate, oppress, and prevent women from participating in public spheres. She further argued that social institutions are biased towards men while women are separated from power, wealth, and influence (1990). Walby's theory enabled us to explore and unpack the problems of women academicians in the higher education setting of AJK.

Review of Literature

The present literature documented an enormous increase in the number of women academicians in higher education in developed countries (Akala, 2018; Alexander, 2010; Altbach et al., 2011; Altbach et al., 2019). These studies show an increased number of women as students and academics in higher education. Developed countries have achieved 52% gender parity in higher education while developing countries are struggling with less than 30% (Becker et al., 2017). The majority of men constitute faculty in higher education across the world (Endeley & Ngaling, 2007). UNESCO (2008) reported 27% of female faculty in commonwealth universities, however, the proportion in developing countries is as lower as 10% in Ghana, and 18% in Pakistan. Besides, female faculty are experiencing overt and covert forms of gender discrimination in higher education (Acker, 2006b). As Christman (2003) also asserted that women academicians' proportion in commonwealth countries are 33.8% for Lecturers and 9.9% for Professors. In developing countries, for instance, Uganda, Nigeria, Pakistan, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Zambia, the gender disparities are greater in higher education (Bhatti & Ali, 2020; Morley, 2011; Odhiambo, 2011; Ogbogu, 2011).

Jackson and Jackson (2004) asserted that the sociocultural environment of society has a significant impact on the women academicians' working experiences in HEIs. The higher education structure is male-centric. Patriarchal outlook governs women's identity, self-esteem, performance, and employment. Mainah and Perkins (2015) explored several structural barriers that impede women's progress in academia, i.e. gender discrimination in recruitment and promotion policies, lack of mentors/role models, and male power. Meyers (2013) further revealed that women do not experience academic professions similar to their male colleagues (Endeley & Ngaling, 2007; Schuster, Finkelstein, & Finkelstein, 2006).

Acker (2006a) studied the workplace in higher education organizations. She stated that women academicians are not provided equitable workplaces in academia. Due to the patriarchal structure, she argued, men dominate in policy and decision-making. She also revealed that women are disproportioned over men in academic power positions. Thus, working relations between men and women in the workplace are not smooth. Moreover, Acker (2000) further added that higher education work is challenging to women academicians in many ways, i.e. men's number is greater than women and academic power positions are mainly occupied

by men academics. Hence, women academicians are provided less space in the patriarchal structure of higher education.

Acker (2006b) revealed that in higher education organizations, men are working in administrative positions even in women's universities. Due to male dominance, administrative positions are characterized by men and women are apartheid. Acker (2011) further argued that men in admin staff delay the office work of women as compared to men academicians. Besides, certain other barriers are created by men, i.e., delays in the study and maternity leave. In addition, she stated, women academicians have to pursue their files for promotion personally.

Morley and Crossouard (2016) studied the higher education structure of many countries. They asserted that rewards and benefits, status and privileges, decision-making and control, and power relations often favor men academicians. Morley (2005) also unpacked that women academicians, characterized by low potential, are not given active roles like men. Acker (2006b) noted that men exclude women from power positions in academia. They, Acker (2011) stated, are not even given headships in the Department. Similarly, women academicians' capabilities are undermined even in the minimal tasks. In case women academicians qualify for the power position, they are not given full authority like men (Jencks & Riesman, 2017; Lee & Rice, 2007; Maher & Tetreault, 2001; Mainah & Perkins, 2015). Consequently, they are unable to exercise the power they possess and enjoy the entitled status (Ogbogu, 2011; Özkanlı & White, 2008; Prah, 2002).

In developed countries, unlike past, men and women academicians have equal opportunities to grow in academia (Mainah & Perkins, 2015; Schuster et al., 2006). However, research shows that women academicians are still discriminated against in the patriarchal higher education of many developing countries (Mohajeri & Mousavi, 2017; Morley, 2011; Ogbogu, 2011). These studies also revealed that women academicians are not given equal opportunities in academic and power positions, headships, research publication/supervision, and promotions. Savin-Baden (2000) noted: although women publish less however men undermine their quality research publications. She further identified different concerns of women academicians. For example, men do not include women in their research group for publications and also discriminate against them in the thesis/project supervision of students.

Acker (2011) studied the power streamlines in higher education organizations. She revealed that men academics dominate power positions. She further unveiled that women are suppressed to rise in academia through unjust promotion procedures. Acker (2006b) also highlighted women academicians' promotion issues in many countries. She also pointed out problems of women academics in non-tenured positions. They even wait for years to get their promotions as compared to men. Unfortunately, men academicians evaluate their performance in teaching and research in non-tenured positions.

Interaction among women and men academicians is unavoidable in coeducation higher education. Usually, the interaction of women academicians

with men colleagues and students is formal for academic goals (Martin, 2011; Meyers, 2013). However, Acker (2006) revealed that the sociocultural environment of the society navigates women's interaction and, thus, women academicians restrain their interaction in patriarchal higher education. Teacher-student interaction is important for affective teaching and learning. Research unpacked that women academicians rarely experience issues with students in teaching and class control (Odhiambo, 2011; Ogbogu, 2011). However, Hart (2006) noted that male faculty interact with female academicians on the common ground of their ethnicity. Therefore, women academicians from other ethnicities are discriminated (Christman, 2003; Deem, 2020).

Women academicians experience higher education careers differently than men. Research shows that women academicians have issues with work-family balance in academia (Prah, 2002; Savin-Baden, 2000). These studies unveiled that due to family burden, aspirations of women academics remain suppressed. Acker (2011) argued that women academics keep home, take care of children and husbands, and join social gatherings along with the academic loads. It is, thus, hypothesized that women with career and familial responsibilities neither be good mothers nor successful academicians in the sociocultural environment of many developing countries (Acker, 2006a, 2006b). As a result, it is problematic for women academicians to balance work-family at the same time.

Methods

This study is fashioned in feminist cannons to know the lived experiences of women academicians in higher education instiution in AJK. The main objective was to gain a deeper understanding of women academicians' lived experiences in higher education institutions of AJK. It was possible only through in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2014). We employed a qualitative research design (Creswell, 2014). Our data was collected in two public sector coeducation universities of AJK. We did not mention the name of universities and participants rather pseudonyms were given to each university and participant. Primarily, list of women academicians was taken from each respective university. The targeted faculty members were contacted for the interview, majority of them accepted the request but a few refused due to their busy schedule. The sample size was not fixed in advance however saturation was reached at 16. Thus, a sample size of 16 was selected and approached by employing a purposive sampling technique. Among 16 participants, 10 were taken from one university 2 (U-2) and 6 from university3 (U-3) as mentioned in first part of the findings. Before conducting any interviews, all the respondents were contacted for the interviews. All the interviews were conducted in the office setting by using an in-depth interview with the permission of the participants. These interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. We transcribed and analyzed data through thematic analysis as given by

(Clarke & Braun, 2013). We listened to audio tapes again and again to ensure common patterns. After transcription, we read line by line and coded the data while similar codes were grouped. Finally, themes were generated from the coded groups and categories. For the validity and accuracy of the data, we shared data with our participants for number checking and validation (Creswell, 2014). During this process, participants added new data and also deleted information. This check helped to determine the accuracy of data and that information collected was in line with the experiences of participants.

Findings

In this section, the findings of the study are presented. We discussed the demographic information of the women academicians and then interpreted our themes. However, the discussions section comprised pieces of evidence from empirical review in line with the critical analysis of findings with the help of public patriarchy given by Walby (1990). Out of transcribed data, the following broad themes were generated:

- Working relations of women academicians with men colleagues
- Working relations of women academics with administrative and subordinate staff
- Women academicians' interaction with men colleagues, administrative staff, and students
- Managing family and academic expectations

Demographic Information of the Women Academicians

The first section of the interview guide consisted of the demographic information of respondents given below.

Table 1:
Demographic information of respondents

Sr. No.	University	Age	Qualification	Experience	Children	Faculty	Designation
1	U-2, R-1	49	PhD	24	2	Arts	Prof.
2	U-2, R-2	47	PhD	21	4	Science	Assoc. Prof
3	U-2, R-3	45	PhD	17	5	Arts	AP
4	U-2, R-4	46	PhD	18	3	Arts	AP
5	U-2, R-5	43	PhD	12	4	Arts	AP
6	U-2, R-6	41	PhD	14	5	Science	AP
7	U-2, R-7	34	MS	7	4	Arts	Lecturer
8	U-2, R-8	31	MS	6	2	Arts	Lecturer
9	U-2, R-9	36	MS	9	3	MS	Lecturer
10	U-2, R-10	32	MS	8	3	Arts	Lecturer

11	U-3, R-11	41	PhD	15	4	Science	AP
12	U-3, R-12	39	PhD	11	5	Arts	AP
13	U-3, R-13	34	MS	8	2	MS	Lecturer
14	U-3, R-14	36	MS	10	3	Arts	Lecturer
15	U-3, R-15	32	MS	6	2	Science	Lecturer
16	U-3, R-16	37	MS	9	4	MS	Lecturer

In the above table, 10(62.5%) participants were recruited from U-1 and 6 (37.5%) from U-2. The age of the participants ranges from 31 to 49 years, 8(50%) were in the age group 31-37 years, and 4(25%) were in each age group 28-44 and 45-51 years respectively. The education of respondents was found as 8(50%) had Ph.D. while 8(50%) respondents had MS degrees. Job experience of respondents was found as: 10(62.5%) had 6-12years experience, 4(24%) had 13-19years and 2(12.5%) has more than 20-year experience. The number of children was found as 4 participants (25%) has 1-2, 9(56.25%) had 3-4 and 3 (18.75%) had 5-6 children. Participants were taken from different faculties, 9(56.25%) from the faculty of arts, 4(25%) from the faculty of science, and 3(18.75%) from the faculty of management science. Participants on academic positions were interviewed, 1(6.25%) Professor, 1(6.25%) Associate Professor, 6(37.5%) Assistant Professors and 8(50%) were Lecturers.

Working Relations of Women Academicians with Men Colleagues

In coeducation higher education, women academicians working with male colleagues experience diverse marginality (Acker, 2006a, 2006b). Acker (2011) further argued that women academicians do not have healthier working relations with men colleagues due to the patriarchal higher education structure. Morley (2005) also agreed that the patriarchal structure is one of the major reasons for women academicians' unfair treatment. The majority of the respondents, 12 out of 16 revealed that women academicians do not have smooth working relationships with their men colleagues. They also described that working relationship is not based on professional competencies but rather on closeness to the head of the department (HoD) or higher authorities. Furthermore, working relationships are based on personal contacts, family backgrounds, and social, political, and educational references. One respondent said: "I see, men are conscious of women's increasing presence in higher education. They, discriminate against women in manifolds to keep them in subordinate positions." The majority of women had similar views regarding women's marginalization. Another respondent stated: "I found a lack of professional behavior among the male colleagues. Their professionalism is based on personal contacts and family backgrounds. It irritates to work with them." The findings of our study revealed that women are excluded from academic power positions. They stated that women are less likely to possess

academic and power positions, i.e. they are rarely HoDs, deans, directors, and vice chancellors (VCs). They also told that women are not appointed heads of committees but rather members. During the meetings, they argued, women's point of view is given less priority than favors men even juniors. They further said that thus the rigid structure of committees restrains women to play active roles like men. One of the respondents said: "Since I joined academia, I see men in academic power positions, i.e. HoDs, deans, and directors. I did not find any woman in top positions like men." Similarly, another woman academician stated that "men are often head of committees and we are just members to assist them." The majority of participants showed their concern over power imbalances. On the other hand, one senior academician unpacked that women serve in a power position as dean. She argued that "we had woman dean. It was an honor to see her in this position but whenever I went to her to resolve issues, I found her helpless." It shows that women who reach to the top positions are not given the authority to exercise power like men. Among the senior women academicians, one has been dean in her faculty. She explained her experience differently. She claimed that "I served a term as dean and I tried to resolve problems however I may be weak in some areas." It is pertinent to mention here that women academicians are excluded from powerful positions of policy and decision-making. One woman academician expressed her concerns as follows:

> I was appointed chairperson of the Department. I resigned from this position after a few months when I found senior men do not allow to take decisions independently. Even the men faculty of the Department try to keep an eye on activities. Instead of resolving issues, they used to report to higher authorities. Unfortunately, I was never allowed to take independent decisions. I was not included in policy-making decisions. Being a woman and professional, this situation was not favorable for me to continue work, thus, I resigned.

It is, thus, argued that power positions are held by men. They formulate and execute policies, and make decisions. Similarly, men academics are supported by men in possessing power, enjoying status and prestige. On the other hand, women are primarily alienated. In case they reach top positions, men do not surrender to women's academics. Our findings also affirmed that women organize and conduct exams however authority rests with men and credit is taken by them. One of the respondents expressed: "The rigidity of power is primarily indebted in positions. I observed that men take advantage of their position and discriminate against women academicians."

In the case of academic loads, participants argued that women academicians are allotted more credit hours than men. Besides credit hours, they are allocated

clerical work to deal with administrative units. One of the respondents showed her concern: "I am overburdened by clerical work. After classes, I deal with issues of student financial aid." Similar issues were reported by many participants. In addition, women academicians are also given some additional tasks of conducting and organizing the events. However, they are always in assistive roles. One respondent said: "I am often told by HoD to join the seminar/event held in the auditorium. It wastes my time." The above findings represent the public patriarchy of Walby (1990). Patriarchy operates in the higher education structure of AJK where men academicians still dominate oppress and exploit women academicians.

Working Relations of Women Academics with Administrative and Subordinate Staff

Unlike past, women's proportion in faculty positions in higher education has enormously increased (Morley, 2005, 2011). Nonetheless, less number of women academicians have been found in power positions than men (Acker, 2006a). Moreover, they are discriminated against by administrative and subordinate staff in universities (Acker, 2006b). We examined these behavior patterns in the universities of AJK. The findings of our participants revealed that they are discriminated against by administrative staff in manifolds. They also stated that admin staff does not process their file work. Female faculty members have to pursue their files to get clearance or notifications of NOCs, study, and maternity leave. One participant stated that "I often find delay in office work. When I visit the concerned office, I saw, it is kept pending without any reason." Further, men officers in the admin block probably wish for women to visit their offices for delayed work. Another respondent told: "Office work is delayed, when I visit their offices I see it is processed readily. I do not see any reason for delay except perusing ourselves." Many other participants had similar responses. It is important to note that admin staff allegedly delay the file work of women. The following excerpt shows the overall situation:

> I observed that any office work in the administration block is often delayed as compared to male colleagues. When I pursue my files, I found no objection except a deliberate attempt of delay. I also observed that the administrative staff is reluctant toward the male colleague. Due to male dominance, I feel, our office work is delayed. I noted men do not even bother to pursue their files as we do. Personally, visiting the admin office is effective to get things done, however, it is a time-consuming process.

In our study, the experiences of women academicians with subordinate staff are also worth mentioning. It is important to state that subordinate staff is male in

each Department, i.e. clerk, data entry operator, admin officer, and peon. Thus, the subordinate staff is always inclined to men and gives less priority to women academicians' tasks or orders. They usually perform men's tasks efficiently while women's work is ignored and delayed. Our participants also complained about the delay in the provision of stationery and other office items. They are asked several times to accomplish the task, however, they always made lame excuses rather than respond to tasks. The above responses also reveal the public patriarchy of Walby (1990). In the context of HEIs of AJK, women academicians are collectively separated, by men faculty and admin staff, from power, wealth, and influence than men.

Women Academicians' Interaction with Men Colleagues, Administrative Staff, and Students

In the coeducation higher education setting, the interaction of women with men academicians, and students is unavoidable (Jackson & Jackson, 2004). Women academicians regularly interact with men colleagues and administrative and subordinate staff for academic and nonacademic goals (Maher & Tetreault, 2001). It is pertinent to mention that most of the interaction is formal and regulated under the law. Our participants unanimously stated that they interact with men colleagues and admin staff in meetings, events, and common academic and nonacademic tasks. They also interact with admin staff for the sake of official work. The following excerpt explains the situation:

> I often interact with male colleagues and administrative staff due to engagement in official tasks. We interact in meetings, events, and convocations. Being a member of many committees, we keep discussing the issues, sorting out solutions, and suggesting remedies. There is no personal interaction but rather formal. I also interact with principal officers and HoDs because of additional duties assigned to me.

Social interaction plays an important role in learning and teaching. In higher education, students' interaction with teachers has been proven effective in reorganizing thoughts, deeper understanding, and identifying gaps in learning. Our participants revealed that they have steady interaction with students to make the classroom environment conducive to teaching and learning. However, a few respondents avoid unnecessary interaction with students. One participant told that "I do not interact un-necessarily with students except lecture and classroom discussion." Participants also argued that the majority of students listen to lectures regularly and carefully but few create disturbance. They further said that class makeup is good and unnecessary topics are always avoided. Weak students are given special attention. One of the respondents stated: "I replicate weak students to

make them attentive and active in learning." Moreover, our respondents said that they always satisfied the quarries of students and engaged them in the discussion. Another respondent expressed: "During the lecture, I often remain to the point and respond to queries of the students." An interesting point is identified here by participants that students (boys) try to interact with them outside the class on campus, lawn or corridor, and cafe. However, majority of respondents avoid interaction with students outside the classroom except for academic tasks or research purposes. One participant expressed her experience as follows:

> I often see many students try to interact outside the class in the corridor, lawn, and canteen area. They usually seek greetings. I do not think that majority of students take any advantage of interaction with teachers in terms of favors. However, some of the students (boys) wanted to take favors using family background and political influences.

Managing Family and Academic Expectations

The majority of developing countries, including Pakistan, are characterized as patriarchal societies (Mohajeri & Mousavi, 2017; Morley, 2011). In any patriarchal society, working women are supposed to manage their work and family at the same time (Acker, 2006a). We attempted here to examine how women academicians manage their families and academic expectations presently. It is important to note that the explanation of this aspect is important to understand the women academicians' lives.

Our respondents revealed that they were not pretty sure about their competencies to deal with family and career. Later, studying and adopting academia as a career, they experienced different pressures. The majority of women academicians experienced immense fear of meeting the demands of family and academia. Our respondents unanimously argued that they are burdened due to many academic tasks, i.e. credit hours, clerical work, additional tasks, and research supervision. They also argued that they have less time to focus on their qualification. Therefore, they find less time for family and are unable to meet family responsibilities. Hence, it affects their academic performance. One of the respondents said:

> I have to carry out academic pursuits along with clerical work. I do not have enough time to focus the classroom teaching, improve qualifications, conduct personal research and seek funding. Besides, I have also to satisfy family roles. Despite my busy schedule at university, I have to nurture children and meet their demands. It certainly affects my academic career. Additionally, one must please the

authorities/HoD/Deans to attend the unnecessary events. It seems difficult to balance work and family.

Women academicians are struggling on different fronts of family demands and career expectations. The study participants also unpacked that they experience various problems that indulge them in the conflict of study, family, and career. They argued that most of the time is spent perusing academic activities, i.e. classes, meetings, committees, and events. Besides meeting these tasks, observing office timing and unnecessary events are the main reason that consumes their time. One respondent told:

> I know it is difficult for a woman academician to meet career and family demands. This is not the case with men because they devote maximum time to research and projects. It is quite difficult to strategize adequate time and attention to family and career at the same time.

Women academicians are told that men are devoid of familial roles and responsibilities because they have to carry out academic roles only. They have enough time to spend on research and publication and hunt research grants while women have additional responsibilities to take care of their family and home along with academic goals. Another respondent said:

> I have to carry out some academic work at home. When the baby sleeps, I keep working even late at night…manage the family and academia. I also take the baby to the daycare center…take exams scripts, projects, and dissertations with me to work at home. In such a situation…ignore my husband and children and have little time to spend with them.

When it comes to research publications, men academicians publish regularly. They have sound knowledge of research publications because they publish in groups. On the other hand, women publish less due to weak research networking. They either lack research groups or take less research interest. Similarly, they are neither mentored nor guided by senior women academicians. One of the respondents said: "I confess that I felt more constrained due to lack of research group while men publish in groups and senior men guide them while women are never guided and mentored by senior women." Although some women got great potential, however, their research competencies are undermined because men evaluate their research. Some of the women academicians told that they hired home servants/maids to lessen their roles and take care of children and the home. One respondent said: "I think to survive in academia, I must carry out the research work along with the other allocated tasks. So, I feel retrogressed in research due to heavy academic burden." As far as research grants are concerned, men take

advantage of the time to hunt research grants while women are almost absent in hunting research grants. However, male colleagues recruit their junior men colleagues and do not include female colleagues in their projects. One participant said: "I think women are less competitive for hunting research grants due to academic loads." Similarly, senior men colleagues supervise students of their choice and ignore female colleagues of the same rank. They further told that intelligent students are usually supervised by the men colleagues. Notwithstanding, women are never given choice in student supervision. One woman stated: "Neither am I asked about domain not a choice by HoD while students are referred for supervision."

It is argued that the higher education structure of AJK is patriarchal. Here, men academicians take advantage to develop a career while women are neglected and sidelined. Thus, higher education of AJK demonstrates masculine hegemony as given by Connell (1995). In close connection with the public patriarchy of Walby (1990), Connell argued that uneven gender relations between men and women academicians further create imbalances of gender and power.

Discussion

In this section, we have discussed findings in accordance with the empirical literature. Moreover, we have also critically analyzed the findings with the help of the concept of public patriarchy given by Walby (1990).

The working relationship between men and women academicians is not smooth due to certain reasons. These include uneven task allocation by men colleagues to women, i.e. credit hours, clerical and additional tasks. Similarly, women academicians are alienated from power positions. They are excluded from academic positions of HoDs, deans, committee headships, and VCs. Many studies conducted on workplace relations revealed that women academicians do not enjoy equitable workplaces in higher education (Acker, 2006a, 2006b; Morley, 2005). These studies show that higher education is patriarchal. Hart (2006)) argued that women academicians are engaged in more academic load than men. Similarly, Dua (2007) asserted that women academicians are deprived of power positions. However, Deem (2020) noted that women academicians enjoy fair working relations with men colleagues in Western universities. The responses colored a protective coating of public patriarchy. The practices, we found, in the higher education structure of AJK represent patriarchal makeup. It is argued that men still dominate, oppress, and exploit women academicians. Thus, women academicians suffer from unfair treatment and often find themselves in less demanding roles than their men counterparts.

Like working relations with men colleagues, women academicians did not receive fair treatment from men administrative and subordinate staff. They were discriminated against by admin staff in manifolds. However, men's work was

swiftly processed. Moreover, the role of subordinate staff is also full of similar jerks. It is revealed that they are inclined to men and less likely to prioritize the women academicians' instructions (e.g., delay in the provision of office items and even food from café). Research on lived experiences of women academicians has uncovered similar findings in developed and developing countries (Acker, 2000; Akala, 2018). These studies also substantiate that women academicians do not have good working relationships with admin staff. Alexander (2010) argued that women academicians are discriminated against in the provision of office items in Ghanaian Universities. Similar findings are given by Christman (2003). She told that maternity leave has been delayed in many cases. She further noted that women academicians have been discriminated against in office work. Prah (2002) is also categorical in describing that women academicians are not treated fairly even by their men subordinate staff. Many researchers have identified similar findings from other developing countries. However, Schuster et al. (2006) found that women academicians in the universities of Canada accrue similar treatment to men. Our study findings resonate with the argument of the public patriarchy of Walby (1990). It is unpacked that the higher education structure is fundamentally biased towards men that produces and portrays women through a patriarchal viewpoint. Therefore, it is concluded that higher education is inherently oppressive to women academicians through policies and laws.

We found a steady interaction between women and men academicians for academic and non-academic purposes. Similarly, women academicians also interact with administrative and subordinate staff for similar goals. Findings reflect that the sociocultural environment of society restrains the interaction of women academicians with men in many cases. However, this interaction is formal and regulated under rules. Maranto and Griffin (2011) also found that interaction in coeducation higher education is important to meet academic objectives. By the same token, Miller and Chamberlin (2000) characterized the interaction of women academics with admin staff in the higher education setting. Many other scholars and researchers also unpacked similar findings. Besides interaction with men colleagues and admin staff, women academicians also have smooth interaction with students for teaching and learning objectives. Similarly, teachers having good subject command and class control make teaching and learning effective for students. It is further supported by the findings of Skachkova (2007). She stated that teachers and students interact with each other for learning goals. Ullah and Khan (2018) also argued that students interact with teachers for teaching and learning ends.

The findings unveiled that women academics experience immense pressures/fear of meeting academic expectations and family responsibilities. They are burdened to accomplish academic goals. Besides careers, they have responsibilities to keep home, rear children, and meet social responsibilities. Thus, they experience the conflict of study, family, and career at the same time. They are too burdened to balance academia and family. Many studies substantiated the

findings of our study. Acker (2006a) told that women academics look after their families along with their academic careers. Acker (2000) in her other study revealed that women in academia experience role conflict. She further said, unlike men, that role conflict affects their academic performance. Similarly, Morley (2005) found that women burdened with academic loads cannot perform like men. Moreover, Jencks and Riesman (2017) argued that meeting academic demands and managing a family badly affects the career of women in most developing countries. In addition, Christman (2003) found that, in developed countries, women are progressing equally to men in a higher education careers. Our findings affirm that the concept of public patriarchy of Walby (1990) still operates in higher education. Women remain oppressed by gender inequalities in roles, education, and position of power in higher education. Hence, women are collectively separated from power and influence than men.

Conclusion

This research examined the lived experiences of women academicians in higher education institutions of AJK, Pakistan. The findings of the study, we claim, added to very enticing new insights to the existing body of knowledge on women academics' experiences in the context of AJK, Pakistan. The study findings show women academics experience public patriarchy in the higher education settings of AJK, Pakistan. The results show that HEIs are dominated, governed and run with rules and regulation designed, approved and implemented by men which discriminate women academics in more than one way. Women academics expressed that they are discriminated in academic and nonacademic assignments and official tasks. Our study results also show that women academics were feeling alienated from power positions with little chances to publish research, supervise students and improve their studies/credentials like men. Moreover, women academicians reported that they are burdened with academic and family responsibilities. The overall conclusion that we reach from the study findings is-women academics feel powerless, discriminated and alienated whereas men academicians enjoy and benefits the existing hegemonic academic culture.

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