

Overcoming Cultural and Religious Misconceptions: Women's Professional Success in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study explores the obstacles Pakistani women confront in their pursuit of professional achievement by analyzing the intricate interactions between socioeconomic, religious, and cultural factors. It identifies key obstacles include deeply ingrained cultural preconceptions, prevalent patriarchal beliefs, and misunderstanding of religion teachings about women's roles. "Sifarish" (favoritism and nepotism) is a major barrier that has been shown to impede equitable professional development. The research highlights the inadequate implementation of legislative initiatives aimed at supporting women in their careers, highlighting the need for more determined efforts by governmental and business sectors. Working with religious academics to correct misunderstandings regarding women's position in religious texts and starting public awareness efforts to break stereotypes are the recommended treatments. Research shows that women who work have positive effects on their personal life, family dynamics, and society advancement in addition to wider economic benefits like GDP growth.

Keywords: Woman Workplace, Challenges, Corporate Sector, Pakistan

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Introduction

Many studies have examined the role of women in entrepreneurship as a catalyst for economic growth, including those conducted by Tunio et al. (2021) and Ge et al. (2022). But a great deal of scholarly research has been spurred by the complexity and diversity of women's experiences in the field of entrepreneurship. Ge et al. (2022) emphasized how certain female entrepreneurial studies and rhetoric unintentionally support gender-based hierarchy. The vibrant Pakistani business community is becoming more and more aware of the important role and representation of women in top positions. This change is crucial to the larger conversation about gender parity and the effectiveness of institutional frameworks. Although there has been a noticeable shift in the world toward gender parity in leadership positions, Pakistani women working in the business sector face unique obstacles and hurdles when they pursue leadership positions. This study explores these barriers, the advancements that have been accomplished thus far, and the persistent discrepancies in Pakistani women's rise to leadership positions in the corporate world. These methods frequently portray female entrepreneurs as essential to economic expansion while also assessing them in light of prevalent, male-centric business norms that are thought to be essential to successful entrepreneurship. According to Tunio et al. (2021), these assessments give rise to the "women under-performance hypothesis," which tries to explain why women do less well than males based on a variety of measures rather than challenging these accepted standards. Similar to worldwide patterns, Pakistan's corporate sector has always been predominately male. This is a reflection of long-standing organizational policies, societal conventions, and cultural standards that have historically hampered women's advancement in the workforce. However, a growing body of international research highlights the connection between diversity in leadership especially gender diversity—and an organization's overall effectiveness. This relationship means that women's place in Pakistan's corporate ladder needs to be reevaluated. Examining the gendered aspects of female entrepreneurship is essential for a complete knowledge of how it might promote economic growth (Tunio et al., 2021; (Asghar & Pervaiz, 2020). There is a notable discrepancy in the percentage of male and female company owners since women face enormous barriers when trying to access economic opportunities, especially in Pakistan. Women's involvement in the business world has generated a lot of discussion and interest, especially in nations where culture and religion play a major role. Pakistan, a country with a large Muslim population, offers women particular possibilities and problems in the business world. Through the prism of Islamic ideas, this literature review examines the dynamics of women's engagement in Pakistan's business sector, with a particular emphasis on the obstacles they encounter and the accomplishments they make.

Pakistani women have historically had an active role in a variety of economic areas, albeit sometimes in unpaid positions or family enterprises. On the other hand, men have historically controlled the formal corporate sector. Women's engagement in the business sector has gradually increased over the past several decades due to changes in cultural standards, globalization, and educational breakthroughs (Haque, 2016). Women still confront several obstacles in Pakistan's corporate sector, notwithstanding recent gains. These difficulties may be roughly divided into three categories: personal, structural, and cultural obstacles. The work experiences of Pakistani women are significantly shaped by cultural norms and societal

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expectations. The limitations imposed by conventional gender norms frequently impede women's mobility and professional opportunities. Women's professional goals may be limited by the notion of "honor" connected with their position as primary caretakers in families (Shaheed, 2016).

According to a 2021 Global Entrepreneurship study, women own just 1.6 businesses, compared to men's 5.81. This background emphasizes how important it is to comprehend the unique obstacles that women in the Jamshoro region encounter when they start their own businesses and use both traditional and modern talents. The investigation of the various and intricate obstacles Pakistani women face in their career path is at the heart of this study. These difficulties include deeply ingrained organizational biases, societal and cultural expectations, and striking a sometimes-difficult balance between work and personal obligations. The article also examines the ways in which these issues are being addressed in the context of corporate culture and at the policy level. Thus, the main goal of this study is to clarify the obstacles that young women from the area face when they want to work in the Jamshoro region. The goal of the study is to determine the obstacles and impediments that female entrepreneurs encounter and how they overcome them in order to launch and grow their companies.

It is predicted that the study's findings would improve knowledge of the opportunities and difficulties that Pakistani women face while pursuing business. Policymakers, educators, and business support groups will find the data important in developing and implementing measures to increase women's participation in entrepreneurship. Furthermore, by highlighting the necessity of recognizing and addressing the gender-specific norms and practices that maintain inequality in this industry, our research will contribute to the larger conversation on gender and entrepreneurship. The purpose of this research is twofold: it seeks to shed light on the policies, methods, and success stories that support women's leadership positions in Pakistan in addition to identifying the obstacles faced by Pakistani women in the business sector. By doing this, the study adds to the current discourse around gender diversity in leadership by offering insightful analysis and suggestions that are applicable to businesses, decision-makers, and aspiring female leaders in Pakistan and elsewhere.

Literature Review

There is much evidence to support the growing global significance of women in leadership positions. Eagly and Carli's seminal (2007) research, "Through the Labyrinth," deftly describes the plethora of challenges women face en route to leadership roles. Our comprehension of the larger global context in which Pakistani women leaders operate is greatly influenced by this research. With a particular emphasis on Pakistan, women in leadership positions face unique obstacles in the business world. Ali and Kramar (2015) explores how social and cultural norms affect Pakistani women's ability to advance in their careers. Identifying significant obstacles such as deeply ingrained gender norms and inadequate family support. Understanding the particular complexities of female leadership in the Pakistani setting requires an understanding of their research.

Khan,. (2018) examines in further detail how Pakistani organizations' activities impact the proportion of women in leadership positions. According to their research, organizational

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rules and practices have a big impact on women's development into leadership roles, either favorably or adversely. There has been much discussion on the relationship between gender diversity in leadership and organizational effectiveness. Hoobler et al. 2018 claimed that enhanced organizational performance is correlated with increased gender diversity in senior management teams. This conclusion is especially relevant when considering Pakistan's corporate environment. Scholarly study has also focused on the recent initiatives in Pakistan aimed at promoting women's leadership development. Mahmood and Shah (2021) evaluates these activities critically, offering insightful analysis of successful tactics and pinpointing areas in which the Pakistani context requires improvement.

Scholarly interest in and study on female entrepreneurship has significantly increased during the past thirty years. Since its inception with the first studies published in the 1970s, the field has expanded to include a wide range of specializations, approaches, and regions (Asghar & Pervaiz, 2020; Memon et al., 2019). Understanding the characteristics and goals of Asian female entrepreneurs is a crucial component of this research. Research has shown that, in spite of being underestimated, female entrepreneurs are motivated by a strong desire to prove their ability via perseverance, hard effort, and dedication (Anderson & Ojediran, 2022).

The increased acknowledgment of educated women in leadership roles has contributed to the entrepreneurial scene. Research, such as that conducted by Carter et al. (2014), emphasizes how important it is for female leaders to encourage, mentor, and advise female entrepreneurs. According to Díaz-García. (2018), female executives play a crucial role in promoting gender equality inside their companies, which may have a positive impact on the number and prosperity of female entrepreneurs. Furthermore, studies show that female executives frequently use participatory and collaborative leadership philosophies, which encourage creativity and innovation in their companies (Gupta & Shukla, 2018). Additionally, they are more likely to place an emphasis on moral behavior and social responsibility, which benefits the standing and long-term development of their companies (Kaliannan et al., 2019). Female-led companies tend to be smaller in terms of staff, sales, and profit, particularly in developing Asian nations. Building external networks presents challenges for women entrepreneurs since they are often less risk-tolerant (Afshan et al., 2021). In Asia, a large number of women work as informal sector entrepreneurs, frequently in traditional marketplaces where wages are lower. According to Ab Hamid et al. (2014), this tendency can be partially attributed to the concentration of women in lower-status occupations and their restricted access to paid employment and technical training, which limits their ability to start their own businesses. Women's success as entrepreneurs can be seriously hampered by societal conventions and gender expectations. Research by Qureshi et al. (2021) show how these elements affect the accomplishments of female entrepreneurs and mold their identities as entrepreneurs. Furthermore, women's empowerment Opportunities for female entrepreneurs may be limited in many Asian cultures where a husband's work is often valued more highly. Despite these challenges, Asian women entrepreneurs have demonstrated perseverance and tenacity in overcoming setbacks and starting profitable businesses. As a result, research on female entrepreneurship in Asia has changed, concentrating on the particular difficulties these women encounter and how these affect the region's economic development. Even though there are still many obstacles, new studies, such as those

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conducted by Chowdhury et al. (2018), highlight how determined and resilient female entrepreneurs are to overcome these difficulties. It is crucial for politicians, educators, and corporate executives to address the cultural and gender conventions preventing women from succeeding and to provide more conducive environments in order to promote female entrepreneurship in Asia.

In Pakistan, the business world frequently does not encourage female involvement. Gender-biased recruiting and promotion practices, insufficient childcare facilities, and the absence of maternity leave are all common issues. Another major obstacle is the "glass ceiling" effect, which makes it difficult for women to advance to senior management positions (Rehman & Roomi, 2012). Personal obstacles include internalizing gender norms, lacking confidence, and having little networking possibilities. Women frequently experience dread of juggling work and family obligations and self-doubt about their talents, which might impede their ability to advance in their careers (Khan, 2018).

In Pakistan's corporate sector, several women have accomplished noteworthy achievement in spite of these obstacles. Their success tales frequently center on a trifecta of favorable corporate rules, networks of support, and individual willpower. Numerous accomplished women in Pakistan's business sector credit their own tenacity and will for their successes. Overcoming social and professional barriers with unwavering determination and commitment has been a recurring motif. Women who have broken down barriers and established examples for others to follow are Shazia Syed, CEO of Unilever Pakistan, and Roshaneh Zafar, founder of the Kashf Foundation (Khan, 2018).

The significance of professional networks, mentors, and familial support is critical for women to progress in their careers. Family members, friends, and mentors can offer the emotional and practical support required to overcome obstacles in the workplace. Professional networks provide chances for information exchange, skill improvement, and career progression (Haque, 2016). Gender-sensitive organizations typically have better involvement and success rates among women. Flexible work schedules, paid parental leave, and anti-harassment policies all contribute to a more welcoming and encouraging workplace. Businesses that support inclusion and diversity not only help women, but they also improve the performance of the entire business (Rehman & Roomi, 2017).

Islamic teachings offer a foundation for comprehending women's roles in the workforce and in society. Within the confines of Sharia (Islamic law), Islam promotes women's equality, decency, and respect, enabling them to pursue vocations and make contributions to society. The spiritual and moral equality of men and women is emphasized in Islam. The significance of gender collaboration and mutual respect is emphasized in both the Quran and Hadith. As long as their actions are in line with Islamic values, women are encouraged to pursue education and engage in the economy (Mernissi, 2011).

Islam encourages people to have balanced lives and to fulfill their obligations to their families and careers. Islamic teachings place great emphasis on the idea of "tawazun" (balancing), which implies that women can pursue occupations while still fulfilling their responsibilities as homemakers and caretakers. This viewpoint backs up the idea that having a profession and a family don't have to conflict; rather, they may coexist peacefully (Siddiqui, 2017). Islam acknowledges women's autonomy to work and own property. The first wife of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, was a prosperous businesswoman; she is one

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of the historical figures that influences Muslim women today.

These illustrations show that women can pursue economic endeavors while upholding Islamic principles (Mernissi, 2016).

One well-known example of a successful woman in Pakistan's corporate sector is Shazia Syed, CEO of Unilever Pakistan. Her story highlights the value of learning, willpower, and institutional assistance. Not only has Unilever prospered under her direction, but it has also put in place a number of gender-inclusive policies, leading the way for other businesses (Khan, 2018). The creator of the Kashf Foundation, Roshaneh Zafar, has significantly impacted Pakistani women's economic emancipation. The Kashf Foundation helps female businesses become financially independent by offering microfinance services. Zafar's research emphasizes the value of establishing opportunities for women at the local level and the influence of encouraging networks (Haque, 2016). Women's involvement in Pakistan's business sector is a complicated topic that is impacted by institutional, cultural, and individual variables. Even though there are numerous obstacles to overcome, many women have done so by being self-motivated, finding networks of support, and having supportive workplace rules. The Islamic viewpoint on women's employment highlights the values of equality, respect, and leading a balanced life. This perspective offers a useful foundation for comprehending and assisting women in pursuing their career goals. In order to create an atmosphere where women may prosper in Pakistan's business sector, it is imperative that these issues be addressed going forward and that inclusive policies be promoted.

Material and Methods

It is critical to select a research technique and framework that are acceptable and in line with the study objectives and setting (Hair, 2010). An interpretative qualitative technique was used for this study, which strives to explore the nuanced experiences of Pakistani women in the workplace (Saunders et al., 2012). This method works especially well for developing a thorough comprehension of certain circumstances and surroundings (Cresswell, 2003). Our exploratory study sought to illuminate women's meanings and perceptions by elevating their voices (Creswell, 2013). In contrast to quantitative approaches, qualitative research offers a comprehensive understanding of the ideas and mechanisms behind a phenomena (Bryman, 2004). This enables an exhaustive investigation of all the contextual elements that might influence the phenomenon (Bryman et al., 1996).

Researching women in traditional, patriarchal nations has its own set of difficulties. We turned to convenience and snowball sampling procedures since normal ways of collecting samples proved to be challenging (Berg et al., 2004). Finding people who were informed about the procedure was the main objective rather than trying to assemble a representative or random sample (Hornby and Symon, 1994). Participants were able to suggest other possible responders by using the snowball approach (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). In order to reduce the potential for sample bias associated with snowball sampling, which arises from the possibility that initial participants may recommend others who are similar to them (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981), we started five distinct snowball chains, each originating from a different networking source and a different industry: banking, telecommunications, healthcare, education, and food.

Researchers contacted participants via phone and email to explain the goal of the study. All

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participants were guaranteed compliance with relevant data retention, confidentiality, and ethical requirements prior to data collection. Prior to the start of data collection, all participants provided written, informed permission. No identifying information was provided in the text to preserve participant anonymity, and individuals were referred to by letters (A, B, C, etc.) rather than by names. Data collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, which are in line with the principles of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). Seven comprehensive interviews were carried out, each one tailored to the requirements of our inquiry and organized in accordance with Abalkhail's (2017) criteria.

We kept this framework in mind, but we were also willing to look at any other ideas that participants brought forward. Occasionally, probing questions were posed to steer the conversation toward the main goals of the study. Each interview lasted between forty and seventy-five minutes and was conducted over the phone, WhatsApp, Skype, and in-person. Most of the contacts were video calls, which allowed us to see nonverbal signs, which are important for adding meaning to qualitative data, particularly when discussing delicate subjects like gender inequality (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004). Six interviews were conducted in English, four in Urdu, and the remaining two were translated into English by multilingual professionals. The interviews were conducted without recording in order to promote open communication, although thorough notes were collected.

There were no significant issues with misunderstandings or misinterpretations, as the interviewer, assistants, and participants shared similar gender, socio-religious, and cultural backgrounds. To enhance the study's rigor, precision, and credibility, we employed various techniques such as triangulation (Patton, 1999), confirmability (Shenton, 2004), and member checks (Mertens, 2014). Investigator triangulation involved multiple researchers in data collection, offering diverse observations and conclusions, enriching the study's depth (Carter et al., 2014). Member checks involved verifying interview summaries with participants to ensure accuracy in representing their views.

For data analysis, each respondent was treated as a unique case. Notes were taken immediately post-interview to retain critical insights. Adopting the methods recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Braun and Clarke (2006), we conducted a thorough thematic analysis. This involved multiple readings of the transcripts, developing a coding scheme focusing on workplace challenges and gender equality issues. Codes were continuously refined through analytic induction. Main themes were identified and aligned with existing literature, ensuring coherence and relevance.

The use of NVivo 14 Plus facilitated the thematic analysis, helping identify and map the emerging relationships between themes (King, 2004). Finally, themes were theoretically integrated, and connections were drawn in relation to the research questions, culminating in a comprehensive understanding of the workplace challenges and barriers as perceived by the participants.

Results and Discussion

The analysis revealed themes and subthemes spanning personal, organizational, and socio-cultural dimensions, each intricately linked and affecting women's career progression in Pakistan. These themes, reflecting interconnections across micro, meso, and macro levels, highlight the complex nature of the challenges faced by working women in Pakistan.

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The findings underscored a prevailing belief among Pakistani women that national socio-economic and cultural contexts significantly influence their career trajectories. One issue that was frequently noted was the misreading of religious scriptures to support gender stereotypes about women's responsibilities and income. Many women brought up how cultural standards are sometimes mistakenly associated with religion beliefs, which impedes their ability to advance professionally.

Ms. A, a banking industry representative, for example, said, "Islam promotes ease and doesn't restrict women's professional aspirations." Islamic teachings fully permit dual income if both parties consent to it. In the same way, Ms. B from the field of education noted that "Old misconceptions still exist." Certain males hold the belief that women should solely concentrate on their household duties, conflating customs and religious teachings, thereby restricting women's employment prospects.

The idea of "Sifarish" (favoritism and nepotism) was another recurring motif. The majority of participants conveyed their dissatisfaction with this pervasive practice, believing that women were disproportionately affected because of their restricted access to powerful networks. "Sifarish diminishes merit, providing a larger barrier for women who often lack the broad networks that males have," academic Ms. B pointed out.

Furthermore, the respondents emphasized that in spite of legal reforms intended to enhance women's working circumstances, these initiatives frequently fail in practice because of a lack of accountability and enforcement. A manager in the education sector named Ms. P made the following observation: "Many companies view legal improvements as merely formalities, with insufficient accountability leading to little practical influence on women's career progression." A number of initiatives were recommended by the participants to enhance women's job possibilities. They underlined the necessity of strong government action to uphold laws and ensure that institutions are held responsible. According to Ms. C from the banking industry, there is a discrepancy between practice and policy. By guaranteeing policy execution, regular supervision and feedback from public authorities might help close this gap. Additionally, over half of the participants suggested contacting religious professors to dispel myths regarding women in the workforce. They recommended utilizing media channels to combat prejudices that are more rooted in tradition than religion and to spread truthful religious teachings. According to an assistant professor, "The government ought to bring forth progressive Islamic academics to rectify misunderstandings of religious texts that are employed to rationalize male supremacy, thereby educating society about the actual meaning of Islamic teachings concerning women and labor."

All the women interviewed highlighted that achieving career equality and enhancing female participation in the workforce would significantly contribute to poverty reduction. Ms. D, employed in a telecom call center, shared her personal experience, "Coming from a conservative, lower-class family, I wasn't initially allowed to work, despite being more educated than my husband. With five children and my husband's unstable job, we struggled financially. Once we decided that I should also work, our financial situation improved considerably, leading to a happier life."

A gender studies expert, Ms. C, emphasized the broader socio-economic impact: "In Pakistan, a large segment of the population is either below the poverty line or belongs to the lower middle class. With the rise in women's education, translating this into higher workforce

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participation could dramatically reduce poverty. Households with dual earners generally enjoy a higher income and better quality of life. Countries with greater female workforce participation have seen increases in their GDP and productivity, benefiting from a diverse workforce. Another key benefit discussed was happiness and improved quality of life.

A bank employee, Ms. A, reflected on her experience: "Before I started working, our financial constraints caused a lot of stress, negatively affecting my behavior at home. Since I've been employed, our quality of life has significantly improved, I'm much happier, and my relationship with my children is better, despite some time and energy constraints. Similarly, Ms. E from the banking sector shared, "I've always been independent and confident. Following marriage, unhappiness and declining health resulted from being unable to work because of customary modesty requirements. My happiness, confidence, and health all returned when I went back to work. My work is a major contributor to my wellbeing, a source of independence, and competition.

Theme

- Misunderstandings about religious teachings and their impact on women's careers are highlighted by the distorted interpretation of religious doctrine regarding modesty and female roles.

- Cultural customs and conventions limiting women's job options, looking at how society expects women to fulfill certain professional roles.

The prevalence of patriarchal ideology, with an emphasis on how these ideas affect women's ability to progress in their careers.

- "Sifarish" influence (favoritism and nepotism), examining how these practices hinder women's advancement based only on merit.

- Gaps in the application and oversight of laws designed to help women in the workforce, as well as inadequacies in the enforcement and upholding of gender-supportive legislation.

- Enforcing accountability in the application of gender equality laws, highlighting the necessity of stricter governmental and business responsibilities in doing so.

- interaction with religious authorities to get clarity on religious rules pertaining to work, with the suggestion that religious experts be involved to demystify religion teachings about women's employment and clear up common misconceptions.

- Specific actions to actualize current gender policies, emphasizing how crucial it is to take decisive action in order to successfully implement gender policies.

- Improved life quality and family harmony for working women, revealing the ways in which employment benefits women's mental and emotional health as well as their personal well-being, stress levels, and family dynamics.

- Economic growth through the inclusion of a diverse workforce and an analysis of the contribution of female labor force participation to GDP growth and overall economic development.

- The benefits to society of female inclusion and empowerment, highlighting the larger societal advantages of adopting gender inclusiveness and women's empowerment.

Findings

The study uncovers a complicated network of obstacles impeding Pakistani women's

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advancement in the workforce. The distortion of religious teachings, which results in deeply rooted cultural beliefs about women's responsibilities and demands of modesty, is at the center of these. Cultural prejudices and the ubiquitous impact of patriarchal standards exacerbate these problems and further restrict women's job options. A sort of nepotism and favoritism, known as "Sifarish," is a common practice that impedes fair professional development. Furthermore, the implementation and supervision of legislative initiatives aimed at assisting women in the workplace are frequently inadequate, highlighting the critical need for more responsible corporate and governmental behavior. In order to challenge and alter preconceived notions, the research recommends enlisting the aid of religious experts to assist reinterpret and propagate true religious viewpoints on women's work. It also emphasizes the benefits of female employment, pointing to boosts in women's mental and general well-being, improved family dynamics, and major contributions to economic growth—including GDP rises—resulting from a more inclusive and diversified workforce.

Conclusion

The study's findings highlight the numerous obstacles Pakistani women encounter in the workplace, which are mostly brought about by a misreading of religious texts, ingrained cultural practices, and prevalent patriarchal viewpoints. These difficulties are compounded by the practice of "Sifarish," which prevents equitable professional advancement based on merit. The study emphasizes how crucial it is to implement and enforce law changes in a way that supports women's career advancement, and it calls for greater responsibility from the public and private sectors. It also recommends enlisting the aid of religious academics to rectify and disseminate legitimate religious viewpoints about women's work. The study is significant because it clarifies the advantages of women's employment for their family life, personal satisfaction, and broader economic metrics like GDP growth. It highlights the need for more welcoming and encouraging work settings by showing that empowering women professionally benefits not only their personal lives but also the larger social and economic advancement.

Practical and Theoretical Implications

The study's conclusions will have a significant impact on how Pakistani legislators and business executives behave. Stronger enforcement and execution of regulations relating to gender equality in the workplace are urgently needed. In order to go beyond mere compliance, this entails not just updating legislative frameworks but also developing an organizational culture that genuinely appreciates and incorporates these changes. Another crucial step is to address the pervasive habit of "Sifarish," or favoritism. One possible way to do this is by implementing open, merit-based hiring and promotion procedures. In order to increase the involvement of women in the workforce, businesses are also urged to foster more inclusive settings. This may be achieved by providing flexible work hours or assistance with childcare. Broadly speaking, the results support a cooperative strategy between the government and religious experts to clear up misconceptions about religion teachings about women's duties, utilizing media platforms to spread factual information and eliminate ingrained cultural prejudices. By putting these policies into practice, workplace balance may

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be achieved and the social and economic fabric of the nation can be strengthened.

Theoretically, this study contributes significantly to our understanding of gender disparity in the workplace by highlighting the intricate interplay between Pakistan's socioeconomic, cultural, and religious factors. It contradicts mainstream theories that frequently ignore the unique conditions of developing countries such as Pakistan, where the interaction of religion and culture has a big impact on workplace standards. The results show that theoretical approaches to gender equality in the workplace need to take these unique cultural and religious contexts into consideration, especially in settings where cultural traditions and misinterpreted religion teachings have a significant impact on gender roles.

The study also adds to the conversation on the function of "Sifarish" in the workplace by proposing that organizational behavior and HRM theories be expanded to include these particular socio-cultural elements. This method not only extends the reach of existing theoretical frameworks but also creates new avenues for study to develop more specialized theories and models that successfully tackle the particular difficulties faced by women in the workforce in comparable cultural situations.

Recommendations

A number of crucial initiatives are suggested by this study to enhance the participation of women in Pakistan's employment. It is imperative to enhance and proficiently implement legislative requirements pertaining to gender equality, in addition to instituting measures of responsibility for businesses. In order to break down ingrained prejudices and preconceptions, it is critical to correct cultural and religious misunderstandings by interacting with religious experts and using media channels for educational projects. Eliminating the "Sifarish" mentality and promoting open, merit-based recruiting and promotion procedures are crucial first steps. Furthermore, it is advised that rules that promote work-life balance be adopted. Examples of these policies include flexible work hours, chances for remote work, and assistance for childcare.

The aforementioned steps are intended to cultivate a climate that is more equitable and inclusive in the workplace, consequently propelling gender equality and augmenting Pakistan's broader societal and economic advancements.

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