

Women in Legal Education and the Legal Profession in Pakistan

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Executive Summary:

This research article explores the challenges and discrimination faced by female lawyers in Pakistan's legal profession, a traditionally male-dominated field. It focuses on the personal and professional difficulties these women encounter and analyzes power dynamics using Bourdieu's theory of habitus, capital, and field. Key findings are derived from qualitative research article, including interviews with female lawyers from various cities in Pakistan.

Main Findings:

1. Discrimination & Gender Bias:

Women face resistance from colleagues, clients, and society, including subtle and overt discrimination.

- Senior male lawyers often question the competence of female lawyers, and bar associations are reported as being hostile.*
- Clients often show reluctance in hiring female lawyers, especially in criminal and corporate law cases, pushing women towards family law, which pays less.*

2. Workplace Challenges:

- Female lawyers struggle to find mentors or secure well-paying cases, leading to financial difficulties during their early careers. Male lawyers often create obstacles, including withholding opportunities and making the work environment uncomfortable.*
- Professional spaces like courts are generally more supportive, but interactions with court clerks and police are difficult, with instances of bribery and unprofessional behavior.*

3. Social Resistance & Family Expectations:

- While some women receive family support, others face cultural pushback, especially in conservative households that discourage professional careers for women.*
- Many women adapt their behavior (e.g., becoming more assertive) to fit into the male-dominated environment.*

4. Sexual Harassment and Safety Issues:

- Gender-based harassment and lack of safety remain pressing issues, with female lawyers reporting biased treatment from male colleagues and clients.*

Theoretical Framework:

The study applies Bourdieu's theory to understand how societal structures reinforce gender-based discrimination. It explains how cultural expectations define male lawyers as breadwinners, reinforcing power hierarchies that marginalize female lawyers.

Recommendations and Future Research article:

The study suggests further research article to understand why many female law graduates do not pursue legal careers.

It also recommends exploring the reasons behind the competition and lack of support among female lawyers.

Future work could include the perspectives of male lawyers and clients to provide a more comprehensive view of gender dynamics in the legal profession.

The research article concludes that despite numerous challenges, female lawyers are making gradual progress. They are breaking stereotypes by expanding into non-traditional fields like criminal and corporate law. However, the male-dominated structure of the legal profession continues to pose significant hurdles, limiting women's opportunities for advancement and leadership

Since January 24, 2019, the UN has observed the *International Day of Education*. The 2023 commemoration highlighted Afghan girls deprived of education by school bans, reflecting the ongoing struggle for women's educational rights.

One path available to high school graduates is legal education, which has become increasingly global. Legal studies from Asian and Islamic traditions are now taught in Western institutions, while lawyers trained in the East practice in the West, navigating diverse legal frameworks.

Studying law is often considered intellectually stimulating and eye-opening. It's a dynamic field that evolves alongside societal developments and interacts with other disciplines. Legal education offers insights into various aspects of life and facilitates comparative learning, allowing students to benefit from other nations' experiences.

Motivations for Studying Law

People pursue legal studies for diverse reasons-some follow their passion, others aim to earn financial rewards, or seek to defend their country from colonialism, religious discrimination, or oppression. Many influential figures, such as Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Mohammad Iqbal, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton, Barak Obama, and Sandra Day O'Connor, began their journeys as law students. The accomplishments of these individuals provide inspiration and career insights for future generations.

Interestingly, many world leaders and decision-makers, including presidents and ministers, have a legal background. Professionals in other sectors, like medicine and journalism, also turn to legal education to better understand governance and regulatory systems.

Gender Inequality in Legal Education and Practice

While law is a prestigious and financially rewarding career in many developed countries, the situation is different in developing nations. Women, in particular, bear the brunt of economic and political challenges, exacerbated by outdated education systems. Historically, women's rights have often been granted as political bargaining tools, even in advanced democracies.

In many developing societies, women who pursue legal education face social stigma. Law students or female lawyers are often labeled as "less feminine" or "unfit for marriage," reflecting deep-rooted societal expectations. Families may discourage women from studying law, suggesting it's unnecessary because their primary role lies within the household. Furthermore, some communities argue that women's education threatens traditional gender roles and leads to demands for equality.

A striking example comes from Egypt, where a campaign discouraged men from marrying female lawyers, especially criminal law practitioners, claiming they are "argumentative" and

“troublesome.” Social and familial pressure often forces women to pursue other fields of study, limiting their opportunities in law.

Literature Review

Research on gender and the legal profession is a significant area of study within the sociology of law. Its relevance grew as women began entering the legal field in larger numbers. Over recent decades, a substantial amount of literature has emerged, particularly from Western countries such as the U.S., Canada, the UK, and other European nations. These studies explore various aspects of women’s participation in the legal profession, including shifts in professional relationships, power dynamics between genders, gender-based discrimination, and workplace harassment.

This research primarily reviews literature from Western countries due to the extensive work conducted in these regions on the topic of women in the legal profession. While research on female lawyers is limited in Pakistan and other parts of Asia, this research includes three relevant studies: one from Bangladesh and two from Pakistan. To provide a structured analysis, the literature is divided into subsections, each addressing key issues relating to female lawyers in the legal profession.

Female Lawyers in the Legal Profession in Western Countries

Ann Gellis (1991) conducted a survey of the Indiana Bar focusing on discrimination and bias against women in the legal field. The study found that unequal treatment contributed to lower job satisfaction among female lawyers. Women faced challenges such as abusive language, verbal and sexual harassment, and skepticism regarding their competence. Many encountered obstacles when balancing career and family responsibilities, with discrimination evident in hiring, promotions, and pay. Women in law firms reported a lack of respect, limited advancement opportunities, and difficulties in maintaining professional relationships, further contributing to their dissatisfaction.

In a bibliographical essay, Bowman (1998) reviewed the literature on women in the legal profession, highlighting recurring themes such as the "paradox" and "double bind." The paradox refers to society’s contradictory views of women as both nurturing figures and professional lawyers, while the double bind captures the internal conflict women face when navigating masculine and feminine stereotypes in their careers. Bowman emphasized the persistent pay gap and low representation of women in senior legal roles, commonly referred to as the "glass ceiling."

Schultz and Shaw’s (2003) *Women in the World’s Legal Professions* offers a cross-national perspective on gender issues in law, examining 15 countries across both common law and civil law systems, including Brazil, Japan, and South Korea. The book addresses topics such as access to the profession, career planning, discrimination, and the marginalization of women. Schultz argued that gendered labor divisions-where men are viewed as breadwinners and women as caretakers-remain prevalent and perpetuate professional hierarchies. This stereotyping, she noted, reinforces disparities in conservative societies and limits women's advancement.

Dau-Schmidt et al. (2009) analyzed gender differences in the legal profession in the U.S., tracking career trajectories, job satisfaction, and work-life balance among male and female lawyers. The study found that men were more likely to pursue private practice and business roles, while women gravitated towards corporate counsel positions, government roles, and public interest work, often due to childcare considerations. Women reported working fewer hours than men, which impacted their earnings.

Kay and Gorman (2008) reviewed gender inequalities in Canada's legal profession, exploring disparities in education, hiring, pay, and promotions. They observed that while overt discrimination had declined, issues like sexual harassment and a lack of family support structures persisted. Women expressed dissatisfaction with promotions, recognition, and salaries, though they were increasingly taking on leadership roles and challenging traditional career models to create more flexible workplace arrangements.

The International Bar Association (IBA) conducted a global survey in 2017 across various regions, including Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, examining why gender bias persists in the legal profession (Ellis & Buckett, 2017). Despite rising numbers of female law graduates since the 1980s, women remain underrepresented in senior positions, largely due to societal expectations of women as primary caregivers. The demanding nature of legal work, with long hours, makes it difficult for women to manage both professional and domestic responsibilities, perpetuating gender inequality across both common and civil law jurisdictions.

Latourette (2005) examined the historical and cultural barriers that women have faced in entering the legal profession. He noted that social norms traditionally restricted women to household roles and discouraged them from pursuing careers. Women have historically been paid less than men, reinforcing a male-dominated professional environment. Even today, women in law struggle with stereotypes that associate them with family law rather than corporate law, and those pursuing careers often face pressure to choose between family and work. Latourette emphasized that women who succeed in the legal profession often do so with strong family support.

Levinson and Young (2010) explored implicit gender bias through an experimental study using the Implicit Association Test (IAT). They found that, despite equal numbers of male and female law graduates over the past two decades, men still dominate higher positions in law firms and academia. The study revealed that both male and female participants unconsciously linked judges with men and associated women with household roles. Male participants, in particular, preferred masculine traits for judicial roles, illustrating how implicit gender biases continue to influence decision-making in the legal profession.

This research highlights the systemic challenges faced by women in the legal profession, including discrimination, pay disparities, and the glass ceiling. It also points to progress, with women increasingly taking on leadership roles and pushing for more inclusive work environments. However, many issues remain unresolved, particularly in conservative societies where gender stereotypes are deeply ingrained. This research aims to build on the existing literature by focusing on the experiences of female lawyers in underrepresented regions, including Pakistan and Asia, where research is still limited.

Women in Pakistan's Legal Profession: A Study of Challenges and Gender Discrimination

Pakistan's legal profession, like much of its society, is predominantly male-dominated. However, in recent years, a significant increase in the number of women entering the field has been observed. Despite this progress, the employment landscape for women remains challenging, with the legal sector being no exception. Women in this profession encounter several obstacles, including limited opportunities and systemic discrimination. Although we have several female judges in superior courts and subordinate courts. Our country has also produced several brilliant women lawyers. This research explores the experiences of female lawyers, focusing on the dynamics of power and inequality within the legal profession. Using Bourdieu's theoretical framework of habitus, capital, and field, the research examines the everyday challenges female lawyers face in their professional lives.

The research employs a qualitative approach, collecting primary data through semi-structured interviews with female lawyers from three cities in Pakistan. Findings reveal that these women experience discrimination, resistance from society, and bias from colleagues, judges, and clients. They face additional hurdles such as unequal pay and implicit harassment. The research concludes that societal stereotypes about women hinder their progress in the legal field. The profession's power structures are deeply rooted in male dominance, setting hierarchical barriers that marginalize women. However, despite these difficulties, female lawyers continue to persevere in their struggle to establish their identity and gain recognition within the profession.

Scope of the Study

This research focuses exclusively on female lawyers working in Pakistan's private sector. It examines their experiences as private practitioners, including those who are self-employed or employed in law firms. Female judges and public-sector lawyers, such as public prosecutors, are excluded due to time constraints. The exclusion of male lawyers and judges, as well as societal perspectives, also limits the scope. While international studies have documented the challenges faced by female lawyers, this research specific to Pakistan remains limited, highlighting the need for localised analysis of the issues at hand.

Background and Overview of the Legal Profession in Pakistan

To understand the experiences of female lawyers in Pakistan, it is essential to first explore the country's legal system. Pakistan, an Islamic republic in South Asia, operates under a legal framework that combines elements of British common law with Islamic principles. The legal profession includes judges, advocate generals, attorneys general, public prosecutors, and legal practitioners. The profession is regulated by the *Legal Practitioners and Bar Council Act of 1973*, which governs the establishment of bar councils and outlines the criteria for the enrollment, qualification, and conduct of lawyers.

Pakistan has six bar councils: one for each province, one for the federal capital, and the overarching Pakistan Bar Council (PBC). These bodies supervise legal education, regulate admissions, and oversee lawyers' licensing. In addition to these councils, bar associations at the Supreme Court, high courts, and district courts provide further representation and support for legal practitioners.

To practice law, an individual must obtain a law degree (LL.B.) from a PBC-recognized university and pass an aptitude test administered by the relevant district bar association. Practicing lawyers are categorized based on the courts they serve:

- Advocates of Subordinate Courts
- Advocates of High Courts
- Advocates of the Supreme Court
- Senior Advocates of the Supreme Court

The Pakistan Bar Council the apex bar, grants its advocates the right to appear in any court or tribunal in the country. Each province has a high court, and lower-level courts are divided into civil and criminal jurisdictions, including district and session courts. A fresh graduate begins their career practicing in subordinate courts after passing an entry test and completing six months of apprenticeship. After two years of practice, they can apply for admission to the High Court, and eventually to the Supreme Court, upon meeting specific criteria, including the submission of case judgments and enrollment fees.

Section 29 of the *Legal Practitioners and Bar Council Act* ensures that women cannot be denied entry into the legal profession based solely on their gender.

Structure and Career Pathways in the Legal Profession

The structure of Pakistan's legal profession, as outlined by the *Legal Practitioners and Bar Council Act*, establishes entry requirements, training procedures, and disciplinary rules. To become an advocate, law graduates must train under experienced lawyers or firms. While legal education in Pakistan does not provide specialized tracks, individuals often pursue further education or choose their specialization through practice under senior lawyers in specific fields.

Advocates in Pakistan can pursue a variety of career paths, including private practice, partnerships, public-sector roles, or in-house legal advisory positions within corporations. There is no formal division between barristers (court representatives) and solicitors (legal advisors) as found in countries like the UK; Pakistani advocates perform both roles.

Although exact statistics on female lawyers are unavailable, the total number of advocates practicing across various courts is known. The Punjab province alone has over 48,000 High Court advocates and more than 36,000 practicing in subordinate courts. However, women remain underrepresented and face barriers at every level of the profession, limiting their access to higher positions and career growth.

This research sheds light on the challenges faced by female lawyers in Pakistan, with a particular focus on gender discrimination within the private legal sector. The findings highlight how women navigate societal stereotypes and power structures while striving to establish themselves in a male-dominated profession. Despite these challenges, their persistence reflects their determination to overcome barriers and build a professional identity. There have been some top class lawyers and judges in Pakistan like Justice Aysha Malik (First Female Judge in Supreme Court/future Chief Justice of Pakistan, Asma Jahangir, Majida Rizvi, Fakur un Nisa Khokhar and others.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics play a crucial role in the research process, ensuring the protection of participants' rights and preventing any potential harm to them (O'Reilly, 2009). To adhere to ethical standards, all measures outlined in the European Commission Report for Ethics for Researchers were implemented. Careful efforts were made to inform all the seven interviewees about the research article's objectives prior to conducting the interviews. An informed consent was obtained from them. It was explicitly explained that their participation is voluntary and anonymous, with identification numbers or symbols used in place of their names.

Analysis and Results

To thoroughly understand the situation of female lawyers in Pakistan, this research investigates the challenges they faced at the beginning of their careers and continue to encounter daily. The analysis is based on several themes that were developed from the research objectives and questions, which also served as coding categories. The four themes used for coding and analysis are as follows:

1. Acceptance and resistance from family and society
2. Workplace experiences with colleagues, bar associations, judges, court clerks, clients, and police

3. Harassment and safety at the workplace, including gender bias experiences from bar associations, male lawyers, clients, and judges
4. Job satisfaction regarding earnings, career growth, facilities provided by Bar Associations, and professional fulfillment

Acceptance and Resistance from Family and Society

The interviews explored the experiences of female law practitioners regarding the acceptance and resistance they faced from family, relatives, and society when pursuing a legal career.

In Pakistan, the approval of actions taken by women is vital due to their financial dependency on their families. With no governmental financial support available, most women must seek permission from their families regarding career decisions (with some exceptions).

The findings of this research reveal that the majority of interviewees did not experience resistance from their families when choosing a legal profession. For instance, three interviewees indicated that their families supported their decision because their fathers desired a family member to enter the legal field. Additionally, two of these interviewees noted that their fathers had previously encountered negative experiences with litigation, which prompted them to encourage a family member to pursue law. Witnessing their fathers' struggles, both financially and legally, led the interviewees to agree to join the legal profession. They noted that in Pakistan, lacking personal connections in any field makes it challenging to achieve success. Two additional interviewees expressed that their parents consistently supported them in all situations, including their choice to pursue law.

The five interviewees who did not encounter resistance emphasized the difficulty of entering this profession without family support, considering themselves fortunate to have faced no opposition from their parents or relatives.

Only two interviewees reported experiencing family resistance. One mentioned her father's remarks: "My father told me that the environment of courts and *katcheri* (the Urdu term for Bar) is not suitable for women and girls in our family, as our women never visited a police station." Another interviewee shared that her family permitted her to pursue an LL.B. on the condition that she would not practice law.

Although most interviewees reported no resistance in choosing their initial careers, many noted that conservative societal norms led to relatives expressing concerns about social propriety. One interviewee stated, "My uncle and the rest of the family were not very literate, so it was initially challenging for me. I had to go through a lot of turmoil to make them understand that I'm not going to violate any customs or family rules; I'm just working, learning, and it will benefit all of you. So, I had to put in extra effort in that regard."

This highlights the low level of social acceptance for female lawyers in Pakistani society, where they often face challenges even within their homes and families. This situation reflects the gender roles within the social structure, where men are seen as breadwinners, and women are viewed as caretakers, shaping the dispositions of both male and female agents. As Bourdieu suggests, human behavior is influenced by culture as part of the habitus (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In the patriarchal context of Pakistani culture, which is predominantly male-oriented, women's active participation in public life is significantly restricted. Additionally, the gendered division of labor reinforces men's monopoly over public activities (Bourdieu, 2001). This cultural habitus complicates societal acceptance of women working in public spheres.

Workplace Experiences with Bar Associations, Colleagues, Clients, Judges, Clerks of Courts, and Police

This research also examined the workplace experiences of female lawyers. Interviewees shared their experiences with bar associations, courts, judges, clerks of courts, police, and both male and female colleagues. They discussed the challenges and difficulties they face in the legal profession. All interviewees reported mixed experiences at their workplaces; some aspects have improved, while others remain problematic with little hope for progress.

Challenges and Difficulties Faced by Female Lawyers in Bar Associations

Most interviewees indicated that the bar environment is highly discriminatory and hostile for female lawyers. In their early careers, they encountered significant challenges, such as finding a reputable senior lawyer or firm for apprenticeship and enduring financial hardships. Many reported that they were initially assigned minimal work, often performing menial tasks like attending court for their seniors and securing dates for cases. A recurring theme in the interviews was a lack of trust from male seniors towards their female counterparts, with concerns raised about the professional abilities of female lawyers before they were assigned fieldwork. This lack of work and resulting absence of compensation was identified as a major hurdle, making it challenging for them to build a client network that could lead to more cases and alleviate financial difficulties. One interviewee expressed, "Seniors were not generous enough to assign us cases, and we lacked social support or connections. When we did connect socially, it often led to inappropriate proposals, which contributed to my financial struggles in the beginning."

In terms of workplace experiences, remuneration remained a significant challenge for female lawyers. Another interviewee shared, "I began working at a law firm, but for six months, I was not assigned any meaningful work. My responsibilities were limited to attending court and managing dates for cases. I received no pay from the firm and had to cover all work-related expenses out of my own pocket."

The majority of interviewees described the atmosphere within bar associations as hostile and challenging for women. They highlighted various factors that hinder female lawyers, leading many to feel intimidated and ultimately leave the profession early. One interviewee remarked, "If you're male, you can survive; but if you're female and wish to succeed in this field, you need to have nerves of steel."

Resistance from Male Colleagues

The research revealed that resistance from male colleagues is a significant issue for female lawyers. All interviewees perceived the behavior of their male peers as discouraging towards women, with a few exceptions. They noted that the prevailing stereotype often relegates female lawyers to traditional roles, leading to discriminatory behavior, both overtly and subtly.

Three interviewees shared experiences where their male colleagues were unsupportive of women who voiced their opinions. They cited a prominent senior female lawyer who was active in the bar and a human rights advocate, mentioning that male colleagues often disparaged her and advised against emulating her. Most interviewees considered this senior lawyer a role model and were inspired by her work. One noted, "Male lawyers feel insecure about our advancement, which is why they speak negatively of her and create obstacles for us." Another added that working alongside male lawyers can be particularly challenging; they often perceive successful female lawyers as a threat and may engage in sabotage, such as misplacing or hiding files.

One interviewee described the discriminatory behavior of male colleagues: "For example, if they engage in behaviors that make you uncomfortable, like smoking, they disregard your feelings, believing they have the right to behave as they please. Their language and laughter can be vulgar and unsettling. They may not address you directly, but their actions make the workplace uncomfortable. This social attitude is prevalent, especially in the legal profession, where the male-dominated environment can feel exclusive."

Experiences with Senior Male and Female Lawyers

The interviewees' experiences with senior lawyers varied significantly. While all agreed that senior female lawyers often lacked support and encouragement during their initial career stages, their experiences with senior male lawyers were mixed. Four out of seven interviewees reported positive experiences with male lawyers, whereas three described their experiences as negative. One interviewee, who began her career with a senior male lawyer, found him to be particularly harsh towards women and was surprised that women were part of the profession. She ultimately left him to work with another male senior lawyer.

Challenges with Clients

Interviewees also discussed the difficulties they encounter when dealing with both male and female clients. Initially, many clients would mistake female lawyers for administrative staff and were reluctant to discuss legal matters unless a male senior partner was present. Clients were often hesitant to hire female lawyers and, when they did, they frequently underpaid them. Most interviewees found challenges with both male and female clients, though the nature of these challenges differed. For instance, female clients would often approach them with family law cases-which typically offer lower fees-feeling more comfortable discussing personal matters with female lawyers. However, they frequently could not afford the appropriate fees. One interviewee elaborated, "Female clients often struggle to pay the fees or, if they can, it's not the amount we request. This is largely due to the overall status of women in society, where few are financially independent."

In summary, while female lawyers face challenges in gaining acceptance from male clients, they generally report respectful interactions with female clients, who tend to follow their guidance. In contrast, male clients often attempt to dictate the direction of their legal arguments, displaying aggressive behavior that complicates the working relationship.

Challenges Faced in Court

Most interviewees found the court atmosphere to be generally supportive, with judges displaying encouragement towards female lawyers, likely due to the professional code of conduct they are required to uphold. However, some exceptions exist, as highlighted by one interviewee: "Male lawyers find it easier to interact with male judges due to a shared familiarity, allowing them to engage more freely. For females, maintaining a distance is necessary."

Obstacles with Court Clerks and Police

The majority of interviewees reported challenges when dealing with court clerks. They noted that the legal profession's male-dominated nature leads clerks to view female lawyers as somewhat puzzling, complicating their interactions. Many interviewees mentioned that clerks would delay document requests and often demanded higher bribes than those typically solicited from male lawyers.

All interviewees expressed frustration with their experiences with police, noting that interactions were often unpleasant and marked by discrimination.

The interviewees unanimously agreed that male colleagues find it easier to navigate the bar and court environments. They felt that if they had been male, they would have achieved their current positions much sooner. Additionally, they noted that newcomers benefit significantly if they have male relatives in the legal field, as it eases the search for good mentors and facilitates early learning. Such connections also help in acquiring clients through established networks. Female lawyers specifically identified the lack of their own chambers (offices) as a major challenge. Of the seven interviewees, only one owned her chamber, while the others shared spaces with male seniors or female colleagues. They noted that it is generally easier for male lawyers to establish their own chambers, often relying on family property, while parents view their investment in male children as a secure path to financial success.

Behavioral Adaptation Challenges

Lastly, the interview explored the behavioral changes female lawyers feel compelled to adopt to reduce gender identification in the legal profession. Most interviewees indicated that they must exhibit assertiveness and adopt the loud, aggressive demeanor typically associated with male lawyers. They often feel the need to communicate in a manner similar to their male counterparts to gain respect for their arguments. One interviewee remarked, "I've changed myself for the work environment; I am not myself anymore."

Underrepresentation of Women in Law

One major obstacle in the legal field is the underrepresentation of women, particularly in senior roles. Social barriers, legal restrictions, and stereotypes perpetuate the idea that women are too emotional to serve as judges. For instance, female law students in Pakistan have internalized the belief that they are unsuited for judicial roles, echoing the stereotypes ingrained in male-dominated societies.

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor emphasized the importance of having women in leadership positions, noting that representation plays a critical role in shaping women's self-perception and professional aspirations. Positive role models can inspire future generations to break free from these stereotypes.

In practice, female lawyers often encounter discrimination, including wage gaps, delayed promotions, and biased treatment upon returning from maternity leave. Some employers hesitate to hire newly married women, fearing potential pregnancy and its associated leaves. In extreme cases, women are denied the opportunity to resume their positions after childbirth, discouraging them from utilizing their full maternity leave.

New Challenges: AI and Legal Technology

Beyond social challenges, the legal profession faces disruption from artificial intelligence (AI) and legal technology. Some have even questioned whether legal education has a future, fearing that AI might replace lawyers. However, there is still optimism that human lawyers will remain essential, especially in complex disputes. In developing countries, these changes may unfold more slowly, providing time for adaptation.

Female Representation and Progress in Pakistan

The challenges facing women in law are evident in Pakistan statistics. This research shows that while most top-performing law students are female, the number of female professors remains disproportionately low compared to their male counterparts. This disparity highlights the persistent barriers women face, despite their academic achievements.

Empowering Future Generations

Legal education plays a vital role in promoting justice and equality, especially for women. Bridging the gender gap requires early intervention-such as teaching students about legal principles and human rights in schools. Organizing school visits to courts and inviting legal professionals to speak at schools can inspire students to pursue law and foster a more egalitarian mindset.

When asked for advice on thriving in the legal profession, I always tell my students:

Stay determined and invest in your knowledge every day. Being informed and confident will empower you to succeed. Expand your network to exchange ideas with practitioners from various legal systems-this broadens your perspective and opens up opportunities.

For females, my message is:

Don't let others dictate what you can achieve. Believe in your abilities, ignore stereotypes, and embrace challenges. Take opportunities, explore your potential, and prove the doubters wrong. Love and accept yourself, even during difficult times-your perseverance will make all the difference.

The core of the problem for women in a profession like law is the very word balance. There is none. Any attempt to convince women that they can and should meet all obligations on all conceivable fronts is misguided. I will urge men on how they can adjust their work life balance to accommodate female work-loads and success. Women do not need to be changed, adjusted, domesticated, moulded, formed, or coddled. They need space and a runway.

Conclusions and Future Work

The aim of this research was to explore the experiences of female lawyers in Pakistan, with a particular emphasis on the discrimination they encounter and the power dynamics within the legal profession.

Additionally, the research examined the various challenges and difficulties that female lawyers face in their daily professional lives.

The first research question (RQ1) investigates *how female lawyers perceive their work in a male-dominated field, specifically the legal profession*. The findings indicate that female lawyers in Pakistan generally view the legal profession as demanding and challenging. The societal male dominance and negative stereotypes portraying women as subordinates significantly impact the status of female lawyers. They experience discrimination from various sources, including society, male colleagues, and Bar Associations. Consequently, the overall environment of the legal profession is hostile for women in Pakistan.

Moreover, the findings highlight a gendered division of labor, as female lawyers are often advised by their senior male counterparts to handle family law and other similar cases, reinforcing the notion that such cases are more suited for women.

The second research question (RQ2) delves into the challenges and obstacles faced by female lawyers in their careers and the strategies they employ to overcome them.

The results for RQ2 indicate that women lawyers encounter numerous difficulties throughout their professional journeys. These challenges begin at home and persist through interactions with colleagues, Bar associations, clients, judges, and police. Their capabilities are frequently questioned by male seniors, clients, and judges. The root causes of these challenges stem from cultural barriers and societal norms, alongside lower cultural and social capital within the legal field. Gender-biased social and cultural norms hinder women lawyers' acceptance in society and limit their opportunities for advancement within Bar Associations. This scenario contributes to the glass ceiling phenomenon commonly discussed in Western literature concerning female lawyers' positions in the legal profession. The male-driven power structure within the legal field establishes hierarchies that serve male interests. Nevertheless, female lawyers are adapting their behaviors to navigate these challenges. Their evolving case selections-from family law to criminal and corporate cases-demonstrate their efforts to break through the glass ceiling.

Additionally, the growing number of female lawyers contributes positively to their social capital, fostering a sense of confidence and security in their field. Overall, this thesis illustrates that while the challenges faced by female lawyers are often overlooked by Bar Associations, these women continue to strive for recognition and identity within the legal profession.

Looking ahead, there are several avenues for future research. The findings suggest a significant discrepancy between the number of female law graduates and those actively practicing law. Investigating the reasons why many women do not enter the legal profession could be a valuable area of study. The research also highlights a competitive environment among female lawyers, which results in newcomers often being unwelcome by their more established peers. Future research article could explore the reasons behind this intra-gender competition. Additionally, due to time constraints, the perspectives of male lawyers and clients were not included in this study, representing another potential area for further exploration.

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