



---

**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Issues of Networking and Gender Disparities**

**Dr. Bushra Inayat Raja**

Former Controller of Examinations Fatima Jinnah Women University Rawalpindi, Punjab,  
Pakistan

---

<b>PAPER INFO</b>	<b>ABSTRACT</b>
<b>Received:</b> July 31, 2020 <b>Accepted:</b> September 05, 2020 <b>Online:</b> September 30, 2020 <b>Keywords:</b> Career, Networking, Pakistani Culture, Senior Management, Women	This qualitative inquiry investigates the reasons behind the striking low presence of women in high-ranking managerial positions within Pakistani Universities. By conducting semi-structured interviews with 48 women occupying various management roles and facilitating a focus group discussion, the study meticulously investigates the reasons behind this imbalance. The gathered data highlights, among other factors, the significant influence of networking opportunities on their career trajectories. Thematic analysis uncovers prevalent challenges and obstacles hindering women's advancement to senior management, particularly disparities in access to supportive networks compared to their male counterparts and their exclusion from predominantly male networking circles. The research emphasizes how deeply ingrained organizational cultures, discriminatory practices, and societal norms in Pakistani culture create an unfavorable environment for networking, compounded by women's own networking shortcomings. This underscores the pressing need for systemic reforms and initiatives aimed at bolstering professional support for women and fostering greater gender equity in higher education management.
<b>Corresponding Author</b>  bushrarajputraja@g mail.com	

---

**Introduction**

The In Pakistani universities, women continue to be conspicuously underrepresented in senior management roles. This qualitative investigation examines the multifaceted factors that contribute to this gap, aiming to shed light on the hurdles impeding women's progress in academic leadership.

A central focus of the study is the recognition of networking opportunities as pivotal in shaping women's advancement in higher education management. Participants consistently highlight the significant role of supportive networks, which not only facilitate vital professional connections but also offer essential mentorship,

guidance, and avenues for skill enhancement. These networks empower women to navigate complex organizational structures, increase their visibility, and access critical information crucial for career growth.

Thematic analysis of the qualitative data reveals prevalent challenges hindering women's rise to senior management positions. Foremost among these challenges is the glaring contrast in access to developmental support networks compared to their male counterparts. Women frequently express the importance of these networks for career advancement, yet lament their marginalization in predominantly male-dominated networking spheres. This exclusion significantly hampers their ability to cultivate influential relationships and gain recognition within their academic institutions.

Moreover, the study sheds light on entrenched organizational cultures and discriminatory practices that exacerbate these barriers. Gender biases in promotion processes and networking opportunities often favor male candidates, perpetuating the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. Organizational cultures that marginalize women in networking contexts further compound these challenges. Additionally, societal norms discourage women from participating in male-dominated gatherings, further limiting their networking opportunities and support for career progression.

The findings emphasize the urgent need for systemic reforms within Pakistani higher education institutions. Recommendations include initiatives to enhance women's professional support through tailored mentorship programs, leadership training, and equitable access to networking opportunities. Advocacy for policies promoting inclusivity and transparency in career advancement processes is deemed crucial to creating an environment conducive to women's success and achieving parity in senior management roles.

Given that this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the systemic barriers hindering women's advancement in Pakistani university settings.

### **Literature Review**

Women often have fewer developmental support networks compared to their male counterparts. Developmental networks, as described by Higgins and Kram (2001), play a crucial role in providing professional development support (Ismail and Rasdi, 2007) and gaining power within an organization by connecting like-minded individuals (Ismail and Rasdi, 2007). Networking is particularly vital for working women, offering emotional and instrumental support through counseling and mentoring (Coleman, 2011). Ismail and Rasdi (2007) found that networking enabled 31 executive women to access senior positions. Quinlan (1999) highlights that networking with female leader peers provides essential emotional, psychological, and social support in male-dominated fields.

Women perceive that being part of male networks can aid their career success by providing relevant information and resources (Linehan, 2001; Bierema, 2005). However, they remain at a disadvantage due to fewer support networks that promote them within organizations, offer job information, and assist in interviews (Blackmore, 1999). Men, conversely, have established networks and feel more comfortable networking with other men (Coleman, 2011), leading to more networking opportunities for men. In Pakistani universities, Rab (2010) notes a higher percentage of male faculty members who support male colleagues in elections for representative positions and in career promotions, often excluding women from these male-dominated networks and creating barriers to their advancement. Gardiner et al. (2000) agree that women are marginalized from networking because these processes are highly exclusive and male-dominated. Miller (2006) also indicates that a masculine work culture at senior levels causes significant stress for women.

Exclusion from male developmental networks (Tharenou, 2005) and lack of networking opportunities are significant barriers to women's career progression in senior management across professions (York et al., 1988). This segregation limits women's 'social capital' (Burke and Vinnicombe, 2005), resulting in minimal professional support and biased promotion decisions (Ibid). Halford and Leonard (2000) explored the connections between gender, power, and organizations, showing that organizational structures mobilize gender differences rather than importing them from elsewhere (p. 44). Fiske and Lee suggest that stereotypes and prejudice contribute to workplace discrimination. The 'masculine organizational culture' (Miller, 2006) implies that men manage as both managers and men (Blackmore, 1999). (2006) asserts that such discriminatory practices within organizational cultures stress women, and organizations continue to favor male leadership (Coleman, 2005; Blackmore et al., 2006). Brodbridge (2008) found that women's primary family roles, discriminatory attitudes by men, and related organizational cultures are major barriers to women in senior positions. In male-dominated organizations, women receive less support and acceptance (Marcinkus et al., 2007), and they feel threatened as organizations typically favor masculine values and practices (Bagihole, 2002). Kanter (1977) suggested that in male-dominated hierarchies, decision-makers are likely men, and internal networks are male, disadvantaging women.

A research project at five UK universities – Oxford, Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt, Luton, and Surrey – concluded that 'universities are unfriendly to women.' None of the women felt comfortable working in predominantly male environments (Schein, 2005). Women without supportive superiors are likely to perceive their organizations as unfriendly (Allen, 2001), lacking control over work and family matters (Thomas and Ganster, 1995), and more likely to experience work-family conflict (Snow et al., 2003). White (2001) observed that women at senior levels encounter male dominance, which they tend to accommodate rather than challenge.

The under-representation of women in management positions is linked to the lack of professional and institutional support, limiting their career planning and development opportunities (Moorosi, 2010; Greyvenstein, 2000). Morley (2007; 2012) suggests this reflects the micro-politics of the academic world, and Ryan and Haslam

(2006) describe it as the 'glass cliff,' where women are promoted to difficult positions to set them up for failure. Women might expect support from female bosses in male-dominated environments (Wichert, 2011). Zulu (2003) recommends that women in high positions support and affirm other women rather than closing doors once they succeed. Many countries have encouraged the establishment of women's universities, often led by women (Sagaria, 2007), which play a significant role in promoting women's career opportunities (ACU, 2002). Asia has several women's universities (Rowley and Yukongdi, 2009), and Pakistan has seven public and one private women's universities (HEC, 2014).

However, contrary to expectations (ACU, 2002; Zulu, 2003), a study of nearly 1,800 U.S. employees found that women working under female supervisors reported more physical and psychological stress symptoms than those with male supervisors (University of Toronto, 2008). Drexler (2013) reported that a 2007 survey of 1,000 American workers found that 45% had been bullied at work, with 40% of bullies being women. Sloan and Krone (2000) found that hierarchical relationships in society also exist between men and women in the workplace, revealing the 'queen bee' syndrome (Staines et al., 1974). Gender and power issues are not confined to one gender alone, making it challenging to determine if women have better experiences in single-gender institutions.

In addition to the absence of supportive groups, inadequate networking skills among women in organizational settings pose a significant barrier to their professional advancement and career success. Research consistently underscores that women typically possess fewer and less impactful professional networks than their male peers (Coleman, 2011). This deficiency in networking abilities is complex and contributes to numerous challenges that women encounter when navigating and thriving in predominantly male-dominated workplaces.

The limited networking opportunities for women often stem from organizational cultures that are historically male-centric. These cultures may prioritize and facilitate networking styles and environments that are more comfortable and accessible to men, such as informal gatherings, after-work social events, and professional clubs or associations dominated by male members (Burke and Vinnicombe, 2005; Kanter, 1977). Consequently, women may find it challenging to integrate into or benefit from these networks due to exclusionary practices or implicit biases that favor male participation (Miller, 2006).

The nature of networking itself can pose specific challenges for women. Studies suggest that women may face barriers such as time constraints, family responsibilities, and societal expectations that hinder their ability to participate consistently in networking activities (Tharenou, 2005). For instance, networking events often occur outside regular working hours, which can clash with familial obligations or caregiving responsibilities that disproportionately fall on women (Blackmore, 1999).

Moreover, when women do engage in networking, they may encounter social and psychological barriers that affect their networking effectiveness. These barriers include feelings of impostor syndrome, where women may doubt their own abilities or qualifications compared to their male counterparts, thereby reducing their confidence in networking situations (Coleman, 2007). Additionally, studies indicate that women may perceive networking as more transactional or competitive, rather than collaborative, which can influence their approach and outcomes in networking interactions (Ismail and Rasdi, 2007).

Furthermore, the lack of effective networking skills among women can perpetuate a cycle of limited career opportunities and professional development. Networking plays a crucial role in accessing career-enhancing opportunities such as mentorship, sponsorship, job referrals, and knowledge exchange (Ismail and Rasdi, 2007). Without robust networking skills and access to supportive networks, women may miss out on crucial information, career advice, and advocacy that are instrumental in career progression and leadership advancement within organizations (Coleman, 2011).

Given that, addressing the issue of poor networking skills among women requires organizational interventions that promote inclusive networking environments, provide structured networking opportunities that accommodate diverse schedules and responsibilities, and offer support and training to enhance women's confidence and effectiveness in networking interactions. By dismantling systemic barriers and fostering equitable networking opportunities, organizations can empower women to build and leverage meaningful professional connections essential for their career success and advancement.

## **Material and Methods**

### **Sample and Population**

Convenience sampling was utilized to select a diverse sample of participants from eight public sector universities in Pakistan. The study included 30 senior women in positions such as Deans, Directors, Heads of Department, Registrars, and Treasurers, along with 18 junior women aspiring to senior roles in assistant positions. These participants were chosen based on their employment in cadre/BPS 18 and above, encompassing married, single, with children, or without children, representing various university management departments.

### **Data Collection**

Qualitative research techniques were employed, involving in-depth semi-structured interviews with a total of 48 women across senior and junior management roles. Additionally, a focus group discussion was conducted during a conference break at Punjab University, allowing participants to discuss pertinent issues related to the study.

## **Interviews**

While most interviews were audio-recorded, four participants preferred not to be recorded, citing reasons such as media shyness or personal preference. In these cases, detailed notes were taken during the interviews, which typically lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. Follow-up interviews were conducted with two senior participants to delve deeper into specific topics.

## **Focus Group Discussion**

Held during a conference lunch break, the focus group discussion provided an opportunity for participants to share insights and experiences in a facilitated environment. The session, facilitated by the interviewer, was structured to encourage participation and ensure all viewpoints were captured through recording and note-taking.

## **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis, a qualitative research approach, was employed to identify and analyze emerging themes and patterns from the collected data. This iterative process involved continuously revisiting the data to develop cohesive themes that accurately represented participants' perspectives and experiences. Quantitative methods were also integrated to tally the frequency of comments related to each identified theme, enhancing the robustness of the analysis.

## **Ethical consideration ????** add

## **Results And Discussion**

This qualitative investigation rigorously scrutinized the notable underrepresentation of women in senior management positions within Pakistani universities. Employing meticulous methodologies, the research conducted comprehensive semi-structured interviews with a diverse group of women encompassing both senior and junior management roles. These interviews yielded nuanced insights into the multifaceted challenges and barriers encountered by women aspiring to and currently occupying senior positions.

Through these methodological approaches, valuable qualitative data was generated, shedding light on the complex dynamics within Pakistani university environments. Following thematic analysis, several themes emerged, providing deeper understanding and insight into the experiences of women in academic leadership positions. Only main themes are presented below:

### **The Transformative Impact of Networking**

Networking emerged as a critical factor shaping the professional trajectories of women in higher education management. Participants highlighted the profound

impact of having access to supportive networks on their career advancement. These networks not only facilitated valuable professional connections but also provided crucial mentorship, guidance, and opportunities for skill development. Networking enabled women to navigate organizational complexities, increase their visibility, and access information about career advancement opportunities. Moreover, these networks served as platforms for sharing experiences, strategies, and resources among peers, thereby fostering confidence and resilience in facing career challenges. Overall, participants' insights underscored networking's instrumental role in mitigating barriers and enhancing opportunities for women striving to achieve senior management positions in academia.

### **Barriers to Advancement**

The study identified several significant obstacles hindering women's career progression in higher education management. Unequal access to developmental support networks compared to men emerged as a prominent barrier. Women emphasized the essential role of these networks in career advancement, yet many experienced marginalization within predominantly male-dominated environments. This exclusion limited their ability to build influential professional relationships and gain visibility within their organizations, thereby impeding their access to career opportunities and senior roles. These findings underscored systemic barriers within academia and emphasized the urgent need for equitable access to supportive networks and systemic reforms to promote gender equality in leadership roles.

### **Organizational Cultures and Discriminatory Practices:**

Entrenched organizational cultures and discriminatory practices within university settings were found to exacerbate barriers for women advancing their careers. Participants highlighted pervasive gender biases embedded in promotion processes and networking opportunities, which consistently favored male candidates and perpetuated women's underrepresentation in leadership roles. Organizational cultures were described as masculine-dominated, prioritizing traits associated with traditional male leadership styles while marginalizing female professionals. Discriminatory practices in resource allocation, career development opportunities, and decision-making further hindered women's career progression. These findings underscored the critical need for organizational reforms aimed at dismantling gender biases and fostering inclusive environments conducive to women's advancement into senior management positions.

### **Poor networking skills among women**

Interviewees noted that while women had their own networks, these were often ineffective due to difficulties in attending meetings regularly. Senior participants expressed a desire to establish platforms where women could comfortably discuss their ambitions and career needs. Recognizing the lack of such forums as a barrier to professional growth and career advancement, some women

attempted to foster connections with colleagues within the university. However, a significant majority (60.4%) did not actively engage in these efforts:

Participants believed that women possessed the potential to effect change if motivated, but generally lacked their own networks and forums. Even when networking opportunities were available, many women showed disinterest in attending.

### **Call for Systemic Reforms**

The research findings emphasized the pressing necessity for comprehensive systemic reforms within Pakistani higher education institutions. Key recommendations included enhancing professional support mechanisms tailored to women's needs, such as mentorship programs and leadership training initiatives. The study advocated for policies promoting inclusivity and equity in career advancement, transparent decision-making processes, and equal access to networking and leadership roles. These reforms are crucial for creating supportive environments where women can thrive, contribute effectively to academic leadership, and achieve parity in senior management positions within universities.

### **Conclusion**

Through thematic analysis, this qualitative study meticulously examined the significant underrepresentation of women in senior management roles within Pakistani universities. Employing rigorous methodologies, including in-depth semi-structured interviews with a diverse group of women spanning various management positions, the research provided nuanced insights into the challenges hindering women's progression to top management positions.

The findings illuminated the transformative impact of networking on women's career advancement in higher education management. Networking emerged as a critical factor facilitating professional connections, mentorship, and skill development, enabling women to navigate organizational landscapes and access career opportunities. However, barriers such as unequal access to supportive networks and discriminatory practices within organizational cultures perpetuated gender disparities in leadership roles.

The study emphasized the urgent need for systemic reforms within Pakistani higher education institutions. Recommendations included enhancing networking opportunities, addressing systemic barriers, supporting professional development, promoting inclusive organizational cultures, and establishing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress towards gender equity goals.



In summary, the study's findings highlight the complex interplay of societal norms, organizational structures, and individual experiences contributing to gender disparities in senior management within Pakistani academia. By implementing the proposed recommendations, institutions can foster inclusive environments where women have equal opportunities to thrive and contribute effectively to academic leadership, ultimately achieving gender equity in senior management positions.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and implications of the study on "The Impact of Networking on Women's Career Journeys in Higher Education Management," the following recommendations are proposed to address the identified barriers and promote gender equity in senior management within Pakistani higher education institutions:

- Establish formal networking platforms and events that are inclusive and accessible to women in higher education.
- Implement mentorship programs that pair senior female leaders with aspiring women professionals to provide guidance, support, and career advice.
- Foster a culture of networking that values diverse perspectives and contributions, ensuring women have equal opportunities to build influential professional relationships.
- Implement policies that mandate diversity and inclusion training for all faculty and staff to challenge and change entrenched organizational cultures that perpetuate gender disparities.
- Develop leadership training programs tailored to women's unique needs and challenges in academia, focusing on skills such as negotiation, conflict resolution, and strategic planning.
- Encourage participation in conferences, workshops, and seminars that promote professional growth and visibility for women in higher education management.
- Foster a supportive and inclusive organizational culture that values and celebrates diversity in leadership.

These recommendations aim to create a more inclusive and equitable environment within Pakistani higher education institutions, where women have equal opportunities to thrive, contribute effectively to academic leadership, and achieve parity in senior management positions. By addressing systemic barriers and fostering supportive networks and cultures, these reforms can pave the way for transformative change towards gender equity in academia.

**References**

- ACU, 2002; ACU (2014). Association of Commonwealth Universities (2014). *ACU members*. Retrieved from <https://www.acu.ac.uk/membership/acu-members>.
- Bagihole, B. (2002). Challenging equal Opportunities: Changing and Adapting male Hegemony in Academia. *British Journal of Education*, 23, (1) 19-33.
- Bierema, L.L. (2005). Women's networks: A career development intervention or impediment? *Human Resource Development International*. 8 (2), 207-224.
- Blackmore et al., 2006). Blackmore, J., Thomson, P. & Barty, K. (2006). Principal Selection. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 34(3), 297- 315.
- Blackmore, 1999). Blackmore, J. (1999). *Troubling Women: Feminism, Leadership and Educational Change*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Broadbridge, A. (2008). Senior Careers in Retailing: An Exploration of Male and Female Executives: Career Facilitators and Barriers. *Gender in Management*, 23 (1), 11-35.
- Burke and Vinnicombe, 2005), Burke, R. & Vinnicombe, S. (2005). Advancing women's careers. *The Career Development International*, 10, 165-167.
- Coleman, M. (2007). Gender and Educational Leadership in England: A comparison of secondary head teachers' views over time, *School Leadership and Management*, 27, 5.
- Coleman, M. (2011). *Women at the Top; Challenges, Choices and Change*. London: Palgrave Macmillan
- Coleman, M. (2005). *Gender and Headship in the Twenty-First Century*. Nottingham, NCSL.
- Drexler, P. (2013). *The Tyranny of the Queen Bee*. The Wall Street Journal, Retrieved from <http://online.wsj.com/>
- Gardiner, M. E., Enomoto, E., & Grogan, M. (2000). *Coloring outside the lines: mentoring women into school leadership*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Greyvenstein, L. A. (2000). The untapped human resource: An overview of women in Educational management in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 20, 30-33.
- Halford, S., & Leonard, P. (2000). *Gender, Power and Organizations: an Introduction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (2014). Retrieved February 22, 2014 from <http://www.hec.gov.pk/OurInstitutes/Pages/Default.aspx>
- Higgins, M. C., & Kram, K. E. (2001). Reconceptualising mentoring at work: A developmental Network Perspective. *Academy of Management Review*, 26, 264– 288.
- IsIsmail, M. & Rasdi R.M. (2007). Impact of networking on career development: Experience of High-flying women academics in Malaysia. *Human Resources Development International*, 10 (2), 153 – 168.
- Kanter, R. M. (1977). *Men and Women of the corporation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Linehan, M. (2001). Networking for female managers' career development: Empirical evidence. *Journal of Management Development*, 20(10), 823 - 829.
- Marcinkus WC, Whelan-Berry KS, & Gordon, JR. (2007). The Relationship of Social Support to the Work – Family Balance and Work Outcomes of midlife Women'. *Women Manage. Rev*, 22(2), 86-111.
- Miller, K. (2006). *Organizational Communication: Approaches and Processes*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.
- Moorosi, P. (2010). South African female principals' career paths: understanding the gender gap In secondary school management. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 8 (5), 547-562.
- Morley, L. (2006). Hidden transcripts: The micropolitics of gender in commonwealth Universities. *Women Studies International Forum*, 29, 543–51.
- Morley, L. (2007). 'Sister-matic: Gender Mainstreaming in Higher Education. *Teaching in Higher Education* 12(5/6), 607-620.
- Morley, L. (2012). *International trends in women's leadership in Higher Education*. In British Council's International Forum on Women's Leadership in Higher Education, March, 2012. Institute of Education University of London.
- Quinlan (1999) Quinlan, K. M. (1999). Enhancing mentoring and networking of junior academic Women: What, why and how. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 21(1), 31-42.
- Rab, M, (2010). *The Life Stories of Successful Women Academics in Pakistani Public Sector Universities*. (Unpublished EdD Thesis) Institute of Education, University of London.
- Rowley, C. And Yukongdi, V. (2009). *The Changing Face of Women Managers in Asia*, London: Routledge.

- Sloan and Krone (2000) Sloan, D.K., & Krone, K.J. (2000). Women managers and gendered Values'. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 23, 111-130.
- Snow D.L., Swan S.C., & Raghavan C., (2003). The relationship of work stressors, coping and Social support to psychological symptoms among female secretarial employees'. *Work and Stress*, 17 (3), 241-263.
- Staines, G., Travis, C. & Jayarante, T.E. (1974). The queen bee syndrome. *Psychology Today*, 7(8), 55-60.
- Tharenou, P. (2005). Does mentor support increase women's career advancement more than men's? The differential effects of career and psychosocial support. *Australian Journal of Management*, 30(1), 77-109.
- Thomas, L.T & Ganster, D.C. (1995). Impact of family-supportive work variables on work- family conflict and strain. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 80, 6-15.
- White (2001) White, K. (2001). Women in the Professoriate in Australia. *International Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 3(2), 64-76.
- Wichert, I. (2011). *Where Have All the Senior Women Gone? 9 Critical Job Assignments for Women Leaders*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- York et al., 1988). York, R. O. Henley, H. C., & Gamble, D. N (1988). The power of positive mentors: variables associated with women's interest in social work administration. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 24(3), 242-250.
- Zulu, C. (2003). Gender representation patterns in higher education management in South Africa. *South African Journal of higher education*, 17(3), 98-104