
Navigating Tradition and Modernity: Sociocultural and Legal Challenges for Muslim Women in Western HRM Organizations in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at the social and legal issues Muslim women face in Pakistani organizations that have taken on Western human resource management (HRM) practices. It examines how these women deal with the mix of tradition and modernity, trying to balance cultural gender roles with what's expected in today's workplaces. Using feminist and intersectional theories, the research looks at how religious beliefs, cultural values, and legal systems affect women's work experiences.

The study uses qualitative methods, interviewing 15 selected participants from various fields like banking, education, administration, and telecommunications to get their workplace stories. The results show notable differences based on age, job type, and personal views on Islamic teachings impacting the understanding of gender roles and women's rights to work. Participants mentioned widespread bias and discrimination, including doubts about their work skills, push back against their leadership positions, and difficulties in applying workplace harassment laws in a traditional and patriarchal setting.

This study emphasizes the challenges of implementing Western HRM practices in a cultural environment that is strongly traditional. It suggests creating HR policies that are sensitive to local culture, improving legal enforcement, and running awareness programs to fight patriarchal views. By highlighting the various challenges Muslim women face, this research provides important insights for policymakers, HR experts, and researchers working to connect tradition and modernity in Pakistan's work culture.

Keywords: Women's Employment, Western HRM Practices, Sociocultural Dynamics, Legal Framework, Gender Roles

Introduction

1.2. Background and Context

The world is fast changing, and these trends have deeply affected the Pakistani corporate culture with a large selection of companies choosing to implement western HRM frameworks. Considering this development, more educated women have been able to enter the workforce, paving the way for higher female representation in areas such as the banking, academic and telecommunications sectors. Nevertheless, such changes present dilemmas which are particular to Pakistan and are dictated by the cultural context of the country such as, gender roles, collectivism and gender segregation. Legally Pakistani women are able to gain equal rights in the workplace but normally their lives are shaped by social forces and cultural limitations that determine how they function and behave in work settings despite the business areas being western influenced.

Earlier studies shed light on the complicated situations Pakistani women face in these Western HRM workplaces. They run into problems like gender inequality limited social acceptance, and hurdles to their workplace rights.¹ Research highlights the complex impact of Pakistan's cultural landscape on women's position in these companies indicating that a multi-faceted approach is needed to grasp the elements that shape their work life. In environments affected by Western HR methods, women in Pakistan have to juggle modern job roles with old-school expectations, which makes their entry into the workforce even more challenging.²

Research Purpose and Objectives

This study aims to explore how sociocultural ideologies, and legal frameworks influence the workplace experiences of Muslim women working in organizations with Western HRM practices in Pakistan. By focusing on macro-level factors such as religion, cultural values, gender ideologies, and legal structures³ this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges women face as they navigate professional roles within a predominantly patriarchal society. Specifically, the study examines how external societal pressures, including traditional interpretations of gender roles and limitations on women's workplace autonomy, shape their professional lives and attitudes toward employment. This study aims to explore how social and cultural beliefs, along with legal systems, affect the work lives of Muslim women in Pakistani organizations that use Western HR practices. By looking at big-picture factors like religion cultural values, ideas about gender, and laws, this research wants to give a full picture of the hurdles women face as they work in a male-dominated society. The study looks at how outside social pressures such as old-

fashioned views on gender roles and limits on women's freedom at work, shape their careers and how they feel about having a job.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it sheds light on the interplay between cultural and organizational dynamics in Pakistan, where contemporary employment practices often conflict with traditional values. As numerous Pakistani organizations adopt Western HRM models, it becomes crucial to understand the sociocultural and legal factors that influence women's experiences. This understanding is vital for crafting inclusive policies and fostering supportive work environments. By exploring the viewpoints of women across various professions, the study provides a detailed perspective on the challenges they encounter and highlights the necessity for culturally aware HRM practices that advance gender equality while honouring Pakistan's distinct cultural context.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sociocultural Norms and Gender Roles

The sociocultural framework of Pakistan is significantly shaped by collectivist values, which highlight specific gender roles and social hierarchies. The traditional practice of *Purdah*, which enforces gender segregation, continues to influence how men and women interact in different social and economic areas.⁴ *Purdah* is evident in the limitations placed on women regarding their clothing, communication, and movement. These restrictions uphold religious and cultural norms that confine women mainly to domestic and caregiving responsibilities, whereas men are seen as public figures and providers.⁵

The practice of *Purdah*, which enforces gender segregation, has a profound impact on how different social classes, regions, and ethnic groups interact with one another.⁶ This institution has clear manifestations, like limiting women's clothing, communication, and movement, which together strengthen the religious and cultural norms regarding women's behavior in public spaces.⁷ Primarily, *Purdah* aims to maintain social order and align gender relations with Islamic values, placing women in the private sphere as caregivers, while men usually take on public roles.⁸ This cultural framework presents significant challenges for women trying to juggle their professional responsibilities with traditional expectations. Haque notes that these norms frequently result in restricted mobility and diminished career ambitions for women, as entering public spaces for work is perceived as a challenge to conventional roles.⁹

Additionally, societal beliefs about modesty and honor often pressure women to conform to cultural expectations of humility and submission. These norms can discourage women from asserting their rights in the

workplace, resulting in heightened stress as they attempt to balance professional demands with cultural roles (Jabeen & Iqbal, 2020). This intersection of religion and gender roles affects not only women's entry into the workforce but also their acceptance and advancement in professional settings. As more organizations embrace Western HRM practices, women encounter a dual challenge: fulfilling organizational expectations for assertiveness and productivity while adhering to societal ideals of modesty and restraint.¹⁰

2.2. Legal Protections for Women in Pakistan

Pakistan's constitution advocates for gender equality and forbids discrimination, as outlined in Articles 25 and 27.¹¹ The practical implementation of these rights is still constrained by inadequate enforcement mechanisms. Pakistan has ratified multiple international agreements, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which requires equal employment rights. Nevertheless, societal and institutional obstacles frequently hinder the effective realization of these rights.¹²

In recent years, Pakistan has introduced legislation aimed at supporting women in the workplace, most notably the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010. This law aims to protect women from harassment, but its enforcement is often inconsistent, especially in male-dominated industries.¹³ Additional legal frameworks, including the Factories Act of 1934 and the Mines Maternity Benefit Act of 1941, offer protections such as maternity leave and safe working conditions. However, these provisions frequently fall short due to insufficient political commitment and a lack of awareness among female workers.¹⁴ The gap between legal rights and their actual implementation highlights the persistent challenges that Pakistani women encounter in their pursuit of true workplace equality.

2.3. Western HRM Practices and Challenges for Women

The introduction of Western HRM practices in Pakistan brings inclusive policies designed to enhance gender equality in the workplace. These HRM models support equal opportunities in recruitment, compensation, and advancement, as well as initiatives for employee engagement and inclusion. Nevertheless, these Western HRM strategies frequently conflict with Pakistan's traditional values and societal expectations regarding gender roles.¹⁵ The inclusive and assertiveness promoted by Western HRM practices may clash with Pakistan's patriarchal culture, which often emphasizes modesty and gender segregation.

While Western HRM practices promote women's participation and advancement, cultural norms often hinder women from pursuing leadership positions. Organizations that emphasize inclusive and equality frequently

find it challenging to align these values with the wider sociocultural beliefs of their employees and management. Consequently, women entering these organizations may encounter subtle discrimination and exclusion, highlighting the necessity for HRM strategies that are culturally tailored to acknowledge Pakistan's distinct societal context.¹⁶

2.4. Framework for Analyzing Women's Workplace Experiences

To investigate the experiences of women in the context of Western Human Resource Management in Pakistan, this study utilizes a multi-level analytical framework that considers the wider societal and institutional factors at play. At the macro level, elements such as religious beliefs, gender ideologies, and legal structures shape the environment in which women operate. These influences contribute to a complex workplace dynamic where women's professional roles are constantly negotiated in relation to societal expectations.

The multi-level framework enables an examination of how societal norms, organizational practices, and individual experiences interact with one another. At the macro-structural level, external influences like cultural ideologies and legal frameworks play a vital role in shaping workplace policies and interactions.¹⁷ This approach allows for a thorough understanding of the systemic factors that influence women's experiences in the workplace, shedding light on how traditional values can both coexist with and sometimes clash against Western HRM practices. By examining these elements, the study seeks to provide a detailed perspective on the obstacles and supports for women's professional integration in Pakistan. Despite the constitutional protections in Pakistan, like those outlined in Articles 25 and 27, which advocate for equality and forbid gender discrimination.¹⁸ Societal pressures often prevent women from confidently asserting their legal rights in the workplace. Cultural and religious beliefs frequently define what is considered a "suitable" role for women, emphasizing their place in the home and reinforcing gender norms that value modesty and submissiveness over assertiveness.¹⁹ As a result, women face twofold pressures: the expectations of their careers in Western-style organizations and the cultural obligations to maintain family honor and modesty.²⁰ This conflict often leads to psychological stress, as women try to balance the demands of being assertive at work with the societal expectations of being humble.

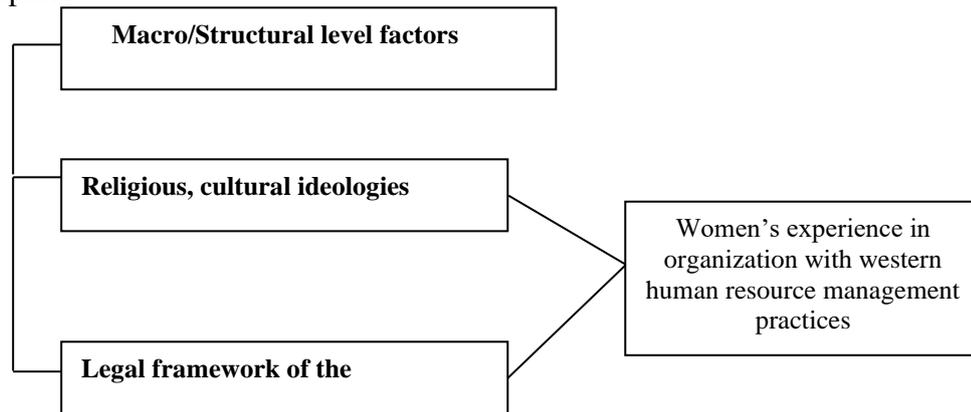
The state of Pakistan has ratified multiple international conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and others that mandate equal rights for women in employment. In support, domestic legislation, such as the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010, was enacted to safeguard women's rights. However, gaps in the implementation of these policies persist,

attributed to weak enforcement mechanisms and limited political will.²¹ Laws such as the Factories Act 1934 and the Mines Maternity Benefit Act (1941) grant essential workplace protections, including provisions for maternity leave, regulated work hours, and safe environments, yet practical enforcement remains inadequate. The disparity between Pakistan’s commitments under international and domestic law and the actual on-ground implementation reveals persistent barriers to achieving substantive equality for women in the workforce.

Through this theoretical framework, the study explores how sociocultural and legal structures impact women’s experiences in Western HRM environments, addressing the ongoing challenges of aligning legal rights with cultural expectations in Pakistan. This analysis offers insights into the tensions between organizational demands and societal norms, highlighting the need for a nuanced approach to enhance women’s integration into the workforce.

3. Theoretical Framework of the Study

The basic purpose of the study was to explore the perspectives of women regarding the effects of sociolect-cultural and legal factors on their workplace environment. That includes i) the role of religious/cultural ideologies regarding women’s role in public life and ii) and role of legal provisions/basic fundamental rights to determine their equal status at the workplace.



4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Approach

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore women’s workplace experiences in mixed, gender-egalitarian environments. The research relied on in-depth interviews as the primary method for gathering rich, detailed insights into the lived experiences of women in various professional sectors. The qualitative design allowed for an in-depth

examination of social and organizational dynamics that shape women's professional integration.

4.2 Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling method was used to choose participants, ensuring a variety of professional backgrounds. The sample included 25 women from different sectors, such as banking, academia, administrative positions, and telecommunications. This strategic selection was designed to gather a wide range of perspectives, offering a thorough understanding of workplace experiences in various organizational settings.

4.3. Sample and Data Collection

Data collection consisted of 15 in-depth interviews with women employed in gender-egalitarian workplace settings. A semi-structured interview guideline, created in line with the study's theoretical framework, directed the conversations. This method allowed for the exploration of essential themes while also providing the flexibility to delve into the individual experiences of the participants. The interview questions aimed to draw out detailed responses about workplace dynamics, gender interactions, and the challenges encountered by women in their professional lives.

4.4: Data Analysis

The data were analysed using a deductive qualitative content analysis approach, adhering to the guidelines set by Leedy and Ormrod.²² Themes and codes emerged from a thorough review of relevant literature and were systematically applied to the interview data. Key findings were highlighted with representative quotations from participants, adding depth and clarity to the analysis. To protect confidentiality, the identities of participants and their organizations were anonymized throughout the research process. This methodological rigor ensured that the analysis was both ethical and a true reflection of the participants' genuine experiences.

5. Findings and Analysis

5.1. Impact of Religious and Cultural Philosophies on Workplace

Participants in the study shared insights into how deeply rooted religious and cultural beliefs influence their experiences, interactions, and acceptance in the workplace. While these beliefs provide a framework for societal norms, they frequently restrict women's professional development and opportunities. A common theme was the conflict between traditional cultural expectations, which often link women to domestic and caregiving roles, and their desires for active involvement in the economy. For example, a participant from the banking sector noted, "*Despite my qualifications I often find myself needing to prove my worth in a male-dominated environment, where traditional views still see women as secondary earners.*" These attitudes not only make it difficult for women to fully integrate into

professional settings but also reinforce the idea that their contributions are merely additional rather than essential.

In fields such as academia and telecommunications, participants also expressed feelings of skepticism about their abilities, often citing instances where male colleagues would undermine their authority or leadership. The pressure to meet cultural expectations, along with workplace discrimination, often resulted in participants feeling undervalued and isolated. These observations underscore how the interplay of cultural beliefs and workplace dynamics continues to hinder the empowerment of women in Pakistan.

The challenges presented by cultural ideologies have a significant impact on women's career paths, mental health, and overall participation in society. In professional settings, these obstacles often restrict opportunities for advancement, particularly in male-dominated fields where women are not seen as equal contributors. This constant need to justify their roles can lead to heightened stress and self-doubt, adversely affecting their mental well-being. From a societal standpoint, these limitations also deter women from entering or staying in the workforce, which ultimately lowers female labor force participation rates. Furthermore, the clash between Western human resource management practices—focused on inclusivity, meritocracy, and equality and local cultural norms creates ongoing challenges for organizations trying to adopt modern frameworks without alienating their employees.

The study highlights the importance of implementing culturally sensitive policies to address these issues. Programs such as gender-sensitization training, mentorship opportunities, and the elevation of female leaders can help combat discriminatory attitudes. Additionally, creating a supportive organizational culture that honors religious and cultural values while promoting inclusivity is essential for breaking down barriers and ensuring that women can participate equitably in the workplace.

5.2. Experiences of Discrimination and Social Constraints

Participants from different sectors shared their experiences of gender discrimination, biases, and social obstacles. Women in the banking industry voiced considerable frustration with their workplace interactions, especially highlighting how male colleagues frequently took over informal conversations. One participant remarked, “The work environment seems fine on the surface, but during breaks, male colleagues often steer discussions towards women.” This behavior reveals persistent gender biases, even in companies that publicly advocate for gender equality.

In male-dominated fields like telecommunications and banking, participants pointed out the lack of proper infrastructure, such as restrooms and common areas for women, which worsened workplace difficulties. Restrictions on mobility further hindered career advancement, as one sales manager noted, “My role requires fieldwork, but I’m often restricted, which

affects my career.” On the other hand, women in academia encountered more subtle obstacles, like discomfort in leadership positions. A female chairperson shared, “When I was offered this position, I hesitated because I believe in gender-segregated roles,” highlighting how cultural expectations often limit women’s aspirations for leadership.

Another respondent remarked, “Working moms are treated differently than working dads. It’s seen as a negative, or a sign of unreliability, for a mom to be working. I might need a day off or work from home or need an hour here or there to attend to my son. For men, it’s viewed as ‘Oh, what a good dad to help out and be involved.’”

The sociocultural and infrastructural challenges that working women in Pakistan face significantly impact their career development, mental well-being, and participation in society. Gender discrimination, biased attitudes, and insufficient workplace facilities create barriers that restrict women’s professional opportunities and perpetuate societal inequalities. These challenges are especially evident in sectors where Western human resource management (HRM) practices try to function within deeply rooted traditional norms, leading to a disconnect between policy and practice.

One of the most noticeable effects of these challenges is on women's career advancement. The lack of gender-sensitive facilities, like restrooms and common areas for women creates a workplace environment that does not accommodate their needs, particularly in male-dominated industries like banking and telecommunications. Mobility restrictions further exacerbate these challenges, as roles requiring fieldwork are often inaccessible to women due to cultural constraints. For instance, a sales manager noted that her career progression was hindered by such restrictions, limiting her ability to excel in her role. Additionally, cultural norms often discourage women from pursuing leadership opportunities. This is evident in academia, where women hesitate to assume leadership positions due to internalized beliefs about gender-segregated roles. Such barriers reduce the representation of women in decision-making positions, hindering their professional development and contribution to organizational leadership.

These challenges also have a profound effect on women's mental health. The experience of gender biases in the workplace, such as male colleagues dominating discussions or trivializing women’s contributions, creates a sense of exclusion and professional dissatisfaction. Over time, this can lead to stress, frustration, and feelings of inadequacy. Women who internalize societal expectations may also struggle with self-doubt, as seen in the case of a female academic leader who hesitated to accept a chairperson position. This internal conflict, compounded by external pressures, can negatively affect women’s confidence and overall well-being.

Beyond the workplace, these constraints have broader implications for societal participation. Cultural and social norms that limit women's roles in professional settings also restrict their visibility and influence in wider societal and economic development. Women's reluctance to engage in leadership roles or fieldwork reflects the societal expectation of maintaining gender-segregated roles, which diminishes their representation in public and professional spheres. This perpetuates patriarchal structures, reducing the potential for women to contribute to societal progress and shaping a more inclusive future.

The conflict between Western HRM practices and local sociocultural norms further complicates these issues. While many organizations adopt Western HRM systems that promote inclusivity and gender equality, the persistence of discriminatory behaviors and the lack of supportive infrastructure undermine these efforts. For instance, male-dominated discussions and the trivialization of women's roles persist even in workplaces that outwardly advocate for equality. This dissonance highlights a significant gap between policy and practice, which prevents organizations from fostering genuinely inclusive environments.

To address these multifaceted challenges, a holistic approach is essential. Organizations must invest in gender-sensitive infrastructure to meet basic needs, such as dedicated facilities for women. Diversity training programs can raise awareness about implicit biases and promote respectful workplace interactions. Furthermore, mentorship and leadership development initiatives tailored to women's needs can build their confidence and encourage them to take on decision-making roles. Importantly, culturally adaptive HR policies should align organizational goals with local societal values, ensuring inclusivity without alienating traditional norms.

By addressing these barriers comprehensively, workplaces can support women's career growth, mental well-being, and societal participation. Bridging the gap between Western HRM practices and local cultural expectations will not only benefit women but also create more inclusive and equitable workplace environments in Pakistan.

5.3. Challenges in Enforcing Legal Protections

The weak enforcement of workplace harassment policies in Pakistan continues to hinder women's career progression, mental well-being, and societal participation. Although legal frameworks exist to address harassment, cultural and institutional resistance often renders these measures symbolic, creating environments where women feel unsafe and unsupported. Fear of retaliation and lack of faith in grievance mechanisms deter women from reporting incidents, resulting in unresolved conflicts that limit professional advancement. This institutional mistrust contributes to psychological distress, including heightened stress and diminished self-confidence, ultimately affecting job satisfaction and retention.

Moreover, the failure to address workplace harassment restricts women's public and economic engagement, reinforcing patriarchal norms and limiting their representation. The misalignment between Western HRM principles emphasizing equity and accountability and Pakistan's socio-cultural context further impedes progress. Addressing these issues requires effective policy enforcement, independent grievance mechanisms, and culturally informed training to bridge institutional gaps. Such measures are essential for fostering inclusive workplaces and promoting gender equity in Pakistan's professional landscape.

5.4. Impact of Profession, Age, and Gender Role Perceptions

Participants' workplace experiences were significantly influenced by their profession, age, and perceptions of gender roles. Younger women in male-dominated sectors, such as banking and telecommunications, expressed frustration with restrictive societal perceptions and challenging workplace interactions. While they were aware of their legal rights to work, they reported psychological and emotional strain stemming from societal resistance to women's economic participation.

Women in academia experienced fewer overt barriers, as education is generally considered a more socially acceptable profession for women. However, they still faced cultural expectations that conflicted with their professional responsibilities. In contrast, women in banking encountered systemic issues, including inadequate workplace facilities and segregation, which reinforced gender disparities. For instance, the absence of common rooms for women hindered their sense of inclusion, even in organizations outwardly promoting equality.

Across professions, participants emphasized the need for institutional support systems, such as daycare facilities, to alleviate the dual burden of work and family responsibilities. This was particularly crucial for women managing both professional and domestic roles, who felt such resources would reduce workplace pressures and enhance their productivity. Although workplace legal protections were acknowledged, participants largely viewed them as ineffective due to socio-cultural and organizational barriers. As one respondent noted, "Rights exist, but the socio-cultural environment hinders their implementation." This underscores the urgent need for structural reforms to address organizational practices and societal norms, ensuring the effective enforcement of workplace rights and facilitating women's professional integration in Pakistan.

The influence of profession, age, and gender role perceptions significantly impacts women's career growth, mental health, and societal participation in Pakistan. Younger women in male-dominated sectors like banking and telecommunications face restrictive societal norms and

systemic challenges, such as inadequate facilities and workplace segregation, which hinder their professional advancement. Even in academia, where barriers are subtler, cultural expectations often conflict with professional roles, discouraging women from pursuing leadership positions. These challenges also take a psychological toll, as women struggle with stress, exclusion, and dissatisfaction, exacerbated by the dual burden of work and family responsibilities. The lack of institutional support systems, such as daycare facilities, further compounds workplace pressures and mental health issues. Additionally, these barriers limit women's societal participation by reinforcing patriarchal norms and reducing their representation in professional and public spheres. Western HRM practices aimed at inclusivity often clash with local cultural norms, creating a disconnect that undermines the effectiveness of such policies. To address these issues, organizations must adopt culturally sensitive approaches, including gender-sensitive infrastructure, diversity training, and stronger enforcement of workplace protections, to foster inclusive and equitable environments.

6. Results and Discussion

6.1. Balancing Western HRM and Traditional Gender Norms

Integrating Western HRM practices with Pakistan's sociocultural norms presents significant challenges. While organizations often implement gender equality policies aligned with global HRM standards, societal attitudes toward women's economic roles frequently clash with these measures. Women in banking and telecommunications reported psychological and emotional strain due to societal resistance. One participant shared, "The working environment is good outwardly, but during breaks, male colleagues often focus discussions on women," highlighting how traditional gender biases persist even in workplaces with formal equality policies.²³ These findings align with Shaheen's analysis of workplace dynamics in Pakistan, which emphasizes the pervasive impact of cultural norms on professional interactions²⁴

6.2. Implications for Organizational Policies

The study underscores the necessity of culturally adaptive policies that address structural and infrastructural barriers faced by women. Beyond symbolic gender equality initiatives, organizations must invest in practical solutions such as common rooms, restrooms, and daycare facilities. For instance, a sales manager in telecommunications shared, "My role requires fieldwork, but I'm often restricted, which affects my career."²⁵ Such restrictions not only limit career progression but also perpetuate informal segregation

The impact of gender stereotyping on women is evident irrespective of the level of position women belong to in an organization. However, it is more salient when managerial or leadership positions are concerned²⁶

6.3. Comparative Insights with International Standards

When compared to international HRM standards, Pakistan's approach to gender equality shows significant gaps in policy implementation. Global frameworks emphasize proactive enforcement of anti-harassment policies and equal opportunity practices, yet respondents in this study viewed such policies in Pakistan as largely symbolic. A university faculty member remarked, "We avoid reporting harassment as we don't expect justice from these committees," reflecting broader distrust in formal mechanisms.²⁷ The disconnect between policy formulation and enforcement reflects findings by Budwar and Debrah, who argue that local contexts often undermine the effectiveness of global HRM practices.²⁸

6.4. Challenges in Enforcing Legal Protections

Enforcing workplace protections like anti-harassment policies remains a significant challenge within patriarchal organizational structures. Many respondents were either unaware of such policies or perceived them as ineffective due to weak enforcement. One participant summarized, "Rights exist, but the socio-cultural environment hinders their implementation, making them largely ineffective." This aligns with Sultana's observations about the role of informal networks and patriarchal resistance in undermining legal protections for women due to patriarchy, where women are deprived of their legal rights and opportunities. Patriarchal values restrict women's mobility, reject their freedom over themselves as well as their property.²⁹ Strengthening these frameworks requires cultural change and improved accountability mechanisms.

6.5. Impact of Profession, Age, and Gender Role Perceptions

Women's workplace experiences varied based on profession, age, and individual perceptions of gender roles. Younger women in banking expressed greater dissatisfaction with workplace interactions and societal attitudes, citing mobility restrictions and inadequate infrastructure as significant barriers. Conversely, university faculty viewed education as a more respectful profession but still faced cultural discomfort in leadership roles. A female chairperson noted, "When offered this position, I hesitated because I believe in gender-segregated roles"³⁰

6.6. The interplay of profession and societal perceptions demonstrates the multifaceted challenges women face.

Women in telecommunications highlighted difficulties in customer interactions within a conservative social context, while respondents in banking and academia emphasized the need for systemic changes, such as

daycare facilities, to address dual-role pressures. These findings resonate with exploration of how gender roles and organizational culture interact to shape women's professional experiences in South Asia.³¹

The findings underscore the need for culturally sensitive policies, stronger enforcement of legal protections, and infrastructural support to enhance women's workplace integration in Pakistan. Bridging the gap between global gender equality standards and local realities demands a holistic approach that considers societal norms, organizational practices, and individual experiences. Systemic reforms and greater awareness of workplace rights are vital to creating environments where women can thrive. While banking professionals acknowledged efforts toward gender inclusion, they highlighted inadequate infrastructure—such as the absence of common rooms and restrooms—that reinforces informal segregation. In male-dominated sectors like banking and telecommunications, such gaps, along with mobility restrictions, continue to hinder women's career advancement.

The participants also identified the women role in society is control by socio cultural norms. The respondents talked about the challenges that women have to face in workplace. They recognized that several forms of gender inequality as well as socio cultural and personal barriers which consistently restrict women's employment opportunities should also be resolved. Most interviewees thought that gender inequality and socio cultural were the main prompting factors at work. In this perspective, Pakistan's low level of women's empowerment is a real problem because the nation is almost at the bottom of the Gender Gap Index, coming in at number 151 out of 153 countries assessed (World Economic Forum. The global gender gap report 2020. Geneva).

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study highlights the intricate interplay of cultural norms, religious beliefs, and workplace challenges that shape the professional experiences of Muslim women in Pakistan, particularly within organizations adopting Western HRM practices. Key findings include and recommendations:

- **Cultural and Religious Influence:** Deeply ingrained cultural and religious ideologies often conflict with the demands of professional environments, reinforcing traditional gender roles and creating resistance to women's economic participation.
- **Workplace Discrimination and Bias:** Women face systemic discrimination, ranging from overt harassment to subtle biases, particularly in male-dominated industries like banking and telecommunications.

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- **Inadequate Legal and Structural Support:** Legal protections against workplace harassment are perceived as largely symbolic, with weak enforcement mechanisms failing to address gender-based inequities.
 - **Dual Responsibilities:** The lack of supportive infrastructure, such as daycare facilities and gender-sensitive spaces, exacerbates the challenges of balancing professional and domestic roles.
 - **Profession-Specific Challenges:** Women in banking and telecommunications face mobility restrictions and inadequate facilities, while those in academia encounter resistance to leadership roles due to cultural expectations.

7.2. Recommendations for Policy and Practice

To foster equitable and inclusive workplaces, the following steps are recommended:

1. **Culturally Adaptive Policies:** Develop policies that respect local traditions while promoting gender equity, such as flexible working arrangements and gender-specific accommodations.
2. **Strengthen Legal Frameworks:** Establish independent, transparent mechanisms to enforce workplace harassment laws and encourage reporting without fear of retaliation.
3. **Infrastructure Investments:** Provide essential facilities, including daycare centers, restrooms, and common rooms, to address women's specific needs and improve workplace inclusivity.
4. **Leadership Development:** Introduce mentorship programs and targeted initiatives to increase women's representation in leadership positions, particularly in sectors with entrenched gender stereotypes.
5. **Awareness and Sensitization:** Conduct regular training programs on diversity, inclusion, and gender sensitivity to mitigate implicit biases and create a supportive organizational culture.
6. **Support Networks:** Establish women's support system within organizations to offer peer mentorship and collective advocacy for workplace improvements.

7.3. Future Research Directions

Future research can expand on these findings by examining sector-specific challenges in industries such as healthcare and technology, and by analyzing regional disparities between urban and rural settings to assess the influence of sociocultural norms. Intersectional factors—such as socioeconomic status, education, and marital status—also warrant closer attention for their

role in shaping women's workplace experiences. Comparative studies involving Muslim women in other Islamic-majority or South Asian contexts can further contextualize these dynamics. Additionally, incorporating male colleagues' perspectives may facilitate more inclusive and collaborative solutions. This study underscores the importance of aligning Western HRM frameworks with Pakistan's cultural realities. Lasting change requires both structural reform and cultural transformation to dismantle gender biases and enable meaningful professional participation for women.

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