

Assessing Social and Work Environmental Factors Towards Women Upward Career Development: An Empirical Study from Pakistan

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Abstract

The goal of this research was to find the relationship between the work environment and societal issues that impede women's advancement to senior management positions. The study included 500 women professionals from diverse firms in Pakistan's business sector, of whom 100 were chosen as the sample size using a purposive sampling method. Experts confirmed the validity of the study tool, which was a questionnaire, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to verify its reliability (0.704–0.982). The model's standardized regression coefficients suggested that social factors (0.298) were the most important factors determining women's empowerment in terms of career development and that they were further influenced by factors related to the work environment (0.411). It was concluded that organizational rules for female employees assist them to maintain a balance between work and family, resulting in a less stressful working environment. The role of the social factor as a mediator is also thought to be important in maintaining a healthier work environment in companies. It was also determined that much more work needs to be done on promotional regulations, as well as gender-blind legislation so that women's professional advancement is not limited to middle management.

Keywords: Women Career Development, Social Factors, Barriers, Corporate Sector, Pakistan

JEL Classification Code: M50, M12, O15

1. Introduction

Women's empowerment is a complex and nuanced phenomenon with many distinct definitions across

cultures. Women's empowerment typically relates to a woman's feeling of self-development, her ability to seek out available decisions and opportunities, the impact of societal changes, and her ability to govern her life both within and outside the house. Women have more freedom to exhibit and improve their capacity as productive employees, caretakers, and overall more capable household heads than men (Sen, 1999).

Women's economic engagement is linked to increased economic growth. Women's empowerment has the potential to accelerate progress. As a result, ensuring that both genders have a fair playing field is vital. Gender equality is also emphasized in Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). More sustainable economies will result from equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes for women. In many countries throughout the world, implementing new legal frameworks for female equality in the workplace and the prohibition of harmful practices directed at women is crucial to ending gender-based discrimination. Surprisingly, the World Development

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Report (World Bank, 2012) identifies gender equality as a critical goal and expects effective initiatives to achieve it.

Women take on many different jobs throughout their lives, and society expects them to do so regularly. As a result, women's career growth patterns, responsibilities, development obstacles, and a number of other concerns differ from men's. To begin with, few women in business occupy mentorship and leadership positions that can act as role models for other women (Baker & McKenzie, 2001). A range of factors may impact women's advancement into leadership positions as they advance in their careers. For example, the culture of power is frequently oriented on male dominance, and as a result, men occupy most of the top echelons and executive ranks. Women held 6 percent of CEO roles in S&P 500 companies in December 2019. Women held 7.8 percent of CEO roles at the end of 2020, up from 6.7 percent at the start of 2020, with UPS, Clorox, Citigroup, CVS, and Dick's Sporting Goods naming women to lead their organizations.

In Pakistan, a male-dominated culture dictates women's lives. Women are denied proportionate rights under such socioeconomic systems. There are huge disparities between men and women in terms of wealth, education, salary rate, work, personal security, asset control, and administrative engagement. Although gender relations are not uniform across the country, Pakistani society is overwhelmingly male. Gender differences are huge, and establishing laws to defend women's rights can have far-reaching implications for women's empowerment. Women are governed by males in most domains, and men frequently hold crucial positions of power. As a result, Pakistan is indisputably one of the countries with significant gender disparities.

Representation of women on boards and senior positions has been a topic of increasing attention in Pakistan in recent times. Financial or non-financial matters of the firms are often linked with gender representation. In Pakistan, 48.54 percent of the population comprising of women, this constitutes a significant portion of the workforce. Even though women have been a driving force in the development of their countries by becoming journalists, engineers, doctors, researchers, anthropologists, social workers, and so on, their true potential has yet to be realized.

Women labor force participation climbed from 12.51 percent in 1995 to only 24.93 percent in 2017, according to a World Bank (2012) report. In Pakistan, there is a severe imbalance of women professionals on corporate boards and in upper corporate management positions. Improved corporate leadership and economic empowerment opportunities for women are critical. Women's involvement on corporate boards was only 4 percent in several of Pakistan's major firms, according to a study (Baqir et al., 2020).

Women in Pakistan, as in other male-dominated countries, are still subjected to conventional male-centric rules as well as a number of social and cultural hurdles

(Saifuddin et al., 2019). Sociocultural and economic factors commonly influence the shape and trajectory of women's interest in the employment market in the country. Social and cultural barriers, as well as gender differences in society, particularly in the job sector, limit their entrepreneurial alternatives. Because managers assume that women's principal vocation is that of housewives, their human capital is viewed as inferior to men's.

As a result of the exploitation of female employees, women have accumulated in the auxiliary division of the labor market. The connection of women with tradition, which is popularly referred to as the purdah, is one societal pressure that Pakistani women face. Women are unable to make an effect in Pakistan's workforce because, in a developing country like Pakistan, the family, cultural, and social milieu restricts and discourages women from having any form of decision-making authority.

Because men in the corporate sector have more and better opportunities, women's entrepreneurial expertise in Pakistan does not realize its full potential. There are 4,000 directors on the boards of 559 publicly traded companies, with women making up a small percentage of that number. According to a study, twenty-one of the 559 companies registered on the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) have a female director on their board of directors, while 32 other companies have independent female directors (Dilawar, 2017).

As Pakistan develops as an economic and cultural power, there is an urgent need for a better understanding of the cultural environment, organizational practices, and individual factors that influence women's career advancement. According to the World Economic Forum, in 2017, Pakistan ranked 143rd out of 144 countries in terms of women's progress. The findings of the study shed light on key variables that stymie women's advancement in the workplace. Understanding the factors that limit women's potential is the job of organizational management. The findings of the study may also aid in a better understanding of the challenges that women face in several areas of Pakistan. The findings can help companies devise strategies to boost the number of women in top management positions. Gender disparity affects communities and countries, and this research can help the government understand it and develop policy measures to overcome it.

The purpose of this study was to expand on previous research into women's perceptions of work environmental and social factors that contribute to success and act as impediments to women's advancement to senior management roles. The precise research objective was: What main social and work environmental factors do women experience in advancing to senior management positions?

2. Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of the associated literature on the topic under consideration, as offered by

various researchers, scholars, analysts, and authors. It also conducts a literature evaluation concerning the research objective of factors influencing women's career growth in the corporate sector in Pakistan.

Many scholars have demonstrated that the existence and persistence of stereotyped cultural norms and socialization, as well as gender biases, explain the underrepresentation of women in senior management positions (Embry et al., 2008; Shah, 2009). Stereotypes - preconceptions of women's roles - were consistently detected in the Catalyst (2005) survey. Gender prejudices were the most common barriers to women's advancement (Vinkenburg & Van, 2005). Coleman (2011) further showed that 'gendered attitudes' play a significant effect on women's job advancement and significantly support women's childcare and home obligations (Hewlett et al., 2005), whereas males have historically been allocated the breadwinner role (Snow et al., 2003; Duxbury and Higgins, 2005). While their male counterparts did not have the obligations for housekeeping and childcare during their working lives, the majority of females believed that they did and that these responsibilities exacerbated their stress levels; the family structure has a significant impact on career success. Mustapa et al. (2018) found that both work-life balance and women's career advancement is important to retain women in the working environment.

According to Morrison et al. (1987), top management support was shown to be the most important element in women's career advancement in a study of female executives. Similarly, according to Mattis (1995), firms' initiatives are more likely to succeed if CEOs understand the need for initiatives and adopt strategies for women's progress. Organizations bear the major duty of fostering a positive environment (Schmidt & Duenas, 2002). Friendly workplace policies are provided by a supportive environment, however senior management commitment is required to adopt such rules. Thus, top management must be involved in addressing women's related issues at work. To break the discriminatory attitudes and remove the barriers that prevent women from realizing their full potential, it is most important to comprehend the barriers that women face. Secondly, it is important to take note of the strategies employed by successful women to overcome their insecurities and to achieve the right balance between personal and professional obligations.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

There are a number of hypotheses as to why women have been unable to advance in their careers in the workplace. Some corporate leaders, for example, believe that women are too sensitive and weak to handle clients and problems, but these women are also classified as "bitches" if they become assertive and aggressive, according to a "double-bind theory"

(Carroll, 1989). Women lack specific masculine personality attributes that would allow them to be effective managers, according to the characteristic theory of leadership. Most women still believe the following myths, making it impossible for them to see the value in pursuing their careers. Burton (1991) and Bierema and Opengart (2002) discovered that the issues that surround women's upward career development are rooted in the work environment, social views, and direct job experience.

2.2. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 below shows a clear picture of the theoretical framework that indicates the factors (Social factors and work environment factors) affecting women's career advancement in the corporate sector of Pakistan.

3. Methodology

3.1. Population, Sampling Technique, and Data Collection

A survey-based study is the research design. The study's participants are all female employees of the Perak State Secretariat in Ipoh. The women who work in Pakistan's corporate sector serve as the study's unit. In this investigation, the cluster sampling technique was used. Because the population is separated into groups based on various departments, cluster sampling was chosen.

The study's goal is to identify and assess the elements that influence women's career advancement in Pakistan's business sector. Because the population is large and homogeneous, the study is conducted with a purposive sample. A total of nearly 71 people from various backgrounds were surveyed. To make the study more convenient and fruitful, the sample is separated into senior, middle, and junior level managers. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire was created using previous research.

3.2. Data Analysis Method

Smart Partial Least Squares (PLS) path modeling is used to conduct the analysis in which the impact of various factors or impediments on the career development of women is investigated. PLS was also used to determine the significance level. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is based on a second-generation multi-derivative approach. It's especially useful in marketing research investigations. This method is recommended since it examines both additive casual models and linear models, both of which are backed by several studies (Kaplan & Norton, 2004). SEM is the best approach when dealing with business-related studies, as it uses latent variables that are unobservable and

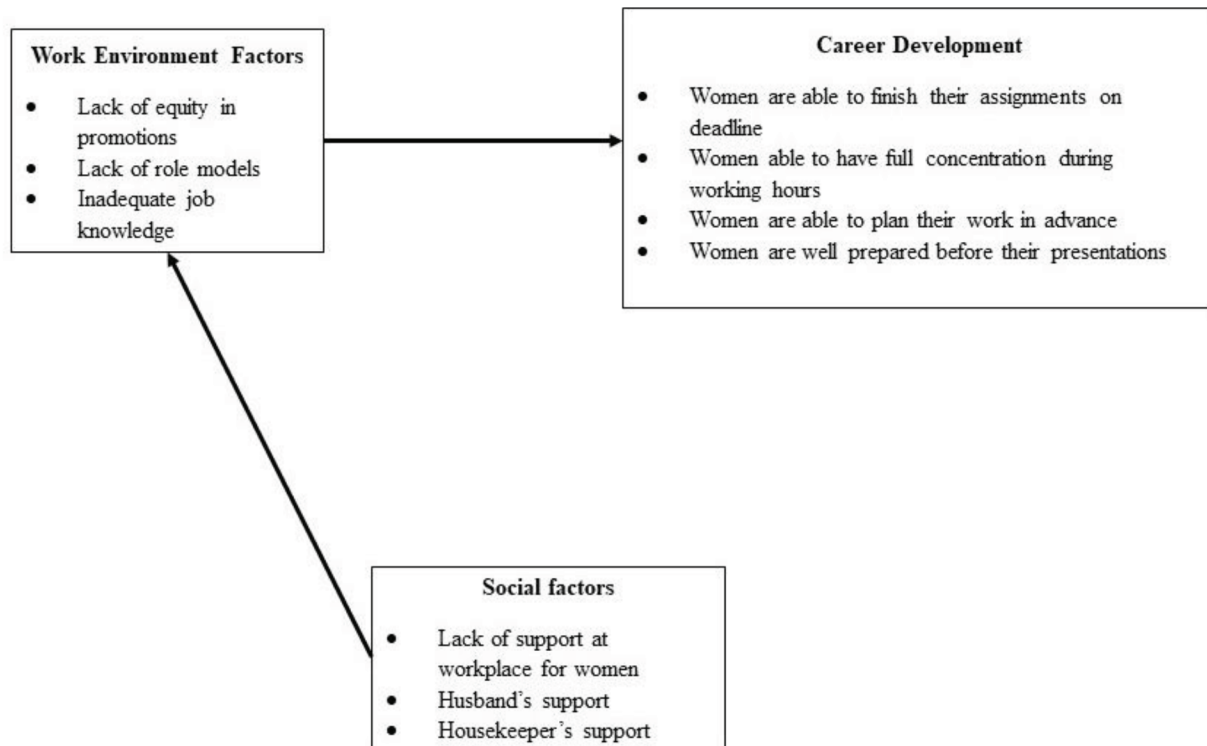


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

hard-to-calculate or even having both issues. The structural equation model is based on further two sub-models. The internal model describes the interconnection between both independent and dependent latent variables. While the outer model explains the relationship amongst the latent variables and their respective observed indicators.

4. Results

4.1. Demographic Information

4.1.1. Age, Education, Marital Status, and Work Experience

Table 1 shows that the vast majority of women (39.2%) were between the ages of 26 and 30. Similarly, the bulk of the responders (83.5%) had completed their education at the Master's level. According to the findings, 57 percent of the women were single, 31.6 percent were married, and 1.3 percent were divorced. These findings also reveal a trend of late marriage, indicating that women want to settle down early in their careers so that they can focus on their careers before deciding to marry. Table 1 reveals that all of the respondents have prior experience.

4.1.2. Respondent's Work Specializations

The data was gathered from women from various fields and backgrounds. Table 2 shows that 5.1 percent of respondents worked in the field of data management, 43 percent in engineering/production, 13.9 percent in administration, 10.1 percent in finance, 1.3 percent in gender development, 11.4 percent in human resource (HR), 2.5 percent in teaching, 1.3 percent in graphic design, and 1.3 percent in marketing/merchandising.

4.2. Empirical Results

Table 3 indicates the results of CFA. To measure how reliable factors loadings, occur, cross-loadings of the constructed variable were implemented. The thumb rule suggests that for every factor, 0.7 must be the loading criterion. According to some studies, numbers ranging from 0.5 to 0.7 are considered weak loadings, but they can also be regarded as legitimate and an indicator of validity (Hair et al., 1998). Although several parameters are calculated with low loadings, it is clear that the AVE is unaffected. Factor loadings are used to calculate extracted variances, composite reliabilities, and factor loadings. The values of convergent validity are given in

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Age	<25	20	25.3	28.2	28.2
	26–30	31	39.2	43.7	71.8
	31–35	8	10.1	11.3	83.1
	35–40	4	5.1	5.6	88.7
	41–45	5	6.3	7.0	95.8
	>45	3	3.8	4.2	100.0
Marital Status	Unmarried	45	57.0	63.4	63.4
	Married	25	31.6	35.2	98.6
	Divorced	1	1.3	1.4	100.0
Educational Level	Bachelors	3	3.8	4.2	4.2
	Masters	66	83.5	93.0	97.2
	Higher Studies	2	2.5	2.8	100.0
Work Experience	1–5 years	43	54.4	54.4	64.6
	6–10 years	18	22.8	22.8	87.3
	11–15	3	3.8	3.8	91.1
	16–20	4	5.1	5.1	96.2
	>20	3	3.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	79	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Respondent's Work Specializations

Work Specialisations	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Data Management	4	5.1	5.6	5.6
Engineering/Production	34	43.0	47.9	53.5
Administration	11	13.9	15.5	69.0
Finance	8	10.1	11.3	80.3
Gender Development	1	1.3	1.4	81.7
HR	9	11.4	12.7	94.4
Teaching	2	2.5	2.8	97.2
Graphic designing	1	1.3	1.4	98.6
Marketing/ Merchandising	1	1.3	1.4	100.0

the table below. Composite reliability scores indicate how well the construct indicators specify the latent construct. It varies between 0.799 and 0.865.

According to Hair et al. (2017) standards, AVE values can be justified if the composite reliability of all latent constructs surpasses the indicated threshold of 0.7 to 0.5, which is the minimum criterion for AVE values, and where they all must be greater than this base value. Table 6 shows

that the average variance retrieved ranges from 0.544 to 0.616. The overall amount of variance in the indicators accounted for in the latent construct is mirrored by these average variances. As demonstrated above, all values of latent construct average variances extracted are greater than 0.5. The results show that verifying convergent validity is appropriate when the construct clarifies the AVE (IV2, IV3, CD).

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed via PLS on the hypothesized model in Figure 2 below to ensure its applicability. Structured Equation Modelling (SEM) PLS was used to examine the factor loading design. The test is used to determine to construct validity and to determine how reliable the model's elements, such as discriminant validity, outer loadings, and convergent of the

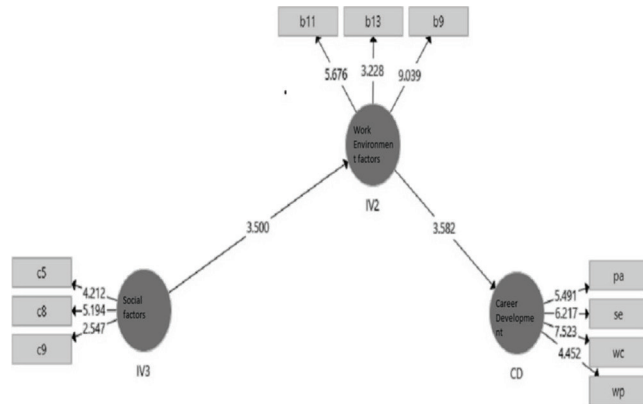


Figure 2: Effects of Social Factors on Women Career Development via Work Environment Factors

constructs for which Smart PLS was used, are. The figure below depicts PLS route modeling.

Discriminant validity, sufficient reliability, and convergent validity are all well-represented in Table 4. The average variance retrieved from the model is more than the square correlations for each construct, indicating that the measure is discriminantly valid and efficient. The square root of every construct of the Average variance extracted surpasses its determined maximum correlation among the constructs for all other constructs (Hair et al., 2017). The correlations of the constructs are smaller than all of the values across, as seen in the table.

The *R*-square values of 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75 show low, moderate, and high correlation with the endogenous variable respectively. These values show how accurate the predictive values for the “goodness of model” occurs. As shown in Table 5, the values of CD’s *R*-Square are 0.089, indicating that the model has an accuracy of 8.9%. Whereas IV2 has a slightly better accuracy value of 0.169, indicating that the model has a 16.9% long-term prediction accuracy.

To test the hypothesis, path coefficients, *p*, and *t* values of the SEM were measured and used. All the path coefficients (*B*’s) of the latent constructs are shown in Table 6. The results and analysis of statistics demonstrate that the link between IV2 and CD - Career Development

Table 3: Results for Measurement Model of CFA

Construct	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach’s Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Work Environment			0.798	0.865	0.616
	b11(Lack of role models)	0.779			
	b13(Inadequate job knowledge)	0.596			
	b9(Lack of equity in promotions)	0.818			
Social factors			0.600	0.799	0.544
	c5(Lack of support at a workplace for women)	0.795			
	c8(Husband’s support for women)	0.856			
	c9(House keeper’s support for women)	0.671			
Career Development			0.714	0.8	0.605
	Pa (Plan my work)	0.803			
	Se (Finish my assignments on deadline)	0.768			
	Wc(Work concentration during working hours)	0.826			
	Wp(Well-prepared before my presentation)	0.740			

(H1) consists of the values ($\beta = 0.298$, $t = 3.582$). It also confirms the relationship between the IV3 - Work Environment and IV2 - Social Factors (H2) having values ($\beta = 0.411$, $t = 3.500$). Therefore, the relationship between variables is highly significant.

5. Discussion

The study has shown that social factors have a predominant impact on the professional development of women and often result in various societal pressures. Women must go the extra mile professionally in comparison with men as they are restricted to their traditional roles and must also fulfill their professional expectations at the same time. Results suggest that women's husbands have a significant role to play in their career progression, but societal barriers act as a hindrance. Men are considered providers for the family, but women are generally restricted as caretakers of the family. Therefore, in terms of women's career opportunities, motherhood is seen to have a detrimental effect on the other hand, it is found to have positive effects on men's opportunities. Therefore, social conditions play a salient role in determining women's career growth. These results are in line with that of Fuegen et al. (2004) and Khanh (2021).

Employee training and development, mentorship, employee performance evaluation, and equity in the employee promotion process are all factors in the work environment (Emnawer et al., 2021). Several studies

(Singh et al., 2006; Schein, 2007) suggest that the climate for women's professional growth is improving, and that prominent firms are making efforts, but that there is still much to be done. Workplace practices, or organizational practices, continue to demonstrate that discriminatory practices within businesses, such as training and development, promotion choices, mentoring roles, and selection procedures, reflect stereotypes and prejudices against women in the workplace.

According to Hutchings and Weir (2006), women in the Arab world can only reach the upper echelons of organizations through their contacts, family name tags, and not by their professional competence, because organizational systems do not encourage women's advancements. Another study by Al-Lamki (1999) found that when it comes to women's selection and promotion, male managers or supervisors have prejudiced and frequently stereotypical ideas about women employees, which impedes their advancement. The present study confirmed the same findings, demonstrating that in Pakistan's corporate sector, discriminatory organizational practices result in fewer professional promotions for women and that nepotism based on gender also works in terms of promotions. The findings point to the core source of the inadequacies in Pakistan's organizational structures.

This study highlights the fact that female executives in Pakistan's corporate sector have faced negative stereotypes and attitudes in the workplace, leading to them being viewed as unsupportive and discriminatory. Jamali et al. (2005) come to similar conclusions, emphasizing how work cultures influence women's career advancement. His findings also suggest that societal social and cultural norms play a role in shaping organizational work cultures and promotion processes. This explains why there are still few women in senior management positions in Pakistan.

Mentoring has long been a valuable tool in the advancement of one's career, and research reveals that it is extremely beneficial to professional development. Employees can develop in their professions by participating in coaching and counseling. Burke (1997) came to similar conclusions. Employees who have mentors in their professions have greater connections and access to promotions, and they advance more quickly than those who do not have access to mentors or effective trainers (Brett & Stroh, 1999).

Having female mentors for female employees is critical because it aids them in establishing their own identity in

Table 4: Discriminant Validity of Constructs
(Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Construct	CD	IV2	IV3
Career Development	0.785		
Work Environment factors	0.298	0.737	
Social factors	0.237	0.411	0.778

Table 5: Goodness of Fit

Variables	R-square
Career Development (CD)	0.089
Social Factors (IV2)	0.169

Table 6: Path Coefficients

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficients(B)	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	IV2 > CD	0.298	3.582	0.000	Supported
H2	IV3 > IV2	0.411	3.500	0.001	Supported

the workplace, increases their confidence, and reduces the likelihood of discrimination (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). However, multiple studies have revealed how difficult it is for female employees to find mentors, particularly female mentors (Burke & Vinnicombe, 2005). Similar results are shown by Al-Lamki (1999), who stated that the lack of role models in the form of mentors is a major worry for businesses since it impedes women's professional advancement and hampers their approach to senior management positions. In Pakistan, there are far fewer women in top positions or on corporate boards, making it difficult to identify female mentors.

Men often hold key roles in organizations and, as a result, have superior control. As a result, men are more likely to be mentors. As a result, having female mentors in Pakistan's business sector (which is extremely unusual, but does happen) will most likely allow female employees to have stronger interactions. In Pakistan, there is a dearth of research in this area, necessitating a greater focus on building a more nuanced relationship between female mentors and women's career advancement. According to studies, women who have female mentors in their organizations advance faster because they are more likely to earn influence through female mentors. They also have a superior feedback mechanism and, as a result, do better in their careers. Through their mentors, they can also gain access to senior roles. Despite the benefits of mentoring in terms of employee growth, contentment, confidence, and promotion opportunities, the concept is only used in a limited way in Pakistan's business sector.

6. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

According to the study's findings, organizational norms for female employees help them maintain a work-life balance, resulting in a less stressful working environment. The role of the social factor as a mediator is also thought to be important in maintaining a healthier work environment in companies. More good organizational behaviors result from family-friendly policies. Furthermore, the sensation of not being able to balance work and family obligations can lead to an unbalanced stressed life, which can hinder job productivity. According to the findings, there is a lack of equity in both training and development programs and promotions.

Promotional rules and gender-blind laws still need to be improved so that women's professional advancement is not limited to middle management. Because of changing circumstances, women's oppression cannot continue indefinitely. The vast majority of people are unaware of the myriad dynamics that exist in our culture. It is necessary to create an enabling environment for women professionals, as well as to execute various training programs that will orient workers toward better ways. Women should be educated and

sensitized about gender issues at a young age, preferably while still in school. In Pakistan, gender issues should be addressed in the curriculum, with gender-neutral and gender-aware curricula being implemented. Stereotyped prejudices, as well as any behavior by men or women demonstrating superiority or inferiority of any gender, should be opposed at the government level.

It will be necessary to restructure conceptions of women and their responsibilities to overcome societal and cultural barriers. Women's economic participation and rights should be desensitized, and municipal, political, and religious leaders should speak out about it publicly to reach out to the public. Enlightened religious scholars may reframe and explain rich examples from a variety of religious traditions, dispelling stereotypes about gender roles. This is an effective strategy for breaking free from old social habits. Women must be socialized in the workplace, schools, and homes to understand how to secure their rights and advance to senior decision-making positions in various corporations.

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