



Gender-based Inequality in workplace: The case of Media industry in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study examines gender-based inequalities in Pakistan's news media industry. For this purpose, our study applied qualitative measures to investigate workplace gender discrimination in national media setups. To provide a comprehensive scenario, regarding problems of gender based discrimination, faced by women journalists in Pakistan, this study analyzed written interviews of respondents about disparities in wage gap, opportunity discriminations, and misconduct at workplaces. Existing research, on work-place gender inequity in industrial and commercial setups of Pakistan, predominantly excluded media industry in its research focus. Though on global scale, gender-based discrimination in news industries of developed and developing nation-states are widely researched and published, in the Pakistani media women journalists' experiences of gender-based discrimination are hardly investigated. In this background, this study, with its results, is of significance for better understanding of workplace inequities and issues in our national industrial sector, in general, and in our news media industry, in particular.

Keyword: *Gender discrimination, Workplace inequalities, Wage gap, Misconduct, Female journalists*

Introduction

This research examines gender-based workplace inequalities in media industry of Pakistan, which helps us to enrich the understanding of working environment regarding female journalists. For this purpose, our study investigated workplace

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gender discrimination in wages, assigning tasks and promotional opportunities, and analyzed the behaviour of supervisors and male colleagues to their female subordinates and counterparts. For presenting a comprehensive analysis, we have conducted in-depth qualitative interviews to 25 female journalists of television and newspaper industry in Lahore. It is found, resultantly, that despite significant improvements in the overall working status of female journalists, disparities in wages, obstacles in opportunities, and misconduct towards them, is still visible. Some major determinants to that bleak situation are the prejudiced policies and unwelcoming environment of these media outlets.

World Bank Report 2019 on “Pakistan at 100: From poverty to equity” has expressed grave concern on workplace gender inequalities and its subsequent challenges for Pakistan (World Bank, 2019). No doubt, women are entering in workforce of Pakistan by challenging certain stereotypes of society, however, the indicators for gender equality are still poor (Nusrat, 2018). Eventually an active voice of our community, the female journalists, are facing discrimination in wages, opportunities, promotions, and struggling against biased behaviour at their workplace, even in this global age of modern media climate (Ali, 2015). In media industry of Pakistan, female journalists have only 5 percent presence (Nusrat, 2018). Largely this is due to negative attitudes, poor career progress and wage gap, instead of equally qualified employees’ status (Stamarski & Son Hing 2015). International organizations, like the Coalition of Women in Journalism (CFWIJ) and Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, have also emphasized on grave issues of female journalists to

understand the challenges and problems, and for sustainable solutions to improve female voice in the society (Zahid, 2018). Without prejudice, there is a dire need to eliminate the workplace inequalities against women in order to increase their representation. This study has attempted to explain workplace discrimination against female in terms of wage parity, advancement opportunity and behavioural issues in media industry of Pakistan.

Conceptual Framework

Gender pay gap in Pakistan is more than double to global average due to inhospitable workplace environment, facilities and opportunities (International Labour Organization, 2018), and this unfriendly workplace negatively affect women's earning (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). "Gender inequality in the workplace is often attributed to the preponderance of men in positions of power" (Penner & Toro-Tulla, 2010, p. 83), and here in Pakistan, the major reason behind this is also gender power imbalance in the society in general and in the profession of journalism in particular; as evident in proportional ratio of male and female reporters, editors and photographers (Nusrat, 2018). In media organizations, male dominated culture is psychologically affecting female journalists (Zia, Batool, & Yasin, 2016) and their skills and performance (Chambers, Steiner, & Fleming, 2004). Women ever seemed at secondary level (Lucifora & Vigani, 2016) with "secondclass status in the newsroom" (Hardin & Shain, 2006, p. 329; Strong, 2007) and perform at low scale job in masculine domains (Safa & Akter, 2015). 'Macho culture', that is, male domination, in the news room practices, like

assigning important duties and beats, and in news selection and presentation is still high, mainly because of low inclusion of women journalists. However, men are not agreed with this macho context (Ross & Carter, 2011). Women, working either as internee or permanent employee, face a clear wage gap as compared to their male colleagues. Organizations claim that women are responsible for their less income due to their poor working skills and reporting abilities (Strong, 2007) and it is obvious that employees of different capacities, cognitive skills, professional experience, productivity, receive different remunerations (Figueiredo & Botelho, 2013). But, women journalists witnessed, or are victims of numerous discrimination. Male reporters cover special events and hard beats like political and crime while women journalists are assigned lesser news-worthy health and education beats. At global scale, however, diversity change the scenario, like in New Zealand where women are working as political and crime reporters (Strong, 2007), and previous studies also stated that a newsroom with a woman in a managerial position, can alter the situation and routine (Ross & Carter, 2011).

Moreover, matrimonial issues implied as an important variable here that enhance wage gap on gender basis and these less earnings become insufficient for married women. Sometimes boss refused to increase salaries by claiming that their husbands have good income and they have no need of increment. Married women get less salaries than married male colleagues and unmarried female colleague too (Kabubo-Mariara, 2003). Similarly, previous studies identified negative effect on mothers' wages while positive effect on fathers' wages (Cukrowska

Torzewska & Lovasz, 2016). It is sure that the amount of gender based wage differential not only affected job satisfaction but also remains active enhancement of perceived stress level, among female workers in media industry (Melki & Mallat, 2016). Experience-based salaries and increments were proved lame excuse for female journalists. After joining the media organization, male journalists' salaries increase highly automatically than their females counterparts (Walsh-Childers, Chance & Herzog, 1996).

The policy note of the World Bank report, 'Pakistan at 100 – Shaping the Future', also mentioned inequality of opportunities for female workers. The report expressed grave concerns on the waste of this large stratum (World Bank, 2019). Inequality of opportunity is also higher in the media industry of Pakistan (Zia, Batool, & Yasin, 2016). Female journalists, worldwide, complained negative attitude of higher management not only regarding equal opportunities, courses, and training, but also for income acquisition and in-career advancement (Figueiredo & Botelho, 2013). They faced impartial behaviour of male colleagues as well and were refused by the management to cover potential beats and events (Nusrat, 2018).

Male-dominated environment exercises its power to let down female presence in the news media (Melki & Mallat, 2016) and resists, on great extent, against women entry and promotional opportunities (Smucker, Whisenant, & Pedersen, 2003). No doubt, employees face higher standards of evaluation in opposite gendered domains and organizations expect extraordinary performance (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015; Hegewisch,

Liepmann, Hayes, & Hartmann, 2010), but benevolent relationship and attitude towards the same gender is evident. This phenomenon not only impact relationships of colleagues but also affect the advancement of opportunities (Feather & Boeckmann, 2007), job assignments and rewards (Huffman, Cohen, & Pearlman, 2010). Media inevitably needs diversity due the female strata of the society (Strong, 2007) and good environment, flexible work hours and parental leave can improve the diversity in the organization (Lucifora & Vigani, 2016).

A positive advancement in this bleak picture is a few international organizations which, with collaboration of local institutes, are providing platforms to women journalists for their career advancement, and to achieve right positions in the media industry (Zahid, 2018). They are working hard and improving skills to meet the standards and to falsify the myth that women are not capable to produce active and efficient results in news media industry (Melki & Mallat, 2016; Strong, 2007). However, this conception, or misconception, of women capability increases microaggression behaviour, which is a common expression of gender discrimination in everyday life (Sue, et al., 2007). Women's experiences to lack of respect, misconduct and harassment at workplace by male colleagues and employer is evident at large scale (Taylor, 2020). Moreover, frequent discrimination of male supervisors with female subordinates is also a phenomenon of workplace micro-aggression (Basford, Offermann, & Behrend, 2014). Women are passed through the stricter standards of evaluation and performances, (Foschi, 1996) and they are

discouraged, deliberately, to join news media industry (Melki & Mallat, 2016).

Victimization of Pakistani women journalists, within the organization, is a daunting challenge for authorities and alarming for the society (Nusrat, 2018). They undergo damaging psychological effects of stereotype attitude and unethical gestures of male counterparts (Zia, Batool, & Yasin 2016), which sometimes leads to completely abandoning the profession (Safa & Akter, 2015). Unfortunately, socio-cultural environment does not allow female to seek support, due to overwhelming threat of job discontinuation (Pradhan-Malla, 2005). Rarely when some who stood against these cruelties, and voiced on harassment assaults of male colleagues or supervisors, endured awful circumstances of non-serious attitudes of management or even dismissal of these cases as false (Safa & Akter, 2015).

These attitudes disturb gender integration and progress of employees and organization as well (Melki & Mallat, 2016). Workplace inequalities may lead or increase the occupational segregation between male and female workers as well. Developed countries have successfully implemented rules and regulations to eliminate workplace inequalities, and to overcome biased segregation (Strong, 2007) while others have not taken considerable steps to eliminate these problems (McDonald, 2000). Moreover, women journalists' resistance against inequalities and struggle for their rights is altering situation throughout the world (Melki & Mallat, 2016; Safa & Akter, 2015). No doubt, the pace is slow in the news field (Ross & Carter, 2011), but the overall

conditions are going to the right direction for the better status of women(Melki & Mallat, 2016).

Methodology

The study used qualitative method of in-depth interviews as discovery tool to examine what female journalists say about workplace gendered discrimination. We designed a questionnaire to analyze wage disparities, opportunity discrimination and misconduct. 25 female journalists of different levels in hierarchy, age and category were interviewed from 18 different newspapers and television channels of Lahore as a sample. Due to mistrust and inappropriate environment of research in Pakistan, participants were approached through their trusted relatives, friends and colleagues. Female researcher visited homes, or the places, where most of the respondents feel comfortable and secure regarding the consequences of employer or supervisors, hence few respondents discussed their problems and issues in press club without any hesitation and fear. We encouraged respondents to give detailed answers to the questions, keeping in mind their experiences and observations, for the variety of views and to dig out complicated issues of inequalities in the media industry. More specifically we asked respondents about wage disparities and opportunity discrimination holding the same position as their male colleagues. We stopped interviews at 25 participants due to the repetitions of information. Qualitative interviews sought detailed information of gendered base workplace inequalities in media industry of Pakistan.

Results

The clear majority of the participants, 20 out of 25, were young, like 25 to 35 years old, and in their mid-careers. They belong to 13 different news organizations, both television and newspapers. Only one of them was the employee of government television channel, while all others work with private news outlets.

The question regarding wage gap on the same position expressed mixed views. 11 out of 25 interviewees blamed that female journalists, are considered inferior and this being the main reason behind the lesser inclusion of women in media industry. They complained about the supposition that women cannot ensure the coverage of hard topics like demonstrations, strikes and terrorist incidents. Even they are not paid equally working on the same reporting beats or on same level of anchors because females are considered less credible in media industry of Pakistan. Moreover, they responded that it also depends on organization and structure of human resource departments; few are paying equal salaries to female journalists while majority are not.

On the other side, rest of the respondents said that there are wage parities, and that difference depends on how much capable you are, in terms of knowledge, skills of writing and interviewing, and how much previous experience you have. One senior female journalist said, "Media industry is grooming in Pakistan with the advent of electronic media during this century. I cover important beats, politics, health and education, and receive same wages as my male colleagues, however, in the beginning of my career, female journalists were not treated

fairly.” Another responded that “there is no discrimination in this field and pay is awarded according to seniority and I am one of the highly-paid employees, irrespective of gender, on my position.” They mentioned that increments and previous salaries produce wage differences and these depend on performances and negotiation with respective human resources department. One interviewee expressed that male journalists get more benefits on their claims on behalf of caretakers of a family and household expenses. In nutshell, it is obvious that there is still a great problem of wage parities because some respondents, who are getting same wages, claimed themselves lucky.

In response to the question of assignment opportunity, 14 out of 25, female journalists seemed dissatisfied and unhappy to the provision of opportunity rights by mentioning macho culture in the industry. For them, mostly organizations do not trust on women for hard news or burning issues because they consider women inappropriate and ineffective to achieve the task. They expressed grave concerns by stating that “it is a problem that your assignments and domain are decided on basis of your gender, and you are not given tasks being a female.”

Supervisors of newspapers channels do not assign duties to female reporters on crowded and dangerous places like coverage of election rallies, demonstrations, protests, blasts, and strikes, while television female reporters are sent anywhere when they need. One respondent contradicted, however, that in her organization supervisor assigned same tasks, or any available reporter is sent, without distinguishing male or female or any news venue, good or bad. Female reporters are asked to cover

news of women and places where male counterparts are restricted to move or enter, due to some societal limitations.

No doubt, most of the interviewees blamed that the domination of men in the industry, and on higher newsroom positions is a main cause of opportunity discrimination. While one of them contradicted this phenomenon by describing it as an act of respect and security. She said that “females are respected very much in the media. Male colleagues are sent to the places of blast, firing etc. and female are assigned duties of sports or other light issues.” Moreover, discussing the provision of opportunity for assignments, 11 respondents commented that situation is not the same as was in past years. Now, in this modern age, the factor of credibility of the journalist is considered mainly without considering their gender. A person, either male or female, is given the task keeping in mind his/her ability to complete the assignment comprehensively. Moreover, change in the societal norms where women, either victims or representatives, are expressing their views directly to the media has altered the situations of hard beats, crime and politics. Female journalists are now considered essential part of the team to cover a blast, accident or incident due to their easy access to man and woman both.

At the other end of the spectrum, only four out of 25 interviewees who were looking very passionate and enthusiastic about their jobs denied presence of gender base opportunity discrimination. They expressed that it all depends on you; girls do not avail the opportunities available to them, even, they refuse the hard task to complete that is why hard beats are not assigned to female journalists generally. One of them stated that “I do hard

work and complete difficult tasks for my organization, so, I am treated differently to other female colleagues." She concluded that there is no discrimination and equal opportunities are available for both, female and male. Another respondent stated that opportunities and facilities are provided irrespective to gender with the condition of quality of work and no relaxation is given being a girl. Sometimes, women work more than male colleagues and receive rewards as well, and somehow females are accommodated more than a male colleague.

However, for a very clear majority of the respondents, no equal promotional opportunities are available in media industry of Pakistan for female journalists. Even the journalists who were satisfied for the opportunities of assignments seemed disappointed regarding promotional opportunities. Only, 4 out of 25 expressed positive consent for the promotional opportunities in their organization while other responded that it is not easy and simple for women; neither job nor promotion is given to them on merit.

Several interviewees responded that they need support of editors, senior male reporters, anchors, and influential persons of the industry, to get timely promotion otherwise there is a few examples or organizations where female journalists, anchors and hosts are promoted in virtue of their work and performance.

Seven respondents mentioned that flattery, irrespective to gender, is another determinant for promotional discrimination in the media industry of Pakistan. Male and female both are involved in fawning to get extra rewards and it works there on large scale, and share of newcomer female journalists, in this

immoral attitude is also obvious. They faced favoritism because the head is male; 24 respondents out of 25 have male supervisors.

They were refused promotions on lame excuses of lesser quality of work and capabilities. Attitude of male domination in the industry and society is worth noting in the promotion of female workers. A reporter stated that she is not accepted as a boss in her organization, regardless of her seniority. You can find very few examples of women supervisors in the newsroom but not in the reporting department. It is a male dominating society where male never want to obey the order of a female boss. Nevertheless, how able a woman is, her name is not considered for the post of chief reporter.

For almost every respondent, mocking is a regular incidence on monthly, weekly, and even daily basis. 22 respondents shared experiences of belittling and name calling regarding their work, personality and dressing, while only 3 responded that the culture of our organizations is decent and we are treated respectfully by our male colleagues and supervisors, however, the overall situation in media industry is worse. Most of the respondents stated that male colleagues frequently pass remarks for fun, and sometimes to tease and degrade them directly or indirectly by pointing out to their dresses, makeup, appearances etc. Few respondents also added that frankness level to the male colleagues leads towards compliments and comments; it depends on women who encourage or discourage such behaviour and practices, and mostly they do not bother remarks in a good working environment.

Majority of the respondents pointed out the gender based discrimination, individual and organizational level, regarding dress code. Female are criticized by male counterparts and receive sarcastic remarks and comments on wearing western dresses like jeans, t-shirts, sleeveless etc. The one respondent who was very disappointed replied, 'main factors are jealousy and personality clashes because we are criticized even looking charming or ugly.' On the other hand, female journalists bear an opposite discrimination in TV industry on dress code; they cannot host a programme by covering your head with a traditional scarf or cannot go on-air in reporting as well without their desired dress up. Three respondents explained that they are not willing to join TV industry as a host of a programme on their condition, put off traditional headscarf.

Moreover, most of the respondents seemed dissatisfied about professional behaviour. They expressed that they face rude behaviour during discussions and work, if things are going against males' point of view or way of thinking. But, they were not disappointed to overall situation and were committed to continue this profession by overlooking these gender-based discriminations. As replying to the question about the overall behaviour of all male colleagues at workplace, they said that majority of the male colleagues is supportive and kind. 17 respondents expressed that they feel comfortable with male counterparts at workplace, and most of the people are supportive in offices and in fields as well. They appreciated male colleagues' care in weird and dangerous situations during reporting.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research set out to investigate gender based inequalities at workplaces of media industry, print and electronic, and results of our research strongly support wage disparities, opportunities' discriminations and misconduct on gender basis, which systematically discouraging female journalists and creating barriers and difficulties for their career advancement.

Female journalists are not still considered capable like man for the important reporting beats, politics and crime, and TV programmes of prime time in several organizations, which lead to the wage disparities. The research found two main reasons behind this phenomenon of wage gap: macho culture and female incompetence. No doubt, women' struggle in this field is challenging the male domination of media industry (Safa and Akter 2015), and they are fighting for their rights at workplaces, which is also evident in Pakistani news outlets and over the globe, by working on hard news and in unsocial hours(Ross and Carter 2011; Melki and Mallat 2016). However, in several organizations, they are not still paid equally, even, working on the same reporting beats or on same level of anchors, by claiming their small viewership and less value among the masses. Women are never considered trustworthy or confident for hard news and mostly news beats are also decided with favoritism. Similarly, male domination on high positions were blamed for opportunity discriminations, either task opportunity or promotional. Criteria of assigning duties or beats keeps women restricted to the specific domains and male side resist assigning their beats to a female counterpart. But, the overall investigation of this study identified

two factors, nepotism and social change, which are improving the position of women in newspaper and TV industry. No doubt, one of them has negativity; however, these factors are providing number of opportunities for females to groom in male dominated fields; now only talented female relatives are encouraged for important tasks due to the credibility of organization. The promotion criteria for common female journalists is also quite difficult, and it is generally consisting of flattery, compromises and relationships, moral and immoral both, with senior authorities, that is why most of female journalists are still working on entry level for many years. Macho culture in reporting department is so powerful that we could not find a single female chief reporter in any news organization.

It seems that, in Pakistani media industry, mostly male do not accept female counterparts as compared to male counterparts, and considered them a competitor at workplaces. As a result, females become victim of verbal aggression and agnostic behaviour. Most of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction about professional behaviour of male because of discourteous and discouraging attitude at workplace. It is noted that female journalists were overall satisfied with male colleagues, however, they were not comfortable with supervisors and immediate bosses due to their rudeness and most of them had not registered their complaint on gender-based misconduct, mainly due to promotional and job threats. They bear direct and indirect funny and sarcastic remarks of males about their appearance and dress up, particularly on wearing western dresses. On the other side, female face discrimination on wearing cultural or religious

dresses in television industry. Both stereotypes are making workplace environment uncomfortable for female, through adopting either ultra-modern or ultra-conservative approaches. However, a positive harbinger, we found in our research, is that male-dominated environment is beginning to change as some national and international organizations raised up questions of workplace discrimination for women, and female journalists are showing a strong resistance against these gender-based discriminations.

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