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# Exploring the Experiences of Female University Leaders: Oppressions, Privileges, and Professional Identities

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*Women's leadership in higher education has been the subject of many debates, especially in developing countries like Pakistan, where patriarchal norms and gender discrimination are deeply embedded in society. The under-representation of women in leadership positions is a persistent problem in the country's universities. Despite the efforts of policymakers and universities, women still face various forms of oppressions and privileges that affect their leadership roles. The current study aims to explore the oppressions and privileges experienced by female leaders in Pakistani universities and how these experiences intersect with their gender and professional Identities. Under the typology of interpretivism the study used a qualitative approach. The experiences of female leaders at Pakistani universities were investigated using phenomenological ethnography as a research approach. Female vice chancellors, department heads, coordinators, and deans from all Punjab public sector universities were study participants. The technique of purposeful sampling was adopted. For data gathering, a guide for interviews was created. Thematic analysis was employed. The study emphasized how crucial it is to comprehend how gender and professional identity interact to shape the experiences of female leaders in higher education institutions. This study's examination of these issues has contributed to attempts to advance gender equity in institutions of higher learning by illuminating the difficulties experienced by women in leadership roles in Pakistani universities. The study may add to the body of knowledge on women in leadership positions in institutions of higher learning and shed light on the experiences of female leaders in Pakistani universities.*

**Key Words:** Oppressions, Privileges, Female Leadership, Gender Identities

## **Introduction**

Many nations have debated the issue of women holding leadership positions in higher education institutions.<sup>1</sup> Women continue to be underrepresented in senior positions despite attempts by legislators and academic institutions to boost their participation.<sup>2</sup> This underrepresentation is caused by a number of institutional and cultural constraints that favor gender-based discrimination, including bias against women in hiring and promotion, a tradition of men predominating in leadership roles, and a lack of support for work-life balance.<sup>3</sup>

The examination of the privileges and oppressions faced by female university leaders is crucial in today's society. Despite notable progress in gender equality, women in leadership roles in academic institutions still confront particular difficulties that may compromise their professional identities.<sup>4</sup> In order to illuminate the various forms of oppressions that female university leaders may experience as well as the privileges they may negotiate, this topic dives into the intersectional dynamics of gender, power, and authority.<sup>5</sup> Understanding these intricate interactions will help us create a welcoming climate that encourages women to advance and be empowered in positions of leadership, which will ultimately benefit the entire academic community.

Awareness regarding the current struggles faced by female university executives requires an awareness of the historical context of women's fight for equality in leadership roles. Women have battled for their right to education and the chance to hold leadership positions throughout history. Women's access to leadership roles at universities has remained restricted despite significant improvements due to gender bias and cultural expectations.<sup>6</sup> Understanding this historical context is essential to understanding the intersectionality of the privileges and oppressions currently faced by female university administrators.<sup>7</sup> Women's ability to hold leadership positions in impoverished nations is constrained by strongly ingrained patriarchal norms and societal expectations of traditional gender roles.<sup>8</sup> This has resulted in a lack of representation of women in senior leadership positions in universities. While there have been some efforts to address this issue, such as the establishment of gender equity committees in universities and policies promoting diversity and inclusivity, progress has been slow.<sup>9</sup>

Institutional and structural barriers persist within the academic sphere, impeding the progress of women aspiring to leadership roles. Biases and stereotypes continue to shape decision-making processes, resulting in a

lack of female representation in top-tier leadership positions. Women often face challenges such as gender-based discrimination, limited access to mentorship networks, and unconscious biases that hinder their professional advancement. These systemic oppressions not only affect individual female leaders but also perpetuate a cycle of underrepresentation and exclusion within the higher education landscape.<sup>9</sup> Examining the privileges experienced by female university leaders is equally important in understanding the complexity of their professional Identities.<sup>10</sup> While gender oppressions is a common experience, the intersectionality of Identities amplifies or mitigates the impact of privileges and oppressions.<sup>11</sup> Women who possess multiple privileges Identities, such as being white, cisgender, or heterosexual, may encounter distinct advantages in their career progression compared to those who lack such privileges.<sup>3</sup> Recognizing and analyzing these intersections helps us acknowledge the nuances and complexities involved in the experiences of female university leaders. Awareness and acknowledgment of privileges facilitates confrontation of societal and institutional oppressions in developed countries. Today, there is concern that academia is still perpetuating marginalization and oppressions throughout the academic landscape. Although there have been numerous scholars in educational leadership who have called for the incorporation of social justice in universities there is still concern that Intersecting gender and professional Identities are needed to be discussed while exploring the experiences of female leaders regarding oppressions and privileges in higher education institutions. Gender and professional Identities have not been fully embraced.<sup>1</sup>

Women's leadership in higher education has been the subject of many debates, especially in developing countries like Pakistan, where patriarchal norms and gender discrimination are deeply embedded in society. The under-representation of women in leadership positions is a persistent problem in the country's universities. Despite the efforts of policymakers and universities, women still face various forms of oppressions and privileges that affect their leadership roles. The current study intends to examine the privileges and oppressions that female leaders in Pakistani universities encounter, as well as how these influence their professional identities.

### **Theoretical Framework of the Study**

Feminist theory provides a framework for comprehending the experiences of female university leaders by stressing gender as a social construct that impacts power relations, inequities, and gendered

expectations within organizations. <sup>1</sup> It looks at the necessity for gender equality as well as the discrimination faced by women. The idea of intersectionality emphasizes the connections among social identities such as gender, class, ethnicity, and religion and how these affect opportunities and experiences. This paradigm explains how different aspects of oneself affect how female university leaders see their environments.

The social self-theory emphasizes how a person's sense of self and self is influenced by their affiliation with social groupings. It can be used to investigate how gender and other social identities influence and shape the professional identities of female university executives. This viewpoint investigates the dynamics of power inside organizations and how individuals might maneuver and confront these dynamics. It can be used to examine how female university administrators bargain and exercise agency in a setting characterized by privileges and oppressions. The study of organizational norms, beliefs, and practices that influence opportunities and behavior is known as organizational culture theory. Applying this lens, the research can investigate how the organizational culture within universities either reinforces or challenges gender biases and stereotypes, influencing the experiences of female leaders.

By employing this theoretical framework, the researchers provided a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of female university leaders, examining the interplay between oppressions, privileges, and professional Identities. It allowed for a nuanced analysis of the challenges faced by these leaders, the opportunities available to them, and the ways in which they navigate and shape their professional roles within the university context. On the basis of the research topic following research questions were framed;

1. What are the roles and responsibilities of female leaders in Universities?
2. What are the challenges and strategies faced by female leaders in Pakistani Universities?
3. What are the perceptions of female and male leaders regarding gender dynamics?

Within the interpretivism paradigm, the researchers adopted a qualitative approach, specifically utilized the phenomenological ethnographic research design. The objective of this design is to capture the lived experiences, perspectives, and behaviors of individuals within their natural contexts, enabling a deep understanding of their social interactions, values, beliefs, and practices. In the context of this research topic, employing the phenomenological ethnographic research design entailed the researchers immersing their identities within the university environment and actively engaged with female university leaders. By doing so, they had the opportunity to firsthand observe and document their experiences, while also conducting interviews, participating in their professional activities, and observing their interactions with colleagues, staff, and students.

#### Procedure

The participants of the present study were the twelve female leaders. The detail is given below:

Vice Chancellors	03
Directors/Deans	03
Chairpersons/Coordinators	06

These female leaders were selected from all Pakistani public sector universities. Purposive sampling technique was used by the researcher. The researchers constantly collected and analyzed data, identify patterns or themes, and then purposefully select additional participants or data sources that can provide valuable insights to deepen the understanding of these emerging concepts. The researchers developed an interview guide that involved several steps to ensure that the questions were clear, relevant, and aligned with the research objectives. First of all based on our research objectives, the researchers identified the key themes and subtopics. Open-ended questions allowed interviewees to provide detailed and nuanced responses. We encouraged participants to share their experiences, feelings, and perspectives.

The researchers also considered crafting questions that prompted discussion and reflection. Here are some sample questions related with our study;

- a. Can you describe any instances where you have felt oppressed or experienced discrimination as a female university leader?

- b. How have you navigated and responded to instances of oppressions or discrimination in your professional role?
- c. Have you ever experienced any privileges or advantages based on your gender or other factors? If so, how has this influenced your leadership journey?

The interview questions formulated through an iterative process that involved reviewing relevant literature to identify similar studies and questions previously employed. To ensure clarity and accurate interpretation of the questions, a "think aloud activity" was conducted with female leaders, allowing for minor adjustments to the wording as needed, ensuring alignment with the researcher's intended meaning. To enhance the face validity of the questions, a group of researchers also contributed their expertise and perspectives, thereby considering a range of expert viewpoints. This collaborative approach aims to refine and validate the interview questions for effective data collection.

The researcher also requested the experts in the field of educational leadership for their expert opinion. They provided valuable feedback about the format and appropriateness of draft questions. Their valuable opinions acknowledged and suggested changes that were incorporated to ensure the content validity.

The collection of data for this study involved conducting in-depth interviews with the female leaders. All interviews were carried out in person, and respondents informed in advance about the recording of the interviews. Recording the interviews was deemed an appropriate approach to ensure efficient capture of the interview data. Reliance solely on handwritten notes during the interview can lead to inaccuracies and the potential omission of critical points by the researcher. Recording the interviews allows the interviewer to focus on the interview's content and verbal cues, facilitating the production of a verbatim transcript of the interview.

The participants were asked for their consent regarding the audio recording of their responses, with the assurance that their Identities will be kept confidential. The researcher established trustworthiness by assuring participants that their individual perspectives will be respected, their true desired concepts will be accurately expressed, and their unique elaborations will be carefully considered.<sup>12</sup> To enhance the analysis process, the researchers conducted a thorough review of both the transcriptions and recordings, paying particular attention to linguistic clues, including intonation-based cues. In order to ensure accurate transcription of the

interviews, the researcher engaged in post-interview communication with participants to clarify any expressions that require further understanding or follow-up.

Multiple opportunities for member checking were provided to the participants, allowing them to review and provide feedback on the data and interpretations. This iterative member checking process involved revisions and edits to ensure the accuracy and alignment of the data with participants' perspectives.

### **Data Analysis**

The researchers identified patterns and developed themes that represent the experiences of female leaders. Thematic analysis techniques were used. This study explored the oppressions and privileges experienced by female leaders in Pakistani universities and how these intersect with their gender and professional Identities.

#### Female Leaders' quotations and their interpretation

Following main themes were developed.

- Roles and Responsibilities of female leaders
- The Challenges and Strategies Faced by Female Leaders in Pakistani Universities
- Perceptions of Gender Dynamics in University Leadership: Insights from Female and Male Leaders"
- Unveiling the Oppressions Faced by Female Leaders in Pakistani Universities: Insights from Participant Responses
- Perceptions of Gender Dynamics in University Leadership: Insights from Female and Male Leaders".

#### Roles and Responsibilities of Female Leaders

The participants' responses varied based on their positions within the university. The female dean described her role as overseeing academic programs, managing faculty members, making strategic decisions, handling budget management, curriculum development, fostering research collaborations, and representing the faculty in committees. The female department chairperson explained her responsibilities as supervising faculty members, coordinating course offerings, ensuring quality teaching and research, managing departmental resources, liaising with other departments, and participating in strategic planning and policy development. The female department coordinator highlighted her role in organizing and overseeing

academic programs, including scheduling courses, managing student registrations, coordinating with faculty members, facilitating student-instructor communication, and handling administrative tasks. Lastly, the female director of research detailed her responsibilities in setting the strategic direction for research initiatives, securing funding and grants, establishing external collaborations, overseeing research projects, promoting a research culture, organizing conferences and seminars, and disseminating research outcomes.

*Some answers to the query "Can you please provide a brief overview of your current role and Responsibilities" are included below.*

*"As dean of the faculty, my duties include managing the faculty and making strategic decisions to ensure the department runs smoothly. I also oversee the academic programs. I am in charge of overseeing the budget, developing the curriculum, encouraging research partnerships, and representing the faculty on various university committees.*

*"I lead the [particular department] department as its head. In addition to managing departmental resources and communicating with other departments and administrative bodies, my duties also entail overseeing faculty members and planning course offerings. I also participate in the department's strategic planning and policy formulation.*

*As an academic coordinator, I am instrumental in planning and managing the university's academic programs. Course scheduling, student registration management, faculty coordination, and encouraging communication between students and teachers are all tasks that fall under my purview. Additionally, I manage the administrative duties associated with testing, grading, and student records.*

*In my capacity as the center's director, I set the strategic direction for research programs, get funds and grants, create partnerships with other parties, and supervise the research projects conducted there. I am in charge of fostering a thriving research culture, planning seminars and conferences, and publicizing research findings.*

**The Challenges and Strategies Faced by Female Leaders in Pakistani Universities**



The comments from the participants showed a variety of difficulties and obstacles experienced by female leaders in Pakistani colleges. These included widespread gender bias that undermined their authority, exclusion from decision-making processes and professional development opportunities, skepticism and resistance due to societal expectations of gender roles, limited recognition and advancement opportunities due to stereotypes, overlooking of ideas and suggestions, a lack of specifically tailored mentorship and support networks, and undervaluation or misattribution of contributions. It took persistence, boldness, networking, and the development of personal support networks to overcome these obstacles. These responses shed light on the various barriers that female leaders confront in advancing their careers as well as the techniques they use to get around and over them.

*Following are a few answers to the query, "Have you experienced any particular hurdles or barriers in your career growth as a female leader in the university? If so, kindly describe them if you can.*

*"Yes, as a female leader in the university, there have been many hurdles throughout my career. The widespread gender bias that frequently undercut my authority and trustworthiness was one of the main obstacles I faced. I had to put forth more effort than my male competitors to be respected and acknowledged. There were also times when I was denied equitable access to professional growth opportunities or excluded from crucial decision-making processes. It took persistence, aggressiveness, and persistent self-promotion to get beyond these obstacles.*

*"Being a female department chairperson, I have come across various challenges in my career progression. One significant barrier has been the struggle to balance my leadership responsibilities with societal expectations of traditional gender roles. There have been instances where I faced skepticism or resistance from some colleagues who questioned my ability to handle a leadership position while fulfilling my family responsibilities. It required constant negotiation and advocating for myself to overcome these challenges."*

*"As a female department coordinator, I have faced unique difficulties as I have advanced in my job. The belief that administrative positions were more suited for women than higher leadership positions was one of the biggest obstacles*

*I had to overcome. My possibilities for recognition and advancement were frequently constrained by this stereotype. There were additionally instances where my thoughts or recommendations were disregarded or not given much weight. I had to express myself, show my knowledge, and present my leadership skills in order to overcome these obstacles.*

*"As a female leader in the institution, there have undoubtedly been difficulties and obstacles in the way of my professional advancement.*

*One significant challenge has been the lack of mentorship and support networks specifically tailored for women in leadership positions. It was often challenging to find role models or mentors who could provide guidance and advice on navigating the unique obstacles faced by female leaders. Moreover, there were instances where my ideas or contributions were undervalued or attributed to others. I had to actively seek out networking opportunities and create my own support system to overcome these challenges."*

### Perceptions of Gender Dynamics in University Leadership: Insights from Female and Male Leaders

The participants' responses regarding the overall gender dynamics within university leadership and the differences in experiences between male and female leaders varied based on their perspectives and experiences. The female dean highlighted the persistent gender imbalance and the unique challenges and biases faced by female leaders, such as scrutiny and skepticism. The male department chairperson acknowledged the progress made in promoting diversity and inclusivity but recognized the hurdles and biases still faced by female leaders. The female department coordinator noted the gradual shift towards a more balanced representation but highlighted the additional obstacles faced by female leaders due to gender bias and societal expectations.

The male head of research believed that gender dynamics were changing and underlined the significance of fostering an environment that was encouraging and inclusive of all leaders. These replies highlight the necessity of carrying out ongoing initiatives to promote gender equality and develop an inclusive culture that supports various points of view in university leadership.

*Following are some comments. "How do you think the leadership at the universities generally handles gender dynamics? Do male and female leaders' experiences differ significantly in any way?"*

*"In my opinion, there is still a considerable gender imbalance in the general gender dynamics of university leadership. While there has been progress in increasing gender diversity, much work remains. Compared to their male colleagues, female leaders frequently experience particular difficulties and biases. For instance, male leaders could profit from unconscious prejudices that give them more opportunities and recognition, whereas female leaders might experience more scrutiny and doubt over their leadership ability. To address these discrepancies, it is crucial to build an inclusive and egalitarian atmosphere.*

*"In my opinion, the gender dynamics in university leadership have changed for the better over time. Diversity and inclusivity are becoming increasingly important, as is being acknowledged. I am aware, though, that biases and obstacles still exist for female leaders. It might take more effort on their part to overcome conventional gender roles and expectations and establish their credibility. It is critical to keep advocating for gender equality and offering equal opportunities for career advancement.*

*"In my opinion, a more balanced representation of genders in university leadership is increasingly becoming more prevalent. The experiences of male and female leaders still differ in observable ways, though. Due to cultural expectations, limited recognition, and gender bias, female leaders frequently face additional challenges. Their possibilities for leadership roles and career advancement may be impacted by these variances. It is crucial to overcome these inequalities and establish an inclusive society that respects many viewpoints.*

*"I perceive the overall gender dynamics within the university leadership as progressively evolving. Efforts have been made to promote gender equality and empower female leaders. While differences in experiences exist, both male and female leaders face challenges in their respective roles. It is important to focus on creating a supportive and inclusive*

*environment for all leaders, regardless of gender, where their skills and abilities are recognized and valued."*

### Unveiling the Oppressions Faced by Female Leaders in Pakistani Universities: Insights from Participant Responses

The participants' responses shed light on the key oppressions faced by female leaders in Pakistani universities and how these oppressions manifest in daily interactions and decision-making processes. The prevalence of gender bias was identified as a significant oppression, leading to the undermining of authority and credibility, doubting of decision-making abilities, and heightened scrutiny of female leaders. Another major issue that was highlighted was the absence of equal chances and recognition, which was affected by traditional gender roles and biases. Female leaders are under additional pressure to perform various roles in addition to their professional obligations, such as caring for others and attending to home commitments. The absence of a welcoming and inclusive workplace, where prejudices and stereotypes limit opportunities for growth and impair leadership potential, was also noted. These responses highlight the importance of resolving these oppressions in Pakistani colleges and offer insightful information about the many difficulties experienced by female leaders.

*Here are a few answers to the interview query. What, in your opinion, are the main discriminations experienced by female administrators at Pakistani universities? What effects do these oppressions have on people's identities in terms of daily interactions and decision-making processes? The predominance of gender bias is, in my opinion, one of the main oppressions experienced by female leaders in Pakistani universities. This bias shows up in many different ways, such diminishing the authority and credibility of female leaders, questioning their ability to make decisions, and putting them under more scrutiny. Stereotypes and expectations that limit female leaders' prospects for development and promotion must frequently be overcome. They might also be excluded from crucial decision-making processes or experience subtly discriminatory behavior in daily interactions.*

*"at my opinion, one of the major oppressions experienced by female leaders at Pakistani colleges is the dearth of acknowledgment and equal opportunity. Female executives frequently face obstacles brought on by biases and established gender stereotypes that impede their professional advancement. Accessing the tools, networks, and mentorship*

*that can help them advance their careers may be difficult for them. Inequalities in decision-making processes, when female viewpoints are not given equal weight or are ignored in favor of male perspectives, are another way that these oppressions present themselves.*

*"The pressure to perform many tasks and responsibilities outside of their professional responsibilities, in my opinion, is one of the most serious oppressions experienced by female leaders in Pakistani colleges. Frequently, societal expectations for women in leadership positions be a hardship.*

*"at my view, one of the major oppressions experienced by female leaders at Pakistani colleges is the absence of a nurturing and welcoming workplace. This may appear as prejudices and stereotypes that impair their capacity for leadership and constrict their prospects for development.*

*Female leaders may also face challenges in having their expertise and contributions recognized and valued. Moreover, daily interactions and decision-making processes may perpetuate gendered power dynamics, where female leaders are not given an equal platform to influence decisions or have their perspectives taken seriously."*

### Understanding Patterns and Factors in the Distribution of Privileges among Female Leaders in University

The participants' responses provide valuable insights into the patterns and factors influencing the distribution of privileges among female leaders within the university. The female dean highlighted the concentration of privileges among those with strong networks and factors such as seniority, achievements, resources, and navigating power dynamics. The male department chairperson emphasized exceptional leadership skills, subject matter expertise, personal connections, mentorship, and visibility as influencing factors. The female department coordinator noted inequitable distribution tied to relationships, gender biases, cultural norms, and support from higher authorities. The male director of research identified visibility, impact, research record, collaboration, effective communication, assertiveness, and building alliances as factors. These responses collectively underscore the importance of fostering an environment that promotes meritocracy, equal access to privileges, transparency, and addressing

systemic biases in the distribution of privileges among female leaders within the university.

*Here are some potential answers. "Have you seen any patterns or trends in the distribution of privileges among female university leaders? What variables affect the distribution of privileges?"*

*"Based on my observations, there are some trends in the privilege distribution among female leaders in the university. A strong network of support and influence, both inside and beyond the university, tends to concentrate privileges among a select few people. The distribution of privileges is significantly influenced by elements including seniority, professional accomplishments, access to resources and opportunities, and the capacity to deal with power dynamics. Additionally, prejudices and biases might affect how privileges are distributed since some leadership attributes or styles might be more admired or rewarded.*

*"In my observation, there are some discernible trends in the allocation of privileges among female leaders. Those who demonstrate exceptional leadership skills, possess subject matter expertise, and have a track record of successful initiatives tend to be granted more privileges. Additionally, factors such as personal connections, mentorship opportunities, and visibility within the university community can also influence the allocation of privileges. It is important to foster an environment that promotes meritocracy and equal access to privileges for all female leaders."*

*"Based on what I have observed, the distribution of privileges among female leaders in the university is not always equitable. Privileges often seem to be more readily available to those who have established strong relationships with influential individuals or have access to supportive networks. Factors like gender biases, cultural norms, and the level of support and recognition received from higher authorities can significantly influence the allocation of privileges. It is crucial to create a transparent and inclusive system that ensures equal opportunities and recognition for all female leaders."*

*"In my perspective, the distribution of privileges among female leaders shows a correlation with their visibility and impact within the university. Those who actively contribute*

*to the university's success, have a strong research or publication record, and engage in collaborative initiatives tend to receive more privileges. Factors such as effective communication, assertiveness, and the ability to build alliances and partnerships can also play a role in the allocation of privileges. However, it is important to continually assess and address any systemic biases that may hinder equal distribution of privileges."*

### Navigating the Intersectionality of Gender and Self in University Leadership: Insights from Participants' Perspectives

The participants' responses shed light on the complexities of navigating the intersectionality of gender with other aspects of self, such as class, ethnicity, or religion, in leadership roles. The female dean highlighted the balancing act and the opportunities for understanding diverse groups that arise from these intersections, but also acknowledged the additional barriers and biases she faces. The male department chairperson recognized the importance of understanding the challenges faced by female leaders in navigating multiple dimensions of their self and emphasized the need for creating an inclusive and supportive environment. The female department coordinator described the constant balancing act, the unique challenges, and privileges that arise from her intersections, emphasizing the importance of leveraging them to foster inclusivity while addressing biases. The male director of research, though not directly experiencing these intersections, acknowledged their significance and highlighted the importance of understanding and supporting female colleagues. These responses collectively emphasize the importance of recognizing, addressing, and leveraging the unique challenges and privileges associated with intersectionality to promote inclusivity and equality in university leadership. Here are some possible responses "How do you navigate the intersectionality of gender with other aspects of yourself, such as class, ethnicity, or religion, in your leadership role? Are there any unique challenges or privileges associated with these intersections?"

*"Navigating the intersectionality of gender with other aspects of myself, such as class, ethnicity, or religion, is a complex task. I often find myself balancing multiple dimensions of myself in my leadership role. While these intersections bring unique challenges, they also provide opportunities for understanding and connecting with diverse*

*groups. For example, being from a marginalized ethnic or religious background can help me empathize with the experiences of underrepresented students and faculty. However, it also means facing additional barriers and biases that can hinder my leadership potential."*

*"As a male department chairperson, I recognize the importance of understanding the intersectionality of gender with other aspects of self. While my gender grants me certain privileges, I also need to acknowledge the challenges faced by female leaders who navigate multiple dimensions of their self. It is crucial for me to create an inclusive and supportive environment that considers these intersections and provides equal opportunities for all leaders."*

*"In my leadership role, navigating the intersectionality of gender with other aspects of my self, such as class, ethnicity, or religion, is a constant balancing act. These intersections bring unique challenges and privileges. For instance, being from a particular ethnic or religious background can help me connect with specific student communities, but it can also lead to stereotypes or biases. It is important for me to be mindful of these intersections and leverage them to foster inclusivity while addressing any biases that may arise."*

*"Though I may not directly experience the intersectionality of gender with other aspects of self, I am aware of its significance for female leaders. It is essential for me to understand and support the challenges faced by my female colleagues in navigating these intersections. By acknowledging the privileges associated with certain aspects of self, such as class or ethnicity, I can work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive environment for all leaders."*

## **Discussion**

Women are underrepresented in senior leadership positions, which has been an ongoing problem in higher education institutions all around the world. Cultural and institutional constraints that promote gender-based discrimination have made it difficult for women to hold leadership roles in many nations, including Pakistan. Understanding power relationships and gender disparities in society can be critically viewed through the lens of feminist theory. It looks at the political, cultural, and social systems that



support the oppression of women. Feminist theory will aid in identifying and analyzing the many forms of oppression experienced by women in leadership roles, such as gender-based prejudices, stereotypes, and structural hurdles. According to the intersectionality hypothesis, people encounter several oppressions and overlapping identities at once. Depending on their color, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and sexual orientation in addition to their gender, female university administrators may endure particular difficulties and experiences. According to<sup>13</sup>, intersectionality aids in understanding how these intersecting Identities and systems of advantages and oppressions impact the possibilities and experiences available to female leaders in the academic setting. The intersectionality hypothesis emphasizes how gender interacts with other identities like race, ethnicity, and class to provide specific experiences of privileges and oppressions for women.

According to the literature already in existence, female leaders in higher education institutions face both privileges and oppressions. Women executives may receive perks like being viewed as "tokens" or "symbols of diversity" in their organizations, but they may also encounter discrimination, harassment, and unfair treatment based on their gender. Organizations may occasionally utilize these benefits as an excuse for systematic gender inequality and the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. According to research, over half of America's dominant culture thinks that they are subjected to persecution just as frequently as minorities are.<sup>14</sup>

The study of the privileges and oppressions that female leaders face has highlighted the particular difficulties and benefits that they face in a variety of professional circumstances. As scholars work to understand the mechanics of gender discrepancies in leadership posts, this subject has attracted a lot of attention. In this article, systemic biases, gender-based discrimination, and cultural expectations are examined as forms of oppression experienced by female leaders. It also explores the perks that female leaders could enjoy, including as visibility, network access, and mentorship opportunities. We may improve gender parity in organizational settings and obtain a thorough grasp of the complex dynamics underlying female leadership by looking at both ends of the spectrum.

In their careers as leaders, women frequently experience a variety of oppressions. Their progress and recognition are severely hindered by systemic prejudices and gender-based discrimination. According to research, women may face obstacles to obtaining leadership positions, such as unconscious prejudices in decisions about hiring and promotion.<sup>10</sup> Their

advancement may also be hampered by stereotypes that link leadership to masculine characteristics.<sup>10</sup> The repressive conditions that erode the credibility and authority of female leaders might be brought on by societal pressure to conform to established gender roles and gender expectations. Addressing the structural obstacles that maintain gender gaps in leadership roles requires an understanding of these oppressions.<sup>15</sup>

It is a prevalent form of oppression that female leaders deal with. Women in leadership roles may experience overt or covert types of discrimination, such as unequal remuneration, few possibilities for career progression, and exclusion from decision-making. The glass ceiling and glass cliff phenomena draw attention to the difficulties women confront in overcoming insurmountable obstacles and advancing past hazardous leadership positions.<sup>16</sup> Discrimination can damage female leaders' self-esteem and professional identities, preventing them from reaching their full potential and making a positive contribution to organizational success.

The oppressions experienced by female leaders are significantly shaped by societal expectations and gendered norms. Women are frequently expected to prioritize family and caregiving obligations, which might impede their career advancement and constrict their prospects for leadership.<sup>17</sup> Female leaders may be subjected to additional demands as a result of these expectations, such as the idea that they must put in more effort to demonstrate their abilities or successfully integrate their personal and professional lives. In order to create inclusive settings that value and acknowledge the leadership talents of women, it is crucial to go against social expectations and gendered conventions.

Female leaders experienced a variety of forms of persecution, female leaders may also enjoy certain perks that help them succeed. Access to resources, networks, and mentoring opportunities can result in privileges. According to<sup>18</sup> women who are members of privileged groups due to their race, class, or other social identities may enjoy additional benefits in their pursuit of leadership positions. To guarantee that all women, regardless of their social background, have access to leadership opportunities, it is critical to recognize and address these benefits. Organizations can endeavor to create more fair and inclusive environments that support the full involvement and promotion of women leaders by acknowledging both the privileges and oppressions of female leadership.

## **Conclusion**

The study's findings offer insightful information about the experiences, difficulties, and possibilities faced by female leaders at Pakistani

universities. Women who hold leadership positions in higher education confront a variety of obstacles, including discrimination based on gender, exclusion from decision-making processes, a lack of opportunities for recognition and promotion, and a lack of specialized mentorship and support systems. It takes persistence, assertiveness, networking, and the development of personal support networks to overcome these obstacles. While significant progress has been achieved in encouraging diversity and tolerance, there are still persisting gender imbalances, skepticism, and criticism directed towards female leaders in university leadership. Key oppressions include gender biases and cultural expectations, which limit possibilities for women, undermine their authority and credibility as leaders, and increase pressure from caring for others and family duties. A number of variables, including networks, seniority, accomplishments, subject-matter expertise, mentorship, visibility, and managing power dynamics, have an impact on how female leaders are granted advantages. Leadership roles are made more complex by the intersectionality of gender with other parts of self, such as class, ethnicity, or religion, necessitating a nuanced understanding and encouraging atmosphere. These results make it obvious that more work has to be done to advance gender equality, combat prejudice and stereotypes, develop inclusive environments, offer equal chances and recognition, and cultivate an atmosphere that honors different viewpoints in university leadership.

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