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# Female Labor Force Participation in Pakistan: Assessing the Barriers and Exploring the Legal Mechanisms

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## Abstract

The female labor force participation in Pakistan has been significantly low even though women in the country are almost half the national population. This happens despite the formal promises regarding gender equality and inclusive development. This systematic disparity can be explained by the strongly embedded socio-cultural beliefs and structural circumstances that restrict access to paid labour and economic mobility systematically among women. The main objective of the study is to investigate both the socio-cultural and structural obstacles regarding the low rate of participation of the female labor force in Pakistan, and to understand the effectiveness of the current policy enactment mechanisms (legal and workplace) aimed at making labour market assessible for women. To conduct a qualitative study, the research design based on secondary data analysis was considered, and national statistics, international reports, legal tools, and policy documents were used. Thematic analysis was used to extract common themes that define the outcomes of women in the labor market. The results note that patriarchal culture and restrictions in movement, security at their places of work, wage disparities, and poor implementation of the laws all weaken the engagement of women. The research suggests the adoption of the implementation mechanisms to achieve safer and more inclusive workplaces.

**Keywords:** Female labor force participation, gender inequality, labor market, Pakistan, workplace policy

## Introduction

Women constitute approximately 49.6 percent of the global population, yet their participation in economic activity remains significantly lower than that of men across most regions of the world (World Bank, [2022](#)). Despite international recognition of gender equality as a fundamental human right—most notably under Sustainable Development Goal 5—gender-based

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discrimination continues to shape access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making power (UN Women, [2022](#)). One of the most visible manifestations of this inequality is women's limited participation in the labor force, which reflects broader structural and societal constraints rather than individual choice or capability (Verick, [2014](#)).

Female Labor Force Participation (FLFP), commonly defined as the proportion of women who are employed or actively seeking employment, serves as a critical indicator of both economic development and social inclusion. Globally, women remain underrepresented in formal employment and leadership positions, with only a minority holding managerial or board-level roles (Dezso et al., [2013](#)). These disparities persist even in developed economies, indicating that gender inequality is not confined to less developed regions (Dorius & Firebaugh, [2010](#)). However, as the focus shifts to developing countries, these inequalities intensify, making female labor force participation an even greater concern (Verick, [2014](#)).

Pakistan represents a particularly acute case of gender-based exclusion from the labor market. Despite ratifying multiple international human rights treaties and embedding equality provisions within its Constitution, the country consistently ranks among the lowest in global gender equality indices (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], [n.d.](#)). Patriarchal norms shape social expectations regarding women's roles, assigning them primary responsibility for domestic and caregiving work while positioning men as breadwinners and public actors (Iftekhar, [2021](#)). These norms significantly limit women's mobility, autonomy, and access to paid employment (Kousar et al., [2019](#)).

Empirical evidence highlights Pakistan's weak performance in female labor force participation. Women constitute only about one-fourth of the total labor force, far below the global average of 51.2 percent (Sarwar & Abbasi, [2013](#)). Moreover, women who engage in economic activity are disproportionately concentrated in low-paying, informal, and insecure employment, particularly in agriculture and family-based work where labor remains unpaid and unrecognized (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], [2021](#)). Even within formal sectors, women face a substantial wage gap, earning approximately 34 percent less than men for work of equal value (Khan, [2021](#); Philipp, [2024](#)).

Structural and institutional failures further compound these challenges. Limited access to safe transportation, workplace harassment, and inadequate organizational facilities restrict women's ability to enter and remain in paid employment (Asian Development Bank [ADB], [2016](#); World Bank, [2018](#)). Although several laws and workplace policies exist to protect women, weak enforcement mechanisms undermine their effectiveness (Khan & Ali, [2019](#); Waqar, [2017](#)). The resulting gap between legal intent and lived realities sustains women's marginalization. Theoretical explanations for low female labor force participation emphasize intersecting dimensions. Feminist economic perspectives highlight the systematic undervaluation of unpaid care work (UNDP, [2021](#)), while labor market theories point to occupational segregation and wage discrimination (Iftekhar, [2021](#)). Institutional analyses argue that gender-neutral policies often fail to address gender-specific constraints, reproducing inequality rather than mitigating it (Khan & Ali, [2019](#)).

Given these realities, this study seeks to examine the socio-cultural and structural factors underlying Pakistan's low female labor force participation, and to assess the effectiveness of existing legal and policy frameworks aimed at supporting women's inclusion in the labor market. By analyzing these dimensions together, the study highlights the disconnect between policy design, implementation, and actual labor market outcomes.

The paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 reviews the relevant literature; Section 3 outlines the methods; Section 4 presents findings; Section 5 discusses results; and Section 6 is the conclusion.

## Literature Review

The body of existing literature on female labor force participation in Pakistan universally indicates that there is a compound relationship between socio-cultural practices, structural barriers, and institutional failure. These factors, instead of acting separately, support each other to create a cumulative labor market environment that marginalises women systematically. Likewise, the current studies stress that the absence of women in paid labor is not associated with their choice or inability to work, but is a collision of socially ingrained expectations and disparaging models in the labor market (Sarwar & Abbasi, [2013](#); UNDP, [2021](#)).

Many scholars generally agree that women are an important part of advancing social-economic development through enhancing household

income levels, alleviating poverty, and raising the growth rate in an economy (Faridi & Rashid, [2014](#); Verick, [2014](#)). Nonetheless, the benefits are not achievable in the case of Pakistan because of the continuous barriers that limit the economic activities of women in the country. These barriers can be analyzed through the literature by categorizing it into two mutually inclusive strands, such as socio-cultural constraints and structural impediments.

### **Socio-Cultural Constraints**

One of the themes that prevail in the literature is the impact that patriarchy has on the labor market performance of women. The social structure of Pakistan has often been described as a male-centered one, and the gender roles of the country are such that they promote leading the male population in the outer circle and preserve women as domestic workers and care providers (Iftekhhar, [2021](#); Kousar et al., [2019](#)). Such set of norms condition the expectations towards the manner of behavior, movement, and economic input of women, which restricts their right to be employed.

Various works point out that the culture endows women with the duty of doing unpaid work at home making paid work a secondary or even an unwanted choice. Consequently, any form of involvement by women in the labor force has been considered socially unacceptable especially in traditional families (Faridi & Rashid, [2014](#)). The empirical data indicates that a large percentage of women willing to work are either not motivated or simply not allowed to find any occupation outside the household by their male relatives (Asian Development Bank, [2016](#)). The economic invisibility of women is further alleviated by limiting women to work at home or participate in informal work even when their wish to earn an income.

Marriage stands out as a crucial turning point in the participation of women in the labor force. It has been shown that the employment rates of women reduce drastically upon getting married, as the motherhood responsibilities are added, and the decision-making process is shifted even more towards the male relatives (Iftekhhar, [2021](#)). In joint families, the role of extended family also strengthens the conventional gender roles, which denies women the opportunity to focus on their professional ambitions (Kousar et al., [2019](#)). The impression that when a woman chooses paid employment, she loses her position as wife and mother is still ingrained and many women are withdrawing out of the labor market even when there are

jobs to take. There is also the occupational suitability of women based on cultural attitudes. Research observes that in cases where women are allowed to work, jobs are usually pre-selected and the socially acceptable jobs are teaching, healthcare, agriculture, or stay-at-home jobs (Asian Development Bank, [2016](#); Iftekhara, [2021](#)). These limitations limit women to venture into various career options and freely compete in the labor market. Thus, the role of women in the economy is still too limited and underrated.

The participation of women in the labor force is also affected by religion and the cultural interpretations of the religion. Although Islamic doctrines do not deny women their right to work, conservative approaches and cultural values like purdah make women secluded to the outside world (Choudhry et al., [2019](#)). This segregation suppresses the contact of women with the world of work and strengthens gender hierarchies of power. Scholars posit that, it is not the religion but the interaction of religion with the patriarchal cultural norms that maintains women as non-paid workers. All in all, the literature shows that socio-cultural constraints exist at various levels which include households, communities, and the society at large, to limit the economic agency of women. Such norms do not only restrict access of women to work but also structure the labor market in such ways that gender inequality is accepted as normal.

### **Structural Impediments**

In addition to the socio-cultural norms, structural aspects of the Pakistani labor market are also a major obstacle in women's participation in labor force. Researchers underline the fact that, despite women breaking the cultural barrier and trying to find a job, they still face the systemic barrier that prevents easy entry of labor market and retention. Limited mobility is one of the most mentioned structural barriers. One of the big limitations to women is access to safe and reliable transportation especially in urban areas. Research has found that a high percentage of women cannot travel alone because they either have a low level of security, social prohibition or the absence of gender-sensitive transport. The fear of harassment in social areas will further deter women to move to work places and as a result, their job opportunities will be reduced to areas near their homes, which act as an effective form of discrimination (Asian Development Bank, [2016](#)).

Safety and harassment in the work place is a major structural issue. It

has been empirically shown that a significant percentage of women are harassed in the workplace or when commuting, which contributes to creating the atmosphere of insecurity and exclusion (ANI, 2022). Harassment has also been widespread making women hesitant to engage in or continue working in the paid labor force due to lack of adequate reporting systems and fear of social rejection. In many cases, the victims suffer more consequences than the offenders, hence encouraging a culture of silence and withdrawal. These are further worsened by labor market discrimination. The gender pay gap in Pakistan is always reported as highly significant, with women receiving much less compared to men for the similar value of work (Khan, [2021](#); Philipp, [2024](#)). This gap reduces the economic motivation of women to participate in the labour force especially when compared to the unpaid domestic role. Occupational segregation amplifies the disparity in wages with women being over-represented in low-paying feminized industries like agriculture, household labor and informal trade.

Another major structural barrier that comes out is pregnancy and discrimination in marriage. Studies point to the discriminatory nature of hiring, such as the requirement for women to postpone pregnancy or give guarantees about family planning at the stage of their hiring. The payment and working conditions of women usually worsen even at the time when they are still employed and pregnant (Farooq et al., [2019](#)). Such practices force women to either pursue a career or family life, and this dilemma is not common among male employees. Lack of gender sensitive workplace facilities is also an indication of exclusion. Lack of availability of childcare centres, maternity benefits, separate restrooms, and breastfeeding areas shows an implicit belief that women are not supposed to be in formal places of employment. Such institutional accommodation deficiency strengthens the marginal status of women and deters labor-market participation on a permanent basis (Jain et al., [2021](#)).

There are structural barriers also to job search process. Networking is still a main source of finding jobs in Pakistan, but often women cannot use it because of social isolation and lack of experience in the workplace (Khan & Ali, [2019](#); Waqar, [2017](#)). There is also a lack of other female role models, and peer support that contributes to a further decreasing motivation of women to take jobs on, thus, reinforcing the loop of exclusion.

## **Institutional and Policy Context**

The role of institutions, laws, and policies in shaping female labor- force participation is also critically examined in the literature. In its bid to encourage equality between genders and secure protection of women in the workplace, several laws have been enacted and international conventions have been ratified by Pakistan. Nevertheless, researchers always indicate that there is a big disconnect between policy formulation and implementation. The gender-neutral policy frameworks have often been denounced to be insufficient in overcoming gender-concrete limitations. Although discrimination is formally banned by the laws, it tends to disregard some of the challenges, like wage disparities, occupational segregation, and unpaid work (Khan & Ali, [2019](#)). Weak institutional capacity, absence of monitoring mechanisms and political will also contribute towards weak enforcement. Consequently, law has not been effective as a way of providing relief to discriminated women as the laws are symbolic.

The need to achieve gender equality and decent work has been preempted by the international development frameworks like the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals. However, empirical literature argues that the institutional structure of Pakistan does not have the necessary capacity and accountability systems to transform these commitments into real results. The limited institutional ownership, along with governance issues, has limited the efforts to achieve meaningful gender inclusion in the labour market.

Collectively, the literature indicates that, in Pakistan, low female labour force participation is sustained through an intersecting system of cultural norms, structural and institutional weaknesses that mutually reinforce each other. It is not likely to bring permanent change by tackling each and every dimension separately. Instead, systemic and joint actions are needed to unravel the systemic restraints that define women's non-participation in the labour force.

## **Methods**

This paper will adopt a qualitative and interpretive research design to discuss the issue that limits the participation of women in the labor force in Pakistan. The strategy focuses on the role of interplay between socio-cultural norms, structural limitations, and institutional processes to

determine how women can gain access to, and remain in paid jobs (Iftekhhar, [2021](#)). Qualitative design was selected since it enables a contextual and interpretive analysis that cannot be achieved with quantitative approaches, especially to phenomena that are deep in norms and institutional practices within society (Faridi & Rashid, [2014](#)).

The research includes only secondary sources of data, such as national and international labor statistics, policy briefs, legal documents and academic literature. Major ones are the Global Gender Gap Index (UNFPA, [n.d.](#)), Global Wage Reports (Philipp, [2024](#)), the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (Khan, [2022](#)), and policy reports by the Asian Development Bank ([2016](#)). The legal and institutional frameworks were reviewed in terms of the constitutional provisions, the applicable labour laws, and the adopted International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions on maternity protection and equality in the workplace (International Labour Organization, [2008](#)).

The thematic analysis was used to analyze the data and identify three primary themes that included socio-cultural barriers, structural impediments, and institutional/policy constraints (Farooq et al., [2019](#); Iftekhhar, [2021](#)). Family honor, patriarchal authority and expectations of the society were socio-cultural barriers. The structural factors such as restricted mobility, pay inequality, unsafe working environments and work segregation were structural impediments. Legislative provisions, organizational policies, constitutional guarantees and gaps in enforcement are all examples of institutional/policy constraints. The framework allowed conducting a comprehensive, interpretive analysis of the determinants of the labour market participation of women.

### **Findings**

The findings suggest that Pakistan ranks among the few countries globally where women's participation in the labor force remains particularly low. Pakistan is ranked second-last in the world under the international indicators, which shows that there is an underlying and chronic gender imbalance in the economy of participation. Although women make up almost half of the national population, their involvement in the labor market is highly limited, which highlights the level of exclusion of women in the economic activities (UNFPA, [n.d.](#); World Bank, [2022](#)).

The analysis shows that employment of women in Pakistan is highly

directed in the informal sector and low-productivity firms. A high percentage of women are employed in agricultural activities, household activities, and unpaid family services where their worth in the labor market will still go unnoticed in the labor statistics. Such a concentration in informal work not only reduces the level of income security but also denies access to social protection, labour stability, and career mobility (Khan, [2022](#); UNDP, [2021](#)). There are still limited formal sector jobs available to women and those who are in such jobs are rarely in managerial or decision-making positions.

There is a high gender pay gap within sectors. Women receive significantly lower wages than men when they do similar jobs and the average wage differentials are about 34 percent. This ongoing income inequality discourages women to get into or stay in the workforce and strengthens the notion that women's income is not a basic need but a supplemental one to the family income (Philipp, [2024](#)). Wage discrimination also adds to the economic dependency of women as well as to gender hierarchy in the labor market. The physical limitation of mobility and safety is seen as a major challenge to women's participation in labor force. Poor access to safe and affordable means of transportation inhibits women to travel to workplaces especially in the urban and peri-urban regions. The fear of being harassed in the open environment and during traveling discourages women to find jobs beyond their local area even more, which restricts the number of potential jobs (ADB, [2016](#); World Bank, [2018](#)).

The results also depict shortcomings in working environments. Numerous work places are not gender sensitive in terms of childcare facilities, maternity support and proper sanitation facilities. Sexual harassment is still a common issue, and reporting systems are usually inefficient or unavailable, which makes women unwilling to report about abuse, resulting in unsafe working conditions (UNICEF, [2022](#)). Such circumstances have an adverse impact on the job satisfaction, retention and productivity of women. Despite the fact that Pakistan has developed constitutional provisions, labor laws, and workplace policies to enhance gender equality, the results show that there is a wide divide between policy making and policy enforcement. Laws that safeguard women employees such as those that deal with maternity entitlement and workplace harassment are loosely implemented. The efficacy of these legal

frameworks is weakened by institutional capacity limitations, absence of monitoring as well as social resistance, exposing women to discrimination and employment insecurity.

The results also indicate that Pakistan has signed international commitments and conventions that have failed to translate into the real change in terms of improving the labor market performance of women. Although these frameworks are in line with international labor standards, there are structural weak points and a lack of effective enforcement mechanisms that prevent these frameworks from delivering a tangible change. This disjunctive brings out the difference between the intent of the legislation and the reality of the effects in combating economic alienation of women.

On the whole, the results prove that women in Pakistan do not engage in labor force participation on a low level due to one factor but because of the combination of socio-cultural values, structural barriers, and institutionalization factors. These intertwined obstacles work at all levels of labour market participation, which strengthens the marginalization of women even though legal and policy frameworks that foster equality exist.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study reaffirm that female labor force participation in Pakistan is constrained by a mutually reinforcing set of socio-cultural, structural, and institutional factors. Rather than operating independently, these forces interact in ways that systematically limit women's entry into, continuity within, and advancement across labor markets. The persistence of low female participation despite constitutional guarantees and international commitments suggests that formal equality has not translated into substantive equality in practice.

### **Socio-Cultural Norms and Gendered Labor Outcomes**

The results are highly consistent with literature on the importance of patriarchal social institutions in determining the labor market performance of females in Pakistan (Iftekhhar, [2021](#); Kousar et al., [2019](#)). The social expectations of who men and women ought to be are determined by culture as the breadwinners and nurturers, respectively. These expectations still dominate the socially acceptable behaviour, both at home and in institutions. The work of women is often perceived as a secondary, not a primary one, and thus, it does not get the approval of society to participate

in the economy and justifies the limitations of their movement and their professional opportunity.

These constraints are further amplified by marriage and family set up. As the previous research has recorded, the labor force participation among women drops significantly following the onset of marriage as they have more domestic chores and less autonomy in decision-making (Faridi & Rashid, [2014](#); Iftekhhar, [2021](#)). Expectations of extended family caring in joint family systems add to time poverty and limits women in their ability to go to work. The results highlight that the labor market exclusion cannot be explained as a mere process of market relations but it is deeply rooted in the power relations at the household level.

Patriarchal norms have a point of contact with cultural interpretations of religion to strengthen the roles of women in the private domain. Such practices like purdah are frequently used to justify the limitation of women's mobility and accessibility to society and even employment (Choudhry et al., [2019](#)). Although religion as such does not necessarily forbid women's economic participation, it is based on its selective application in the conservative social contexts that result in marginalization of women out of formal labor markets. This overlap of culture and religion forms a strong normative system to define the economic opportunities of women much before the prospects of labor market application can be thought about.

### **Structural Barriers and Workplace Exclusion**

In addition to the socio-cultural norms, there are structural constraints that restrict the participation of women even when they are interested in employment. The limited availability of safe means of transportation is one of the most commonly mentioned barriers, especially in the urban and peri-urban settings (ADB, [2016](#); World Bank, [2018](#)). Women are not willing to travel long distances to work due to the fear of being harassed in the public and during commuting, which effectively limits their job opportunities to local or home-based activities.

The results also indicate that there is continued occupational segregation, as women are in the low-wage, informal sector (in agriculture, domestic work, and small-scale manufacturing). The characteristics of these sectors include low job security, social protection, and skill development or career growth (UNDP, [2021](#); Khan, [2022](#)). Women are still underrepresented in the managerial and decision-making positions of the

formal sector, which supports the stereotypes of gender hierarchies in the organizations (International Finance Corporation [IFC], [2022](#)).

Another significant structural barrier is wage disparities. The studied gender wage gap when women earn about one-third of what men earn for similar work discourages labor market participation and proves the beliefs that the work of women is underestimated (Philipp, [2024](#)). These differences are not just the consequences of the difference in education or experience but a manifestation of discriminatory practices and gender-based perceptions of work traditionally done by women. Even the working environments do not have gender sensitive infrastructure. Women, especially those who have caregiving duties, are disproportionately impacted by the lack of childcare facilities, maternity support, flexible work arrangements, and safe mechanisms of reporting harassment (Farooq et al., [2019](#); UNICEF, [2022](#)). These institutional gaps indicate the lack of concern regarding the needs of women, and increase the rates of attrition among women workers.

### **Institutional and Policy Gaps**

Pakistan has passed several laws with the aim of creating gender equality and protecting women in the workplaces; however, there are empirical findings that Pakistan is experiencing a wide gap between policy making and policy realization. The principle of equality before the law, which ensures that all individuals are entitled to the same legal protections and cannot be treated differently based on gender or social status, is enshrined in Pakistan's constitution. Labor laws aim to protect women from harassment, provide maternity and childbirth protections, and prevent workplace discrimination. However, the effectiveness of these legal frameworks is limited by weak enforcement mechanisms, constrained institutional capacity, and social resistance. However, the effectiveness of those legal frameworks is harmed by the weaknesses of enforcement mechanisms, limited institutional capacity, and social resistance (Khan & Ali, [2019](#)).

As an illustration, laws targeting the acknowledgment and security of women in farmlands and informal industries, such as provincial laws on women farm workers, have not been successful due to the lack of enforcement and follow-up. Similarly, the organisational policies that deal with workplace harassment are often token over form, with the reporting

mechanisms that are either unavailable, intimidating, or inefficient in relation to female employees. In 2019, a bill was presented in the Punjab Assembly to increase maternity leave to 24 weeks (Ahmed, [2019](#)). Currently, Punjab offers 12 weeks, while Sindh provides 16 weeks, showing a disparity between provinces. This bill is an achievement because it shows some effort from lawmakers. However, it does not consider more complex needs of pregnant employees. It also disregards other possible benefits they may need. In Pakistan's system, the implementation of even basic provisions remains unclear. These institutional failures also support the vulnerability of women and discourage their entry into formal jobs.

International obligations such as ratified International Labour Organization conventions have also not delivered any transformative results in the absence of domestic accountability provisions (International Labour Organization, [2008](#)). Gender-neutral policy frameworks fail to consider the women-specific limitations, which generate interventions that do not sufficiently respond to obstacles in the area of caregiving, mobility, and work-related safety. These results contribute to the previous literature that states that the success of a policy does not only depend on whether it is adopted legally but also on its ability to be socially accepted, enforced, and responsive.

### **Intersections and Broader Implications**

The main contribution of the current research was the shedding of light on the interdependence between socio cultural, structural as well as institutional determinants. Policy design and workplace practices, structural constraints to support social expectations, and weak institutions to mediate these relationships are all factors that are influenced by culture. As a result, women face barriers at each level of labour market participation such as entry or retention to promotion. The results also reveal that external shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic increase the existing inequities. The high percentage of women in informal jobs increased their exposure to loss of employment and reduction in income when the economy was affected (Khan, [2022](#)). Such a unequal effect highlights the vulnerability of women to labour-market connections, as well as the lack of effectiveness of the social protection measures available.

In a more general sense, there is a significant economic and social cost of continuing to exclude women of the labour force. The low participation

of women reduces household income, limits national productivity and inclusive development. In this way, the findings support the argument that improving the labour-force participation of women is not only a gender-equity issue but is also a severe economic necessity.

## **Conclusion**

The current study attempted to examine the longstanding issue of low female labor force participation in Pakistan in its socio-cultural, structural and institutional framework. Although women form almost half of the population, their participation in paid work is very insignificant, skewed and is mainly restricted to informal and low productivity work. The results highlight the fact that this exclusion was not a one-time event but a part of the long-standing trends of inequality that determine how women get access to economic opportunities throughout life. It shows that the socio-cultural norms are at the center stage in limiting the participation of women in the labor market. Gender roles have remained traditional due to which women are assigned the major role of domestic and caring labor while men are placed as the main breadwinners. The norms affect decision-making in the household, limit the independence of women, and limit the sources of employment which are socially acceptable. These constraints are further enhanced by marriage and family structures, which reduce women's ability to join, stay in, and climb the ladder in paid labor market.

Institutional obstacles are used to strengthen socio-cultural constraints. Western employment opportunities among women are still grossly concentrated in informal sectors that are characterised by low wages, job insecurity as well as lack of social protection mechanisms. When occupational segregation is coupled with an ongoing pay gap, the economic value of women's labor is diminished, which gradually reduces their incentive to remain in the formal labor market. Limited access to safe transportation, increased fear about personal safety and poor infrastructure in the workplace further limit the choice of employment that women can have as well as the rates of attrition.

At the institutional level, the research establishes a steady disengagement between the intention and practice of the policy regime. Even though there are legal tools and workplace controls that are aimed at protecting the interests of women, the poor implementation mechanisms and low institutional capacity compromise their effectiveness. As a result,

the formal commitments of equality not in practice turn into labor market exclusion. In addition, the external shocks, like economic crises, reveal these vulnerabilities in an uneven manner, because women in informal and insecure jobs have to bear the burden of such perturbations.

These are combined to highlight the fact that the low representation of women in Pakistan in the labor force is a consequence of deep-rooted socio-cultural values, structural barriers and institutional vices. It is not sufficient to focus on a single dimension separately. The sustainable development will require an integrated approach that will address oppressing norms, break down institutional obstacles, and strengthen institutional responsibility at the same time. Without such a combined strategy, the economic marginality of women will most probably continue to be experienced even in the face of policy commitments.

According to findings of the study, a number of recommendations come out to practicing policymakers. To begin with, companies ought to focus on ensuring that the workplace is gender responsive, through investments in secure means of transportation, childcare, flexible working schedules and effective systems to prevent and deal with harassment. Second, the implementation of the current labor legislations and other workplace structures should be reinforced with better monitoring, accountability, and avenues of grievance to make sure that women's protection is implemented in practice. Third, women must be engaged in the organizational and policy decision-making processes to ensure interventions that are based on their lived experiences and respond to practical impediments as opposed to symbolic issues.

#### **Author Contribution**

**Ifrah Khalid:** sole author

#### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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