

## Gendered Higher Education and Women Academicians' Career Development

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### ABSTRACT:

Gendered culture in higher education attracted due attention of researchers across the globe. It vividly shaped the academic environment, influenced women's experiences and perpetuated inequalities. This research provides insights on the impact of gendered culture on women academicians' career development in higher education of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). We aimed to highlight the gendered barriers they face in advancing their careers in higher education. We used quantitative epistemologies and employed a cross-sectional approach. We selected a sample of 30 women academics by means of simple random sampling technique and collected data by using questionnaire from one of the public sector universities of AJK. The findings revealed a mixed bag of findings, including disparities in representation, research productivity, promotion, and supervision as well as in familial responsibilities. Based on the findings, we conform the argument of Acker (1990) that higher education is gendered space where men's hegemony contributes to maintain the gender segregation in the organization of higher education. It is suggested to immediate measures to elevate women academicians' status in higher education of AJK.

### KEY WORDS:

Women, Higher Education, Representation, Research, Career

### Introduction

Research on the gendered culture of higher education has garnered significant attention from scholars worldwide, shedding light on the barriers faced by women academicians within academic settings. The organizational culture and structure of academia are often seen as reinforcing and privileging masculine practices and norms (Bates & Organization, 2022; Clark-Saboda & Lemke, 2023). These include academic gatekeeping, recruitment and selection processes, and resource allocation, all of which have historically disadvantaged women (CohenMiller et al., 2022; Lunn, 2007; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2008; Shahzad et al., 2020). The patriarchal structure of society has influenced all public and private spheres, including the social, political, economic, and educational sectors, thus marginalizing women academics within higher education.

Despite progress, Vartika (2022) argues that the effectiveness, transparency, and accountability of recruitment and promotion measures remain questionable, as gender stereotypes continue to position academic women as caretakers or "academic mommies." Women are burdened with academic and non-academic responsibilities, such as pastoral care, committee work, and the pressures of research and student supervision (Johnson, 2022; Williams, 2023). These patriarchal barriers continue to hinder women's representation in higher education (Bhatti & Ali, 2020;

Teferra & Altbach, [2004](#)). Furthermore, the patriarchal structure of higher education often dictates roles and behaviours that are inherently male, with successful women required to adopt these masculine characteristics to thrive (Abdullah & Kauser, [2022](#)). This forced adaptation reflects the slow career growth of women in academia, especially in developed countries.

As stated above and reiterated here that women face numerous barriers in academic journey. Research shows that gender pay gap has been one of the pronounced barriers where men earn more than women, despite having similar roles and responsibilities, in public and private spheres including higher education (Schnackenberg & Simard, [2018](#); Turner, [2002](#)). They also stated that this pay-gap further makes women vulnerable to explore the career aspirations in public and private spheres. Similar situation of gender pay gap is faced by women academicians in higher education careers. This further exacerbates the situation by limiting opportunities to rise in the academic ladder like men. Abdullah and Nisar ([2024](#)) asserted that women academicians' career growth is also suppressed by the sociocultural expectations in most of developing countries including Pakistan and AJK. They added that additional burden of family responsibilities further demotivates women to seek career and develop profiles like men colleagues. Such barriers create inequalities and reduce the diversity by excluding women from scholastic circles (Abdullah & Ullah, [2016](#); De Welde & Stepnick, [2023](#)).

Abdullah and Ullah ([2022](#)) conducted a study on lived experiences of women academicians in universities of AJK. They argued that gender inequalities have vividly affected the careers of women's quality and inclusion of research. In continuation, Pasque and Nicholson ([2023](#)) stated that women academicians face exclusion from main research positions in academic ladder. They also argued that women's research potential is limited to contribute to the scientific knowledge though research in universities. Additionally, Blagojević ([2009](#)) added that women academicians are burdened with family responsibilities that consume large proportion of their time while men are devoid of it (Graves et al., [2022](#); Ullah et al., [2017](#)). They unanimously stated that double pressure of academic and family responsibilities restrains women to contribute in an affective way which results into their low research productivity and, hence slow career growth. This shows that how gendered academic culture suppress women in career growth (Hakiem, [2023](#)).

Like developing countries, women academicians in Pakistan and AJK face numerous challenges during their academic career in higher education. These pronounced challenges include less research engagement, gendered pay gap, and women's underrepresentation on senior academic and power positions which vividly affect their career paths (Abdullah et al., [2024](#); Abdullah & Nisar, [2024](#)). They also argued that although some significant achievements have been made by women academicians, however they experience underrepresentation in academic and non-academic positions in higher education of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). These few studies do not cover the gendered disparities in rapidly expanding higher education of AJK. Thus, we attempted to highlight the challenges faced by women academicians in gendered higher education of AJK.

## Literature Review

Literature on women academicians has been conducted across the societies. Acker (2003, 2012) argued that women academicians are disproportioned in academic positions of higher education. Allan (2011) added that men have long been serving in higher education-possess greater control on resources and decision making due to their long standing in academic structure. Men's position in academia has been decisive for women's exclusion. Similarly, Bagilhole (2002) and other scholars spotlighted that this gender imbalance has negative effects on the women's representation in the academic ladder. Bharathi (2022) highlighted that norms and values of the institution create hindrances to the women's affective participation and contribution in higher education structure, while Eagly and Carli (2007) asserted that men's hegemony in academia further perpetuate these inequalities where women suffer in their career aspirations. Despite various advancements, Eddy and Ward (2017) noted that women remain underrepresented in faculty positions. Egunjobi (2008) showed that the increased proportion of women graduating

has positively impacted their presence in academic careers. However, Ekine (2018) observed that women are still largely confined to lower academic positions in universities across developing countries. Ekpo (2015) and Friedman (2020) argued that this underrepresentation has significantly hindered women's career aspirations as compared to their male counterparts.

Women academicians' underrepresentation in academic positions has been a challenge to the higher education the world over. A number of factors are responsible for gender inequalities included gender biases (Grove, 2013), societal expectations (Jaber, 2014), traditional gender roles (Kamau, 2011), and stereotypes (Madsen, 2010) which restrain the affective participation in academic careers. Malik and Courtney (2011) asserted that men are in numbers, and they occupy the senior academic and power positions including decision making positions and influence the higher education structure. In this way, Mai (2007) argued that women academicians are absent in key academic roles and hence face underrepresentation in academic positions.

In spite of increased women ratio in academia, McNeill (2007) noted that they are mainly found on the low academic positions. She also added that this low proportion of women academics in academia is due to men's dominance in higher education structure that further discriminate women by creating higher education a gendered space. Like other scholars, Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) also drew attention towards the women's additional responsibilities along with the academic load. They contended that women academicians' career development is affected by the additional familial responsibilities.

In addition to institutional and societal barriers, women's dual academic and non-academic roles (Johri et al., 2021), especially familial responsibilities (Naseem et al., 2024), limit their capacity to fully engage in academic life and research. This lack of time and support further exacerbates the feeling of underrepresentation, as women are often expected to juggle teaching, research, and family duties. Consequently, Bates (2022) argued that these challenges create an environment where women academicians struggle to attain equal representation and recognition compared to their male counterparts. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive institutional changes to support gender equity and work-life balance in academia.

Morley (2018) revealed that research is one of the important dimensions in academic career. She asserted that women academicians, like other parts of the world, are deficient in research. She further stated that research plays key role in academic careers, contributing to scholarly advancement, credibility, and expansion of the knowledge. (Morley, 2018; Miller & Triana, 2009). However, in developing countries, women academicians often face challenges in maintaining high research productivity. Morley (2019) highlighted that women in these regions are particularly deficient in research output. While women in developed countries have made significant strides in research and development, they still lag behind men in terms of research productivity (Mousa, 2020). This issue is even more pronounced in universities in developing nations (Abdullah & Kauser, 2022; Mousa & Alas, 2016a).

The low research contribution from women academicians can be attributed to several factors. Neale and Ozkanli (2010) argued that gender biases in academia are a major barrier to women's research and development opportunities. Nielsen and Huse (2010) noted that women publish internationally at a significantly lower rate than men. Many women, burdened with both academic and non-academic responsibilities, struggle to find the time or resources to conduct research. Moreover, Ojo and Olaniyan (2014) pointed out that men often do not provide women with the space to contribute to research productivity, and women are frequently excluded from research groups or lack guidance from male colleagues. Oplatka (2006) also revealed that senior women in academia often fail to mentor junior women, exacerbating the lack of support for research initiatives. Additionally, Ozkanli and White (2008) emphasized that women's research productivity is often affected by familial responsibilities. These factors collectively contribute to the underrepresentation of women in research and academic advancement.

Women in academia often face discrimination when it comes to the allocation of research students for supervision. Despite their significant contributions to both academic and non-academic tasks, women are frequently

overlooked when it comes to supervising research students. Numerous studies, including those by Mousa (2017) and Reid (2015), have found that women are systematically discriminated against in the allocation of student supervision by male bosses and senior colleagues. These findings align with Roberts' (2020) assertion that women are often not consulted about their consent for student supervision, nor is their specific research domain valued. Instead, women are frequently directed to supervise students without consideration of their area of expertise, creating an environment of forced responsibility.

Slaughter (2015) further argued that women are expected to supervise students outside of their research domain, a situation that not only limits their professional development but also undermines their interest and motivation in research. Such practices are reflective of broader issues, including unconscious biases, gender stereotypes, and structural barriers, all of which hinder women's contributions to research and academic advancement. These barriers often result in women being assigned supervisory roles that are not aligned with their academic interests or expertise, diminishing their ability to thrive in their own research areas.

Williams (2010) emphasized that these biases create vulnerabilities in the careers of women academicians, limiting their opportunities for professional recognition, advancement, and meaningful academic contributions. To address these challenges, universities must adopt policies that ensure equitable and inclusive practices in research supervision.

Women academicians often face significant discrimination in the promotion process within higher education institutions. The academic environment tends to favour men, whose hegemony results in their contributions being more widely recognized, while women's work is often overlooked or undervalued. Sadaf, Bano, and Rahat (2025) and Yenilmez (2016) analysed the issue, finding that women overwhelmingly contribute to academia with the necessary qualifications, research achievements, and excellent character. However, they are frequently denied fair treatment in promotion processes compared to their male counterparts.

Similarly, Ceci et al. (2014) revealed that women are often overlooked when it comes to promotions to tenured positions, despite their qualifications and contributions. Albashir, Al-Ali, and Areiqat (2021) identified gendered expectations, where women are expected to handle both academic and non-academic responsibilities but are still discriminated against in promotion decisions. Despite possessing the required qualifications and experience, women often remain in junior academic positions for extended periods (Muleya, 2017; Abdullah, Habib, & Gillani, 2021).

Moreover, Abdullah and Ullah (2022) emphasized that structural barriers, coupled with a lack of mentoring and networking opportunities, keep women in subverted positions. These challenges create an environment where women's career advancement is hindered, and their professional growth is stunted compared to their male colleagues. Addressing these issues requires significant changes in institutional practices to ensure that women receive equal opportunities for career advancement, including equitable promotion processes, mentoring programs, and networking support.

In developing countries, women academicians face numerous challenges as they navigate their academic careers. One of the most prominent issues is the persistent gender pay gap, where women are often paid less than their male counterparts for similar roles and responsibilities (Schnackenberg & Simard, 2018; Turner, 2002, Abdullah et al., 2024). This disparity in compensation not only undermines the value of women's work but also discourages career progression. Additionally, women frequently encounter limited opportunities for promotions and professional advancement, particularly when societal expectations around family and caregiving responsibilities come into play. These societal pressures often force women to juggle academic and familial roles, reducing the time and energy they can devote to research and career development.

These challenges create significant barriers to women's academic growth, perpetuating a cycle of inequality that limits the diversity of thought and perspectives within scholarly communities (Abdullah & Ullah, 2016; De Welde & Stepnick, 2023). The impact of such gender disparities extends beyond individual careers to the broader academic landscape, affecting the quality and inclusivity of research. As women are frequently excluded from key academic and research roles, their contributions to scientific inquiry and knowledge production are marginalized. This exclusion not only stifles the potential for innovation but also hampers the growth of academic institutions (Abdullah & Ullah, 2022; Pasque & Nicholson, 2023). Addressing these disparities is critical for fostering a more inclusive and equitable academic environment, where all scholars, regardless of gender, can contribute meaningfully to the advancement of knowledge.

In addition to these overt challenges, cultural barriers also manifest in subtler forms, such as biases within academic institutions. Women may be overlooked or undervalued in classroom settings, research opportunities, and academic publishing (Abdullah & Shoaib, 2021; Johri et al., 2021). To address these challenges, it is important to understand and focus the cultural barriers that restrain women's participation in higher education. Thus, we aimed to sort out the gendered barriers to women academics in advancing their careers in higher education. It is noteworthy here that by recognizing these obstacles where women are equally represented, supported, and empowered to progress in academia. This research is informed by the Joan Acker's (1990) concept of gendered organization. Acker (1990) argued that organizational structure of higher education is gendered and shaped by the gendered expectations and practices. She further stated that these gendered practices marginalize women in academia because all the rules and regulation, policies, and documents are designed, produced, and executed by the men academicians. This further exacerbates the situation by perpetuating the gendered norms and values while women are silenced.

## Conceptualization

The conceptualization is the process of developing or clarifying the idea or concept. Moreover, ideas are transformed into more defined and structured and concrete measurable form. By doing so, we formulated the following hypothesis. Here, gendered culture is dependent variable while women's proportion, representation, pay gap, family responsibilities, promotion, research and supervision are independent variables.

**Hypothesis:** Gendered culture is predictor of women's proportion, representation, pay gap, family responsibilities, promotion, research, and supervision.

## Methodology

### Research Design

We examined the impact of gendered culture on career development of women academicians in higher education (universities) of AJK. We aimed to sort out the gendered barriers faced by women academics in advancing their careers in higher education. For this purpose, we used quantitative epistemologies in positivistic tradition by employing a cross-sectional approach. The decision to use quantitative methods was driven by several factors, including the availability of data, time constraints, and limited financial resources. Moreover, this approach was selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of women academicians' career paths in higher education. While a cross-sectional research approach allows us to investigate multiple variables simultaneously.

### Population

There are many higher education institutions (HEIs) in the state of AJK including public and private HEIs and universities. However, our focus was public sector universities. There are six public sector universities including one women university in AJK. Due to time and resources constraints, we were unable to focus on all the universities and, thus, selected one of the universities to conduct this study. There are 121 women academicians working in this



university in which 91 were presently working while others were either on study or privileged or sabbatical leave. Out of 91, we selected 30 women academicians for this study.

### Measurements

A sample of 30 women academicians was selected by using random number table. We designed a structured questionnaire for data collection. The questionnaire comprised 21 items on the Likert scale. We pretested the questionnaire to ensure clarity, effectiveness, and reliability of tool and well as data. While we removed the confusing, unclear, and ambiguous questions. We checked the reliability of the data by using Cronbach Alpha while using SPSS. The reliability of the tool ranged from 0.82 to 0.94 and overall, 0.88, which signifies greater reliability. We collected data from women academicians with the help of simple random sampling technique. This method was chosen because it is an efficient way to randomly select a representative sample from a larger population, thus increasing the likelihood of generalizing the results. We tested hypothesis and employed OLS regression model by means of statistical packages for the social sciences (SPSS).

### Ethical Considerations

We took informed consent from the institutional review board (IRB) of the university. This approval helped us to access the respondents of the study easily. We shared this letter with all the identified women academicians in the sample. We intended to take their content for the study by attaching a request of consent in the light of IRB approval. All of them agreed to participate in the survey. Besides, we asked about their availability for data collection and with their consent, we collected data from them in their respective offices.

### Key Findings

This section comprises of findings of demographic information and hypothesis testing. The findings are tabulated and interpreted for the readers.

**Table 1**  
*Frequency Distribution of Qualification, Income, and Designation.*

Variable	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Qualification	MS/M.Phil	20	67
	PhD	08	26
	MA	02	7
Income	80,000- 100,000	04	13
	100,001-120,001	08	27
	140,002-160,0002	13	43
	Above 160,003	05	17
Designation	Lecturer	19	63
	Assistant Professor	10	34
	Professor	01	03

Table 1 presents the distribution of demographic variables. According to the table, 567% of faculty members hold either MS or MPhil degree, including those in the positions of Lecturers and Assistant Professors. In contrast, 26% have earned a PhD, while 7% hold only a Master degree. This suggests that many women academics occupy lower academic ranks, such as Lecturers, with fewer achieving PhD qualifications. Regarding monthly income, 13% of women academics earn between 80,000 and 100,000, 27% earn between 100,001 and 120,000, 43% earn between 140,002 and 160,002, and 17% earn over 160,003. This indicates that women in academia generally enjoy

a reasonable income within higher education careers. Among the faculty members, 63% are Lecturers, 34% are Assistant Professors, and one faculty member holds the title of Professor. This highlights that most faculty members are in the Lecturer position, with only a few reaching the ranks of Assistant Professor and Professor.

**Hypothesis Testing:** The following hypothesis was analyzed, and the results were tabulated. Gendered culture is predictor of women’s proportion, representation, pay gap, family responsibilities, promotion, research, and supervision.

**Table 2**  
*An OLS Regression Model Predicting Gendered Culture in Higher Education*

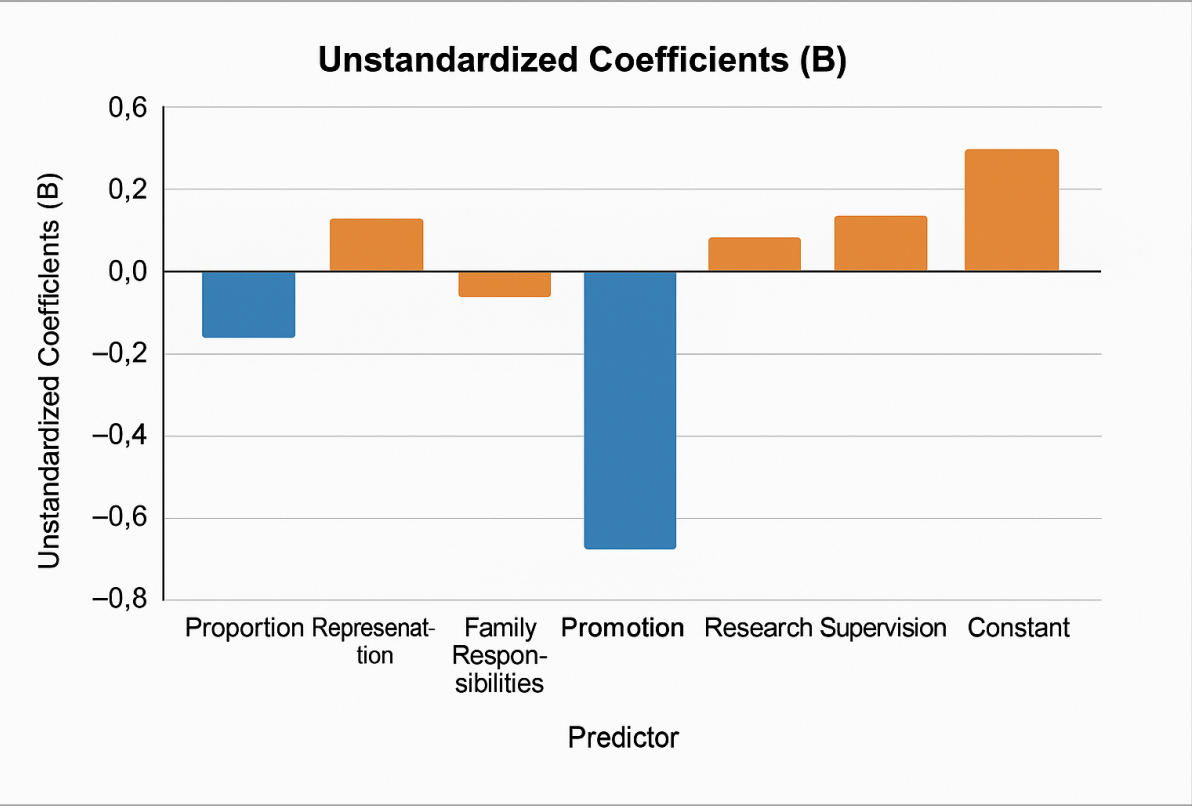
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Proportion	-.211	.141	-.621	-3.321	.000
Representation	.210	.101	.219	2.652	.000
Gender Pay Gap	.109	.210	.421	3.643	.000
Family Responsibilities	-.318	.342	-.371	-2.120	.000
Promotion	-.312	.021	-.422	-4.001	.000
Research	-.720	.231	-.754	-4.234	.000
Supervision	-.532	.204	-.532	-4.512	.000
(Constant)	5.321	.671		8.100	.000
F = 15.654, Sig. = .000			R Square = .732, Adjusted R Square = .821		
Total number of observations = 30					

The above table shows standardized Beta values revealing the strength and direction of the relationship between each predictor and the gendered culture in standard deviation units. A larger absolute Beta value indicates a stronger influence of the predictor on the gendered culture. I discussed the results in the light of Beta values. The Beta of -0.621 suggests a strong negative relationship between proportion and the gendered culture. A higher Proportion is associated with a decrease in the gendered culture. This predictor has the strongest negative effect among the variables listed. The Beta of -0.754 shows that research has the strongest negative effect on the gendered culture. For every standard deviation increase in research, the gendered culture decreases by 0.754 standard deviations. The Beta of -0.532 indicates a moderate negative relationship with the gendered culture, meaning as supervision increases, the gendered culture decreases. The Beta of -0.422 shows a moderately negative relationship between Promotion and the gendered culture. A one-standard deviation increases in promotion results in a 0.422 standard deviation decrease in the gendered culture. The Beta of -0.371 suggests a moderate negative effect. This indicates that more family responsibilities are associated with a decrease in the gendered culture, although it is weaker than the other predictors. The Beta of 0.421 indicates a positive relationship with the gendered culture. A one-standard deviation increases in the gender pay pap is associated with a 0.421 standard deviation increase in the gendered culture. The Beta of 0.219 indicates a positive but weaker relationship with the gendered culture. As representation increases, the gendered culture increases slightly, but this effect is less pronounced compared to the others. The p-value (Sig.) for all predictors is 0.000, which is highly significant. This means all the predictors are significantly related to the gendered culture.

Model Fit: F-value = 15.654, Sig. = 0.000: This indicates that the model is statistically significant. The F-test is used to determine whether the independent variables, as a group, significantly predict the gendered culture. Since the p-value is 0.000, the overall model is significant. R Square = 0.732: This means that approximately 73.2% of the variance in the gendered culture explained by the predictors in the model. This suggests that the model is a good fit. Adjusted R Square = 0.821: The Adjusted R Square value accounts for the number of predictors and sample size,

offering a more accurate estimate of the model’s explanatory power. The higher the value, the better the model fits the data, considering the number of predictors. 0.821 suggests a very good fit even after adjusting for the number of predictors. In conclusion, this regression model shows that research has the most substantial influence on the gendered culture, followed by proportion, and the model overall does a good job of explaining the variance in the outcome. All predictors are statistically significant, and the model appears robust with good explanatory power.

Figure 1



Discussions

Acker (1990) is a popular feminist who worked on different dimensions of gender in higher education. She focused on the gendered organization of higher education by describing that how gendered hierarchies contribute to the women marginalization. Their gendered nature is masked through obscuring the embodies nature of work. She further said that images of men bodies and masculinity pervade organizational processes across the globe. These organizational processes further marginalized women academicians while contributing to the gender segregation in organizations. The higher education of AJK is gendered organization where male dominate since long and woman are merely found on the senior academic and power positions. This shows that how women academicians face gendered segregation. Power is located at all male enclaves. This does not mean that women are not provided opportunities to seek higher education career. Although they are seeking academic careers but with low proportion in lower echelons of academia. This further worsens their career aspirations. This signifies that they are underrepresented in faculty positions as well as on senior academic positions. By the same token, they are not provided equal opportunities to conduct and publish research while they are on the verge of male immediate bosses either to allocate supervision of students or not. It is noteworthy here that women academicians are deficient in research productivity globally while similar issues are faced by the women academicians in this research. Research and supervision of the students is interlinked because engaging students in research is one of breakthrough for the research and publications of women academicians. Thus, women face problems in research productivity and hence supervision. This shows that men dominate research and supervision while women are kept at subverted positions and less likely engaged in the research and supervision like men colleagues. Besides, women academicians



experience many issues in the promotion process. As men get swift promotion while women despite fulfilling the required qualification and experiences they have to wait for their promotions. Higher education of AJK is under the great influence of patriarchy where men are devoid of the family responsibilities while women are burdened with career paths and family responsibilities. They have to balance academic and familial tasks. This vividly affects the academic careers of women academicians because of familial responsibilities, they were not able to spend a considerable time to research and academic loads as they have to rear children and manage the domestic chores. However, women and men have equal pay scale this means that men and women are given equal remuneration against their duties. Based on findings, we agree with the concept of Acker (1990) that higher education is gendered space. Men's hegemony contributes to maintain the gender segregation in the organization of higher education. It is noteworthy here that men occupying the academic structure will never let the women to grow. Thus, women academicians are marginalized. This dually verifies the argument of Acker that women academicians are marginalized in higher education.

## Conclusion

It is concluded that higher education of AJK is gendered where women academicians face significant challenges related to underrepresentation, research productivity, delayed promotions, and the balancing of family responsibilities. This study highlights a positive aspect in terms of equal pay for both men and women. Nonetheless, these mixed findings suggest that some strides have been made toward gender equality, while gendered structure still create barriers to women academic and their professional development in higher education of AJK. Based on the study findings, we conform the argument of Acker (1990) that higher education is gendered space where men's hegemony contributes to maintain the gender segregation in the organization of higher education. It is suggested to address these disparities and support women in overcoming the obstacles they face in higher education of AJK.

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