

***Faculty Mentoring and Unmasking Gender Biases and Influences for Pakistan
Returnee Doctoral Graduates from Abroad***

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Abstract

The mentoring of faculty is an important aspect in higher education for countries investing in training faculty abroad. This study explores the key challenges faced by young female faculty returning from doctoral studies abroad and assuming leadership positions in higher education without prior mentoring. The participants of this study were doctoral graduates who completed studies in the UK and USA and working in universities overseen by Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan. A thematic analysis was conducted for interview data obtained from the British Council in Pakistan and consisting mainly of young female academics. The findings reveal cases of outright discrimination against females, a lack of support systems for female faculty and the role of socio-cultural context in constraining them. Remedial mechanisms in the form of appropriately matched mentoring is needed to address the emerging concerns.

Keywords: International Doctorates, Mentoring Female Academics, Academic Career, Higher Education, South East Asia

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Introduction

Developing world class research universities is a strong drive for many countries in South East Asia. For Pakistan, the ambition is enshrined in a program of providing scholarships for faculty to undertake doctoral studies abroad. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) connects gifted students and faculty with world class research universities through an international scholarship program. The HEC provides scholarships that include among others; the Overseas MS/MPHIL leading to PhD, UK-Pakistan knowledge corridor PhD scholarship program, Academic and research linkages under Bilateral Agreement, Learning opportunities abroad, Faculty development program, and a Split PhD and postdoctoral Fellowship program with France. Others include the overseas scholarship Aghaz-e-haqooq-e-Balochistan project and partial support scholarships offered to students at completion stages of PhD. The large number of scholarships not only provides opportunity to study in the world's top universities but also a rare opportunity for young female academics to access positions of leadership especially with the creation of women only universities in Pakistan.

According to the Higher Education Commission-Pakistan Annual Report 2013-2014), an increasing number of beneficiaries of the government scholarship program are returning. For instance, in a period between 2003 and 2013 a total of 9,895 scholarships were awarded through 22 scholarship schemes. By 2014, there were 12,895 scholarships from the projects and the Fulbright scholarship support schemes awarded. The returnees from the PhD programs during the period were 1,985 graduates. Clearly, an enduring outward mobility and inflows into the higher education system ensures that universities under the HEC will continue being fed with fresh young graduates from the best universities across the world.

The main challenge however lies in the limited capacity to mentor them into higher education tasks given the shortage of mentors or the difficulty of finding willing mentors (Bonawitz & Andel, 2009). Considering the scanty literature on the experience of young female academics and cognisant of the absence of prior mentoring, we pose questions; how do young female academics in Pakistan higher education describe their experience of being in leadership? How do the social and cultural roles of patriarchy affect the experience of the young academics? Such evidence would inform policy debates and practice on developing mentoring approaches for incoming young female academics returning from universities abroad.

Mentoring women in higher education

The issue of women participation in higher education has gained scholarly attention over the years. On the one hand, studies on mentoring for women in higher education focus on the challenges to mentoring and establishment of mentoring relationships. Recent studies attempting to understand the “glass ceiling” on women academic careers highlight exploitation and harassment of female academics often with a male line manager as a factor (Yousaf & Schmiede 2016). The idea of a glass ceiling is often used to explain the absence of women in the senior roles of medical education (McKimm et al 2015). In related studies women academics complain about teaching overload and mentoring is suggested as a possible mechanism of improving the situation (Bower 2012).

Debates still exist about the ideal mentoring relationship. Some perspectives on mentoring relationships still prefer female to female mentoring arrangements despite the apparent low numbers of female professors. Worse still, no data is available on Higher Education staffing and the little available data indicates female participation at PhD level was reported at 28% by 2003-04, from 22% in 2001-2002 (Batool, Sajid & Shaheen 2013). Despite the emphasis on female mentors for female faculty, others prefer a cross-gendered mentoring. For instance, Bower (2012:7) states;

“I do not agree that women seeking full professorship need to be mentored solely by other females. I believe a female associate professor needs to be mentored by individuals, regardless of gender, who will provide her with the most beneficial guidance in obtaining her desired position. I was fortunate to have two mentors provide me with the guidance necessary to achieve promotion and tenure”.

Therefore, considering the diversity of views on mentoring relationships, we need a more context specific evidence to enrich this debate.

Despite many studies recommending mentoring as a solution to career progress for women, a key obstacle is the few numbers of female academic mentors. Studies show that female faculty can access mentors to negotiate through the tenure process but academics progressing to positions of professorship report fewer opportunities for mentorship than men (Bonawitz & Anzel 2009). Women in STEM disciplines find greater problems because some institutions hardly accept women for STEM positions with tenure and the reason is the social and family demands that hampers their participation. Unmarried women often find themselves encumbered by social and work obligations. To cope with social difficulties, Bonawitz and Anzel (2009) suggests female mentees request a female mentor and where possible, a full professor. However, women face barriers of finding female mentors in higher education due to a shortage of women in leadership positions. Bower (2013), recommends having cross gender mentoring so that one provides career support and another on psycho social support. As Bower states; “I think being mentored by a man and a woman is an advantage because each has a different perspective”. The proposed arrangement is consistent with findings from a study of faculty in international physical education departments (Bower & Hums 2008). The study supports a mentoring relationship helping mentees obtain knowledge and skills to do their career functions of teaching, scholarship, and service. The second aspect important for women is to nature the psychosocial or emotional benefits of the mentoring relationship. The authors further suggest a closer look at career and psychosocial functions with women in other industries.

Most available studies focusing on the experience of mentoring relationships for women are quantitative. Gender-related attributes were seen as impacting on the type of mentoring received. In the study conducted by Obers (2014), women with male mentors were more encouraged to apply for promotion than women who had female mentors. Masculine mentors were more goal-orientated and able to teach the mentee to be more “single-minded in approaches to projects, competitive, strategic and focused” and were more likely to provide challenging assignments (Khan 2013). Meanwhile, women role models were seen as being more aware of the need to build self-esteem in women and they are also known to offer advice on managing domestic and work obligations (Obers 2014). Therefore, having few women role models poses the risk of

disadvantaging women as men may be ill prepared to build self-esteem among women faculty.

Same gender relationships are perceived as providing two psychosocial functions. Ragins & Cotton (1999) quantitative study examined all possible combinations of gender and reported diverse results. Female to female mentoring were more likely to engage in social activities than female to male mentors. Moreover, compared to all the other mentoring gender combinations, male mentees were less likely to report that their mentors provide acceptance roles. They were also less satisfied with their mentors. While male mentors were expected to provide more career development functions than female mentors, there was no evidence to support it. However, mentees who had a background of male mentors received more compensation and promotions than mentees with female mentors. Male to male mentoring also reported mentee satisfaction. Males with female mentors however reported less psychosocial and career development functions than the other gender combinations. In particular, males were less satisfied with their female mentors on the mentor contribution to professional development or provision of challenging assignments and or exposure (Ragins & Cotton 1999).

Socio-Cultural influences of patriarchy

Exploring gender dynamics is a pertinent issue in the higher education context especially given the negative stereotypes against women in South East Asia. Morley et al (2014) reveals cultural perspectives as impediments to the success of women. Citing typical examples, Morley study observes attitudes in China view that an educated woman has no virtue and a parallel Japanese perspective that women should conform to patriarchal norms or risk unhappiness. The perspectives all have social and affective consequences (Morley et al 2014). Although in Pakistan, the women only universities are recognized for changes in female participation (Morley & Crossouard 2015; Shah et al 2013), that is only a small success that allows women to move up the university hierarchy. Despite the changes, more recent quantitative studies still connect gender to family and organisational barriers that fall outside the institutional domain. A prior study conducted among women managers in academia across four public and four private universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad suggested women in management still encounter familial and organizational barriers and more especially in private universities (Ghaus 2013).

Analysis of the more context specific literature on Pakistan reveals little on the social cultural influences of patriarchy on young female academics. Similarly, Shah (2008; 2010) study of the patriarchal nature of Pakistani culture within which sex-segregated education is conducted and Durrani (2008) study of gender in Pakistan focusing on sexual harassment address issues affecting than specific mentoring challenges for young faculty. Studies of senior women academics including a Vice-Chancellors, deans or heads of the department in public sector universities in Rawalpindi and Islamabad contain descriptions of their professional experiences and framing by Patriarchal cultures and the family support roles in women's career advancement Rab (2010a and b). Building on existing studies,

In summary, while existing studies address issues of senior academics in leadership, no studies address the concerns of young academics. Furthermore, the quantitative studies tell us about the relationship between gender pairing and expected mentoring outcomes.

Nevertheless, such studies lack detail and sometimes cover up the actual experiences that lead to observed outcomes. We need a qualitative description of the experiences of female academics in the work environment. Moreover, aware that most studies are largely conducted in western societies and a few focusing on participant background characteristics, a study is needed that specifically addresses the position of women in alternative higher education settings.

Methodology

In this paper we investigate the importance of gender in establishing mentoring relationships for young academics by exploring their work experiences as leaders in higher education. The focus of the study is the experiences of female academics serving under the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. A qualitative methodology was found to resonate with the study objective as it provides detailed descriptions of participant experiences.

In-depth interviews were considered appropriate data collection method that would allow access to participant perspectives on mentoring needs as lived experiences. Fortunately, the study founded available secondary data from in-depth interviews collected by the British Council in Pakistan. The secondary data resulted from interviews at university campuses in Pakistan. The secondary data provides 25 interviews of senior faculty members from ten public and private universities in Pakistan targeting issues and challenges they face as young academics. The data was collected from both senior and junior faculty members although it is evident that the majority of the participants in the study (76%) were junior academics. The British Council report by Hawkes and Rab (2018) indicates that the data consists; 24% respondents with more than 12 years' experience in higher education. Therefore, more than half of the sample was early researchers and mid-career researchers. The transcripts were obtained for the study and subjected for analysis.

To analyse the data, a thematic analysis as a general framework for analysis of qualitative data was followed. Consistent with the procedures proposed by Braun and Clark (2006), the analysis involved familiarising the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and then producing the report. The transcripts were read several times to gain familiarity. Data identifying barriers experienced by academics was given codes and themes assigned to specific codes. In the current analysis, a theme was defined by a process or activity that shape the mentoring needs of young academics. Finally, a report was produced. The method was found useful and adequate in developing the main themes constituting key findings of the study.

Efforts were made to ensure the credibility of the account, the British Council provided original interview transcripts. While maintaining anonymity of participants in line with ethical standards, thick descriptions were used so that citations made in the text are authentic extracts and can be traced back to interview transcripts (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). The language in the extracts was retained in its original form without attempts to correct errors. External refereeing of the paper was done using academics with firsthand experience of the gender situation in Pakistan higher education. Finally, bias was minimized in the analysis by ensuring that alternative

views about the experiences of young male academics as well as accounts concerning the global context were included and original text cited as it appears in the transcripts.

Findings

Experience of young female academics in higher education

The analysis of the experiences of young female academics in Pakistan higher education reveals two main constraints to performance. The system is characterised by outright bias against female academics and the absence of support systems for female faculty. In the next paragraphs, we explain how young female academics discuss their experiences in higher education.

Gender based discrimination against female academics

Women academics in Pakistan higher education often face discrimination and rarely given opportunity to demonstrate and express their knowledge even among equals. They are relegated into passive receivers of the male perspectives. The bias is compounded by the very nature of the Pakistan society where men are expected to be the leaders and women as followers. This is clearly illustrated in the statement echoed by a respondent relating to own experiences in meetings where the males were the dominant category.

“So, you go and you sit and like the general concept is that they say “... apko nhe pta” (... you don’t know) whenever I talk something the vice chancellor say ... apko nhe pta” (... you don’t know). Aor mujhe dekh dekh ke kehtay hai aap chup hojaye (And looking at me he says you stay silent) let him talk.”

The statement suggests that the Vice Chancellor with prejudice despite the abilities, knowledge and accomplishments of the female academic. Many women experience such bias and it is not only reflected in meetings but extends to promotions and allocation of responsibilities in higher education. Women perceptions are that, for any of them to rise into positions of leadership, they have to work harder than men.

“Reaching senior positions, they [women] have to struggle harder and one and half times more than men because men are very threatened. And because of that click of school tie network they would promote men only.”

While some see hard work per se as a means to overcoming male prejudice, others see their success in terms of cultivating a work culture that shows seriousness. “Also, being taken seriously, that is something I will really cherish after my retirement, I don’t think there were too many times when I was not taken seriously.” However, it takes a lot of work discipline to establish such image. According to this academic, you cannot walk away from a meeting because it is time for children to be back home and you have to go and supervise meals. Instead, ensuring that children get picked from school and having lunch brought to the work place for the child are some of the small things that ensure that others take you seriously. Breaking the barrier therefore, takes more than qualifications but may require additional mechanisms that can be learned from female faculty with similar experiences and have managed to gain respect.

Absence of support systems for female academics

In terms of academic support, women express the lack of support in career development. Women complain over the little support they get compared to their male colleagues and in particular, it is difficult for women to get support from men and yet men support fellow men. Such practices are attributed to socialisation patterns in the Pakistani context where the men are given more attention as reflected in the following remark;

“there are many but sometimes I feel not many but the biggest challenge is when you are working as women the stories are much different because the male setup that we have in terms of socialisation and they have their names and their seniors’ names and they can be easily supported by one another but being a woman you are not supported by these men in terms of getting some funding or supporting your research or guiding you in a positive manner so that’s a big challenge”

The lack of support from the male side is also compounded by the absence of support even from female faculty. So female faculty not only face challenges from the male side but also from the fellow females. Females from the same field where one would expect support are also a source of hurdles for progress to higher positions. Respondents have a feeling that the lack of mutual support among the female faculty contribute to the lack of progress of females to senior positions. Moreover, in some cases women are blamed for undermining one another and promoting male domination. Reflecting on her own experiences, one of respondents observed females never supported her in her career and their contribution was often negative. She indicated that she was often being reported to the vice chancellor by fellow female faculty with a view that she does not gain promotion.

Networks are important for peer mentoring. Unlike the men who networked through historical links, the few women in higher education positions are undermined by apathy and fear of women to form beneficial networks of their own. Realising the importance of networks, female faculty in one of the universities came up with a social networking group. Given the absence of support for female faculty, some of them began participating in networks that support female academics but networks are few and with challenges. While explaining about women tendencies on network formations, this respondent observed;

“Women have no networks and they are not willing to create networks. I think in a coeducation atmosphere women side with women only not openly, they don’t want to do it openly because they see it as a kind of a weakness or they see that men will comment on it and men are never shy on taking sides of their friends, or their friends’ friends, their brothers’ friends or whatever.”

The perception is that, the women are afraid to form or join such networks. Among others, they feared the comments that would come from the men. Such fears indeed have a negative effect on mentoring relationships.

An attempt to form a women club in one of the universities to allow women come together once a month and speak about women issues revealed a weakness of fear among women. At the initial stage, women were not forthcoming and were less enthusiastic in it. Some women even began to question why they were being organised

and so many nasty remarks were made but gradually the group continued to grow and became strong.

“When the women realised that we had no political agenda, we were just wanted to have caucus of women voice to be audible and visible gradually and just as soon as I mean out of those 50 women 35 started coming, the men started best coming after us, are you starting to create an association do you want it get registered, do you want it to be a part of the ASSA to you want to be registered. We said no nothing this is just like a sorority so that we can just understand each other.”

Although the group was under pressure from male faculty, it was a useful way of addressing some of the concerns of the members including personal difficulties faced by individual members. In the absence of formal mentoring arrangements, women wanted access to information contributing to professional careers development.

“...there are some issues you know, how I apply for a scholarship, where do I go and some professional and some personal but it was airing your issues & understanding your issues and men were very threatened by it.”

The absence of information inhibits planning for career development among women faculty. The group that was formed had no political intentions and was never registered. It was aimed at addressing women concerns. One such concern is the absence of information sources due to weakness in female networks. The women point out the case of a career search in Pakistan which they say is informal. Unlike the public sector where jobs are properly advertised, few posts get advertised in the private sector and information often passes through networks. In the private sector someone working in a bank spreads the word around that a bank is recruiting. Female networks for job search are weak in Pakistan and women are more likely to miss out on important job opportunities. Even though the social media has bridged the gap but the female working age population in the labour force remains low hence limiting information access. The establishment of networks for women helps the women to cope and forge a head in their academic careers, access to information is still low.

The Socio-Cultural influences of patriarchy

In the analysis done in response to the question about the social and cultural influences linked to patriarchy, female faculty face family obligations as a key impediment on academic role. However, some respondents downplay the influence of patriarchy and dismiss it as neither unique to women nor to Pakistan. The next part of the findings describes the details.

Female roles

Mentoring relationships are also influenced by women social roles. The family plays a central role in the lives of academics in career for women in Pakistan. For instance, no residential facilities are offered and this is partly explained by lack of willingness of female faculty to take residence in the university due to family obligations and even families do not grant them permission to take up residence in the university. Obviously, the disparities in facilities among societies would account for reluctance of faculty to

move. For some of the female faculty, nobody would want to come from Lahore unless for a very senior position or under serious problems in their own institutions. So, in addition to family obligations, availability of facilities would have an influence on the decision to move to an institution and therefore would affect potential mentoring relationships across universities.

Residential concerns for married women not only impose restrictions on women but also the recruitment potential of universities. It has partly contributed to the failure to fill up some positions where women have no accommodation provisions. Commenting on the influence of accommodation on gender participation, the respondent remarked;

“We have no residential facility so there are departments which we have advertised for women for about 32 times we never had an application of a senior women. Business administration, computer sciences, public administration defence and diplomatic studies, you name it you know.”

The absence of university accommodation and the reluctance of the female faculty to relocate frustrates university development. Owing to the social roles of women, the university is unable to attract applicants. Although the university has a few mid-level PhD graduates and Associate Professors, it needs Professors to generate projects and attract funding so as to develop the research profile of the university.

Other than residence, academics are affected in diverse ways. On one hand, male academics are perceived as privileged in some respects. They are free to decide on what they prefer to do and this happens even at home. If a man is working on a project, he would not take interruptions and the children would not disturb him. A woman cannot do the same. To illustrate the point a woman academic remarked that, “For a woman, it is very difficult to tell her husband do not disturb me, I’m working on this or to kids not to disturb me.” Although tactics might have evolved to achieve just the same, women than men often find it challenging to cope with family and work pressures at the same time. On the other hand, women do not enjoy similar privileges and sometimes have to weigh options before deciding even on marital life. With care, women have to deliberate on decisions concerning completion of studies before getting married because of uncertainties of the potential impact it might have on academic life.

“I was going to marry in 1992, on the day of my Mehndi and Ubtan I submitted my thesis with the threat of what will happen after marriage, maybe the in-laws are not willing to support you or the husband might have different point of view.”

Not willing to risk her academic career in the event of negative marital outcomes, the respondent decided to have the PhD thesis submitted prior to the marriage. Fortunately, she found support and eventually was able to do the corrections and go for her career. However, the fear of marital outcomes represents the kind of decisions that Pakistani women face and could greatly affect mentoring relationships. This is not to imply that the male faculty are free of specific challenges. Quite the opposite was evidenced by some of the respondents.

Males are as vulnerable as females

Although socio-cultural background in Pakistan affected suggest differences in mentoring needs for females, it also came out that socio-cultural roles also affected male faculty. Contrary to common perceptions that only females face challenges in higher education, gender also has negative consequences for male faculty. Despite the expectations of high performance for males by higher education authorities, patriarchy places high demands on male faculty and undermines male career development. Patriarchy includes non-working vibes, expectations on number of children and the extended family obligations. Academics argue that gender roles impact equally on both female and male faculty. Patriarchal attitudes are rampant and stifle faculty aspirations and especially when they are deployed as tools to establish the importance of a position.

“In fact, young male faculty members are victims of male patriarchy as well. And I have to break the shackles for them to move. There should be institutional counselling services for male faculty members because many of them are caught up in different social setups there is no one for them to go and talk to.”

While patriarchy is understood to have a negative impact on young male academics, it is also difficult to break barriers and pinpoint the actual cause of the problem due to diverse social setups at play. The social expectations undermine meaningful mentoring relationships. For example; a leading faculty member who was mentoring a young faculty recalled that;

“a young faculty member didn't publish anything because he had twins right after his marriage & he has to support his wife in taking care and now he has nothing to show in mid-career review so he might have to leave the university”

Having the first child at a time when of great demands to publish and prove yourself is perhaps no good decision. Given the negative impact of patriarchy on performance and career progress, it therefore inevitable that male academics could face difficulties without relevant mentoring relationships in a changing academic culture. Men who are trying to help their working wives, are also affected more as they spend more time on other roles. For instance, academics argued that supporting a wife is the responsibility of a husband. Men who are trying to support working wives are affected even more, because they are trying help wives write the PhD dissertation. Taking leave and sacrificing own classes. So, this whole concept of the nuclear family, surviving as working couple and having a limited family size and making choices which family gathering to attend and which not to attend are all challenging issues for males caught up in such extended family setups.

Supporting parents is considered the role of the son and not for a daughter. Therefore, having sick parents, having to look after them is responsibility of the son. Moreover, for the married daughters, the in-laws will not even allow it. Besides, attending funerals is considered an obligation and she stated;

“Deaths and funerals, I mean I had to walk out of meetings to take a bus to Lahore to attend a funeral. I do it out of my own free will but it's a choice that has to be made”

Given the circumstances, a struggling young faculty member who has to publish or perish, applying for family holidays could impede on professional development because there is no understanding at the family level about what it takes to survive in a higher education. It is not the years of service in university; it is what you put in those years of service in university that matter. In those circumstances, patriarchy has could have an immense influence on the nature of mentoring relationships. Patriarchal influences lead to suggestions of career and family counselling.

Patriarchy as a global phenomenon

Even with the evident socio-cultural differences for male and female faculty. Participants advance arguments against attempts to localise the overall importance of gender roles in shaping mentoring relationships. While acknowledging the negative consequences of gender roles in society, respondents were quick to place the Pakistan gender situation into global context. They argued that the influence of gender cannot be localised but is a global problem that manifests itself even in other countries.

“Developing and hampering career in other countries manifests in different ways and of course it’s the multiple burden which a woman carries anywhere in the world to justify being a professional, being a wife, being a mother, maybe not being a daughter in-law in the west but here in the south Asia in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka so it’s a regional thing”

According to some of the respondents, the situation is not much different. The multiple social roles and expectations for women are global and the only exception for the West are the roles of the daughter in-law but which are the same for the women in South Asia. This opinion was supported by views from other respondents who argued that there is no difference for the women in Pakistan and other countries. The only unique difference might be the attachment to the family for married women. They reason that women in Pakistan are unable to relocate and take up accommodation in the university. They prefer to remain where their support systems are located.

Global differentiation of patriarchy is perceived as a case of cultural relativism that every country has its own culture. Women are facing different issues in different cultures. In Pakistan, the family environment has more influence than the work environment. Therefore, when you are living with your in-laws in joint family system, “you had to take care of your work and your husband & mother n law & bla bla”. This is in contrast with the West where family consists of husband, wife and children only. The extended family is considered an important part of life. Therefore, academic life requires striking a balance between your work assignments and at the same time taking care of your family and relationships.

The importance of contexts was noted as the main source of gender differences between countries. Every country has a unique culture and women have different experiences. For instance, although women in the West have greater freedom as a result of a class struggle challenges still exist. One respondent pointed out that, among the top 500 best organisations, Harvard University is among institutions where females are made Head of Department only in crucial times. Compared to women in the third world, women in West are struggling and talking about achievements. Despite some degree of success,

females in the west continue facing discrimination at a time when upper-class women in Pakistan are actually more liberated.

Discussion and Conclusions

The study explored the experiences of young female academics who completed doctoral studies abroad and returned to senior positions of higher education in Pakistan. One of the key revelations from the interviews includes discrimination against women where women are not expected to freely discuss their views even in formal academic settings. Yousaf and Schmiede (2016) while addressing issue of harassment and discrimination of women in higher education echo the same view by stating that behind the glass ceiling effect on women, there is a male manager responsible for the ceiling. Like in the China context where the virtue of a woman lies in her ignorance and in Japan where a woman's knowledge is perceived as a source of unhappiness (Morley et al 2014), female academics in Pakistan are expected to remain silent even in faculty meetings because they are assumed ignorant (June, 2009). Therefore, it is by no surprise that female academics have to work twice better to prove their worth and gain respect as leaders. Compounding the situation is the absence of female networks that provide support on issues affecting female faculty. Female also complain about male faculty giving no support on access to research funding and even information on scholarships. Unlike the male faculty who enjoy peer support on the basis of their previous school links, the women are few and therefore lack such connections. In a unique way, women academics in Pakistan are sometimes unable to develop a strong network due to mutual suspicion and intrigue. Such problems could still be due to lack of mentoring and as a result, female academics find difficulties in access to information on available opportunities. Female faculty would need to request for mentors.

Participants in this study were also concerned about the socio-cultural challenges of patriarchy in Pakistan higher education. Surprisingly, the difficulties were reported to affect both male and female faculty. Moreover, some participants, they view gender challenges linked to patriarchy as a global rather than a problem unique to Pakistan. However, it impacted the young female faculty in unique ways and therefore the need for a specific approach for the female faculty. For instance, the availability of accommodation, marriage and the support of the husband, and the support of the large extended family with many in-laws. Such a situation may not necessarily be reflective of the global situation and each specific context has its unique ways it affects female faculty. It could have elements of a regional context though some studies have indicated variations even within regions and countries (Jejeebhoy 2001) Therefore, mentoring systems need to be sensitive to contextual variations.

Given the circumstances, mentoring by female academics would be strongly recommended for the young female academics. More important, female mentors are needed to provide the psychosocial aspects of mentoring. However, considering the important role that both male and female academics play in providing wider qualities of an academic role to the mentee (Obers 2014) and the importance of the level of satisfaction reported by mentees in mentoring relationships (Ragins & Cotton 1999), it would be better to arrange for cross gender mentoring relationship involving male and female mentors for a female mentee as suggested by Bower (2013). Perhaps, the arrangement would cater for career and psychosocial development of the young female academics returning from abroad to positions of leadership.

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