

WOMEN ACADEMICIANS AND AUTONOMY: CONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The position of women academicians in higher education has been subject of debate across societies. This study examined the empowerment and autonomy of women academicians in higher education of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). The objectives of study were to explore the economic autonomy of women academicians and to highlight their contribution and participation in family matters. We applied a quantitative research design following the positivistic tradition while employing a cross-sectional research method. We collected data from a sample of 98 (n=98) women academicians in two public sector universities using a questionnaire while employing random sampling technique. The study findings indicated that women academicians reached autonomy in making decisions about spending their earnings within the families. They contribute to the family income by supporting and paying family expenses and use their savings to invest in families. Additionally, they play a key role in their children's education while adhering to the sociocultural norms of academia and society. We conclude that women academics are constructing their identities as productive and autonomous individuals in higher education careers.

Keywords: Working women, academicians, university, autonomy, masculinity, empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education did not escape the global move towards the women empowerment (Elsayed & Shirshikova, 2023). A sparking change in academia has undergone for the past few decades. Research is conducted on structural changes of women constructing identities in higher education (Yehualashet, 2010). This research spotlighted tension between the existence of masculinity and emergence of femininity, scuffling the polarization of identities. Constructing women's identities is a serious threat, increasingly fragile, and contested. Research is conducted on how women academicians navigate career paths to construct their identities to competing men by echoing their existence (Archer,

2008; Nikunen & Lempiäinen, 2020). While Acker (2010) also added that women academics are characterized with lack of objective evaluative standards and thus, identity becomes a key commodity. Moreover, women's struggle in seeking careers in higher education employment has been the focus of the researchers, policymakers, lawmakers, and academicians in the developed countries (Ashcraft & Pacanowsky, 1996; Burkinshaw & White, 2017). These studies revealed that women academicians are empowered to seek academic careers by taking financial control over resources and affectively contribute to academic and family goals. However, the sociocultural and academic

environment of developed nations is different from developing countries. In developing countries, Acker* and Armenti (2004) asserted that even after decades of change in academia, women are still struggling to navigate career paths to construct their identities in academic structure. This research on the women academicians' constructing identities in higher education is under researched in developing countries including Pakistan and AJK.

Despite expanding higher education, a few studies are conducted on empowerment of women academicians in higher education of Pakistan (Jahan, 2024; Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). These studies show that proportion of women academicians increased exceptionally for the last few years. Similarly, women academics achieved autonomy in sociocultural and financial matters by actively contributing to the academic goals as well as conducting research and families (Morley, 2014). For example, they are spending money on their family investments, family expenditures roles, house supervision, shopping, and house decoration. In addition, spending on the children's education (Morley & Crossouard, 2015). This shows how early career academics negotiate career scripts through identity work. Like Pakistan, the higher education of AJK is rapidly expanding. However, research on women academicians' identities prospects is highly ignored area. A study conducted by Abdullah and Ullah (2022) indicate that women academicians face numerous problems in higher education. They also argued that women face discriminations in coeducation universities. Moreover, this study examined a different dimension of the women academicians' financial autonomy and contribution towards family. Nexus of financial autonomy and family contribution has great significance in navigating and constructing women identities (Abdullah & Ullah, 2016). While looking at literature and seriousness of the problem, we conducted this study in patriarchal higher education of Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

Literature

Women empowerment has been one of the key areas of feminist struggle since long. In patriarchal societies, women are primarily separated from power, wealth, and influences by the men (Malik & Courtney, 2011). Similar oppressive factors are

reflected in all the public spheres including higher education of developing countries (Durrani, 2008). However, women's role is important for the progress of society. As havoc of literature on women academicians has been conducted in developed countries (Bracken, Allen, & Dean, 2023; Cidlinska, Nyklova, Machovcova, Mudrak, & Zabrodska, 2023). These studies revealed a persistent feminist struggle enabled women's academic careers. Inclusivity and equitable policies empowered women to actively participate in the development of family and country. Currently, in developed countries, women work in almost all the public and private spheres including academia vis-à-vis men. However, the situation in developing countries is different because the sociocultural environment created many barriers to women's growth (Bracken et al., 2023; Sümer & Eslen-Ziya, 2023). A gender reversal changes in 1990s opened doors for girls' education and, thus, girls and women getting education and graduating seek careers in higher education (Horta & Tang, 2023). It is important to mention here that women in higher education careers have achieved a considerable progress. For example, they become financially sound and happily contribute to their families and workplace. A few women rose to higher academic and power positions while most of them are working on the lower academic positions (Mousa, 2023).

Research shows that women academicians have achieved financial autonomy in many developed countries (Castelao-Huerta, 2023; Du Nann Winter, 2024). They are identified with occupational status while enjoying power and prestige of their profession and contributing to their families. For example, they spend a large proportion of their income on their family members. It is hypothesized that the higher the family income, the lower will be the contribution while lower the income higher will be the contribution. Ayentimi and Abadi (2023) argued that women from higher education of developing countries always contribute to their families in one or the other way. Similar situation is found in Pakistan where Abdullah and Kauser (2023) found that women academics have overwhelming contribution to meet the domestic and familial needs including education of children (Imran, 2023). This shows that women, besides academic goals, meet the familial expectations.

Education and autonomy are strongly correlated as education guides girls and women to explore the new horizons and seek autonomy (Jaysawal & Saha, 2023). The phenomenon of autonomy received due attention of women researchers in developed and developing countries (Hakiem, 2023). While intersection of autonomy and empowerment has several explanations in the contemporary world (Castelao-Huerta, 2023). It carries wide arrays of meaning ranging from equity, diversity, and inclusion. Thus, women career seekers in all the spheres got benefited by these studies. Similar experiences of women autonomy prevailed in higher education. Here, we mention financial autonomy of women academicians spending their income for family. Moreover, they save a defined proportion of their earnings. Ali Alhazmi (2023) found that working women have more sense of saving than men and they even invest their savings for the asset. Similar assertions are given by Miao (2023). She also stated that women save money to invest for the good times. These findings show that women achieving autonomy are self-satisfied.

Working women in all the private and public spheres utilize earnings for the family support and expenditures. As Fakhr and Messenger (2020) argued that women support family members while Naz and Ashraf (2020) found that women contribute to the family expenditures of grocery and other related items. Moreover, Mahsud and Ali (2020) asserted that women participate in the familial ceremonies while spending a considerable amount in coordinating the family activities. There is another commitment of women towards the employer where they perform well for this reasonable amount they receive. Yasmin, Naseem, and Abas (2020) conducted a study on the women empowerment and argued that women navigate their careers to construct their identities as academicians. They also stated that women play a key role towards the family earning and expenditures. Based on findings, it is argued that women play a major role in contributing to their families.

Working women overwhelmingly contribute to the education of children. Many studies are conducted on the contribution of working women across societies (Castelao-Huerta, 2023; Cidlinska et al., 2023). These studies revealed that women focus on the education of children at school, colleges, and

universities (Abdullah et al., 2015). They socialize and supervise the education of their children. Jahan (2024) also supported the assertions of Mousa (2023) by adding that women spend on the education of children. However, Shahzad et al. (2020) and Archer (2008) unveiled that women are also interested in shopping of the family and children. Despite of house supervision, women contribute to family-by-family expenditures while spending a considerable amount to the home decoration (Imran, 2023).

Objectives

The following objectives guided our study.

To examine that how financial autonomy help to construct women academicians' identities in academia.

To assess the contribution and participation of women academicians in familial matters.

Hypothesis

We developed the following hypotheses.

There is a significant difference between spending and occupational status, family size, autonomy, savings, Investment, and Self-satisfaction.

There is a significant difference between earnings and family support and expenditures, role in traditions and ceremonies, decision of children and home, shopping, and home décor.

Methodology

We employed quantitative method in the positivistic tradition to assess the role of women academicians in constructing identities in higher education of AJK. Opting quantitative research method is also to keep in view the availability of data, time constraints, and financial resources. The use of quantitative research methods was decided to attain greater knowledge and understanding of the women academicians' while constructing identities in higher education. We used cross sectional research method that allows researchers to investigate numerous characteristics at the same time. The population for the study was women academicians in two public sector universities of AJK. There were 131 women academicians working on different academic positions. Among them, we determined a sample size of 98 by means of Taro Yamane formula. It helps to improve the accuracy level by determining the chunk of a population to sample at a reasonable margin

error. We collected data by using a questionnaire and applied random sampling techniques to access the respondents. Simple random sampling is an efficient process that allows selection of a small sample from a large one at random and chances of fairly representing a large group are high. We designed two hypotheses and employed a T-test to compare the means. T-test measures are used to determine the significant difference between the means and how they are correlated.

Key Findings

Key findings are the most important and relevant results that support the purpose of study and explain the conclusion for the readers.

Demographic Information

The demographic information of the women academicians is tabulated and interpreted in the following table.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Women Academicians.

Age	Frequency	Percent
25 – 30 Years	17	37.8
31 – 36 Years	19	42.2
37 – 42 Years	6	13.3
43 Years and above	3	6.6
Total	45	100.0
Residence		
Personal	79	71.4
Rented	19	28.6
Total	98	100.0
Income		
60,000-80,000	14	14.3
80,001-100,001	19	19.4
100,002-120,002	23	23.5
120,003-140,003	32	32.6
More than 140004	10	10.2
Total	98	100.0
Employment		
Permanent	71	72.5
Contract	27	27.5
Total	98	100.0
Qualification		
Masters	9	9.2
M.Phil.	72	73.5
PhD	17	17.3
Total	98	100.0
Occupation		
Assistant Professor	22	22.4
Lecturer	62	63.3
Research Associate	14	14.3
Total	98	100.0

The overhead table shows socio-economic characteristics of the respondents included in this study. Data reveals that 37.8 percent respondents

were between age 26-30 years, 42.2 percent in age group of 31-35 years, 13.3 percent were found in age group 36-42 and only 6.6 percent were more than 41

years of age. Residence of the respondents is an important indicator as 71.4 percent possessed personal residence while only 28.6 were living in rented buildings. The indicator of income was encouraging; 14.3 percent respondents earn 60,000-80,000, 19.4 percent 80,001-100,001, 23.5 percent 100,002-120,002, 32.6 percent had 120003-140003 and 10.2 percent had more than 140004 monthly earnings. Status of the women shows that 72.5 percent were permanent while 27.5 percent were recruited on contract. The qualification of the respondents was known as 9.2 percent hold masters degree (MA), 73.5 percent MS/MPhil, and 17.4

percent PhD degrees. The division of occupation was distributed as 22.4 percent were assistant professors, 63.3 percent were lecturers, and 14.3 percent were junior lecturers/ research associates.

Hypothesis Testing

The following hypotheses were developed and tested while using T-test statistics.

Hypothesis-1

There is a significant difference between spending and occupational status, family size, autonomy, savings, Investment, and Self-satisfaction.

Table 2

T-test distribution of Income Spending for Various Purposes.

Variables	T	Df	P-value
Spending income	33.618	44	0.000
Occupational status	44.545	44	0.000
Family members	17.891	44	0.000
Autonomy	28.365	44	0.000
Saving	28.365	44	0.000
Investment	21.149	44	0.000
Self-satisfaction	46.000	44	0.000

The above table shows means of spending income, occupational status, family size, autonomy, savings, investment, and self-satisfaction. P-Value indicates that means are highly significant showing mean difference of spending with other variables. Above values reveal that women academicians spend income on themselves and family members. Career in higher education increases the occupational status of women which elevates their social status in family and society. Similarly, income is spent on the family members. Autonomy of women is increased due to income generation that contribute to family expenditures, savings, and, hence, investments. This

denotes that women academicians save a proportion of income and invest to develop assets. It is noteworthy here that employment increases the self-satisfaction among women academicians because they become self-sufficient and contribute to the families and institution.

Hypothesis-II

There is a significant difference of means between earnings and family support and expenditures, role in traditions and ceremonies, decision of children and home, shopping, and home décor.

Table 3

T-test distribution of earnings for various purposes.

Variables	t	df	P-value
Earnings	27.324	44	.000
Family support	10.024	44	.000
Family expenditures	23.452	44	.000
Ceremonies	33.618	44	.000
Role playing	12.669	44	.000
Education of children	18.558	43	.000

House Supervision	17.526	44	.000
Shopping	19.501	44	.000
House Décor	25.381	44	.000

Table 2 reveals findings of means of earning, family support and expenditures, ceremonies, roles, education of children, house supervision, shopping, and home décor. Here, again P-Value is highly significant, presenting a strong relationship between earnings and other variables. Results show that earnings are great means of supporting family and women academicians support their family by contributing to the family expenditures. Similarly, they take many roles to satisfy the sociocultural values of the family by participating in the ceremonies. By the same token, women academicians spend their earnings on the education of children. Besides, a proportion of their earnings is spent on their own and family shopping. They also spend on shopping of children. In addition, they are good at supervising domestic activities while spending on the food items and home decor.

Discussions

Research shows that employment in higher education strengthens the aspirations of women academicians and lead to autonomy (Acker, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014). Findings of our study also show that women in higher education careers have achieved autonomy. They contribute to the family, supporting and participating in the family functions and events. Similar argument is concluded by Morley (2013) in her study. She expressed, women employment in higher education is an important indicator to navigate the autonomy of women and thus, women contribute towards family support. Acker (2014) working on women issues in higher education also argued that working women actively contribute to the family income. Another key finding we reached is autonomous status due to employment and they use earning for the shopping of families and children. Acker (2024) maintained that higher education career recognizes women with power, prestige, and status. Therefore, they construct their identities as autonomous women, and we substantiate the results of Acker (2014). Moreover, women academicians save a proportion of their income and invest for some asset purposes that further support families. In this way, they received appreciation and

acknowledgement from family and society. This finding was supported by the assertions of Morley (2014) and Archer (2008). They contended that women's status elevated due to employment opportunities and, thus, they exercise power, enjoy prestige and status. In continuation, Morley and Crossouard (2015) added that working women contribute to the family savings and investments. Employment in higher education is one of the prestigious occupations. We stated earlier and reiterate here that women earn a reasonable income from higher education careers and spent on family support and family expenditures in one or another way. For example, women academicians spend on their family members and children. They also have a key role in the family traditions and customs by satisfying the sociocultural values of society. By the same token, they spend money on the educational expenditures of their children to ensure their better education. Besides, women spend on the house supervision and décor including shopping. These findings are aligned to those of Morley (2013). She also found that women support their families by contributing to shopping and domestic purposes. Similarly, Acker (2010) elucidated that women spend their income on the education of children. Moreover, Acker (2012) in her another study maintained that women contribute to the house supervisions and house decor.

Conclusion

The women academicians have key role in the society. It is echoed that higher education made women academicians autonomous across the globe. Similar, trends are witnessed from higher education of Pakistan and AJK. In higher education of AJK, women proportion is less than men, however they are autonomous in nonacademic goals by taking decisions and spending earning in families. It is revealed that women contribute to the family income by spending on the family support and expenditures. Similarly, savings of women academics are utilized in investment of families. By the same token, their income is spent on family support and expenditure. Moreover, they are contributing to the education of

children while meeting the necessary protocols of the family and academia. It is, thus, concluded that women academicians are constructing their identities to be productive and autonomous in higher education careers.

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