

# Career Trajectories of Women Academics in Higher Education of Azad Jammu and Kashmir

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## Abstract

The career trajectories of women academics are shaped by a complex interplay of institutional, societal, and individual factors. However, less is known about the career paths of women academics in the context of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). Thus, we focused the career paths of women academics in higher education of AJK by examining the disparities faced by women academics while navigating their career paths in higher education of AJK. We used quantitative research design in positivistic tradition and employed cross-sectional research approach. We selected a sample of 35 women academics by using random number table and collected data through questionnaire by employing simple random sampling technique. We collected data from a public sector university of AJK. We found a mixed bag of findings. Women academics in higher education of AJK face numerous problems in proportion, representation, research productivity, promotion, and supervision. Moreover, their academic career paths are highly burdened with the familial responsibilities. Drawing on the results, we substantiate the argument of Foucault (1975) that, like society, power circulates and accumulates due to cultural and academic expectations in higher education. Here, power is exercised by men by creating new objects of knowledge through policies, documents, and practices that marginalize the women academics' career aspirations. It is suggested to address these disparities and support women in overcoming the obstacles they face in higher education of AJK.

## Key Words

Women, Academics, Higher Education, Representation, Research

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## Introduction

The career trajectories of women academics have been a subject of extensive debate in higher education globally. Scholars such as Morley (2012), Aiston (2015), Acker (2003), and Schuster and Finkelstein (2008) have highlighted how patriarchal structures influence both public and private domains, including academia. Mousa (2020) argued that such patriarchal dominance in higher education marginalizes women academics. Although Morley and Leyton (2022) noted considerable progress in developed countries, women academics in developing contexts continue to face multiple forms of marginalization. By the same token, Mousa and Ayoubi (2019) found that higher education

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institutions perpetuate the women's underrepresentation. Bhatti and Ali (2020), in line with Teferra and Altbach (2004), added that societal values and norms shape the women's access to careers in higher education.

Morley (2019) stated that women's contributions are restrained by gendered academic culture, while Eagly and Carli (2007) endorsed argument of Morley that male-normed culture restricts women's career development. Eagly and Wood (2013) highlighted that men tend to strictly evaluate the women's roles, while male colleagues are more readily accommodated. Bagilhole (2009) supported by adding that such stereotypes are widely upheld in academia. This situation often favours men in hierarchies, whereas women remain persistently underrepresented.

Many scholars, Slaughter (2015) and Philipsen et al. (2017) have argued that women face disproportionate challenges in male dominated academia, despite having required qualifications and publications. Ozkanli and White (2008), Nieuwenhuis (2011), and Nguyen (2013) also agreed that men prefer men in recruitment process and discriminate women. Neale and Ozkanli (2010) analysed by stating that women are excluded by gatekeepers in academic structure while Mohamed (2017) supported the assertions by adding that such disparities further exclude women from academic career access.

Morgan and Wu (2011) described that women academics must have equal access to research and supervision. While McNeill (2010) associated it with the universal phenomenon of women's lack of interest in research. She further argued that women publish less than men globally whereas situation in developing countries is even worse. Additionally, McNeill noted the absence of effective mentoring and networking opportunities, which impedes women's academic productivity. Women are often excluded from supervising students, with Williams (2010) finding that male academics rarely involve their female colleagues in such roles. Slaughter (2015) added that women's research interests are frequently disregarded when supervision roles are assigned. Reid (2015) emphasized the importance of mutual consent between students and supervisors, a principle often overlooked by male faculty.

Jaber (2014) and Grove (2013) discussed the persistent gender pay gap in developing countries. While recent reforms, such as equal pay structures, have mitigated these gaps (Abdullah & Ullah, 2022), disparities in financial incentives and non-salary benefits continue to marginalize women. Muleya (2017) found that women struggle to secure tenured positions compared to men. Mousa (2020) observed that women with weaker research records face difficulty in promotion, while McNeill (2007) highlighted that even those with strong credentials often encounter undue delays. These promotion barriers reflect structural discrimination within academic hierarchies (Ullah et al., 2017).

Bhatti and Ali (2020) argued that the high demands of academic work, coupled with family responsibilities, present additional challenges for women. Eagly and Carli (2007) detailed the time-intensive nature of academic roles—including research, teaching, grading, and administrative duties—which often result in blurred boundaries between personal and professional life. These competing demands can lead to stress, time pressure, and emotional fatigue, further affecting women's capacity to balance their roles (Abdullah et al., 2023).

These factors contribute to the limited career progression of women in academia (Abdullah et al., 2024; Abdullah & Nisar, 2024; Tang & Horta, 2021; Hammad & Alqarni, 2021). However, Abdullah and Ullah (2022) observed that despite systemic barriers, many women have successfully pursued academic careers by challenging patriarchal norms. Yet, they remain underrepresented in comparison to men. While extensive research has examined gender disparities in academia in developed countries, the sociocultural and institutional contexts in developing regions—such as Pakistan and Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK)—differ significantly. Although some studies have explored gender inequities in higher education in AJK, few have directly addressed the career-related challenges faced by women academics (Abdullah & Ullah, 2022; Abdullah & Nisar, 2024; Abdullah et al., 2024; Abdullah et al., 2024). Recognizing this gap, we aimed to contribute both theoretically and practically to the

discourse. We specifically examine the barriers and disparities encountered by women academics while navigating their career paths in the higher education of AJK.

## Literature Review

The status and representation of women academics in higher education have been extensively studied across global contexts. Acker (2003, 2012) revealed that women remain disproportionately represented in academia, particularly within developing countries. Allan (2011) argued that men, due to their historical dominance in academic institutions, maintain control over higher education structures. Similarly, Bagilhole (2002) emphasized that this disproportionate representation significantly impedes women's academic participation. Bharathi (2022) attributed this inequality to institutional values and norms that act as barriers to women's inclusion. Eagly and Carli (2007) further noted that male academics often reinforce gender biases that perpetuate inequality within the system (Khalique et al., 2020).

Despite notable advancements, women remain underrepresented in faculty positions, as Eddy and Ward (2017) observed. Egunjobi (2008) suggested that the increased number of women graduates has improved their participation in academia to some extent. However, Ekine (2018) contended that women continue to occupy primarily lower-tier academic positions in universities across developing regions. Ekpo (2015) and Friedman (2020) argued that this underrepresentation adversely affects women's career aspirations compared to their male counterparts. Gregory (2006) emphasized the need for systematic policy reforms to enhance women's representation in academic leadership.

The challenge of women's representation in academia is shaped by multiple factors, including gender bias (Grove, 2013), societal expectations (Jaber, 2014), traditional roles (Kamau, 2011), and persistent stereotypes (Madsen, 2010). Malik and Courtney (2011) highlighted the role of institutional practices in limiting women's representation, particularly where men dominate decision-making processes. Mai (2007) found that women often experience exclusion from academic visibility and influence. Even as more women enter academic professions, McNeill (2007) pointed out that they remain disproportionately absent from faculty roles. Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) noted that women face additional challenges related to workplace management and balancing academic and non-academic responsibilities. These dual burdens further restrict their active participation and reinforce feelings of marginalization.

Research plays a pivotal role in academic careers—defining scholarly credibility and contributing to knowledge production (Ali et al., 2025; Morley, 2018; Miller & Triana, 2009). However, Morley (2019) found that women in developing countries remain underrepresented in research productivity. While women in developed countries have made significant gains in research and development, Mousa (2020) noted that women still lag behind men in research output—especially in developing regions (Mousa & Alas, 2016a). Neale and Ozkanli (2010) linked these disparities to institutional biases that hinder women's research opportunities. Nielsen and Huse (2010) observed that only a small proportion of women publish internationally, as many are burdened with heavy academic and familial responsibilities, leaving limited time for research.

Additionally, Ojo and Olaniyan (2014) reported that male academics often fail to provide women with opportunities for research collaboration or mentorship, further isolating them from research networks. Oplatka (2006) also noted a lack of mentorship from senior women, while Ozkanli and White (2008) emphasized the adverse impact of family responsibilities on women's research productivity. Collectively, these barriers contribute to women's limited contributions to research and academic visibility.

Discrimination also persists in the allocation of research student supervision. Despite women's increasing involvement in academic tasks, they are often overlooked in supervisory roles. Mousa (2017) and Reid (2015)

documented cases where male supervisors allocate students without considering women's consent or research expertise (Ali et al., 2025). Roberts (2020) highlighted that women are often assigned supervision outside their domain, which undermines their interest and limits research engagement. Slaughter (2015) added that such practices stem from unconscious biases and structural barriers that marginalize women and hinder their academic growth. As Williams (2010) pointed out, these biases create career vulnerabilities for women academics.

Promotion within academia is another area where women face significant challenges. Despite having equal or superior qualifications, research credentials, and professional conduct, women are often denied fair treatment in promotions (Sadaf et al., 2024; Yenilmez, 2016). Ceci et al. (2014) found that women are consistently overlooked for tenured positions. Albashir et al., (2021) argued that gendered expectations place higher demands on women while simultaneously obstructing their career progression (Abdullah & Ullah, 2016). Muleya (2017) noted that many qualified women remain in junior academic roles for extended periods, while Abdullah and Ullah (2022) pointed to structural barriers, lack of mentorship, and networking opportunities as contributing factors to women's stagnant academic positions.

## Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in Michel Foucault's theory of *power and knowledge*. Foucault (1975) argued that power and knowledge are inherently linked power not only creates new forms of knowledge but also uses that knowledge to sustain and reinforce itself. He stated that "the exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power." In the context of higher education, this interplay becomes evident in how policies, practices, and institutional structures—largely controlled by men—produce forms of knowledge that marginalize women. Men's dominance in the academic hierarchy shapes norms, defines standards, and establishes discourses that influence women's career aspirations and limit their advancement. Through a Foucauldian lens, we critically examine how power operates through academic institutions in AJK to reproduce gender inequality and sustain the marginalization of women academics.

## Hypothesis

We formulated and tested the following hypothesis while results are tabulated and interpreted with the help of empirical literature. We also discussed findings in the context of theoretical framework.

Women academics' career is predictor of their proportion, representation, pay gap, family responsibilities, promotion, research, and supervision.

## Methodology

### Research Design

We employed a quantitative research design within the positivist tradition to examine the career trajectories of women academics in higher education of AJK. The primary objective of the study was to examine the disparities faced by women academics while navigating their career paths in higher education of AJK. The decision to use quantitative design was driven by several factors, including the availability of data, time constraints, and limited financial resources (Creswell, & Creswell, 2005). This approach was adopted to provide a comprehensive understanding of women academics' career paths in universities. A cross-sectional research approach was used, allowing us to investigate multiple variables simultaneously (Creswell, 1999).

## Population of the Study

In AJK, there are 6 public sector universities where 320 female academics are working on different academic positions. Among these universities, we selected one of the universities for the study. Selecting one university was

feasible due to many reasons, i.e. time and resources constraints. So, we did not include other universities in the population. In this university, there are 89 women working on different academic positions. Thus, we selected 35 women academics by using table of random numbers. Using a table of random number increases the validity of the research findings to ensure each number has equal chance of being selected. This method minimizes biases and increases the reliability of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

### Measurement

We designed a questionnaire on the Likert scale and collected data from respondents. The Likert scale helps to assess the feeling and thoughts of the respondents on a range or spectrum, allowing for better and more nuanced understanding (Memmedova & Ertuna, 2024). We collected data by employing a 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 (Brecht, 1983). We conceptualized study and formulated a hypothesis. For data collection, we took informed consent of the respondents sparing on the front page of the questionnaire. We collected data personally by visiting the women academics in their respective offices. We analyzed data by using statistical packages for the social sciences (SPSS) and employed the Linear Regression Model to test the hypothesis. Linear regression analysis is often applied to model a relationship between two or more variables and to understand that how one variable changes as a function of another. It helps predict the value of the dependent variable based on the values of independent variables.

### Ethical Considerations

After identifying each respondent of the study, we took informed consent from each participant who agreed voluntarily to participate in the study. We ensured them confidentiality and anonymity of the data as well as personal information.

### Key Findings

This section presents the findings of demographic information and hypothesis testing. Additionally, it includes a detailed discussion of the results, incorporating Michel Foucault’s concept of power and knowledge.

**Table 1**

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

Variables	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Qualification	MS/M.Phil	20	57
	PhD	08	23
	MA	07	20
Income	PKR 90,000 to PKR 140,000.	04	11
	PKR 140,001 to PKR190,001	08	23
	PKR 190,002 to PKR 240,002	13	37
	>PKR 240,003	10	29
Designation	Lecturer	23	66
	Assistant Professor	11	31
	Professor	01	03

Table 1 presents the distribution of demographic variables. According to the table, 57% of faculty members hold either MS or M.Phil degree, including those in the positions of Lecturers and Assistant Professors. In contrast, 23% have earned a PhD, while 20% 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

(PKR), 11% of women academics earn between 90,000 and 140,000, 23% earn between 140,001 and 190,001, 37% earn between 190,002 and 240,002, and 29% earn more than 240,003. This indicates that women in academia generally enjoy a reasonable income within higher education careers. Among the faculty members, 66% are Lecturers, 31% 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.

Women academics' career is predictor of their proportion, representation, pay gap, family responsibilities, promotion, research, and supervision.

**Table 2**

*Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Women's Career Paths in Academia.*

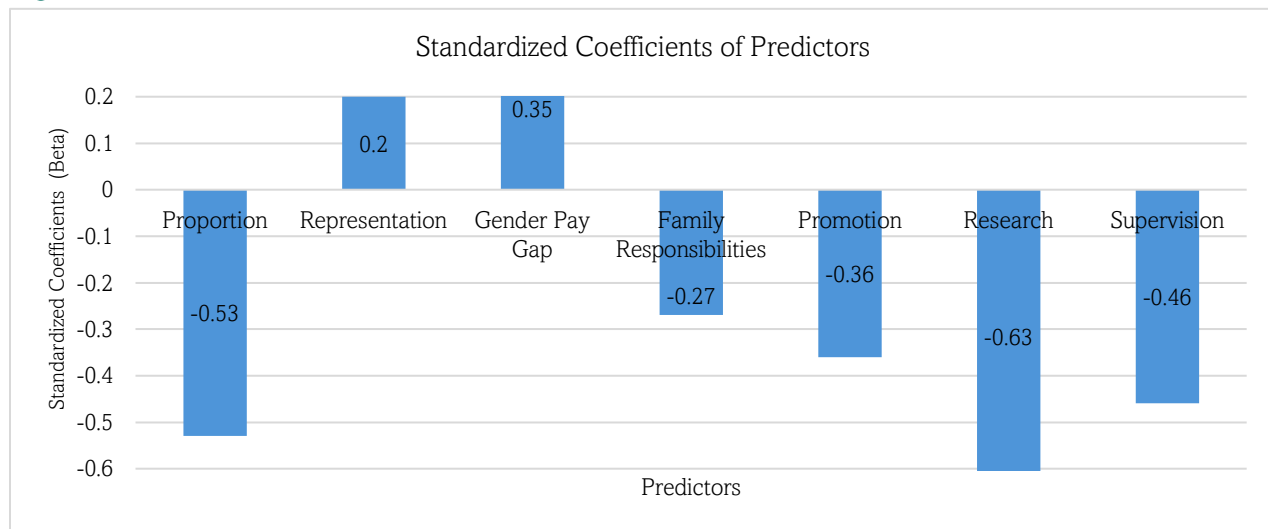
Predictors	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Proportion	-.338	.079	-.526	-4.305	.000
Representation	.155	.091	.198	1.707	.103
Gender Pay Gap	.397	.139	.350	2.851	.010
Family Responsibilities	-.294	.114	-.268	-2.581	.018
Promotion	-.291	.097	-.362	-3.012	.007
Research	-.625	.117	-.626	-5.325	.000
Supervision	-.387	.104	-.461	-3.707	.001
(Constant)	4.287	.537		7.978	.000
F = 12.797, Sig. = .000		R Square = .817, Adjusted R Square = .754			
Total number of observations = 35					

The above table shows that proportion is a significant negative predictor of the women academics' career paths. For every unit increase in proportion, the dependent variable decreases by 0.338 units, holding other factors constant. Its standardized coefficient (0.526) suggests it has a relatively strong negative effect. This means that women academics have low ratio in the higher education of AJK. Our study findings are like the Bhatti and Ali (2020), who also found that women are disproportioned in higher education. Similarly, representation is not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ), meaning there is insufficient evidence to conclude that it has a meaningful effect on the women academics' career paths. These values revealed that women are underrepresented in higher education of AJK. Similar findings are given by Hakiem (2023) and Tang and Horta (2021). They also argued that women have low representation in higher education. However, gender pay has a significant positive effect on the women academics' career paths. For each unit increase in the gender pay gap, the dependent variable increases by 0.397 units, holding other factors constant. Its standardized coefficient (0.350) has a moderate positive effect. This indicates that women and men have equal pay in higher education and no pay gap exist. Our study findings are in line with Sadaf, et al., (2024) and Teferra and Altbach (2004). They maintained that the pay gap does not exist anymore in the modern higher education system. Family responsibilities have a significant negative effect on the women academics' career paths. For every unit increase in family responsibilities, the dependent variable decreases by 0.294 units, with a moderate standardized coefficient of -0.268. Likewise, promotion has a significant negative effect. We assert that women academics are burdened with family responsibilities that consume their most of the time while their academic ends remain unattended. Findings of Mousa and Ayoubi (2019), like many scholars,

support our study findings that women have double responsibilities of family and academia, and they find less time to focus their careers.

Additionally, promotion has a significant negative effect on the women academics' career paths. As promotion opportunities decrease by 1 unit, the dependent variable decreases by 0.291 units, with a relatively strong standardized coefficient of -0.362. Research is a highly significant negative predictor. For each unit increase in research, the dependent variable decreases by 0.625 units. Its standardized coefficient of -0.626 indicates a strong negative relationship. Our finding indicates that women face issues in promotions. Despite fulfilling the promotion criteria, they are not promoted in academic hierarchy and often face delayed promotions. Similar findings are given by many scholars working on the gender disparities in higher education. As Mohamed (2017) and Pasque and Nicholson (2023) stated that women face delayed promotions while Morley (2019) and Turner (2002) contended that careers of women are slowed down by the late promotions. By the same token, supervision has a significant negative effect on the career paths of the women. A unit increase in supervision results in a decrease of 0.387 units in the dependent variable, with a strong standardized coefficient of -0.461. Here, we argue that women are not involved in the supervision of the research that affect their career progression. The same results are given by Madsen (2010) and Johri et al. (2021). They also found that women academics are less likely engaged in the research supervision. While research also has significant negative effect on the career paths of women. A unit increase in research results in a decrease of 0.625 units in the dependent variable, with a similar strong standardized coefficient. Research is important for the career development of academics. Our study findings show that women are deficient in research productivity. This is global phenomenon where women publish less than men. This significantly creates barriers to their career in academia. Studies on research productivity of women academics has largely been conducted across the globe (Friedman, 2020; Ekpo, 2015). Our study endorses the findings of these studies that women are deficient in research productivity. The overall model is statistically significant and explains a large portion (81.7%) of the variance in the dependent variable. The coefficients for proportion, family responsibilities, promotion, research, and supervision are negative, indicating that these factors decrease the dependent variable. Only gender pay gap has a positive effect.

Figure 1



### Foucauldian Perspective

The Foucauldian (1975) perspective of power and knowledge is relevant here because the higher education of AJK is gendered where men create the knowledge by exercising power to maintain their organizational hegemony in the

higher education structure. This marginalizes women in many ways. Our findings revealed that women are disproportioned and underrepresented while they are not provided equal participation in research and supervision. Similarly, they are not given promotion benefits while they are burdened with family responsibilities than further exacerbate the situation. This creates an imbalance to their work life perpetuating their low participation in higher education structure. The nexus of power and knowledge both are important here. Like other countries, men academics use power in higher education of AJK to create knowledge while this knowledge certainly induces the effects of power through policy documents and decision making by creating the higher education a gendered place where women are marginalized. On the basis of the above discussions, we substantiate the argument of Foucault (1975) that, like society, power circulates and accumulates due to cultural and academic expectations in higher education. Here, power is exercised by men by creating new objects of knowledge through policies, documents, and practices that marginalize the women academics' career aspirations.

Knowledge is both a product and instrument of power while power produces and legitimizes certain knowledge. He argued that institutions and universities are key sites where power and knowledge nexus operated and shaped subjectivities while maintaining the hierarchies. For Foucauldian perspective, the lower proportion of women is reflection of discursive formation which defined that who is fit and qualified for academic leadership. This shows that low proportion of women is both a symptom and a reinforcement of the institutional power dynamics that favors male dominance in knowledge production.

## **Conclusion**

We conclude that women academics in AJK face significant challenges related to underrepresentation, research productivity, delayed promotions, and the balancing of family responsibilities, the study highlights a positive aspect in terms of equal pay for both genders. Nonetheless, these mixed findings suggest that some strides have been made toward gender equality, while structural and societal barriers still hinder women's academic advancement and overall professional development in the region. We substantiate the argument of Foucault (1975) that, like society, power circulates and accumulates due to cultural and academic expectations in higher education. In higher education of AJK, men create knowledge by exercising power to contain their hegemony through policies, documents, and practices that marginalize the women academics. 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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