Structures of constraint and women's paid work in Pakistan

Sana Khalil[1],•

[1]*Ph.D. Economics, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Faculty of Habib University, Karachi, Pakistan*

Abstract

This paper examines the role of different structures of constraint in restricting women's access to paid work in Pakistan. Using data from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics and Pakistan Demographic Health Surveys, it offers a descriptive analysis of men and women's labor market outcomes in Pakistan, evincing gender inequalities. Although female labor force participation rates in Pakistan have risen over 1990-2018, much of this increase might have come from informal employment in rural areas, within the category of self-employment and family work. Female employment is largely segregated to the agricultural sector (66%), followed by the manufacturing sector (16%). From 2013 to 2018, employment in the manufacturing sector grew faster for women than for men. However, much of this increase came from a sharp growth in the female share in the category of self-employment and contributing family work (by 39 percentage points); men's share in that category declined slightly (by 3 percentage points). Female shares in wage and salaried employment declined both in agricultural (15 percentage points) and manufacturing (27 percentage points) sectors while the corresponding male shares rose (albeit marginally). This essay argues that various structures of constraint on the supply-side such as early childbearing patterns, patriarchal rules regarding seclusion and marriage, and a larger burden of unpaid care-work under the joint-family system restrict women's participation in paid work. Similarly, on the demand-side, pervasive systematic discrimination, wherein job ads explicitly demand male candidates, discourages women's preferences for and access to paid work.

1. Introduction

Gender inequalities in labor market outcomes in Pakistan remain stubbornly high. A report by Gallup Pakistan (2021), based on analysis of the data from Pakistan Labor Force Survey 2017-18, shows that the incidence of unemployment is much higher among females than males. Among those who are above 18 years of age and have an undergraduate or above degree, 41% of the women are unemployed compared to the 6% of the unemployed men. Within the same cohort, the labor force participation rate was 48% for women and 94% for men. The report revealed that nearly 83% of the unemployed women in this cohort showed a willingness to accept employment with compromising terms and conditions, compared to the 59% of men who showed such willingness. This suggests that women in Pakistan, despite having suitable qualifications, and willingness to pursue paid work, are more likely than men to be unemployed.

A quick look at the historical data on male and female labor force participation rates shows a slow improvement in the female rate over the past three decades. According to International Labor Organization estimates, the difference between male and female labor force participation rate (for ages 15 and above) was around 70% in 1990. By 2019, this difference stood at around 60%. Pakistan Labor Force Survey reports over 1990-2018 show that the difference in male and female labor force participation rate has remained high in urban areas (1999-2000: 56.2%; 2017-18: 55.6%) while rural areas have made some improvement (1999-2000: 57%; 2017-18: 43.2%). In rural areas female labor force participation rate (FLFPR) rose from 16.1% in 1999-2000 to 25.6% in 2017-18, an increase of 59 percentage points. Comparatively, the female labor force participation rate in urban

areas increased by merely 26 percentage points, from 8.8% in 1999-2000 to 11.1% in 2017-18. This finding contrasts the patterns in female labor force participation rates in the developing countries in the neighborhood, India and Bangladesh. In India, for example, FLFPR over 1987-2012 showed a declining trend in rural areas while rising or stagnating in urban areas (Klasen and Pieters, 2015). Similarly, in Bangladesh, the development of garment factories have resulted in expanded work opportunities for women and increasing FLFPR; whereas in rural areas, due to a lack of suitable work opportunities and traditional norms of *purdah* (seclusion of women), FLPR has remained stagnant relative to that of men (Tanaka et al., 2020).

In this paper, I examine gender differentials in labor market outcomes in Pakistan over 1990-2018 and the potential factors that might explain them. The objective is to provide alternate views to identify various constraints that help explain Pakistani women's labor supply patterns. This paper has a two-pronged strategy. First, it will use data from Pakistan Labor Force Surveys (LFS) and Pakistan Demographic Health Surveys (PDHS) to provide an overview of labor market outcomes with an emphasis on gender differentials in indicators related to education, household formation, childbearing patterns, and paid work. Second, it will provide a brief review of literature on gender and labor markets in Pakistan to offer a context on demand and supply-side constraints that restrict women's paid work. In terms of demand-side constraints, I would mainly focus on discriminatory practices on the part of employers. For supply-side constraints, I would focus on factors such as unequal bargaining power in the marriage market and the household, unpaid childcare/eldercare, and religious/cultural stigmas associated with women's paid work.

This paper is structured as follows. The next section discusses a conceptual framework to understand structures of constraint that help explain, in part, differences in labor market outcomes for men and women. The purpose of section three is to elaborate on the differences in men's and women's labor market outcomes in Pakistan over 1990-2018. Section four, then, aims to explain these differences by examining the role of constraints on the supply-side—such as unequal marital rules—and demand-side— discriminatory hiring practices—that discourage women's involvement in paid work. The final section concludes.

2. Conceptual links

Elson (1999) provides a conceptual framework to understand gender differentials in the labor markets. According to this framework, labor markets operate at the intersection of "productive economy" (market-oriented work) and "reproductive economy" (unpaid work and other un-marketed activities critical for the functioning of the productive economy) in ways that are "bearers of gender". For example, labor markets often penalize those engaged in the reproductive economy and do not reward interpersonal skills that develop from caring activities and managing a household. Moreover, labor markets exacerbate the dilemma of who should pay for the kids, as Folbre (1994) points out, by only accounting for costs that employees incur in caring activities (i.e. in the form of time taken off from paid work and development of skills that labor markets reward) and disregarding the benefits created for the productive economy. Labor markets also don't reward sufficiently the benefits of personal development emanating from caring activities (i.e. enhancement of interpersonal skills in the form of empathy, respect, and a drive to solve collective problems).

According to Elson, labor markets are organized around unequal rules that reinforce the idea that the "burdens of the reproductive economy will be, and should be, borne largely by women." This is reflected in a widespread prevalence of maternal leaves, compared to paternal leaves. Similarly, labor markets often perpetuate social stereotypes about what a "male profession" (i.e. construction and repair services) and what is a "female profession" (i.e. teaching and nursing) by discouraging women from entering male-dominated professions, paying them lesser than men with similar qualifications, and using differential criteria to measure performance and grant promotions. Employers may play a strong role in branding certain jobs as "male jobs" by consistently precluding women from certain professions, i.e. by advertising a preference for men in job ads (I discuss in the subsequent sections of this paper). This would not only discourage women from pursuing what is declared as a "man's work" but also lead them to underinvest in their skills and professional development (as they are not rewarded equally in the labor market). This also carries implications on the supply-side as consistent rejections in the labor markets, and ensuing gender stereotypes may shape women's preferences towards paid work as well as their choice of occupations.

On the supply side, social norms and stigmas pose constraints that may shape women's preferences for paid and unpaid work. This includes patriarchal norms that influence women's bargaining position in the marriage market and in the household, which in turn shape married women's labor supply. Folbre (1994, 2020) has provided a useful conceptual framework to understand how constraints can 'define the realm of choice'. She argues that 'structure of constraints' can be conceptualized as 'sets of asset distributions, rules, norms, and preferences that empower given social groups'—i.e. constraints based on gender, class, race, and so on— at the expense of less powerful groups. Political rules that permit certain acts while penalizing others are examples of these constraints.

For example, property rights— that restrict women's control and ownership rights in comparison to men— can leave women in a weak bargaining position in society and the household. Social institutions that award males a control of productive and/or reproductive rights of women reflect and reinforce men's collective interests. Cultural norms, by imposing a certain 'price' for nonconformity, can be also categorized as constraints.

Folbre notes that constraints can be more limiting for some individuals and groups than others. More powerful groups might face lower and less binding constraints than less powerful groups. Norms regarding socially desirable and acceptable gender roles are often strictly enforced through individual and collective punishments, in the form of violence, social exclusion, and financial sanctions, etc. (the punishment for breaking these informal rules are more likely to be harsher for women than men, i.e. the practice of *Karo Kari* — honor killing, primarily carried out against women who, without 'permission', marry outside the family or engage in 'socially unacceptable relations' with men).

Jayachandran (2020) has argued that gender norms may explain differentials in women's employment among societies at similar levels of economic development. She notes five aspects of social norms that might constrict women's paid work: safety issues in public areas, restriction on women's mobility and social interactions, control over household finances, the norms around the male-breadwinner model, and the sexual division of unpaid work wherein women share a disproportionately larger burden for domestic chores and other care activities. Similarly, Heintz et al. (2018) use survey data of 5198 women in Bangladesh to examine the role of cultural norms on Bangladeshi women's likelihood to be economically active. They show that women who support traditional gender norms are less likely to participate in economic activity (even though religion didn't appear a significant factor in this regard, adherence to traditional and religious norms, such as observance of *purdah or veil*, appeared to significantly reduce women's participation in economic activities outside the home).

This paper extends the relevant frameworks by examining the role of unequal marital rules in restricting women's paid work. In the Pakistani context, the patriarchal society, marked by highly 'gendered'[1] social, cultural, and religious institutions, dictates women's subordinated role in the society. This includes a dominant patrilineality (the family line is pursued through male members and mothers might lose custody of their children in the event of divorce), a strict gender division of labor with a male-breadwinner/female-homemaker model (women are primarily relegated to the domestic sphere to contribute to the production and reproduction for family needs), and customs of purdah (women's can't come in direct contact with men designated as their *namahram*—with whom marriage is legal). Unequal marriage rules also perpetuate women's dependence on men for their social and economic survival.

In general, a woman's self-worth is determined in terms of her identity as a daughter, sister, wife, and mother. Her individuality, as an independent decision-maker, is sanctioned through social customs (i.e. exclusion from family affairs or gatherings). In the labor market, this corresponds with a woman's decision about paid and unpaid work as well as how the labor market treats her. Women's familial links decide how they weigh their decision to join either paid or unpaid work, as the decision about their labor supply is not of a labor-leisure sort that can be mediated by compensating wage differentials; rather, it is a decision largely controlled by their male kin. Since daily wages are generally low and care services are not easily available (due to social stigma associated with women's work outside the home), it becomes profitable for families living in a joint family system (with several generations living together under the same roof) to enforce a strict division of labor wherein men earning a bare minimum wage can survive on the unpaid domestic care provided by the women. The inequalities in education and labor market outcomes might, therefore, persist as long as they benefit the interests of the collective social groups.

In the next section, I show differences in indicators related to men's and women's labor market outcomes in Pakistan over 1990-2018.

3. Gender differences in labor market outcomes in Pakistan

In this section, I use selected labor force statistics over the period 1990-2018 for men and women to examine trends and patterns over the years. I then turn to the related literature to highlight possible explanations for these patterns.

Figure 1 shows a gender difference in labor force participation rate (for ages above 15) over 1990-2019. The rate for men has remained stable at slightly above 80% (84% in 1990 and 82% in 2019). Participation rates for

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[1] I use this term in the similar context that Elson (1999) has used. Institutions can be "bearers of gender" in their ability to define and reinforce gender stereotypes and ideas about masculinity and femininity.

women, however, increased from 14% in 1990 to 22% in 2019.[2] Table 1 highlights gender differentials in labor force participation at the provincial level in Pakistan.

A quick observation of the data reveals a puzzle. Urban areas experienced a greater reduction in the difference in male and female literacy rates over 1998-2018 (17% in 1998 and 12% in 2018) compared with rural areas (27% in 1998 and 26% in 2018). However, a greater reduction in the gap in male and female labor force participation rates seems to have occurred in rural areas (from 57% in 1999 to 43% in 2018) relative to urban areas (remaining at 56% in 1999 and 2018). It appears that rural areas have driven an increase in female labor force participation rates over 1998-2018, despite lower female literacy rates compared with the rate in urban areas.
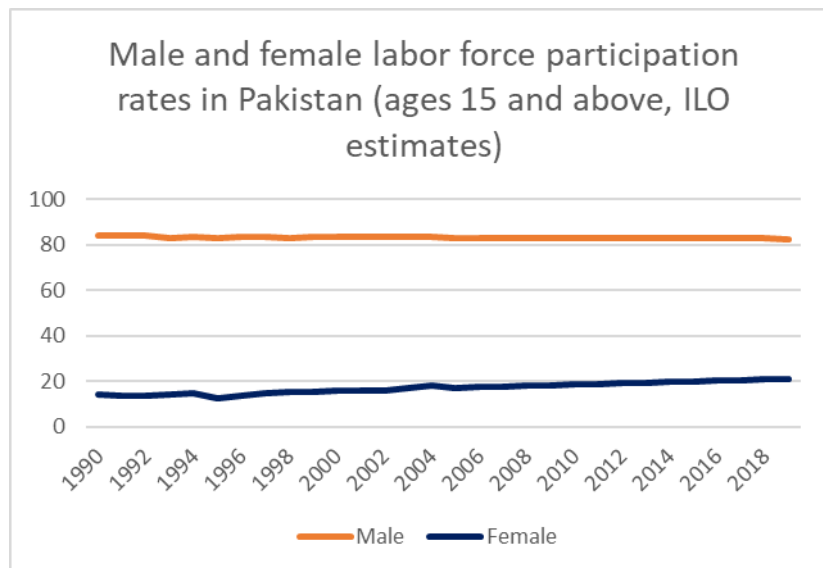

Figure 1. Trends in male and female labor force participation rates over 1990-2019

Source: World Bank Data, 2021

This poses a question why urban women in Pakistan, despite having higher literacy rates and better access to education, public transportation, and other facilities, have lagged behind their rural counterparts in labor force participation. The key takeaway from the table, that higher literacy rates for women do not necessarily coincide with their increased labor force participation, is also elicited further from the regional data on these indicators. For example, the differential in men's and women's literacy rates in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) was higher in both periods (31.7 & 34.8) compared to that in Sindh (21.2 & 22.9); however, differentials in paid work appeared much lower in the former region (53.3 & 49.8) as compared to the latter region (60.1 & 56.4).

Additionally, taking the latest period of 2018, the female literacy rate in Sindh appears second-highest (around 50 percent) after Punjab (57.4 percent) yet female labor force participation rates appear to be one of the lowest (12.1 percent). In Sindh, the gender gap in literacy rate appears much lower than that in Balochistan yet both share an almost identical gender gap in labor force participation (around 56 percent). A similar comparison can be drawn between Sindh and KPK: the latter shows a higher gender gap in literacy rate along with a lower gender   gap   in   the   labor   participation   rate.

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[2] Over the same reference period, growth in female labor force participation rates appears lower in some South Asian countries (in Bangladesh, for example, the rate grew by 43 %) and negative in others (in India the rate declined by 30%).

Table 1. Literacy rates and labor force participation rates (%) by region, 1998-2018

Region[3]	Literacy rates (1998)			Literacy rates (2018)		
	Male	**Female**	**Diff.**	**Male**	**Female**	**Diff.**
All Pakistan	56.5	32.6	23.9	72.5	51.8	20.7
Rural	47.4	20.8	26.6	66.3	40.4	25.8
Urban	72.6	55.6	17	82.2	70.6	11.6
Punjab	58.7	35.3	23.4	72.2	57.4	14.8
Sindh	56.6	35.4	21.2	72.8	49.9	22.9
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK)	52.8	21.1	31.7	73.3	38.5	34.8
Balochistan	36.5	15	21.5	73	33.5	39.5

Region	LFPR (1999)			LFPR (2018)		
	Male	**Female**	**Diff.**	**Male**	**Female**	**Diff.**
All Pakistan	70.4	13.7	56.7	68	20.1	47.9
Rural	73.1	16.1	57	68.8	25.6	43.2
Urban	65	8.8	56.2	66.7	11.1	55.6
Punjab	72.7	16.8	55.9	69.9	26.5	43.4
Sindh	67	6.9	60.1	68.5	12.1	56.4
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	65.4	12.1	53.3	61.1	11.3	49.8
Balochistan	69	5.1	63.9	63.8	7.9	55.9

Source: Pakistan Labor Force Survey reports, 1999-2018

Data from the Pakistan labor force survey 2017-18 shed further light in this regard. Figure 2 plots male and female labor force participation rates by education attainment for rural and urban areas.

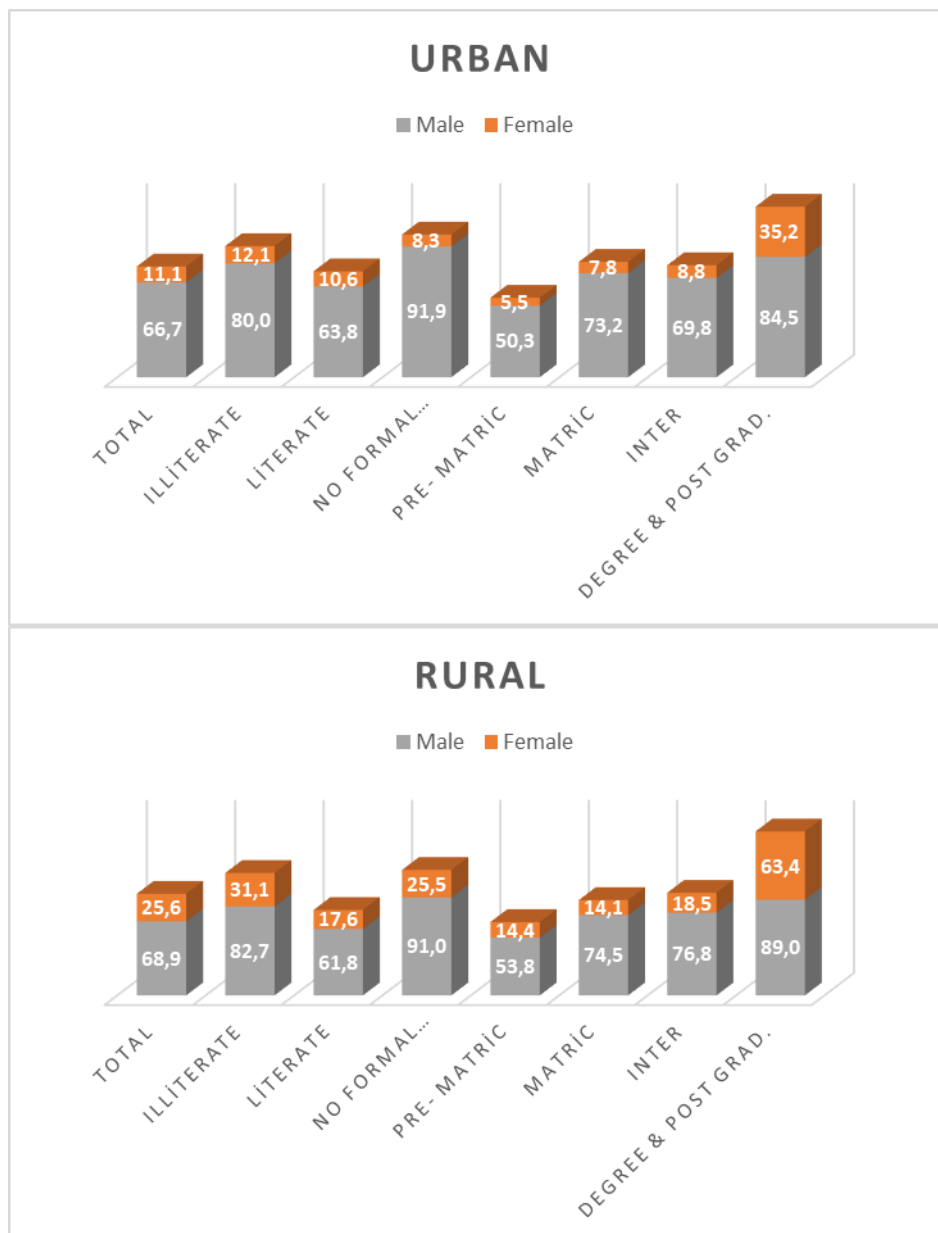[3] Data for Gilgit and Baltistan is not included

Figure 2. Labor force participation by sex and educational attainment, rural and urban (2017-18)

Source: Pakistan Labor force Survey 2017-18

In rural areas, the labor force participation rate for women is highest at the tertiary level of education (bachelors and postgraduate level), 63 percent, followed by the rate for illiterate women, 31 percent. The gender differential in labor force participation also appears to be the lowest at the tertiary level of education (25.6 percent) and highest with no formal level of education[4] (65.5 percent).In urban areas, the gender differential in labor force participation with no formal education expands to nearly 84 percent, suggesting that while men with no formal education might seek paid work, women don't. Informal education in terms of Madrasa education (religious education) might be a possible explanatory factor why women with no formal education might not seek paid work.

Similarly, the differential at the tertiary level appears much higher (49.3 percent) than that in rural areas (25.6 percent). This finding is striking given that one might expect the participation rate for highly educated women to be lower in rural areas due to a lack of suitable employment opportunities which might otherwise be prevalent in urban areas. However, in urban areas, a lack of white-collar opportunities commensurate with the demand might be a deterrent to female participation in paid work in this group.

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[4] No formal education might suggest education at religious, informal institutions such as Madrasas.

Table 2 helps shed some light on gender segregation in employment within each sector. A key observation from Table 2 is that, for the reference period 2017-18, female employment is largest in the agricultural sector (66%), followed by manufacturing (16%) and wholesale and retail (1.6%). Another observation is that, from 2012-13 to 2017-18, the share of female employment in the agricultural sector has declined (from 75% to 66% respectively) rising in the manufacturing sector (from 11% to 16.4% respectively). On the other hand, the share of female employment in the manufacturing sector increased from 11 percent in 2012-13 to 16.4 percent in 2017-18. As of 2017-18, the share of female employment in the services sector remains very low (7.6 percent), especially in education, health, and social work (2.3 percent).

As shown in table 3, a major reason behind women's high involvement with the agricultural sector is that a large share of women tends to work as contributing family workers (unpaid workers employed by family-run farms and enterprises). As of 2017-18, nearly 88 percent of the female employees in the agricultural sector are categorized under "own account and contributing family workers" (those working occasionally on family-run farms and enterprises). In the agricultural sector, the share of wage and salaried workers declined by 3 percentage points over the reference period, falling sharply for women (15 percentage points) and rising slightly for men (2.5 percentage points). It appears that the decline in the female share of employment in the agricultural sector is partly driven by the decline in the share of wage and salaried work.

Table 2. Gender segregation in employment by sector, 2013-2018

Sector	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2017-18
Agriculture				
Both sexes	42.0	42.0	40.8	37.3
Male	32.9	33.1	31.7	29.5
Female	74.9	72.8	71.5	66.1
Fishing				
Both sexes	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1
Male	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1
Female	-	-	-	-
Mining				
Both sexes	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Male	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.3
Female	-	-	-	-
Manufacturing				
Both sexes	14.3	14.4	15.5	16.2
Male	15.3	14.9	15.9	16.2
Female	10.9	12.7	14.4	16.4
Electricity, gas, and water				
Both sexes	0.8	0.3	0.8	0.7
Male	1.0	0.7	1.0	0.9
Female	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.1
Construction				
Both sexes	7.7	7.5	7.5	7.8
Male	9.7	9.7	9.6	9.8
Female	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2

Wholesale and retail trade				
Both sexes	14.7	14.9	14.9	15.1
Male	18.4	18.8	18.9	18.8
Female	1.6	1.7	1.4	1.6
Hotels and restaurants				
Both sexes	1.6	1.6	1.6	2.0
Male	1.9	1.9	2.0	2.4
Female	0.2	0.2	-	0.2
Transport and communication				
Both sexes	5.7	5.2	5.6	6.4
Male	7.2	6.7	7.2	8.1
Female	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2
Finance				
Both sexes	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.5
Male	0.6	0.6	0.8	0.7
Female	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1
Real estate and business activities				
Both sexes	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.5
Male	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.6
Female	-	0.1	-	-
Public administration				
Both sexes	2.7	2.4	2.5	3.7
Male	3.4	3.1	3.2	4.6
Female	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.4
Education				
Both sexes	3.8	3.7	4.0	4.2
Male	3.1	3.1	3.2	3.3
Female	6.5	3.0	6.6	7.6
Health and social work				
Both sexes	1.4	1.5	1.3	1.6
Male	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.4
Female	1.7	1.7	1.4	2.3
Other community, social, and personal services activities				
Both sexes	4.2	5.2	4.1	1.3
Male	3.9	4.0	4.2	0.7
Female	4.8	1.0	2.1	3.6

Source: Pakistan labor for surveys, 2013-2018

Similarly, in the manufacturing sector, the female share of wage and salaried workers declined from 2013 to 2018 (from 60% to 44%, respectively, or an increase of 27 percentage points), rising sharply for 'own account and contributing family workers (from 39.6% to 55%, respectively, or an increase of 39 percentage points). One conclusion from this trend is that the increase in the female share of employed workers in the manufacturing sector is partly driven by the rising share of workers who are self-employed or work for family members.

Table 3. Gender segregation in sectors by wage work, 2013-2018

Sector	2013-14		2014-15		2017-18	
	Wage and salaried workers and employers	Own account and contributing family workers	Wage and salaried workers and employers	Own account and contributing family workers	Wage and salaried workers and employers	Own account and contributing family workers
Agriculture						
Both sexes	12.5	87.5	11.7	88.3	12.1	87.9
Male	12.0	88.0	10.6	89.4	12.3	87.7
Female	14.2	85.0	13.4	86.6	12.0	88.0
Fishing						
Both sexes	72.8	27.2	64.8	35.2	76.9	23.1
Male	72.9	27.1	64.8	35.2	77.7	22.3
Female	50.5	49.5	-	-	-	100.0
Mining						
Both sexes	87.9	12.1	9.3	7.0	97.3	2.7
Male	88.2	11.8	92.9	7.1	97.3	2.7
Female	-	100.0	100.0	-	100.0	-
Manufacturing						
Both sexes	66.2	33.8	62.9	37.1	67.0	33.0
Male	72.5	27.5	71.1	28.9	73.4	26.6
Female	60.4	39.6	32.0	68.0	44.1	55.9
Electricity, gas, and water						
Both sexes	97.12	2.9	98.8	1.2	97.9	2.1
Male	97.0	3.0	98.7	1.3	97.8	2.2
Female	100	-	100.0	0.0	100.0	-
Construction						
Both sexes	94.0	6.0	93.7	6.3	94.9	5.1
Male	94.0	6.0	93.6	6.4	94.9	5.1
Female	85.3	14.7	96.9	3.1	93.7	6.3
Wholesale and retail trade						
Both sexes	25.7	74.3	26.6	73.4	30.9	69.1
Male	26.0	74.0	37.0	73.0	31.3	68.7
Female	17.5	82.5	11.2	88.8	13.0	87.0
Hotels and restaurants						
Both sexes	48.8	51.2	48.4	51.6	51.6	48.4
Male	49.4	50.6	48.9	51.1	52.3	47.7
Female	26.0	74.0	31.2	68.8	27.6	72.4
Transport and communication						
Both sexes	53.4	46.6	52.9	47.1	50.4	49.6

Male	49.6	50.4	52.8	47.2	50.2	49.8
Female	65.5	34.5	79.2	20.6	85.9	14.1
Finance						
Both sexes	98.9	1.1	97.9	2.1	98.5	1.5
Male	97.7	2.3	97.9	2.1	98.4	1.6
Female	100.0	-	-	-	100.0	-
Real estate and business activities						
Both sexes	28.0	72.0	26.6	73.4	37.1	62.9
Male	27.4	72.6	26.4	73.6	36.9	63.1
Female	100.0	-	40.8	59.2	79.7	20.3
Public administration						
Both sexes	99.9	0.1	99.9	0.1	89.0	11.0
Male	99.9	0.1	99.9	0.1	89.0	11.0
Female	98.0	2.0	100.0	-	89.4	10.6
Education						
Both sexes	96.6	3.4	95.6	4.4	96.7	3.3
Male	97.7	2.3	96.9	3.1	97.5	2.5
Female	94.5	5.5	93.4	6.4	95.4	4.6
Health and social work						
Both sexes	76.4	23.6	75.8	24.2	80.5	19.5
Male	72.6	27.4	72.3	27.7	77.0	23.0
Female	87.1	12.9	86.6	13.4	88.4	11.6
Other community, social, and personal services activities						
Both sexes	67.3	32.7	58.4	41.6	47.0	53.0
Male	47.2	52.8	53.8	46.2	47.8	52.2
Female	53.3	46.7	83.3	16.7	40.4	59.6
Activities of private households						
Both sexes	96.0	4.0	100.0	-	92.2	7.8
Male	97.5	2.5	100.0	-	97.7	2.3
Female	94.9	5.1	100.0	-	88.3	11.7
All sectors						
Both sexes	41.0	59.0	41.0	59.0	43.8	56.2
Male	45.0	55.0	45.3	54.7	48.0	52.0
Female	27.2	72.8	25.4	74.6	28.6	71.4

Source: Pakistan labor for surveys, 2013-2018

Note: Own account worker is defined as a person working during the reference period, with one or more partners at a self-employment job, with no employee engaged on a continuous basis. One or more family workers or employees are engaged on an occasional basis. These types of workers include owner cultivators, sharecroppers, and contract cultivators. A contributing family worker is defined as a person who works without any payment in cash or kind, on a family-run enterprise (operated by a member of the household or kin).

Overall, both in agricultural and manufacturing sectors the female share of wage and salaried workers has declined, rising, on the other hand, for own account and contributing family workers. The increase in female labor force participation rates, during the relevant period, therefore, might have been driven by the rising female share in the latter category. Social stigmas associated with women's paid work outside the home and religious factors that restrict women's mobility and interaction with men might be some of the reasons why women's

employment in the agricultural sector, within the category of self-employment and family work, remains higher compared to that in other sectors and the wage and salaried category.

Even though gender differentials in education are considered a major hindrance to Pakistani women's integration in paid work in the formal sector (Shah and Sathar, 1986), the role of cultural norms, with regards to marriages rules, household formation, and childcare/eldercare also spell out substantial constraints for women in their preferences with regards to paid and unpaid work.

In the related literature, Pakistani women's lower participation in paid work has been associated with their socioeconomic status (Shah and Sathar, 1986), marital status (Shah et al., 1976), presence of a male figure (Chishti et al., 1989), observance of purdah[5] (Ibraz, 1993), lower education (Naqvi and Shahnaz, 2002) and presence of children (Faridi et al., 2009). For example, Shah et al. found that women's marriage had a significantly positive effect on women's participation in paid work. They suggested that since married women have greater social permissibility to move around, this may theoretically explain women's greater likelihood to engage in paid work.

A key observation from the pertinent literature emanating from Pakistan is that there is a dearth of studies that examine the extent of social and economic constraints for women by the type of marriage rules. In Pakistan where nearly 62 percent of the marriages are cousin marriages (marriage to first or second cousin either from the father's side or mother's side), there is a need to examine differences in social and economic constraints for women as marriage rules might vastly differ within cousin marriage and non-cousin marriage. The next section discusses how certain constraints, both supply-side— i.e. marriage rules, household formation, and childbearing—and demand-side— i.e. discriminatory hiring practices—might have shaped women's labor supply patterns in Pakistan.

4. Supply and demand-side constraints on women's paid work in Pakistan

As Folbre (1994, 2020) argues, structures of constraints, based on group identity and interests, can be in the form of rules, norms, and preferences that empower one group over the other and may be the cause of persistent inequalities in the social and economic spheres. In the labor market, such constraints, both supply-side— i.e. unequal rules regarding marriage, household formation, and childbearing—and demand-side— i.e. discriminatory hiring practices— may play a strong role in constricting women's participation in paid work.

4.1. Supply-side constraints

Childbearing patterns

Historical data from Pakistan shows that in terms of childbearing patterns there doesn't seem any radical changes in the median age of women at the birth of their firstborn. Table 4 shows that in 1990-91 this age was 21.3 years. After nearly three decades, it stands at 22.2 years. There has, however, been a significant development in teenage pregnancies. The percentage of teenage mothers (ages15-19) who began childbearing declined from 15.7 percent in 1990-91 to 8.1 percent in 2017-18. All the provinces have shown significant development in this regard.

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[5] Cultural and religious segregation of men and women. Practice of purdah is not restricted to Muslim women only, it has been an important feature of in many South Asian countries (see Papanek [1973] for how purdah norms and practice differ for hindu and Muslim women)

Table 4. Onset of childbearing: median age at first birth and teenage motherhood by region, 1990-2018

Province/region	1990-1991	2006-2007	2017-2018
All Pakistan	21.3	21.8	22.8
Punjab	21.6	22.1	23.2
Sindh	20.6	21.1	23.0
NWFP (KPK)	21.4	21.2	21.5
Balochistan	20.3	22.3	22.2
Teenage motherhood: Percentage of women age 15-19 who had begun childbearing			
	1990-1991	2006-2007	2017-2018
All Pakistan	15.7	9.1	8.1
Punjab	16.9	8.3	6.2
Sindh	14.4	11.2	10
NWFP (KPK)	13.9	9.2	14.8
Balochistan	20.5	7.4	11.6

Source: DHS reports over 1990-2019

Both marriage and childbearing patterns are important determinants of women's paid employment. Recent studies from Pakistan that have explored the relationship between the presence of children and women's paid work seem to be largely based on qualitative field surveys (see Faridi, Sharif and Anwar, 2009; Sarwar and Abbasi, 2013 for a review of studies on determinants of women's paid work in Pakistan). In this regard, Naqvi and Shahnaz (2002) use probit and multinomial logit models for cross-sectional data from the Pakistan Integrated Household Survey, 1998-99 to investigate factors associated with women's paid work. In their study, paid work was defined as involvement in economic activity for pay, profit, or work in farms or shops. They included a wide range of explanatory variables for personal characteristics (age, education, marital status), household head's characteristics (age, education, employment status of the head of the house), household characteristics (gender of the head of the house, presence of children, family size, living with a nuclear family, and economic status), and a regional dummy for and residence of the household in a rural area. Their results show that an increase in the number of young children (under 5 years of age) by 1 reduced the likelihood of women's participation in paid work by 1.1 percent. The presence of a male member in the household reduced the likelihood of women's paid work by 0.5 percent. (possibly due to extra demands of domestic work or men's restrictions on women's paid work outside the home).

Marriage rules/ household structures

In the Pakistani context, a focus merely on marital status is insufficient to understand the complexities of marriage dynamics and their implications for women's involvement in paid employment. The type of marriage matters as the associated marriage rules influence intrahousehold bargaining. Hence, I begin this subject in the broader light of kinship endogamy/exogamy and intra-household bargaining—specifically, bargaining over women's allocation of time between paid and unpaid work—on which the literature abound. Debate on the role of marriage forms and women's autonomy and intra-household bargaining outcomes is multifaceted, without a consensus on the mechanisms through which marriage forms influence women as well as their overall impact on women's welfare. According to one view, cousin marriage— a form of kinship endogamy common in patrilineal, patrilocal societies among land-owning classes—offers women the social protection of male kin by consolidating their bonds with in-laws and insuring them against domestic violence, in the absence of integrated social welfare systems. Dowry is neither necessary nor important in consanguineous marriages, default over which in exogamous marriages often contributes to domestic violence. In this regard, Rammohan and Vu's (2018) empirical analyses from the Indian Human Development Survey 2011-13 and District Level Household and Facility Survey 2007-08 showed that controlling for the level of economic development, urbanization, caste, religion, husband's education, household income, and region, patrilocal exogamy worsened gender gaps in

education. At the household level, their results showed that relative proximity of marital residence to the natal one was negatively associated with lower gender gaps in education and higher female schooling.

Contrary to this view is the notion that women's socioeconomic outcomes might be worse under kinship endogamy as the marriage market is captured and dominated by males. Under this argument, men in consanguineous marriages may easily get away with non-payment of *mahr*— an otherwise obligatory payment to the bride under Islamic marriage. Mahr is a financial payment that may provide possible resources that might improve women's intra-household bargaining[6].

However, in close-kin marriages such as in cousin marriage, men fully control the marriage market. Fathers and brothers can easily control the transaction over the bride as sons and nephews are in the same pool making it easier for even the poor men to leverage through barter or watta satta[7] (Edlund, 2018). Since women in consanguineous marriages have limited outside options than those in exogamous marriages they marry early, devoting their time to home management skills. Through this link, we might expect that consanguinity can result in lower levels of education among women in these types of marriages (Agha, 2016).

Male control over women's productive and reproductive capacities might be much more pronounced in consanguineous marriages than in out-marriages as men not only have greater control over women but also have social and economic incentives to do so. For example, Folbre (1997, p. 265-269) has argued that gender-specificenvironmental parameters that counteract the interests of women as a group provide incentives for individuals – who gain from this—to engage in gender-specific forms of coalitions. In this context, it is economically advantageous for males to inculcate caring preference among women by enforcing social norms that reward female altruism and punish deviations. Consanguinity, thus, can be envisaged as a form of gender coalition with intrinsic, material, and psychological rewards for 'well-behaved' women with clear punishments against 'defaulters'. Agha's (2016) case study, conducted in Khairpur village in rural Sindh Pakistan, showed that male kin rewarded domestic caring skills, discourage attainment of education, and punished women who married outside the *biradari* (kinship) by cutting all social ties with her and her kin group.

Rao's (1997) case study, based on both ethnographic and empirical exercises, examined endogamous communities from three villages in the South Indian state of Karnataka. It looked at power relationships, wife-beating, and fertility and health decisions. The findings, based on focus group interviews and empirical exercises, showed that controlling for husband's education, wife's monthly income, rest of family income, number of wife's brothers and number of living male, shortfalls in dowry payments and fewer number of male children along with female sterilization were significant determinants of wife-beating and abuse. An interesting finding in the study was that a husband's education raised the likelihood of wife-beating. Rao argued that since the higher education of the husband leads to higher demands for larger dowry payments, women married to more educated men were more likely to be beaten than those married to less educated ones. Rao didn't, however, provide a comparison of the situation with women in exogamous marriages which would have been useful to understand how women fare under different forms of marriage.

In this regard, it is important to highlight how marriage forms influence women's social and economic situation. Table 5 provides a snapshot of how the incidence of cousin marriage coincides with indicators associated with women's intra-household bargaining outcomes (see Pakistan Demographic Health Survey Report 2017-2018). Among married women aged 15-49, the highest incidence of cousin marriages (58.3 percent) is reported in Sindh.

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[6] The separate spheres bargaining model of Lundberg and Pollak (1993) can apply to Pakistan's rural context where social stigmas associated with divorce restrict its use as a threat point; therefore, control of resources within marriage might determine internal threat points. Whether mahr improves women's intra-household bargaining power is based on anecdotal evidence.

[7] Marriage by exchange of sisters

Table 5. Cousin marriages and women's intra-household bargaining outcomes

	Punjab	Sindh	Khyber Pakhtun-khwa	Balochistan
Average annual growth rates of GDP 1999-2000 to 2014-2015 (percent)	4.1	4.3	5.2	2.5
Incidence of cousin marriages (percent of women married to a first cousin, both father's and mother's side) Unrelated marriages	48.1 38.4	58.3 29.4	43.5 38	51.2 33
Participation in decision marking: Percentage of married women who participate in household decision making by themselves or jointly with husband				
i) Own health care ii) Major household purchases iii) Visiting family or relatives	56.5 49.5 52	59.4 54 63.5	29.2 24 28.8	27 17.3 18.4
Control over own earnings: the person who decides how the wife's earnings are used (percentage)				
i) Mainly wife ii) Wife and husband jointly	49 41.6	51.8 40.4	37 39.7	39.7 22.1
Ownership of title or deed for a house owned (among married women who own house, percentage distribution by whether woman's name appears on the title or deed)				
i) Name is on title/deed	46.2	48.2	26.6	24.3

Source: Except for economic growth rates- for which data comes from Institute for Policy Reforms' report[8]-, all other data has been compiled from DHS data 2017-18

Compared to other provinces, Sindh reports the highest percentages of married women who participate in intra-household decision making (59.4), control their earnings (52%), and are included in the ownership of assets (48.2%). However, the relation between cousin marriage and women's autonomy (for their choice of paid work and overall say in the household) might be complex to map given the intersectionality of other social and cultural factors.

4.2. Demand-side constraints

Systematic discrimination in access to paid work

A key observation from women's labor market outcomes in Pakistan is women have persistently higher unemployment rates than men. Table 6 shows is that over nearly two decades, the gender gap in the unemployment rate (with an exorbitantly high female unemployment rate compared to the male rate) has persisted, especially among the degree holders.

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[8] Pasha, H.A., 2015. Growth of the provincial economies. *Institute for Policy Reforms (IPR). http://ipr. org. pk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/GROWTH-OF-PROVINCIAL-ECONOMICS-. pdf.*

Additionally, the gender gaps in unemployment rates appear to remain lower at the lower levels of educational attainment but rise faster once the candidates attain secondary schooling or a college degree. In 2017-18, the female unemployment rate among the degree holders (minimum college) appears 41.1 percent; a rate more than seven times higher than the male rate of 7.3 percent.

There could be various factors behind women's high unemployment rates. In favor of brevity, I restrict my discussion here to demand-side constraints in the form of employment and wage discrimination in the labor market. A comprehensive overview of other demand-side factors is discussed by Blau and Kahn (2017), for the US, Klasen, and Pieters (2015), for India, and Tanaka et al. (2020), for Bangladesh.

Table 6. Unemployment rate by educational attainment and sex, 2001- 2018

	Less than one year of education		Pre-primary		Primary (below middle)		Middle (below matric)		Matric (below intermediate)		Intermediate (below degree)		Degree	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
2001-02	4.5	14.8	6.8	13.3	6.4	19	8.4	23.1	8.2	25.3	8.3	20.3	7.4	15.3
2003-04	4.2	11.1	7.1	12.4	5.3	16.5	8.5	15.4	9.4	20.9	9.8	22	7.2	17.1
2005-06	4.1	8.7	4.8	9.7	5.5	9.8	5.5	10.5	6.9	14.6	6.9	16.5	5.9	12.5
2006-07	3.5	7.6	4.2	8.3	3.7	9.6	5	10.9	5.3	15.3	5.6	13.9	4.6	9.7
2007-08	5.3	5.8	4.3	4	3.7	11.6	4.2	12.5	5.3	20.9	5.5	18.3	3.5	12.9
2008-09	3	5.6	2.5	11.9	3.9	10.2	5.2	10.9	5	21.3	5.7	19.6	4.2	15.1
2009-10	5.2	4.3	4.3	4.1	3.7	9.5	4.5	12.1	5	18	5.8	23.9	5.8	19.5
2010-11	3.8	3.5	3.8	5.4	4.1	10.3	5.2	14.8	6.4	22.2	8.3	26.8	6.3	19.3
2012-13	2.8	4	4.9	5.2	4.5	10	7.6	15.1	6.7	20.7	7.5	24.3	7.6	22.1
2013-14	0.2	0.2	2.2	0.7	18.4	11.4	16	7.2	16.9	12.1	8.9	9.4	10.9	15.5
2014-15	0.3	0.3	1.8	0.3	13.5	4.3	15.5	8.7	14.7	8.7	10.1	14	12.9	21.1
2017-18	2.9	2.9	5	3.3	3.5	4.8	5	6.9	6.2	8.7	10.6	20.6	7.3	41.1

Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (Compiled by the author from various Pakistan Labor Force Survey reports)

Note: Unemployment is defined as comprising of individuals ages 15 years and above who during the reference period were: a) Without work i.e. those not in paid-or self-employment; and b) Currently available for work i.e. those available for paid work or self-employment: or c) Not currently available for work due to the following reasons: illness, will take a paid job within four weeks, is temporarily laid off from a paid job, is an apprentice and is not willing to work: or d) actively seeking work during last week. The unemployment rate is calculated as the unemployed population as a percentage of the currently active population.

Demand-side discrimination is important as it might restrict women's options in the labor market and, in addition to the supply-side factors already discussed, contributes to observed gender inequalities. In Pakistan, employers have the freedom to state their gender preferences explicitly in their job advertisements (and they frequently do). These practices can not only discourage women from investing in their education and skills, but can also contribute to persistent segregation in the labor market— e.g. as employers advertise an explicit preference for

female applicants for 'feminine jobs' such as office secretary, teachers, and nurses and a preference for males for 'masculine jobs' such as mechanical engineers, machine operators, etc.

If workers with equivalent characteristics associated with productivity are treated differently in the labor market, it is taken as evidence of employment discrimination (Neumark et al., 1996). Neumark (2018) cites a clear definition of discrimination in the labor market based on the code of Federal Regulations (29 & 1604.2) in the US which defines discrimination as differential treatment not associated with observable productive capacities.[9]

Due to a lack of institutional regulations on equal employment opportunities in Pakistan, employers can explicitly state the preferred sex of the potential job market candidates in their advertisements (a practice more common on online job sites than in newspapers where such practice is almost non-existent)[10]. On Pakistan's largest job site, www.rozee.com, advertised preferences for gender serve as standard filters along with job type, experience, skill, career-level, industry, etc. Despite the freedom to explicitly state the preferred gender of potential applicants, many employers advertise themselves as 'gender-neutral'— stating no gender preference in their job ads. One explanation for this could be the tendency among some employers to advertise themselves as gender-neutral to build goodwill around their organization as well as product and services.

To examine how explicit preferences for male candidates vary across various job categories in Pakistan, I examine that data on all the job ads posted on Pakistan's largest online job site (www.rozee.com) during June-July 2019.

Figures 4 and 5, based on the collected data, show the fraction of job ads that state an explicit preference, across 53 functional categories, for male and female candidates for Pakistan. In figure 4, almost 70% of jobs posted in warehousing preferred men over women.

Apart from the job ads for warehousing, the highest fraction of job ads with an explicit preference for a male candidate can be found in manufacturing, maintenance, security, system analyst, and hotel management. Male applicants seem to be least preferred in job ads for researchers, writers, media (print and electronic), database administration, and management consulting. In contrast, figure 5 shows that advertised preferences for women are more common in jobs related to clerical, executive management, teachers, health & medicine, and administration. Job ads in computer networking, engineering, software and web development, distribution and logistics, and maintenance and repair show the least preference for female candidates.

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[9] Discrimination is defined as "The refusal to hire an individual because of the preferences of coworkers, the employer, clients or the employer, clients or customers…" and "The principle of nondiscrimination requires that individuals be considered on the basis of individual capacities and not on the basis of any characteristics generally attributed to the group." It also renders statistical discrimination illegal: "[t]he refusal to hire a woman because of her sex based on assumptions of the comparative employment characteristics of women in general. For example, the assumption that the turnover rate among women is higher than among men."

[10] I periodically scanned job advertisements on Pakistan's largest job site www.rozee.com, Sunday career sections of widely circulated newspapers such as Dawn and The Nation over a period from August 2018 – March 2019.
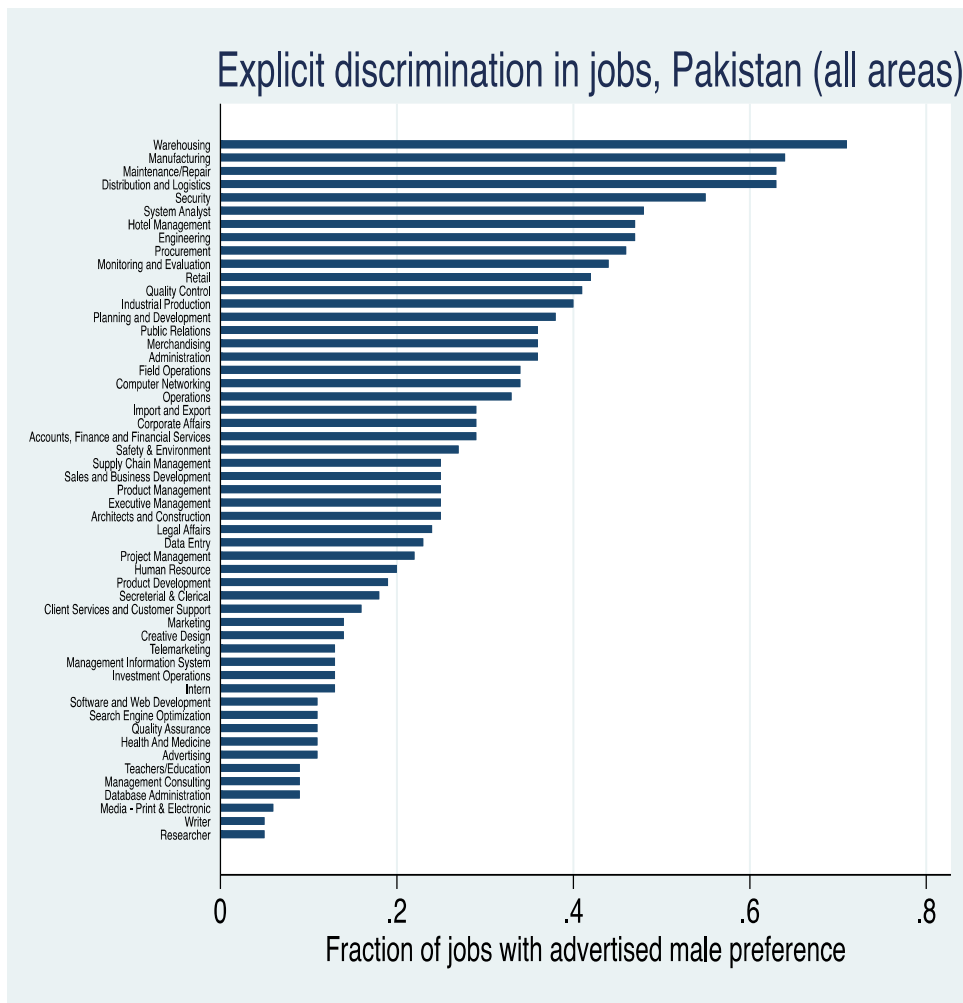
Figure 4. Explicit employment discrimination in job ads in Pakistan: Extent of male preference

Source: Data compiled from www.rozee.com during June-July, 2019

In the relevant literature, evidence of gender discrimination in Pakistan's labor market is primarily based on non-experimental studies—standard wage regression estimates from the labor force and household survey data (see Siddiqui, et al., 2006). Under this method, researchers have used standard Oaxaca-Blinder wage decompositions[11] and quantile regressions to offer evidence of gender wage discrimination in Pakistan. Examples of non-experimental studies on gender discrimination in employment in Pakistan include the studies by Siddiqui et al. (1998) and Sabir and Aftab (2007).

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[11] Under this method, to infer gender wage discrimination, separate wage regressions for men and women are estimated. The method decomposes the differentials into two components. One that is explained by differences in characteristics the market associates with productivity (such as education, experience, etc.) and the second that is unaccounted after controlling for all observable characteristics of workers, industry and occupation. The second component of gender disparity in earnings- captured by estimated value of the constant term and coefficients- is interpreted as differential not explained by observable characteristics included in the regression and therefore associated with discrimination.
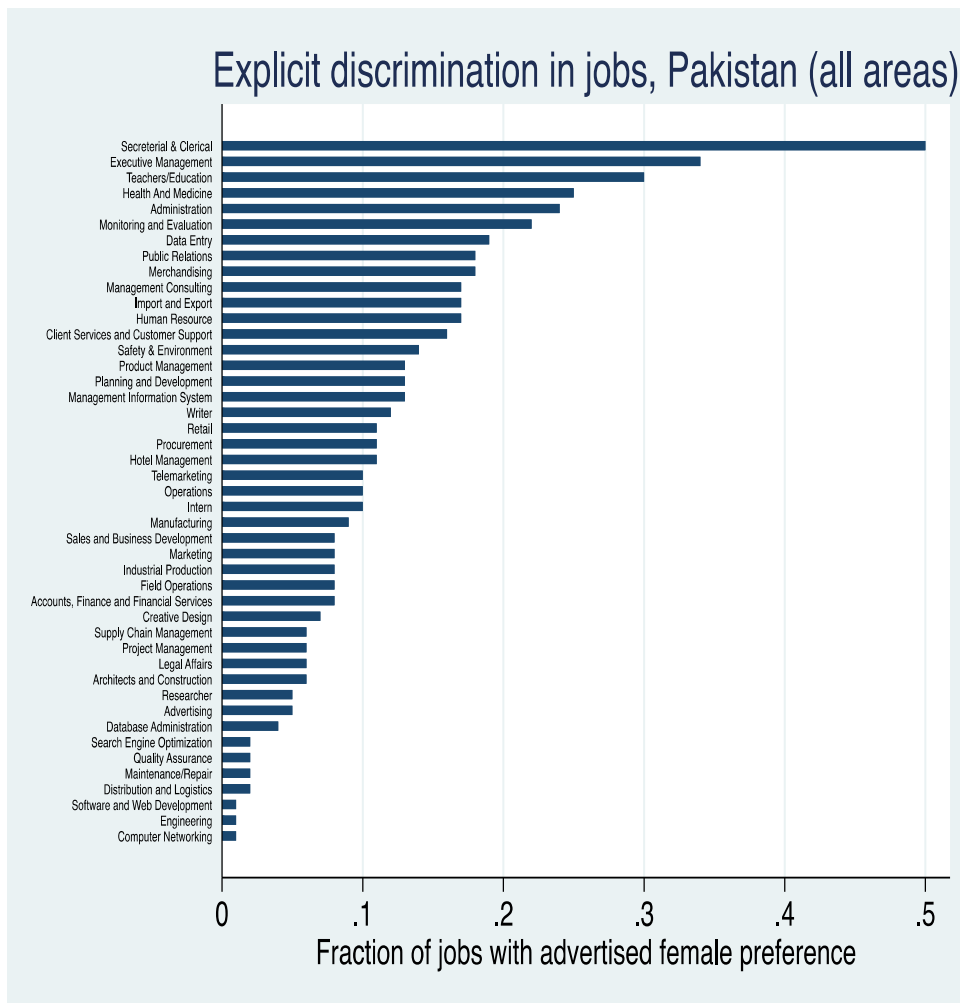
Figure 5. Explicit employment discrimination in job ads in Pakistan: extent of female preference

Source: Data compiled from www.rozee.com during June-July, 2019

Siddiqui et al. have used the Household Income and Expenditure Survey of 1993-94 to decompose male-female earnings differentials in Pakistan. Under their wage decomposition method, they controlled for age, education, experience, number of working days, area, region, type of work, industrial distribution and employment status, and size of the firm. They found that around 55-77 percent of the earnings differential was unaccounted for after controlling for observable characteristics; they interpreted this as evidence of discrimination against women.

Sabir and Aftab (2007), relying on Pakistan Labor Force Survey data, examine gender pay gap for wage employment in Pakistan over two periods: 1996-97 and 2006-06. They control for age, educational level-captured by dummies for each level of schooling from primary till post-graduate- public sector employment, and region (dummy for urban areas), white-collar (defined as professional and managerial jobs), and blue-collar jobs (defined as technical, clerical, crafts and other service-related jobs). They do not, however, include controls for occupational status which they term as their judgment call given the potential endogeneity of the occupational status variable. Apart from the standard Blinder-Oaxaca method, they supplement their model with quantile regression to explore gender wage differential at selected points of the conditional wage distribution. They show that from 1999 to 2006, changes in observable characteristics such as educational level, employment in white or blue-collar jobs, and residence in urban areas accounted for most of the expansion of the gender pay gap at the mean. They also find that expansion of the gender wage gap was sensitive to selected points on the conditional wage distribution. At the 10th and 25th quantile, and the median of the wage distribution, the unexplained portion associated with gender discrimination appears as an important driver of the gender pay gap.

They conclude that expansion in the wage gap associated with observable characteristics in the first half of the period, and increased gender discrimination after 2000 accounted for the overall expansion in the gender pay gap.

5. Conclusion

This essay offers a background of various indicators, and the related literature, associated with women's labor market outcomes in Pakistan. Overall, it highlights demand-and supply-side constraints that restrict Pakistani women's involvement in paid work. On the supply-side, factors such as social and religious ideals of female propriety, customs of purdah, stigmas associated with women's paid work, the burden of unpaid domestic labor (which is higher for women living in joint family systems), and marriage rules (where women in consanguineous marriages might face a larger burden of unpaid work and a greater degree of surveillance than their counterparts in out-marriages) might restrict women's access to economic opportunities outside the home.

On the demand side, employers' discriminatory practices, especially as employers in Pakistan can freely state their preferences for male and female applicants, can discourage women's involvement in paid work. A general tendency, easily discernable on online job sites in Pakistan, is that employers are more likely to demand male applicants in nearly all professions (except for education and health care where employers are more likely to advertise a preference for female applicants) regardless of the fact whether such professions are considered 'feminine' or 'masculine'. For example, in the Pakistani context, jobs in sales, marketing, and advertising seem to be male-dominated due to the higher degree of face-to-face contact with customers and a greater need for mobility. Women's options for pursuing paid work appear few and far between. On the policy front, there is a need to create awareness and debate on factors such as the persistence of cousin marriages in Pakistan as well as a need to address rampant discriminatory hiring practices in the labor market by developing laws that penalize employers engaging in discriminatory hiring practices. Quotas for female employment in public sector firms could also be a good option for increasing women's participation in paid work.

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