



LUMS

Saida Waheed  
Gender Initiative

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# GENDER BI-ANNUAL



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# EDITOR'S NOTE

**W**e bring you exciting articles in this third issue, featuring a range of voices from different fields of work. It is this diversity that allows us to explore a wide variety of topics from different perspectives.

Our focus is pulled towards issues of carework, bureaucratic procedures, and women's visibility in politics; while also looking at ingenious solutions that help make space in patriarchal contexts and provide services to the marginalised.

In Practitioner Voices, a development practitioner and activist shares how interactive theatre has created space for conversations around sexual and reproductive health. Academic Work features three pieces. The first looks at the challenges Hazara women protest leaders face as they take on more visible roles in politics, and the changes they usher in as they take up space; the second piece explores how social and cultural norms impact women's bargaining power within the household; and the third piece explores the devaluation and invisibility of carework and its implication on women's lives. In the Gender and Design section we have two pieces, one looks at the journey of a telemedicine initiative and how it is helping women and men across the country; the second piece of the section shares lessons from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's book "Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions" and explores how feminist parenting must challenge patriarchal norms. Finally, in Student Features we carry three articles. The first looks at carework in Pakistan; in the second piece students share their research findings on the accessibility of NADRA and Union Council processes for women and gender minorities; the final is a thought piece on how women are depicted in Pakistani dramas and how this may impact societal attitudes towards women.



**DR. HADIA MAJID**  
EDITOR  
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# BANDHAN NAHIN BACHPAN

—◆—  
AAMNA LATIF

*A closer look at how Aahung has organized many interactive theatrical performances as a means of community engagement, enthralling and educating rural audiences on topics of gender, family planning and child early marriage.*

**"Sometimes reality is too complex. Stories give it form." --Jean Luc Godard**

**T**here is no denying the power of a good story. It gives us an opportunity to learn from another person's experience and it can shape, strengthen, or challenge our opinions and values. When a story catches our attention and engages us, we are more likely to absorb the message and meaning within it than if the same message was presented simply in facts and figures.

Taking stories where they need to be told, street theatre is the name given to a form of theatrical performance and presentation in outdoor public spaces without a specific paying audience. In Pakistan it has always been a significant feature in the lives of rural communities, and at times been the only source of entertainment. Street theatre sprang from the assumption that everyone can be involved in the fight against oppression and dictatorship and express themselves with creativity without having undergone formal training.

Aahung, a Karachi-based NGO that advocates for sexual and reproductive health and rights in Pakistan, has taken this form of awareness-raising into many of the rural and peri-urban communities it has worked in. One of Aahung's plays that aims to target the menace of child marriage is called *'Bandhan Nahin Bachpan'* (loosely translated to 'childhood instead of (marriage) bonds') and sheds light on the cross-cutting themes of gender inequality, the need for contraception and family planning information, as well as gender-based domestic violence. The organization runs focus group discussions before and after the performance to assess the impact made.

***"After watching this show, I have understood how unfair I have been to my daughter-in-law, I think it is time to change my attitude. It is not in a woman's control to give birth to a boy or a girl,"*** says Sakina, a 45-year-old resident of Thatta who watched the performance.

Pakistan is home to nearly 19 million child brides where 1 in 6 young women were married before the age of 18 and nearly half of these child brides have given birth before turning 18 as well<sup>1</sup>. Child marriage is prevalent due to several reasons including but not limited to deeply entrenched traditions and customs, poverty, lack of awareness and/or access to education, and lack of security. However, one of the least cited reasons is the need to control a young person's sexuality. The level of legal, social, political and/or economic restrictions on female sexuality defines gender roles, norms and indeed, power dynamics. Though it is rooted in gender inequality and the belief that girls and women are inferior to boys and men, its drivers vary between communities, and it looks different across – and within – regions and

countries. This gender inequality is bred within patriarchal systems – that is, systems that give control to men – that value girls according to their virginity and enforce limits on female sexuality and reproductive choices. This can mean controlling how a girl behaves and dresses, where she goes, who she sees, and if, who and when she marries.

Aahung's programs, which are strongly centered around human rights and pay particular attention to choice, respect, and equality, have been shown to elicit significant attitude and behavior changes in young people, particularly girls. Enhanced knowledge of bodily rights and integrity, and demonstrations of improved negotiation and communication skills on issues of marriage, school attendance and sexual harassment have been recorded through evaluations of Aahung's programs. Communication platforms like street theatre continue to play an expanding role in influencing social power norms and creating new avenues for young people to access and utilize information. Aahung uses communications platforms both to pilot test innovative





strategies for relaying information to young people through digital and interactive platforms, and to enhance capacity-building initiatives which have already shown efficacy.

**“We have been organizing street theatres on social issues for many a decade now, but child marriage is a topic that sparks a great deal of debate as people tend to look at it from the lens of religion. When that debate starts, any discussion on human rights is immediately sidelined,”**

says Mahmood Bhatti of the Lahore-based Azad Theatre, a theatre troupe with a fan following especially in the Punjab.

It is important to keep the theatre interactive, with questions posed to the audience for better participation as the performance goes on. At times leading questions

are asked by the narrator to understand whether cultural sensibilities are tickled, and whether values have been questioned at all. Given the opportunity, impromptu dialogues are inserted by the actors themselves to exaggerate a given point during the play. Often the show ends with a flourish, when the pulsating rhythm of the *dhol* complements the emotional climax, cathartic to some viewers. Quite often the show ends with a lively discussion amongst the audience.

**Aamna Latif is a passionate human rights activist. She is also the Communications Manager at Aahung, a Karachi-based NCO that advocates for the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of men, women, and children across Pakistan.**

**“I was studying for my exams when they came with the *rishta*. My elder sister was married when she was 12 years old, so I knew even if I protested, no one would listen to me. I put down my books and changed into new clothes, my mother put make-up on my face and gave me jewelry to wear. I served them chai and samosas.**

**Then, the next day, something happened that changed my fate forever. A street performance took place in our neighborhood which my parents attended. The actors spoke about a girl's rights to living a life- our freedom, our childhood, our body protection. It covered how early marriages can make life almost impossible for young girls.**

**My sister, pregnant at 14, was living proof. That day my mother summoned the courage to talk to my father. It was very difficult and he reacted harshly. But when she told him it was against the law, he stopped and listened. It took a few months of convincing, and he finally understood. And I am not suffering like my sister. I will work hard, complete my studies, get good grades and become a doctor. I will make sure more girls are not forced into a life of misery, like my sister.”**

- Quratulain, 12 years



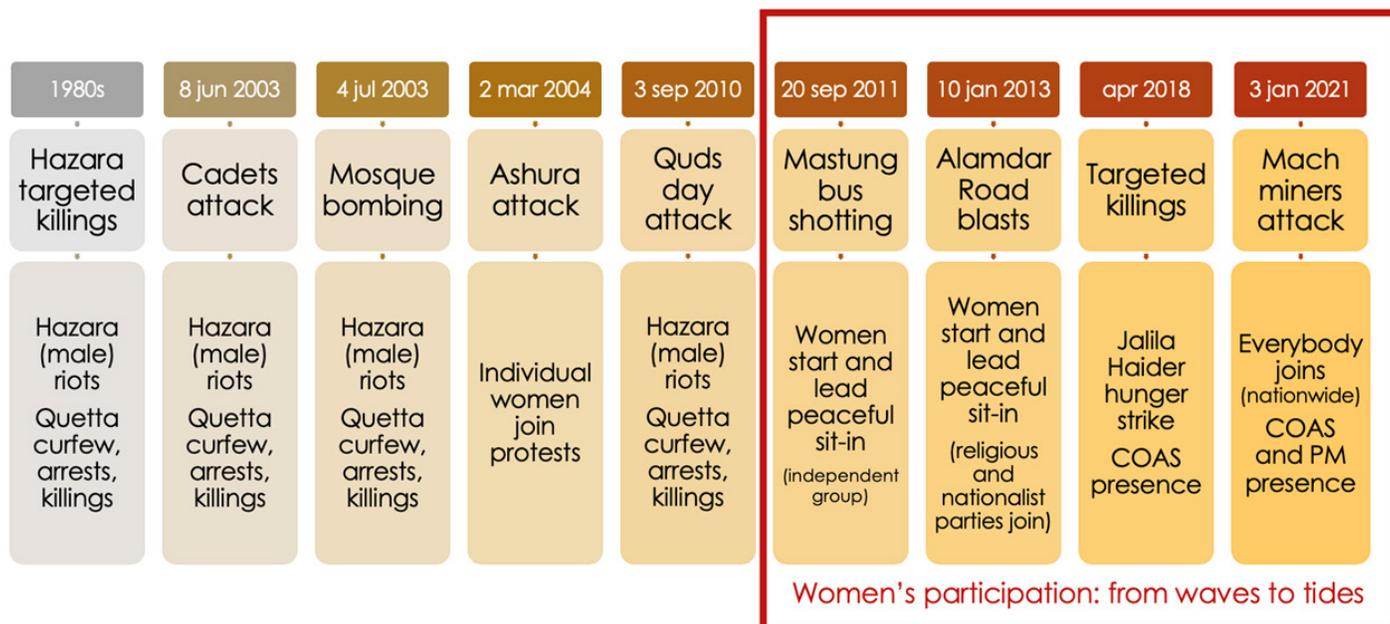
## HAZARA WOMEN PROTEST LEADERS'

# STRUGGLE TO LEAD PROTESTS

JALILA HAIDER AND MIGUEL LOUREIRO

**W**hen people think of Hazara protests, they think of Hazara women's peaceful sit-ins. Yet, the history of Hazara protests in Quetta was traditionally a male-dominated one with a cyclical pattern of violence: a terrorist group attacks, male Hazaras come out to the streets to protest and riot, and the state responds with more violence, curfews, arrests, and

killings. It was in this context that the first wave of Hazara women joined public protests following a terrorist attack on an Ashura procession on 2nd March 2004 which killed more than 42 people and injured more than 100. Over time, women started organising themselves and inviting and motivating others to join the protests initially with two main intentions: to show solidarity towards the families of the victims and to protect protesting Hazara men. Their



enlarged presence made men more conscious of being less violent during protests, effectively reducing rioting.

## TIMELINE OF HAZARA PUBLIC PROTESTS IN QUETTA<sup>1</sup>

In between all these protests more than 3,000 Hazaras were killed in different attacks and seldom did the state bring any of the perpetrators to justice. This has led to changes not only in the nature of the protests, but also in their purpose: from male-dominated violent protests focused on expressions of anger, to female-focused peaceful sit-ins demanding state accountability for a lack of security. As a result, public opinion has softened and several non-Hazara communities have started joining their protests. Yet, despite being key actors in public protests, Hazara women are still excluded from decision-making spaces inside their community and homes.

***“There is a discrimination on the basis of gender. Women make the protests successful. But every time when it comes to negotiations, when it comes to decision-making, we***

“  
*This has led to changes not only in the nature of the protests, but also in their purpose: from male-dominated violent protests focused on expressions of anger, to female-focused peaceful sit-ins demanding state accountability for a lack of security.*  
”

***rarely see any woman in the meeting.”***

-Zainab, NGO worker

Why are Hazara women protest leaders unable to transform their temporary public leadership into more enduring forms of influence? We interviewed key female leaders, organisers, and

participants in these protests to find out why protest presence and leadership has not resulted in a greater decision-making role. We interviewed activists, politicians, NGO workers, businesswomen, students, schoolteachers, and housewives across a range of ages, levels of education, and social classes. Through our purposive snowball sampling we were also able to ensure that we spoke to women who identify themselves with a range of ideologies.

***What did we find?*** We found the intersection of patriarchy, identity politics, and social structures playing a key negative role on their influence in decision-making processes. The stereotyping they go through and the backlash they suffer all contribute to their inability to transform their temporary public leadership into more enduring forms of influence. The backlash Hazara women get for being outside, claiming action in public spaces – male spaces – is related to the various ways patriarchy works to marginalise women. This is visible in the house, in Hazara social structure, and in politics, with nationalist and religious parties having a particular image of women disconnected from reality.

In our conversations with Hazara women protesters we could see three key barriers blocking their visibility as leaders.

First, there is a strong stereotyping of Hazara women based on virtue, obedience, and domesticity where women are invisible as women unless they portray a *normative femininity*<sup>2</sup> accepted in Hazara culture. The stereotyping is not only man-made: both men and women stereotype women's participation in protests, including even some women organisers. Reminiscent of Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel, *The Handmaid's Tale* – where women are subjugated within a hegemonic patriarchal society and named/identified according to their relationship to men – Hazara women are identified according to their relationship to the (male) victims: as mothers of, wives of, sisters of, or daughters of men. Not as protest leaders.

***“In Hazara folklore and history, during 18th century when the soldiers of the Afghan king Abdul Rahman attacked***

***the Hazara, 40 Hazara girls jumped from a mountain and committed suicide. I always ask why women should die? Why can't they fight and live? This is how they still want women leaders to be: they should die to protect their bodies. Men associate their honour with their women's bodies”***

- Jalila, lawyer and activist

A second barrier is the intersection of gender with class, hierarchical social structures, and deep-seated religiosity. Women protest leaders are not only blocked from a decision-making role because they are women, but because they are women and of a lower class, or women and of a lower-ranked tribe/sub-tribe, or women and not pious enough. Many of our respondents highlighted the discrimination they face not only connected with patriarchy but to their families' social status within Hazara tribal society. Politics further intersects with religion, more precisely with religious parties claiming to represent the Hazara plight. Several women

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*The backlash Hazara women get for being outside, claiming action in public spaces – male spaces – is related to the various ways patriarchy works to marginalise women.*  
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activists complained that religious parties force them to dress and behave in accordance with their interpretation of Islam and an ideal Muslim woman. Those not following their defined standards of piety are discriminated against.

A third barrier is that the opposition to women organising and leading protests happens also inside the house, often carried out by close relatives. Hazara women – like Palestinian women<sup>3</sup> – end up *fighting two fronts*: they fight the state, demanding security and accountability; and fight patriarchy from within their community. Throughout South Asian *classic patriarchy*<sup>4</sup>, women's identity and bodies are linked to the honour and shame of the family as well as of the community.

***“I asked many [men] why your honour is attached to us? Your honour is so fragile if you attach it with my clothes,***



Image: Hazem Asif | Instagram: @worldofhazem

***my chador and my dupatta, I request you to keep it away from me.***

- Saira, local politician

Under the strong patriarchal hold, women are not only controlled through religious and nationalistic ideologies in public, but also through everyday practices inside the house. Several of our respondents said the harassment and backlash they faced affected their family to a point where family members asked them to stop their activities.

Women who break such barriers and societal stereotypes face both online and offline harassment within the community. Women are shamed and harassed for participating in protests, not only by strangers within the community but by their own family members and close neighbours.

***“When my own son was not the victim [of an attack] and I was attending the protests my relatives and neighbours were saying that I am a beysara woman and they were thinking I go there for entertainment.”***

-Zahra Khanum, school cleaner

Of the different tactics of shaming and harassing women protest participants both during and after the protests the most common is character assassination on social media. The use of social media is ever-present among the Hazara community. During protests, Hazara men take pictures of women protesters to later name and shame them.

***“Women were always made to sit behind the men. If someone***

***tries to come in front, the men used to make their videos and pictures and shaming them publicly: ‘see the behaya woman sitting among men! Her dress is not good! Her hijab is not right!’”***

-Sareer, government schoolteacher

Despite always standing for the male members of their community, women protesters face a lot of backlash rooted in tribal and patriarchal norms. As a result, many women feel discouraged to join further protests. Even though they actively take on the state with some success, Hazara women protesters cannot be collectively empowered in the absence of wider shifts in patriarchal social norms.

***“Women who have historically been suppressed, who have historically been put to go through so many layers of suppression and so many layers of discrimination that, you know, we actually don’t idealise ourselves. Even in our imagination we don’t put ourselves in those kinds of frames.”***

-Saba, journalist

Still, there are visible changes in women’s perceptions of their own role – from young feminists to more conservative ones – such as Fatima’s, a housewife member of the main Shia religious party when she says, ***“You know they [men] need us now; without us they can’t make their voice heard.”***

“

***Women protest leaders are not only blocked from a decision-making role because they are women, but because they are women and of a lower class, or women and of a lower-ranked tribe/sub-tribe, or women and not pious enough.***

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***Jalila Haider is a human rights lawyer and political activist from Quetta. She was named in BBC’s 100 Women of 2019 and was a recipient of the United States Department of State’s International Women of Courage Award in 2020.***

***Miguel Loureiro is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex. He works at the state-citizen interface from both a citizens’ perspective, examining accountability and empowerment relations, and the state’s perspective, identifying opportunities for state responsiveness.***

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# BARGAINING AND NORMS

## HOW SOCIAL AND CULTURAL NORMS AFFECT INTRA-HOUSEHOLD DECISION-MAKING

PRERNA KUNDU

**E**arly economic models of household decision making modelled households as “unitary” - a collective unit that pooled household resources and incomes, and maximised total household welfare. Over time, the literature has evolved to look at decision making in a household in the form of bargaining between multiple parties - with household outcomes depending, in part, on the relative bargaining power of different members. Self-reported data by female respondents in the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) shows that the poorer the country, the less likely it is that women have a say in household decisions about making

large purchases. A similar pattern is seen for decision making in other spheres, such as whether they can visit family and friends.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, welfare policies around the world often treat households as unitary, with benefits given to male-household heads or family planning interventions that assume couples have similar preferences on fertility. To design more effective policies, it is important to understand the differences in bargaining power within a household and what factors influence these differences. This article discusses some of the ways that social and cultural norms influence bargaining power and decision making within a household.

An important determinant of bargaining power within the household is gender relations, which determine how men and women are expected to behave within a household and outside it. These relations are a product of social and cultural norms. Women in countries across South Asia are restricted by patriarchal values and discriminatory social norms. The Gender Social Norms Index, which measures how social beliefs obstruct gender equality in areas like politics, work, and education, reveals that over 98% of people in India and Pakistan hold a bias against women in at least one of these areas.<sup>2</sup>

Social norms affect bargaining and intra-household decision making by setting limits on what can be bargained for. Further, they can directly, and indirectly determine relative bargaining power and can themselves be a factor to be bargained over since social norms are subject to negotiation and change. Research in Central Africa has shown that women in matrilineal kinship systems (where inheritance is traced through female members) have greater bargaining power in

the household, as compared to women in patrilineal systems (where inheritance is traced through male members).<sup>3</sup>

Cultural norms often influence how marriage markets operate, which can further affect relations within households, and expectations from married women. Marriages in developing countries are mostly arranged by family members (95 percent or more marriages in South Asia are arranged), involve a transfer of resources between families at the time of marriage, and cultural norms about gender roles are strong determinants of spousal interactions.<sup>4</sup> One would expect that women in arranged marriages have less decision-making power since they tend to occur at an earlier age and in traditional societies. Research in Pakistan and India has shown that women who have a say in choosing their spouses have greater autonomy in their marriages.<sup>5</sup> Further, many cultures practise patrilocality, wherein a married couple lives with the husband's parents. This relocation of women from their maternal home to a new family could also reduce their bargaining power since the in-laws continue to be a part of the household.

Yet, socio-cultural norms' effects on intra-household decision-making don't just work through the family structures. Current and lifetime earnings can have significant effects on household decision-making power.<sup>6</sup> The DHS data on household decision making shows that women above the median wealth level in their country have more decision-making power in their household than those with wealth below the median.<sup>7</sup> In developing countries, social norms can restrict women's earning possibilities by discouraging or preventing them from working outside the home, limiting the

*Cultural norms often influence how marriage markets operate, which can further affect relations within households, and expectations from married women.*

types of jobs they may undertake, and limiting their mobility. While comparing data on labour force participation across South Asia is difficult, available comparisons show that employment rates for women are lower than what one would expect given South Asia's economic development. In contrast, male employment rates tend to be as high as those in other developing countries.<sup>8</sup> Gender norms can be a driver of the cross-country variation in female employment because they differ across societies for reasons unrelated to the current level of economic development.<sup>9</sup>

So, what are the implications of household decision-making structures for policy design? Making policies without understanding the underlying household dynamics that drive interactions between household members could also have unintended consequences. An experiment in Zambia provided

access to contraceptives to women - in one condition, they asked only for a wife's consent, and in one condition, they asked for consent from both the husband and the wife.<sup>10</sup> While women who did not require the husband's consent were more likely to access the contraceptives, they reported lower subjective well-being and increased household friction as a result of concealing the access from their husbands. Research on financial choices in the Philippines documents that information asymmetries interact with underlying household structures. Policies that provide information to only one party may create incentives for that party to take advantage of the changes in information created through the program.<sup>11</sup>

It is important to account for asymmetries in decision-making power and the role of social norms. Greater decision-making power in a household for women can be an end in itself since it could increase their well-being by allowing them to bargain for what is good for them. What's relevant from a policy perspective is that when women have more control over household resources, health and nutrition outcomes for children improve.<sup>12</sup> Thus welfare policies targeted at women could be more effective than those that target male household heads, but at the same time might lead to unintended consequences depending on how they affect asymmetries in the household.

Acknowledging the role of social and cultural norms is important since gender norms tend to be sticky in the short run, and restrictive norms may persist across generations despite economic growth. Thus, welfare policies need to go hand-in-hand with policies that get to the root of gender norms - the social, legal, and cultural institutions and gender attitudes that shape how women are expected to behave in a society.

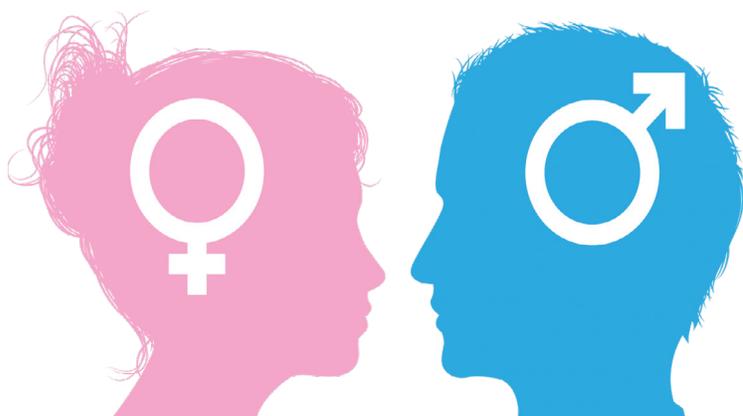


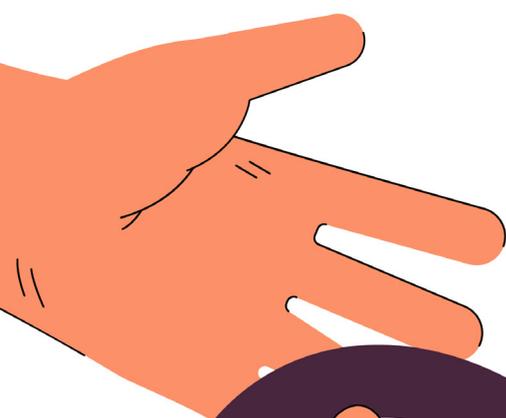
Image: <https://askthescientists.com/men-women-different/>

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# WOMEN'S WORK

## HOW IMPORTANT IS THE UNPAID COMPONENT?



SONA MITRA

**T**he world of women's work often comprises of a major share of activities that is seldom recognised and rewarded. Under certain familial structures, women perform unpaid work to contribute to family enterprises, which while accumulating profit, often excludes women from the shares. Additionally,

*According to rough estimates presented in the World Economic Forum 2019, women carry out three-quarters of unpaid care work, or more than 75 per cent of the total hours provided.*



degrees.

Further, due to its invisible nature and the non-recognition accorded to such work,

the allocation of unpaid

work depends upon many factors;

these include age, social class, presence of children and type of household structure, to name a few. Accordingly, the amount of time devoted to these unpaid tasks is overall smaller for those who remain the 'bread-winners' in the households or non-single heads of households, the very young, those that can purchase substitutes in the market and those with few or no children.<sup>1</sup>

women, especially in agrarian communities, often perform unpaid work in the field to grow food for own (household) consumption. A major

component of unpaid work of women however, includes activities performed towards caring for children, sick and elderly as well as collecting water and wood for fuel, performing daily household chores, animal husbandry and caring for poultry, and community services.

According to rough estimates presented in the World Economic Forum 2019, across the world, without exception, women carry out three-quarters of unpaid care work, or more than 75 per cent of the total hours provided. Women dedicate on average 3.2 times more time than men to unpaid care work. There is no country where women and men perform an equal share of unpaid care work. In South Asian countries especially, the numbers are starker. Women spent around 5-10 times more time on unpaid work compared to men. Such unequal sharing of an important component of the process of social reproduction clearly stems from the historical sexual division of labour and is shaped by the stringent social norms and patriarchal attitudes pervasive across the world – albeit to different

A large body of work establishing the importance of unpaid care work for women has also highlighted the vicious cycle of intergenerational impacts on girls in the family, its adverse impact on the uptake of education and skill development for young girls as well as limited socialisation restricting the intellectual development of women.<sup>2</sup> The theoretical framing of this work in the literature has also highlighted that women's unpaid activities towards reproducing and maintaining the socio-economic structures, especially their efforts at maintaining a healthy source of labour supply in an economy through their unrelenting labour on care and household activities, often subsidises the role of the state.<sup>3</sup> However, there remains limited evidence and analysis on highlighting the economic contributions and the impacts unpaid



*Policy making across the world with a strong focus on privatizing education, health, and social services, without recognizing women's role, has further undervalued and intensified women's contribution in the domain of unpaid work.*



care work has on the lives of those who perform it and those who benefit from it.

The invisibility is often reflected in the statistical framework as the lack of estimates of unpaid care and household work in most official statistics on national labour force: it does not get counted and remains excluded from the Systems of National Income Accounting (SNA) as it is not considered as activities performed against pay or profit. Despite being critical for the smooth functioning of the domestic and community life, it remains largely ignored by economic and social policies due to its absence from the statistical framework. And has the potential to limit the outcomes of even the most welfarist policies. Such approaches often get manifested in adverse outcomes for women in the macroeconomic indicators as the distribution of employment, income, assets and wealth. It also has its implications on women's status in the labour force.

The discourses on the limiting aspects of the disproportionate share of women's time spent on unpaid care and household work has barely led to any acknowledgement or efforts to reduce the same, especially in the context of developing countries. The situation is further aggravated in the case of women who experience socio-economic marginalization and subjugation. In poorer areas, both urban and rural, women typically work longer hours than men, spend even more time on such work, and have limited time available to engage in non-

household/community-level activities.

The inability of macroeconomic frameworks to prioritise unpaid labour and measure its economic value impacts overall quality of life and development of individuals, economy and the overall society. There remains a stark absence of support mechanisms and social provisions, which can potentially recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid work. And while this applies to all forms of unpaid work performed by women, it is especially critical for the case of care work. Policy making across the world with a strong focus on privatizing education, health, and social services, without recognizing women's role, has further undervalued and intensified women's contribution in the domain of unpaid work. At a time when the global economic process acknowledges the value of closing gender gaps, it is imperative to begin not only by recognising, reducing and redistributing unpaid work of women but also create enablers for performing these activities. Here, a major onus lies on the state to deliver through clear women-focused policies.

**Sona Mitra is the Principal Economist at Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy (IWWAGE), hosted by LEAD at Krea University, India.**

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# SEHAT KAHANI

“Sehat Kahani is improving Primary health care with a focus on SRH services for many health underserved patients in Pakistan using a Digital Health Tech Platform that allows a patient to connect to an online doctor in less than 60 secs and in 2 clicks.”

—◆—  
SARA SAEED

**G**ender Equality is a state of equal access to resources and opportunities regardless of the sex of a person. Severe gender disparities exist across the globe. The Gender Gap Index report of 2021 shows that Pakistan ranks 153rd out of 156 countries.<sup>1</sup> Though gender disparity is evident in all walks

of life, women in healthcare, both medical health providers and patients suffer the most repercussions of gender inequality.

Pakistan has a medical workforce of 245,000 doctors out of which 80% or more are female graduates, however, only 50% of these doctors get into formal practice due to social and cultural reservations

against working women across Pakistan. Moreover, 15% of doctors immigrate for better work opportunities leaving 0.5 doctors for 1000 patients in the country.<sup>2</sup> Such a doctor patient mismatch has had a detrimental effect on Pakistan's health ecosystem. Pakistan is placed 154th out of 191 countries in the global Healthcare Access and Quality (HAQ) owing to the high

disease burden affecting our population of 220 million.<sup>3</sup>

Women, despite making up 50% of the total population suffer due to three major reasons: access, affordability, and cultural bias. To date, 38% of women have no access to healthcare due to distance. Focusing especially on sexual and reproductive health, the situation worsens due to cultural taboos that exist in this part of the world. 75% of adolescent girls, under the age of 25, do not have knowledge of their sexual and reproductive rights. This heightens their vulnerability to gender-based violence, unwanted pregnancy, HIV infection, maternal death and disability, early and forced marriage, rape, trafficking, and sexual exploitation and abuse.

Sehat Kahani, a female led digital healthcare platform, is unique in that it connects a network of predominantly female health professionals to patients who need quality, affordable and accessible health using a *one-stop-shop* telemedicine application. In this way, Sehat Kahani looks to meet the constraints faced by the health-sector while providing much needed healthcare to marginalized, vulnerable women populations, by tapping into a medical workforce that is currently going unused.

The app allows real-time and instant chat/audio/video doctor consultation, e-diagnostics, e-pharmacy, and health counseling within a few clicks. Owing to rapid urbanization and digital adoption post Covid-19, Pakistan's smartphone penetration has risen to 51%.<sup>4</sup> For patients with internet access and smartphone access, Sehat Kahani's mobile application and helpline

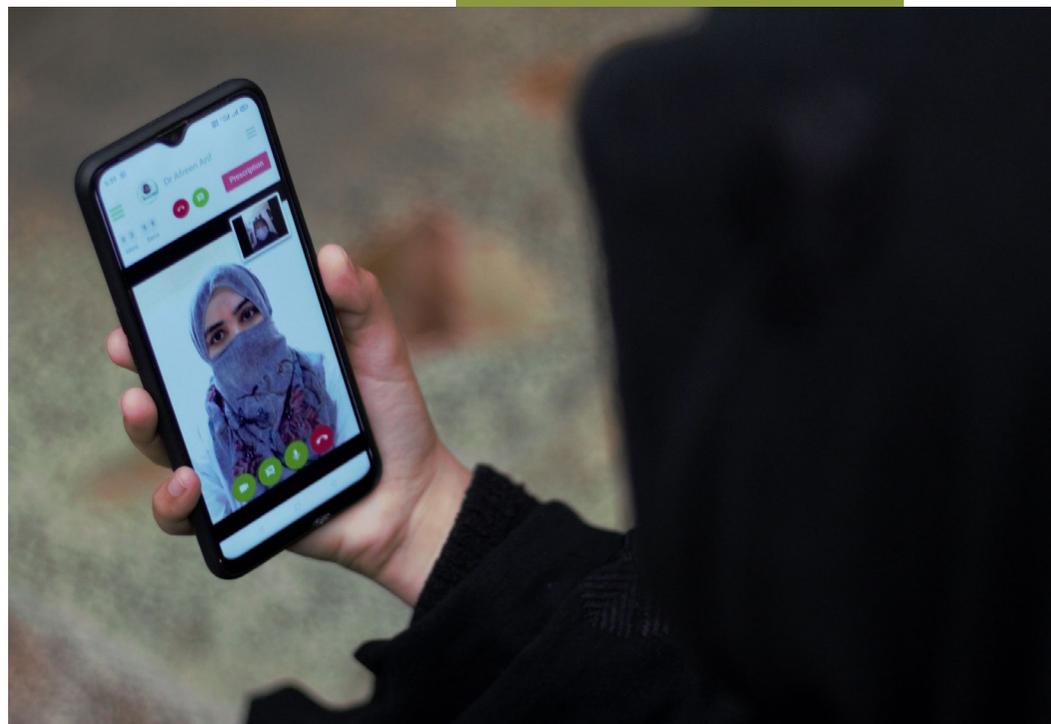
allows patients to connect to doctors within 60 seconds. We also service 410 corporate clients, with a cumulative beneficiary base of 3.3 million lives and has over 950,000 unique users using the consumer app for easy and convenient healthcare for patients and their families

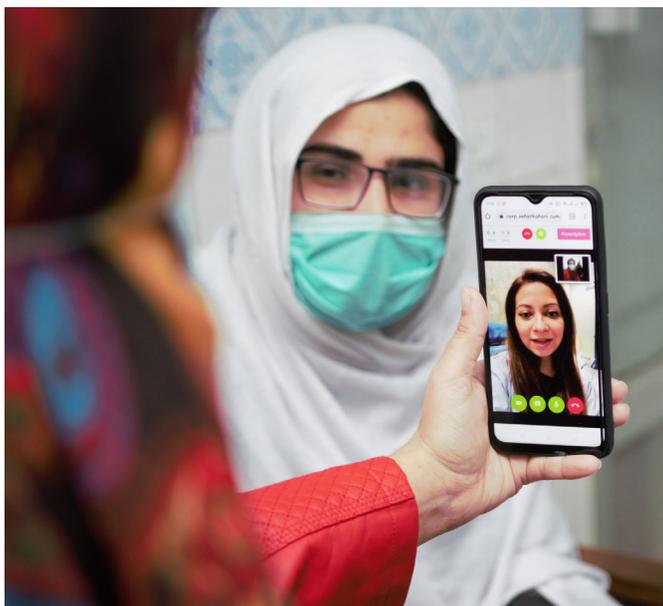
However, there is still a large population, especially women, who do not have access to the internet and smartphones: women in Pakistan are 49% less likely to use the internet as compared to men.<sup>5</sup> These women, rely on traditional and often hard to access fragmented and inadequate public health infrastructure. Given this, Sehat Kahani has created brick and mortar E-Clinics across rural areas where nurse intermediaries connect walk-in patients to online doctors, specialists and mental wellness experts. There are 40 E-Clinics available for patients across all 4 provinces in Pakistan employing 100 plus community health workers. These female "micro-entrepreneurs" in our E-Clinics while acting as intermediaries between doctors and nurses have played an important role in patient counseling, education, and referrals. Our e-health clinics service 90% of female patients with over

30% being in reproductive age between 25 to 40 years. Around 200 women every month attend health education sessions and mental wellness support groups within these safe havens to learn about key areas of health management for themselves as well as their family at risk.



*The app allows real-time and instant chat/audio/video doctor consultation, e-diagnostics, e-pharmacy, and health counseling within a few clicks.*





“*Sehat Kahani has created a network of 7000 medical workforce professionals and has emerged as the premium platform that provides flexible opportunities for female doctors to return to work.*”

On the patient end, our platform has serviced one million plus patients via online consultations, counseling and other value-added primary care services. 60% of Sehat Kahani application users are women, while our “dependent feature” allows a family to sign up on the application using a family account again surpassing the critical digital divide where 20% women own a smartphone.

Aside from filling gaps in under-serviced areas as well as for populations without access, we have also successfully substantially reduced the cost of healthcare. Consultation price points starting from less than a dollar on our application allows even the poorest of the poor to have a chance to access quality healthcare, creating health equity in the country where over 60% of patients pay out-of-pocket for their health expenditure. Besides, given our online presence, Sehat Kahani cuts patient consultation expenses to 1/10th as compared to a physical health service.

The past few years have also helped the organization solidify its vision of holistic healthcare. Sehat Kahani today has specialists of 33 primary and secondary care available on its platform to cater a wide range of patients requiring physical as well as mental healthcare. Sehat Kahani also houses 40 mental

health experts in the form of psychologists, psychiatrists and therapists. The Mental Health wellbeing portfolio makes mental healthcare more accessible to consumers, corporation organizations and educational institutions by providing holistic wellbeing through in-app and helpline consultations, support group sessions to raise community awareness, on-ground training, and wellness activation programs for both doctors and patients. A free Mental Health Helpline called Darmaan was also established for the rehabilitation of teenagers and students in collaboration with the Anti-Narcotics Ministry of Pakistan and has impacted 10,000 patients till date.

To date, Sehat Kahani has successfully created a network of 7000 medical workforce professionals and has emerged as the premium platform that provides flexible opportunities for female doctors to return to work. Our business model allows female doctors and nurse intermediaries to earn an incentive out of each

consultation creating financial stability and independence for our health providers.

Taking pride in creating an impact business, the founders of Sehat Kahani became the first female-led company in Pakistan to raise a pre-series A round of 1 million dollars. Yet, our vision does not stop there. Scaling beyond Pakistan in the MENAP region in the next 18 months, Sehat Kahani aims to build a global network of 50,000 doctors and provide digital care to 25 million patients (more than 10% of Pakistan) and to enable quality, affordable and accessible healthcare to all.

***Dr. Sara Saeed Khurram is the CEO and Cofounder of Sehat Kahani. She is a Public Health specialist working in health tech for the last 7 years. She is a Young Global Leader by WEF, a Rainer Arnhold Fellow, Acumen Fellow and Rolex Award Ass. Laureate. She is committed towards SDG Goals 2030 3, 5 and 8 with a mission and vision to democratise healthcare for all.***

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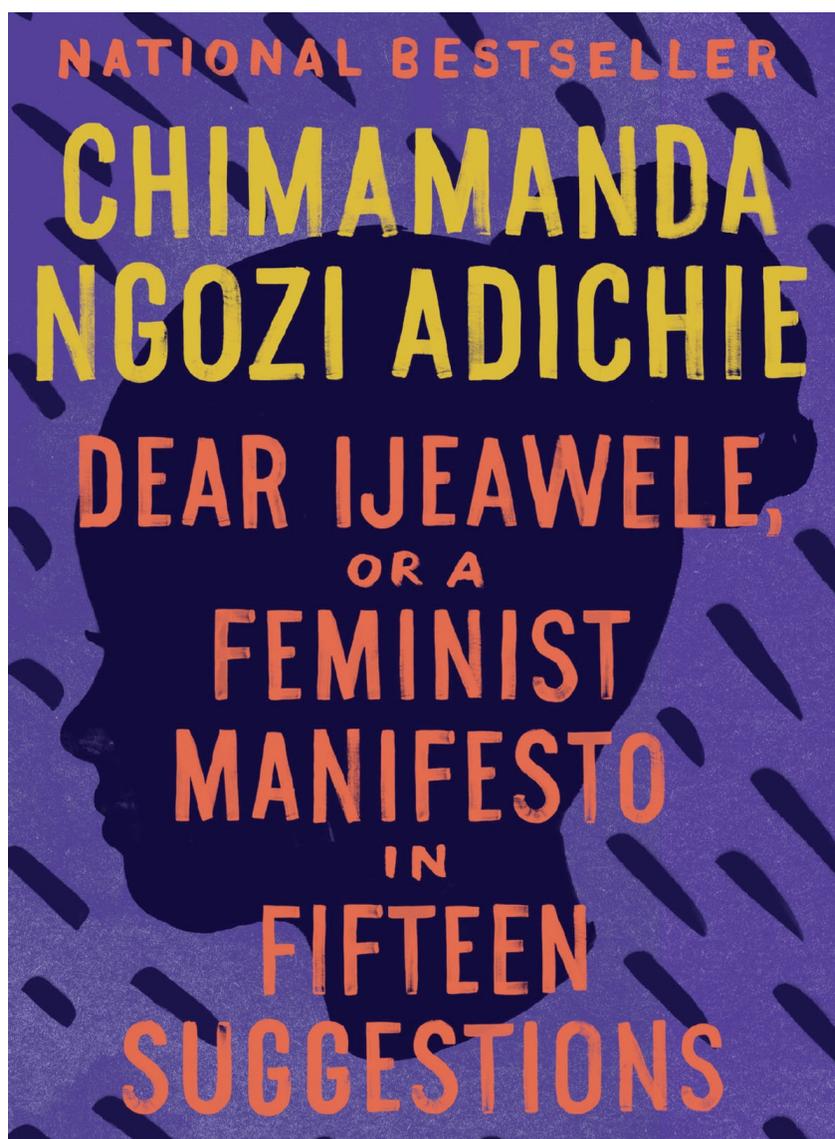
THINKING ABOUT  
HOW TO RAISE A  
**FEMINIST  
CHILD?**

CHIMAMANDA NGOZI  
ADICHIE HAS 15  
SUGGESTIONS.

—◆—  
S. ZEHRA ZAIDI

**T**itled *“Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions”* (initially written as a letter, but later framed into a book) is Adichie’s advice to a friend on how to raise her baby daughter as a feminist. The work provides a manifesto for feminism, and the suggestions though written with a girl in mind are in fact gender neutral. Any parent who wants to raise a feminist child, one who will grow up to believe in equity and equality, be kind, confident and pursue their dreams, can learn from them.

The backdrop of this work is her Nigerian experience and its culture, grounded in patriarchal tradition. The similarities to ours (in Pakistan) hits home. She recalls being told as a child *“bend down properly while sweeping, like a girl”*. Which meant that sweeping was about “being female”. I couldn’t help but flashback to the rage against the *‘Khana khud garam karo’* (warm your own food) and *“Lo baith gayee mein theek say”* (loosely translates to: here, I am sitting properly) placards at the Aurat March. How even a tongue in cheek joke about gender norms was unacceptable in societies such as ours.<sup>1</sup> Adichie advises, *“Teach her that the idea of ‘gender roles’ is nonsense”*. She continues, *“Do not measure her on a scale of what a girl should be. Measure her on the scale of being the best version of herself”*. The advice here reflects what psychologists have long said, to reach their full potential a child must be allowed to pursue their interests, even if they do not meet traditional norms.<sup>2</sup> Raising a child who will one day grow up to be



a content adult begins with parents allowing children to be themselves.

One of the most inspiring aspects of the book is Adichie’s advice on cultural identity, privilege, inequality, and justice. She speaks of the importance of being proud of one’s culture, its community values, language and historical figures, both men and women. But, this does not mean accepting culture unconditionally. In fact, it must be questioned. In instances where it is no longer “beautiful”, such as the undue importance Igbo culture places on material wealth, it must be rejected. She says, *“Teach her about privilege and inequality*

*and the importance of giving dignity to everyone who does not mean to harm her - teach her that the household help is human just like her, teach her always to greet the driver”*. It is urgently needed to instil these values of dignity and justice for all in our children. Especially in times such as these when horrific incidents of physical abuse and torture of domestic workers are rampant and brutal killings such as that of Nazim Jokhio, simply because he dared to report the misdeeds of those considered to be his cultural and societal superiors, go unpunished.<sup>3</sup>

In most societies and especially so in ours, the burden of care work, be it for

the young or old, largely falls to the women, even when both parents work full-time. Adichie advises her friend to share care work equally. This does not mean a literal fifty – fifty score keeping. The equality becomes clear when there is lack of resentment between a couple, from each being attentive to the other's needs. If we hope to raise boys that will one day be supportive partners, friends or relatives, the message here is clear- teach a boy to share the work and teach him to take care of others. Like Adichie's ours too is a culture which normalises raising infantile men. Daughters are taught to do chores and are given responsibility of care work from an early age. The same does not stand true for our sons. Adichie comments *"Can you imagine how many more people today would be happier, more stable, better contributors to this world, if only their fathers had been present in their childhood"*.



Image: Hazem Asif | Instagram: @worldofhazem

Adichie's advice then turns to that oft-repeated social norm that she wisely counsels girls should be taught to reject - likeability. Instead we should encourage them to strive for the better alternative - bravery. *"We teach girls to be likeable, to be nice, to be false. And we do not teach our boys the same. This is dangerous... Many girls remain silent when abused because they want to be nice"*. She urges that girls should be taught to speak up when anything makes them uncomfortable. The deeper message here is about teaching

the importance of consent and bodily integrity to our children. Teaching them that there is no shame in speaking out about abuse and harassment. Teaching boys that no means no.

Adichie ends by hoping for the baby girl that when she grows up *"she will be full of opinions, and that her opinions will come from an informed, humane, broad-minded place"*. There is universality in this message that all care givers could aspire to irrespective of their own or

their child's gender. Perhaps this is what is needed most in this time when the dangers of climate change, prejudice, injustices and war have left no corner of our world untouched.

**Zehra Zaidi is a Visiting Assistant Professor at the Shaikh Ahmad Hassan School of Law (LUMS). She takes a keen interest in and has taught courses on law and gender and feminist jurisprudence for several years.**

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ERAJ TUFAIL ARBAB  
AND  
MAHNOOR IMRAN SAYYED

# THE CARE BURDEN AND WOMEN'S WORK IN PAKISTAN

Pakistani women face significant barriers that prevent them from entering the labour market such as limited access to education, safe transport, and norms of seclusion.<sup>1</sup> One of the biggest barriers, however, is the time-consuming responsibility of childcare and eldercare which falls on women due to the traditional division of household roles in Pakistan.<sup>2</sup> This care burden significantly impacts women's participation in the labour market<sup>3</sup> as it limits the time women can devote to paid work.<sup>4</sup> However, past literature has also found that older female dependents may be able to lessen the reproductive burden on

women<sup>5</sup> and, by doing so, allow women more time for paid work. Considering these differentiated impact that young and older dependents could have, we sought to analyze the impact of the childcare and eldercare burden on the labour force participation of Pakistani women.

We used the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement 2018-19 dataset and estimated how likely it is that women will be a part of the labor force. Of particular interest to us was how the presence of dependents with the household affected women's likelihood of participation. Here, we divided dependents by age ranges, for example, children under 6 or elders between the ages of 66 and 70, as we expected that care burdens varied by ages.

We found that dependents under 6 had a negative impact on female labour force participation (FLFP) while children between 10 and 13 increased the probability of FLFP. This may be because children under 6 require more vigilant childcare than older children who would be more independent. Furthermore, our model revealed that the presence of elderly dependents had no significant impact on FLFP. We expect that this is due to the opposing effects that the presence of

elderly within the household may be exerting on women's ability to work. While on the one hand, older dependents may well be able to help with childcare<sup>6</sup> thereby freeing up women's time, they may require caretaking themselves<sup>7</sup> which would reduce women's propensity to work. In addition, our model found that the presence of older female dependents increased the likelihood of FLFP which suggests that they may take



*One of the biggest barriers, however, is the time-consuming responsibility of childcare and eldercare which falls on women due to the traditional division of household roles in Pakistan.*



on some of the reproductive burden and allow women to participate in the labor force.

Our research therefore found that women's decision to work is significantly influenced by the burden of childcare. Policy interventions should then focus on providing women with assistance in care work by developing day care services in the short term and promoting a change in the understanding of the division of household responsibilities in the long term. Development theorists and economists have long since proven that female labour force participation results in a multitude of benefits for the community at large. However, in order for Pakistan to realize the full potential of its female labour force, it is critical that more inclusive policies are implemented.

***Eraj is a senior at LUMS studying Economics, Sociology, and Anthropology. She is interested in studying the intersection of gender and economics, and social policy.***

***Mahnoor is a senior at LUMS doing a Bachelor's in Economics with a minor in Computer Science. She is particularly interested in understanding how education and labour policies can be made more inclusive and accessible.***

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# THE (IN)ACCESSIBILITY OF NADRA AND UNION COUNCIL PROCESSES FOR **WOMEN** & **GENDER MINORITIES**

—◆—  
MARHA FATHMA  
AND  
HAJRAH YOUSAF

**O**fficial identification documents such as birth certificates and computerized national identifications cards (CNICs) are the fundamental right of every citizen. However, the procedures to attain them, which appear to be objective on the surface, carry within them countless hidden loopholes and biases disproportionately affecting marginalized groups.

In our research project<sup>1</sup>, we took an ethnographical approach to shed light on and identify areas of inaccessibility with regard to the basic policies and procedures of the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) and the Union Councils (UC) for women and gender minorities.

Our study employed a two-pronged approach:

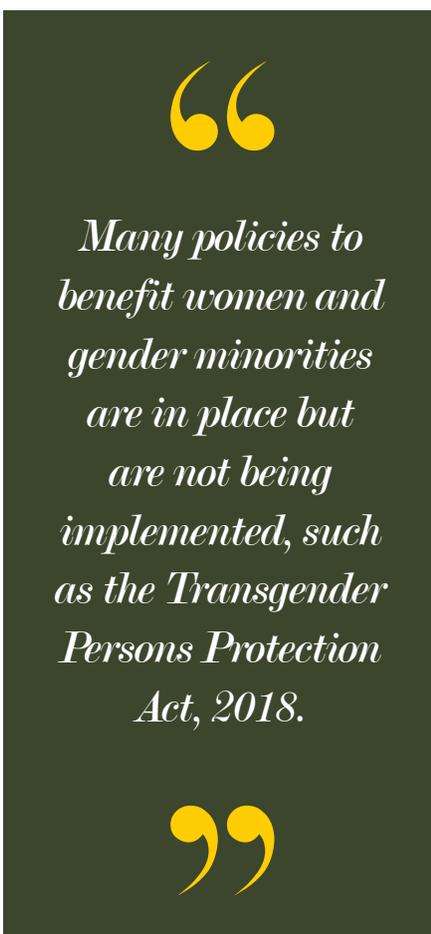
participant observation and interviews. Our participant observation took us to several NADRA and UC offices within Lahore. Additionally, we carried out semi-structured interviews with women and gender minorities who had faced several practical impediments in the process, as well as NGO workers, legal experts, and trans activists.

A common problem faced by women at NADRA offices was discrimination against non-nuclear family arrangements. Given that the UC Birth Certificate contain questions related only to paternal lineage, the situation carries with it the potential to be dangerous when women are required to produce a male guardian. Consider the case of 22-year-old Tatheer Fatima<sup>2</sup>, who filed a case against the State which went up to the Supreme Court (SC) in 2018. Tatheer's father had abandoned her as a child and contributed nothing

financially towards raising her. She was brought up solely by her mother and wished to have her name as her surname as well as on her NIC. However, the highest court of justice in Pakistan denied her request, calling it “un-Islamic.” Similarly, we discovered that trans persons, if registered as ‘X’, cannot legally adopt a child since, according to policy, this child cannot be registered. Sex workers, too, are demeaned when official documents do not contain the language to describe their situations.

Interestingly, if faced with any issue during the process, applicants are told to appeal to a personal contact in the system, even by officials themselves. The flipside is that those individuals who cannot procure contacts must leap through unrealistic hoops to get simple procedures done. However, certain dire situations warrant the involvement of external organizations like HOPE<sup>3</sup> who are able to navigate the bureaucratic complexities. Legal processes are also made exceptionally inaccessible to trans folks, as revealed by NGO Worker, Shawana. These applicants are made to gather a lot of unnecessary paperwork from various sources (such as their *gurus*<sup>4</sup>).

Moreover, personnel at NADRA offices may also be unaccommodating to those who



do not fall into conventional social roles e.g., cis women without male guardians or trans women aiming to get their gender legally changed. Of greater concern is the fact that trans individuals reported being ridiculed and even abused and harassed at these offices. There is an implicit transphobia within the legal system (e.g., the requirement for a medical examination to register with NADRA as a trans individual)

as explained by trans-rights workers, Mehlab and Mani from HOPE. This phobia is reflected in the attitudes of the personnel present in the NADRA offices as well, who refuse to allow the male identity to trans individuals because they do not believe them to be “real men”. Finally, many policies to benefit women and gender minorities are in place but are not being implemented, such as the Transgender Persons Protection Act, 2018<sup>5</sup>.

Recently, NADRA Chairperson Tariq Malik announced that they have picked up on a gendered bias (or as Professor Hoffmann<sup>6</sup> calls it data violence) in their “registration policy and an algorithmic bias in its software.”<sup>7</sup> Feminist discourse and the extensive work on this issue is the reason why it is finally being seen as a crucial matter which is affecting the lived realities of already marginalized populations. We hope that with our work on this topic, we bring to light the blind spots in the procedures and systems that have gone unaddressed for far too long.

**Marha Fathma is a senior at LUMS majoring in Law and her co-author Hajrah Yousaf is a senior at LUMS majoring in Anthropology and Sociology. They are both interested in exploring and writing about themes of gender.**

1. Last summer, we were honored to receive the Students as Co-Researchers (ScR) grant under the guidance of Ms. Hiba Akbar. The end result of our project is a 25-page-long report containing our extensive findings.
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Indeed, the popularity of television serials among women can be assessed purely by looking at the large number of shows which feature women as their leads. Over the years, and across different entertainment channels, a common feature to have emerged is the caricatured depiction of the female protagonist. Elegantly dressed in traditional attire, with perfectly blow-dried hair, blushed pink cheeks, & an insistently furrowed brow, the Pakistani female protagonist is the epitome of demureness and distress; a pretty face in never ending pain. She is a passive victim of her circumstances, who by consistently remaining silent becomes the quintessential damsel in distress.

This female protagonist's overpowering silence signals the presence of her highly palpable, yet largely unacknowledged unhappiness. Whether she is being forcefully yoked in marriage or is stuck in an abusive relationship, this female protagonist will silently endure with a tight-lipped smile and a tint of moisture around the eyes. Clearly, this is a very problematic depiction. One unhappy female protagonist might not mean much, but to imagine this caricature being repeatedly fed into the subconscious of viewers is indeed cause for concern. According to art historian W.J.T Mitchell<sup>1</sup> "the images that we are exposed to everyday are not inert objects but instead impact our mindset in such a way that we in viewing them mindlessly become substantially transformed". Therefore, constantly exposing the masses to unhappy depictions of female protagonists means making "unhappy" women the norm. And when this unhappy representation becomes the norm, it

“

*Whether she is being forcefully yoked in marriage or is stuck in an abusive relationship, this female protagonist will silently endure with a tight-lipped smile and a tint of moisture around the eyes.*

”

becomes easy to disregard it. Such an outright dismissal of women's discontentment informs ideas which infantilize women's further emotions, experiences, and aspirations. If her unhappiness can be taken as her resolve, then her traumas can be taken as her paranoia and her dreams as mere fantasy.

**Mahnoor Tahir is a Politics and Economics senior with a minor in Anthropology & Sociology. She is interested in studying the intersection of gender, class and religion from a feminist lens, within the Middle Eastern and South Asian contexts.**

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