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Saida Waheed
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EDITOR:

DR. HADIA MAJID

SUB-EDITOR:

AIMEN BUCHA

DESIGN & LAYOUT:

IZAH SHAHID

COVER:

FREEPIK.COM

This ISSUE

We are excited for this sixth issue of our Gender Bi-Annual. As before, we bring together experiences and learning across multiple disciplines. Speaking on issues of motherhood and work, our pieces reflect on the conflicts inherent in balancing these roles as well as the biases faced particularly by women. At the same time, our contributors highlight that it is the women themselves that hold the key in solving these issues: from young women's influence in contraceptive uptake to the integral role of women's friendships in creating and managing avenues of work and research. Through their pieces, our contributors then underscore that the many pulls on women's time while creating burdens, present opportunities too.

The piece in Practitioner Voices explores how difficult and complex choices between mothering and building a career can be for young mothers. Through personal experience the author sheds light on how women juggle between these two worlds continually.

In Academic Work, our first set of contributors share research investigating the gendered labour gap to see whether employer preferences and behaviour play into deterring women from the workforce. The second piece looks at the challenges in the uptake of contraception in Pakistan and lays out possible avenues of exploration to increase contraception usage.

The Gender and Design section features a reflection on epistemic value of friendship in doing research and practitioner work. Student Features, our last section carries three pieces with the first focusing on the gendered harm faced by women digital content creators in Pakistan; the second lays out how women working in rice fields in Punjab face the double burden of working in the field and doing carework at home; while the third evaluates a cash transfer programme to see if it can impact women's maternal health outcomes.



A WOMAN CAN'T HAVE IT ALL

A mother of four looks at the challenges of being a stay-at-home-mom and the constant need to defend her life decisions.

◆
MEHREEN ZAIDI

“A woman can’t have it all.”

The former CEO of Pepsico, Indra Nooyi, said these words during an interview back in 2014. I was watching her interview on my phone whilst lying in bed on one side, nursing my one-year-old, with my 6-year-old son and 4-year-old daughter bouncing around the room stirring up their usual midday ruckus. Her words resonated with me so profoundly because I finally got the validation that I had been seeking all these years, and that too from a woman at the highest rung of the corporate ladder - where I once thought I would have ended up myself someday.

By 2014, I had completely given up on having a career and had chosen to

commit myself entirely to raising my three kids all below 6 years old. When my third child turned 3 and started kindergarten, I was offered a job both at her school as a tenth grade English teacher, and also at LUMS, my alma mater, as a teaching fellow for Political Science. I chose to teach at her school. It was a no brainer, really. I would be closer to the kids, and I would be able to bring them home straight from school. No major disruptions. No huge sacrifices. No mom guilt. I remember signing my contract over the summer only to find out that I was pregnant again with our fourth child. That job lasted all of eight months, and I didn't go back for another three years.

Back when I graduated from LUMS in 2003, I really thought I had it all - I was a gold medalist, an international level debater, and even a reasonably good singer. And I had a plan.

I was going to enrol myself straight into a PhD program in the US, so I wouldn't have to be in Pakistan for the dreaded 'suitor search' that every girl had to go through in her twenties. I left with a promise to my parents that I would return as soon as they found someone for me. It was a ruse, really. Mothers of sons weren't exactly searching far and wide for a headstrong, outspoken, nerdy girl who had no major interest in fashion, makeup, or the kitchen.

As luck would have it, I found someone for me. Marriage changed my entire perspective on what mattered most in life to me. I wanted nothing more than to build a life with my husband. I remember calling him from a library at MIT in the Spring of 2007 and telling him that "I'm sitting in MIT and

people would kill to be here, but I don't want to be here. I just don't."

The rest is history. I chose a path for myself very different from what I had ever imagined. It caught my family, friends, and peers by surprise as well. Nooyi rightly said that a woman's biological clock and career clock are constantly in conflict. You can't be in both places at the same time, giving a hundred percent to both spheres of your life. Something's got to give. I decided that it was going to be my career. If I was going to be a mother, I wanted to do it all by myself and the best way I knew how.

No bottles, no nannies, no day care.

There was a time when I had four kids all below eight years old. It was utter madness. Blood, sweat, and tears. Motherhood is tough for everyone - working moms and stay-at-home moms alike. But being a stay-at-home mom can be very lonely. According to a 2012

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Nooyi rightly said that a woman's biological clock and career clock are constantly in conflict. You can't be in both places at the same time, giving a hundred percent to both spheres of your life. Something's got to give.
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analysis² of more than 60,000 women, stay-at-home moms are more likely to be diagnosed with depression, regardless of the income level. Stay-at-home moms are even more likely to experience worry, stress, sadness, and anger.



Image: freepik.com

Part of the reason behind this is the fact that being a stay-at-home mom is not valued enough. It's a thankless job where you're overworked and underpaid. No sick days, no

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...being a stay-at-home mom is not valued enough. It's a thankless job where you're overworked and underpaid. No sick days, no personal days, no annual leave. No JD either. And in moments of self-pity and low self-esteem, it makes you really question your life decisions.
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personal days, no annual leave. No JD either. And in moments of self-pity and low self-esteem, it makes you really question your life decisions.

Society's definition of success is so warped. It's inextricably linked to your financial worth. Not many people question what their work stands for or how it affects the world and their loved ones. As long as it's raking in the big bucks, you're gold. Ten years after

momming, I decided to start my own venture, Mehreen Does English, offering courses in writing and public speaking to kids. I loved the idea of being able to influence kids during their formative years. Yet even after teaching over 400 kids in the past 6 years, I still hear comments like, “Why are you teaching?” “Why are you wasting your life?” “There is a better world out there.”

But there are many worlds out there. There are infinite permutations and combinations of the life decisions you can make to carve your own kind of world, where you can be yourself and find your inner peace. It all boils down to grit and resilience. You commit to something; you see it through. And you make sacrifices along the way to stay on course. And like I tell my kids: you get what you get, and you don't get upset!

It's about time people start realizing that being a stay-

at-home mom is often a conscious choice many women around the world make. They actually value the work they're doing. They actually believe the work is more important than anything they'll ever do 'out there'.

My resume has two, italicized single-line paragraphs that read, Parenting Break 1 and Parenting Break 2. My husband's idea. “You need to tell the world that you were doing something very important during this time.”

He's right. I was building a better world out there.

Mehreen teaches A level English at LGS and runs workshops in writing and public speaking. When she's not teaching, you can find her in her minivan, or in her kitchen, making the umpteenth snack for the first, second, third, or fourth child.



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DO WORKERS' PREFERENCES OR EMPLOYERS'
PREFERENCES EXPLAIN MORE OF

THE GENDER GAP IN EMPLOYMENT?

THE CASE OF URBAN PAKISTAN



The Job Talash Hotline

- Image by Centre for Economic Research in Pakistan (CERP)

ELISABETTA GENTILE, NIKITA KOHLI,
NIVEDHITHA SUBRAMANIAN, ZUNIA TIRMAZEE,
AND KATE VYBORNY

In Pakistan, a high fraction of the female population are “latent workers,” i.e., interested in working but economically inactive due to lack of opportunities. Female labor force participation in Pakistan was 21% in 2020 compared to a male labor force participation rate of 78%,¹ but a quarter of women who are not working report they would like to work if they could find a suitable job.² Such vast gender gaps in employment persist in many low- and middle-income countries, particularly in South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa.³



Figure 1: A Flyer for Job Talash
- Image by Centre for Economic Research in Pakistan

A growing body of literature focuses on the factors that constrain women's labor supply in these contexts, such as self-selecting into occupations that conform to gender identity, differing preferences for job attributes, and gendered social norms about time use.⁴ However, a smaller body of work shows that employers' reluctance to hiring women can also contribute to gender gaps in employment.⁵ We set out to investigate whether supply-side factors, i.e., worker's willingness to supply their labor; or demand-side factors, i.e., employers' hiring decisions matter more in creating this persistent gender gap.

Our research partners at the Centre for Economic Research in Pakistan (CERP) developed a new job matching platform, Job Talash, and offered it as a free service to representative listings of thousands of households and thousands of firms in a single urban labor market (Figure 1). Thus, unlike

other studies based on job search platforms, we capture latent workers in our sample.

Job Talash works by matching each jobseeker to open vacancies based on whether they satisfy minimal criteria set by the firm for the vacancy and occupational preferences set by the jobseeker. The platform sends information to the jobseeker about all the vacancies that meet all criteria, and the jobseeker can decide whether to apply to each one. Thus, the platform generates high-frequency, detailed data on both the supply and demand sides of the labor market for millions of potential job matches between firm and respondent.

We also conducted an incentivized resume rating (IRR) experiment with firms in the Job Talash sample. We showed employers on the platform a series of pairs of CVs and in each pair asked the respondent to select the one that they would be most likely to hire, with the incentive that this could help inform the applicant pool sent to them through the Job Talash platform. CVs for this exercise were constructed using the actual job applicant data from the Job Talash pool, making them a realistic representation of the candidates the firm might see on the platform; we randomly vary the gender of the applicant on the CV to identify firm preferences over gender, holding constant other characteristics such as levels of education and experience between men and women in the pool.

The results from our analysis of the administrative data and the IRR experiment yield 3 key findings, First, gender gaps in employment are greater in magnitude than gender

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Job Talash works by matching each jobseeker to open vacancies based on whether they satisfy minimal criteria set by the firm for the vacancy and occupational preferences set by the jobseeker.
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gaps in search. Women are 89% less likely than men to be working at baseline; however, they are only 53% less likely to complete signup for the Job Talash platform, an investment of time in the telephone-based signup process that indicates willingness to search. The gender gap in both work and willingness to search narrows as education levels rise. At higher education levels, the gender gap in completing the signup process falls by 65%. These findings suggest that many women, particularly educated women, are latent workers, pointing to key constraints on the labor demand side.

Second, for less educated jobseekers, firm gender criteria—an entirely demand-side constraint—are more binding for women than men and are also a larger constraint than supply-side decisions.

Skills training for female jobseekers - Image by Centre for Economic Research in Pakistan (CERP)

Women in our setting are 53% less likely than men to satisfy the explicit gender requirements for any given vacancy. These patterns persist even when we restrict to vacancies where the individual met the education and experience criteria and expressed interest in the occupation: demand-side criteria are the binding constraint on opportunities available to women. In fact, in the set of vacancies where individuals satisfied all basic criteria and were eligible to apply, women apply at a higher rate than men, overall.

Finally, the demand-side gap in quantity of job opportunities substantially closes as education levels rise, while on the supply side women become more selective. The gender gap in satisfying the gender criteria for a position shrinks by 70% for the minority of women with secondary education

and effectively disappears for the third of women with a tertiary education. We find that firms' gender criteria and the educational requirements of the job are mirrored; vacancies with "blue collar" characteristics such as manual labor and longer and late work hours are more likely to exclude women and more common among jobs with low education requirements, even conditional on industry and occupation fixed effects. Additionally, firms' gender criteria and the education level they seek to hire reflect existing infrastructure at the firm: firms that have restrooms or a separate prayer space for women are both more likely to be willing to hire women and more likely to be hiring at a high education level. Strikingly, among those with a tertiary education, women are more selective than men in their job search. At this high

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In fact, in the set of vacancies where individuals satisfied all basic criteria and were eligible to apply, women apply at a higher rate than men, overall.
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education level, women are slightly less likely than men to have selected the occupation of a given vacancy and are slightly less likely to apply to a vacancy. But this is likely driven by differences in the quality of vacancies by gender; indeed, we find that among those with a tertiary education, women are more likely than men to qualify for the vacancies at the lowest quintile of the salary distribution.

Much of the recent literature that studies low female employment focuses on alleviating supply-side constraints via interventions such as overcoming information asymmetries, training in socio-emotional skills, addressing norms by engaging partners and family members, safe transport, and social protection programs

that target women. Our results show that more emphasis is needed on demand-side interventions, including incentives such as tax breaks or grants for firms to offer workplace facilities that would be inclusive to women and might in turn increase firms' willingness to hire women.

Elisabetta Gentile is a Senior Economist, South Asia Department, Asian Development Bank, and Fellow, Global Labor Organization.

Nikita Kohli is a Ph.D. Candidate, Sanford School of Public Policy, Duke University

Nivedhitha Subramanian is an Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Bates College.

Zunia Tirmazee is an Assistant Professor, Center for Research in Economics and Business, Lahore School of Economics

Kate Vyborny is an Economist, South Asia Region Gender Innovation Lab, World Bank

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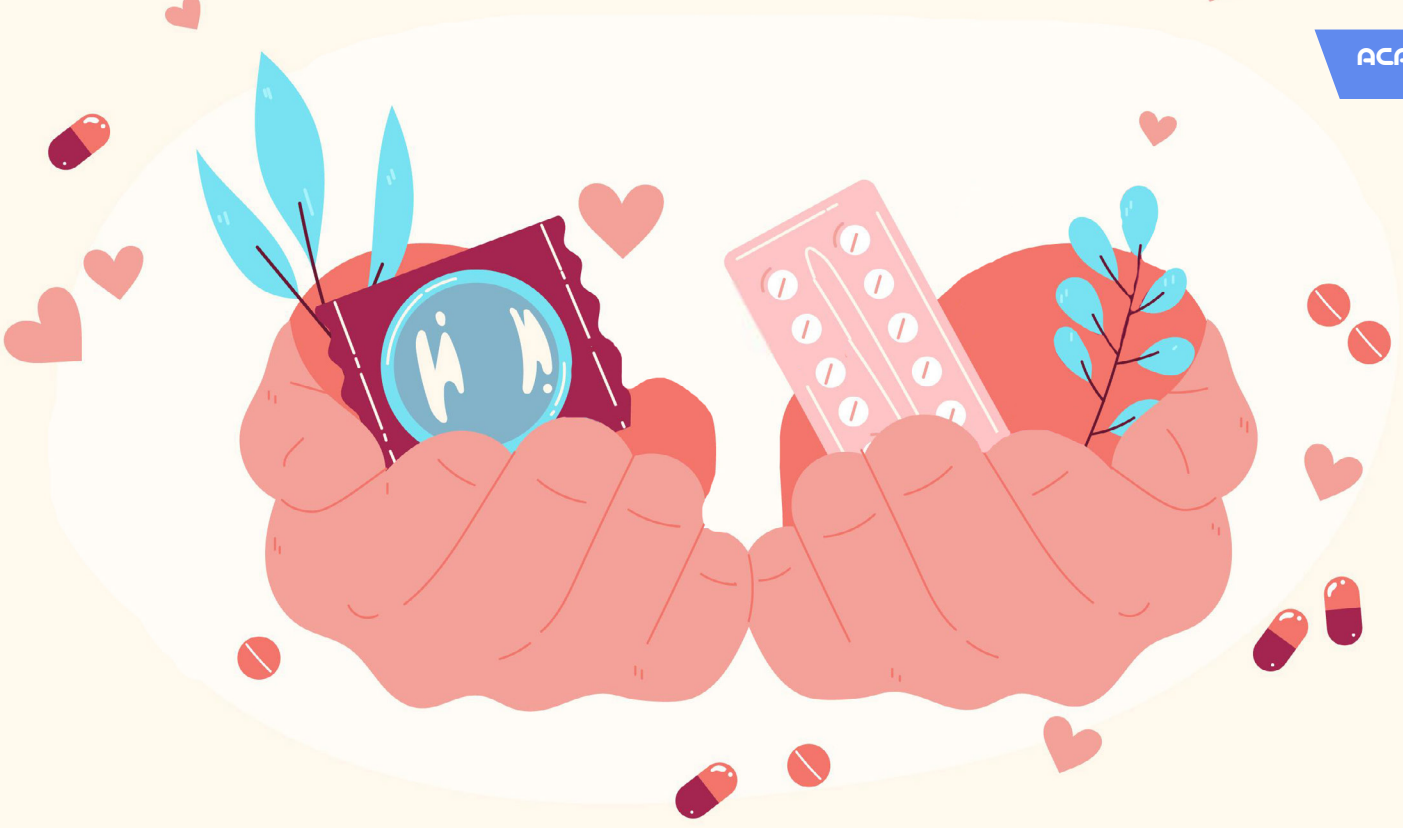


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ARE YOUNG WOMEN THE ANSWER TO ADDRESS PAKISTAN'S UNMET CONTRACEPTIVE DEMAND?

—◆—
AGHA ALI AKRAM

Context and challenge

A high prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STI) and a high fertility rate remain major global public health challenges, especially for young women. STIs are considered a persistent and endemic threat to global health with one million new STIs annually.¹ Additionally, fertility rates remain high in many developing countries² and more than 200 million women have an unmet need for contraception in developing countries,³ with women aged 20-24 years old presenting the largest unmet demand.⁴

The picture for Pakistan is not encouraging: 35% of women and 11% of men who engage in sexual intercourse have an STI.⁵ Moreover, Pakistan has an annual population growth rate of 2%,⁶ the highest in South Asia and one of the highest in the world. Disease and unmanaged fertility present real economic and social costs.

Male condoms can help address both challenges by reducing the chance of disease transmission and helping manage fertility. Condoms provide a safe and effective means to prevent transmission of STIs such as

HIV.⁷ If used correctly, they are also an effective method of birth control, preventing pregnancy 98% of the time.⁸

However, the modern contraceptive prevalence rate in Pakistan is amongst the lowest in South Asia, at just 25%,⁹ compared to a regional average greater than 50%,¹⁰ and women of reproductive age in Pakistan have an unmet need for family planning which increased from 2.8% to 17.3% between 2012 and 2017.¹¹

Low uptake of modern contraceptives, including

condoms, is a result of multiple factors including women's attitudes,¹² husband's attitudes,¹³ a lack of knowledge about contraceptive technologies,¹⁴ isolation,¹⁵ fear of side-effects and influence of mother-in-law.¹⁶ Interventions to improve contraceptive uptake tend to center on counseling but little has been tried beyond this.

One avenue to improve contraceptive uptake that has not been tried is addressing consumer shyness, which is well documented in Pakistan.¹⁷ Embarrassment in buying condoms is "commonly mentioned by men" in Pakistan,¹⁸ and the process of buying condoms has been described as "terrifying" for some.¹⁹ Thus, shyness and embarrassment related to condom buying is a potential barrier to uptake. Additionally, surveys on family planning reveal that men and women demand doorstep delivery of services,²⁰ which at present is not being leveraged. More generally, Pakistan is a conservative society and sex is a taboo subject. There is little space to talk about and engage with topics such as STIs and contraception. Certainly, in the long run, there is a need for cultural change. But in the short run, overcoming existing barriers – such as anxiety and shyness – is critical. We did this in a study that we conducted in Lahore, Pakistan.

Home-delivery service

In our study, we attempted to make accessing condoms an event that induced less social anxiety by providing married couples with an anonymized phone-based and free-of-cost door-step delivery service for condoms. Couples were provided coupons with unique serial numbers on them along

with a phone number. Calling the phone number would result in the delivery of a six-pack box of condoms inside a plain envelope (to hide it and maintain discreteness). This delivery service had two variations to it: one group of couples was provided a service in which we completely removed the need to even mention contraceptives (the word "condom") by advising the caller to simply report the coupon number in order to have them delivered at home (discrete-delivery service); and a second group of couples got a service that did not have this discreteness – callers could carry the expectation to use the word "condom" when calling to order (explicit-delivery service). We also had a third group of couples who were provided shop-redeemable coupons for free condoms, which we thought approximated the business-as-usual anxiety causing situation requiring an interaction at a shop to get condoms. For the technically minded, this study was structured as a randomized

controlled trial, so in essence we could make fair, apples-to-apples comparisons of buying condoms between the couples in the three groups. The study ran for a relatively short 6-month window.

What we found and its implications

First, we found that shop-redeemable coupons were more popular than either of the home delivery options. This suggests that either: (a) that our shop-based coupon inadvertently reduced social anxiety by simplifying the interaction at the shop (debriefs with shopkeepers suggested that conversations with coupon-carrying customers tended to be briefer and did not use the words "condom" suggesting that the anxiety may have been bypassed); or, (b) we were not truly able to overcome anxiety with discrete and explicit home delivery i.e., perhaps home delivery exacerbated social anxiety by bringing more focus to condom buying. Regardless, what



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this implies is that designing home delivery services for contraceptives is nontrivial. We were not able to simply “switch on” home-delivery and find that it was more popular than more traditional channels for acquiring condoms such as buying at a shop (which the shop coupons approximated). So, while people in Pakistan demand doorstep delivery, it is not a given that home delivery of contraceptives will outperform traditional channels such as shops. The design, marketing and delivery of such services will need to be carefully thought through.

However, in contrast to the above, we found that couples with young women responded positively to the two home delivery options. If we split our study sample into couples with younger women (under 30-years) and older women (over 30-years), we find that the home delivery options were much more popular among couples with younger women. Something about the discreteness and home-delivery worked well for couples with young women. We should note that this is not simply a case of younger people in general preferring home-delivery – when we run the same analysis for couples with younger men vs older men, we do not see this pattern emerge. So, it is very specifically the presence of young women in a couple that drives this.²¹ Additionally, this is not about women’s mobility playing a role: none of the delivery orders made over the phone nor the coupons redeemed at shops were by women: it was the men in the couple who did.

So, why might this be? The incentives certainly line up i.e., younger women are most at risk of unintended pregnancy and STIs. In fact, we find that couples with women aged

20-24 years i.e., those who have the largest unmet need for contraception globally, saw even higher usage of the discrete home delivery service. So, young women certainly have the greatest incentive. But that’s true for all young women across all



We find that the home delivery options were much more popular among couples with younger women. We should note that this is not simply a case of younger people in general preferring home-delivery – when we run the same analysis for couples with younger men vs older men, we do not see this pattern emerge.



three groups of the study, yet we did not see couples with young women respond so positively to the provision of shop coupons (again, we note that mobility restrictions do not play a role since most orders were made by the male member of the couple). So, the question remains – why is it that the discrete home delivery specifically enabled couples with young women? Unfortunately, we do not have additional data to understand this fully and can only conjecture. These young

women did not directly call to make these orders, so any “action” of the discrete coupons occurred couple-side i.e., as a conversation that the couple had. Our guess is that it might be that the discrete delivery coupon enabled young women to discuss the use of this option with their partners, and the discrete nature of the delivery process might have been leveraged in that conversation to enable acquiring them.

This is a useful insight. As we think about tools and options to improve contraceptive uptake, perhaps, we need to explore ways to enable couples to discuss seemingly difficult and taboo subjects like sex and contraception. In our case, we may have ended up providing them language – through something as simple as a coupon – to enable them to have those conversations and access needed contraceptive options.

What is clear is that young women can play a powerful role in driving uptake of contraception. In our quite limited study setting, young women with the greatest need really drove uptake. What we need to do now is figure out ways to enable them.

Agha Ali Akram is an applied economist with over 10 years of experience in the climate change, agriculture, and public health sectors. He is currently a senior researcher at Mathematica Policy Research.

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FRIENDSHIP AS A FEMINIST PRAXIS

REFLECTIONS FROM YAARI:
AN ANTHOLOGY ON FRIENDSHIP BY WOMEN AND QUEER FOLX.

—◆—
TANYA RANA

A few months ago, I attended a workshop by Richa Nagar on her body of feminist works¹. The conversation was about the politics of knowledge production in academia. Richa reflected on her years of engagement with communities on what it takes to co-make and co-author knowledge for justice without seeking fixed answers. At the root of it, this process of trust-building involved empathy and care.

“

These narratives of friendships depict its various contours as well. From friendship that embodies grief, longing and loss and distance, disappointment and rage to friendships forged across cities, spaces and conversations and virtual realities, technologies, and connections...

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Nagar's work, in this sense, is guided by friendships (although not explicitly stated). As someone who's trying to tread a fine balance between research and practice, my primary takeaway from the workshop was to reflect on such a nature of engagement with her own research.

A few days after this workshop, I came across an anthology of stories called *Yaari*. It could not have been more timely. Let me, however, put this disclaimer upfront. This note is not a review of the anthology. I will not do right by the deeply personal reflections and visions of friendships narrated in this volume. Rather, I situate myself as a researcher-practitioner who is reflecting on how the idea of empathy and care extend to their own professional ambitions.

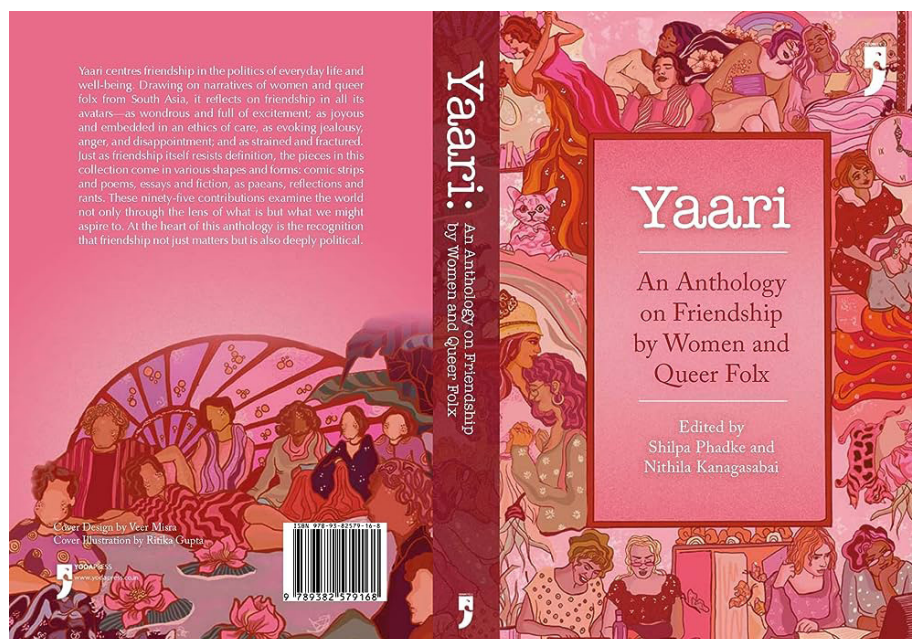
Yaari is a collection of stories on friendships by women and queer folk in South Asia. In their day-to-day, these individuals are also development sector practitioners, activists, and journalists; some of them are teachers and scholars, and others are poets and artists. Their 90+ contributions come in different forms and lengths “just as friendship itself resist definition”, as the editors point out.

Phadke and Kanagasabai, who brought this idea to life during a time when the world was in a pandemic-induced lockdown (or locked-out?), are academics and, of course, friends, who, together, found a ‘gap’ in the existing scholarship on friendships. They noticed that most of the feminist scholarship on women in South Asia focussed on family and kinship networks, and popular media on male friendships. By deciding to collect these stories by women and queer folk, then, also suggests a deliberate marking of their political identities, which exist at the margins and are under-

represented².

These narratives of friendships depict its various contours as well. From friendship that embodies *grief, longing and loss and distance, disappointment and rage* to friendships forged across *cities, spaces and conversations and virtual realities, technologies, and connections*, all the 9 themes of the book convey authors' journeys and reflections on friendship. The diverse form of these stories not only celebrate these chosen networks but also explore the deeply political connections we sometimes forge, resist, or reconsider through these networks.

Academic disciplines often ‘discipline’ us into fitting our engagement with communities into tight and neat boxes of methods. But, does this process involve meaning-making through the lens of empathy and care? I am of the view that this upsets the *objectivity* academic training instils upon us. In fact, honing a friendship in such a set-up can challenge the position



Book Cover Design: Veer Misra
Book Cover Illustration: Ritika Gupta

of power of the researcher (research participants are also referred to as research “subjects”!).

Stories in *Yaari*, in this vein, challenge this narrative. Although personal, the representations of friendship in this volume help a researcher-practitioner like me to reflect on the

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Although personal, the representations of friendship in this volume help a researcher-practitioner like me to reflect on the value of mutual care and reciprocity, and the frictions and fractures that arise out of interrogation and honest feedback.

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value of mutual care and reciprocity, and the frictions and fractures that arise out of interrogation and honest feedback. While this anthology does not look at a story about an experience between a researcher and the communities with which she is engaged (or engages),

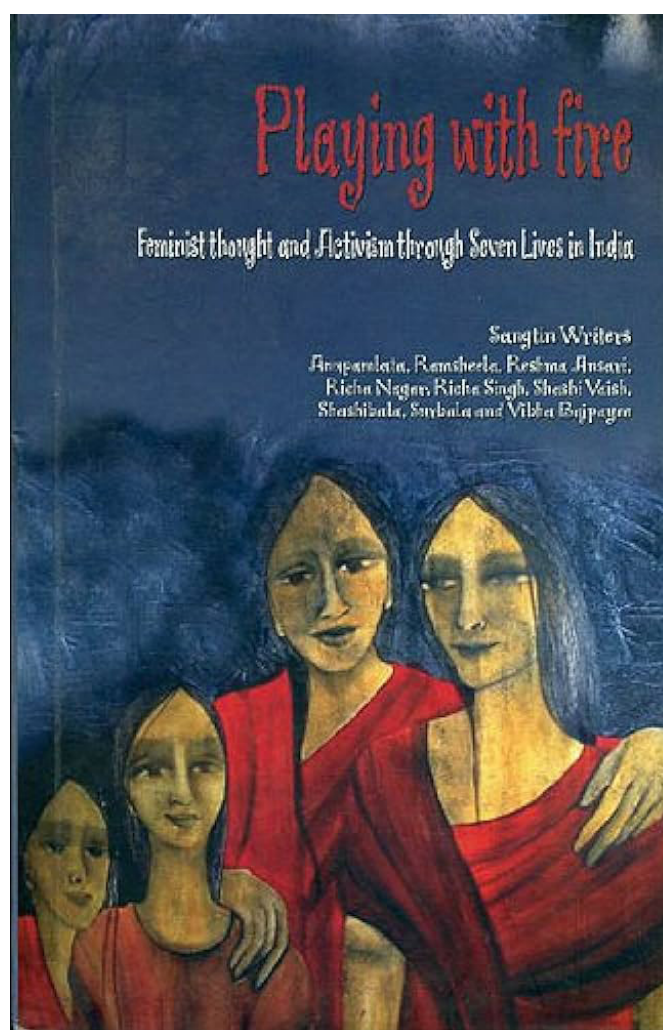
Richa’s work is an excellent example of this.

In her book *Playing with Fire* (2006), Richa shares seven *Sangtin*³ women’s “collective reflections” on common struggles. As an academic located in a different socio-political setting compared to these seven rural women, Richa’s work speaks to feminist epistemology and methodology, and how the “knowledge of resistance” can be co-produced. *Yaari*, similarly, is a documentation of this resistance, given the political identities that women and queer folk occupy (as mentioned earlier).

To me, therefore, *Yaari* is an important contribution to reimagining feminist literature and methods. It inspires us to practice our feminisms through solidarities of empathy and care – or friendship. Friendships, in turn, nudge us to challenge the power dynamics researcher-practitioners (like me) may implicitly impose through our questions

or methods. I would keep going back to this anthology to reflect on my idea of generating value through my work. Lastly, and in a rather selfish pursuit, I also hope that the editors of *Yaari* raise a call for contributions for another iteration of this volume; and, this time, focussing on journeys of friendship and meaning-making explored on the field.

Tanya Rana is an early-career researcher on gender and governance.



Book Author: Sangtin Writers
Publisher: Zubaan Publications

1. Professor Nagar shared insights and excerpts from her trilogy *Playing with Fire: Feminist Thought and Activism through Seven Lives in India* (2006); *Muddying the Waters: Coauthoring Feminisms Across Scholarship and Activism* (2014) and *Hungry Translations: Relearning the World Through Radical Vulnerability* (2019). You can read more about her work, here: <https://cla.umn.edu/about/directory/profile/nagar>
2. <https://femasiamagazine.com/if-we-centred-friendship-editing-an-anthology/>
3. The term *sangtin* refers to companionship or friendship. *Sangtin Collective* was founded by 7 rural women, Richa Nagar, and others, in response to “donor-driven NGO politics and regional inequalities” in Uttar Pradesh.

BETWEEN FAME AND FEAR

UNDERSTANDING THE THREAT LANDSCAPE AND UNCOVERING THE HARSH REALITIES FACED BY PAKISTANI CONTENT CREATORS

SHANZA AND WALEED ARSHAD

In the dynamic realm of content creation, the surge in online presence has brought forth a parallel rise in risks, especially for female¹ content creators in Pakistan. These creators have diverse posting habits, from crafting thought-provoking visual content to advocating for social and political change, and their work encompasses

a broad spectrum of topics such as gender equality, entertainment, and motivational speaking. Our research studied the content and the habits of these social media creators, shedding light on gender disparities and the spillover of online threats into the real world. This study is methodologically grounded in understanding how digital users articulate

their privacy and security issues. Gender emerges as a pivotal factor shaping content creators' experiences. Female content creators bear a disproportionate burden of negative experiences, including elevated levels of hate, vitriol, and negative feedback, compared to their male counterparts.

The disparities between



Image: freepik.com

genders in an online space emerge from deeply rooted societal norms², such as not providing space to females in society and limiting opportunities for them in physical space³, which also translates into their online experience. In a patriarchal society like Pakistan⁴, the online presence of female content creators is often

“One significant aspect we explored is how online threats spill over into the real world; female creators are stalked and harassed in real life by their online followers. Topics like female empowerment, discussion on gender, and raising issues for minorities are some topics deemed taboo or inappropriate to be talked about online.”

perceived as a threat as it provides them with a platform to express themselves. This leads to concerted efforts to restrict their visibility, and these efforts come in the form of hate, harassment, unsolicited messages, bullying, and stalking. These entrenched societal norms⁵, including rigid gender roles, expectations, and deeply ingrained misogyny, significantly amplifies this gender-based discrimination in an online setting. The visibility

restriction often results from a complex interplay of familial pressure, cultural norms⁶, and the alarming prevalence of hate-filled comments on their social media profiles. To provide a more nuanced understanding of these challenges, our research explored first-hand experiences from respondents, shedding light on their personal experiences. As one participant aptly stated,

‘I constantly feel the pressure to conform to traditional roles and expectations, and the online space often amplifies this pressure.’

One significant aspect we explored is how online threats spill over into the real world; female creators are stalked and harassed in real life by their online followers. Topics like female empowerment, discussion on gender, and raising issues for minorities are some topics deemed taboo or inappropriate to be talked about online. There is a lot of resistance

and harassment for creators who talk about these issues. Female participants reported facing unique challenges, such as being unable to promote menstrual hygiene products or share pictures with bold dressing. Female content creators, in particular, face unique challenges when threats manifest beyond the digital realm. Impersonation attacks emerged as a particularly concerning issue in our study. These attacks involve malicious actors who impersonate content creators, often ending up with dire consequences for the creator. As one respondent expressed:

‘These impersonation attacks can lead to the removal of creators from platforms, damage their reputation, and, in extreme cases, even lead to physical harm. The malicious actors behind these attacks remain hidden, making it difficult to trace and hold them accountable.’

Impersonation attacks further intensify the need for robust protective measures.



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Unresponsive platform support and ineffective defence mechanisms for many females give them few options. Consequently, they turn to behavioural defences, resorting to self-censorship or seeking help from people around them, mostly family and friends.”

Unresponsive platform support and ineffective defence mechanisms for many females give them few options. Consequently, they turn to behavioural defences, resorting to self-censorship or seeking help from people around them, mostly family and friends. Moreover, the non-cooperation from the authorities and lack of legal

aid compounds these issues. Seeking help from families can be complex, especially for females, as victim-blaming stems from the patriarchal norms in our society.⁷ One notable revelation is that many content creators adopt security practices only after falling prey to attacks, and this reactive approach highlights the need for proactive education and awareness campaigns for these content creators to empower them with legal support and the tools and knowledge to safeguard themselves in an online setting.

Our research paints a complex picture of the content creation landscape in Pakistan, where gender disparities, real-world

consequences of online threats, and challenges in seeking protection are significant issues. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for crafting practical solutions that promote a safer and more equitable environment for content creators, regardless of gender or background.

Shanza is a Computer Science senior at LUMS (RA Interactive media lab / TA).

Waleed Arshad is a CS Senior at LUMS. (RA at Interactive Media Lab and CISPA Institute).



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[Names within this article have been altered for anonymity]

BEARING THE GRAIN

WOMEN POWERING PUNJAB'S RICE FIELDS

INJEEL ABDUL AZIZ

Are the hours between men and women the same?" I inquire of Rashida Bibi.

We're welcomed inside her house, the diligent arrangement of chairs by young boys allows our team of researchers to join the family circle and discuss their experiences in the rice fields.

"Yes," a man interjects on behalf of Rashida Bibi, his tone exuding satisfaction. "We all get paid for the same hours!"

This isn't the entire truth. In the rice fields of Punjab, women wade through insect-infested waters, their nimble fingers tending to delicate seedlings under the scorching sun. Returning home,



Image: freepik.com

they assume the weight of domestic responsibilities, women stand as the unsung pillars of an industry deeply entrenched in their toil.

Like many communities in the vicinity, this community is made of up a collection of families that are employed by a local landlord paying them to work on the land. This community in particular are migrant workers, travelling from South Punjab to areas of Central Punjab such as Gujranwala and Narowal where the rice transplanting season is still active. With help from brokers that act as an intermediately between the *Waderas* (landlords) and the labourers, the labourers travel to where they are needed during the hot summer transplanting season.

The women accompany the men to work and to provide sustenance to the families. Women feel the double burden in capitalist and domestic production 'with little, if any, acknowledgement of, or compensation for their role in the capitalist agrarian production process'.¹ Women as major stakeholders lack the power to better their situation, which is often attributed to their lack of economic capital even though their value is significant. NGOs have attempted to bridge this gap through interventions seeking to empower women by imparting marketable skills and providing them with sewing machines and associated equipment.

However, amidst these efforts lies a critical question - do these interventions truly pave the way for women's economic independence and growth, or do they serve as mere symbols of corporate social responsibility, leaving



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women confined within low-skill, traditionally female-dominated fields? And have their interventions addressed how one is to find the time to seek independence whilst the weight of the household rests on her shoulders?

Many may argue that

economic value comes from capital and that the conventional understanding of capital is predominantly associated with economic resources and financial wealth. However, it should be argued that the notion of capital should extend beyond financial assets to include the invaluable contributions of caretaking, often performed by women within the framework of social reproduction.

Karl Marx introduced the idea of the social and economic reproduction of societies within a cultural structure, emphasizing the significance of various social, cultural, and economic factors in perpetuating and sustaining societal structures. Feminist Marxists such as Federici emphasise the critical role played by women in nurturing families and communities through caretaking activities, underscoring the essential yet often undervalued labour involved in caregiving and



domestic responsibilities. This analysis sheds light on the broader perspective of capital, urging a recognition of the non-monetary contributions that are integral to the functioning and continuity of societies.² Rashida Bibi explains how when it comes to the *daals* or the *salaans*, each woman will make it for their own family but collectively the women will make rotis for everyone to eat in the middle of the day. Women will rise early to prepare breakfast and then spend additional time after everyone's return from the fields to prepare dinner. On average women are spending more time working than their male counterparts but their domestic and child-rearing related forms of labour has never been compensated monetarily even

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When asked about what the men do during this time in the evening, she laughs and says their sit on their chaarpais and talk.

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though great value is added to the reproduction of their community.

When asked about what the men do during this time in the evening, she laughs and says their sit on their *chaarpais* and talk. When asked by a researcher if she thinks this is unfair or if women should not have to bear the brunt of the domestic responsibilities, she looks at us in the fading evening light and says, “*Agar hum nahi karenge, toh kon karega?*” (If we don't do it, then who will?)

Injeel Abdul Aziz is a Political Science Senior with an interest in Environmental Sciences as well as a Research Assistant at the Centre for Water Informatics and Technology.

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BISP & WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES

Image: Documentary - Benazir Nashonuma Program

ADEEN SAEED

Women's empowerment is defined as "the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability"¹. These life choices can be further distinguished into first- and second-order choices.

Where the former pertains choices that are imperative for a person to live the life they want (for example, decisions regarding whether or not to marry, have children, or accessing reproductive health care²). These first-order choices then help shape the less consequential second-order choices.



Photo: Women providing information on their household members at the Rawalpindi BISP Centre www.health.bmz.de/stories/pakistans-transition-to-a-dynamic-social-protection-registry/

Reproductive health services, which contains place of delivery, skilled attendance at birth, antenatal and postnatal care³ have been acknowledged as an essential human right for women. They also play a pivotal role in combating poverty and ensuring improved long-term health of both mother and child⁴.

Considering the above, I conducted a study to assess whether a cash transfer program leads to empowering women of Pakistan by increasing their uptake of reproductive health services. For this purpose, the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) was explored, which was initiated by The Government of Pakistan to provide monetary relief to eligible households. The program also aims to empower women by targeting ever-married women as beneficiaries.

Women's access to financial

resources can improve their well-being and position; this notion is generated from household bargaining theories that assert access to monetary resources as a significant factor which influences power dynamic in a household⁵. The difference in access to these resources leads to variations in the well-being of members in a household⁶.

Therefore, my study focuses on BISP, because it hypothesizes that access to monetary resources through the program translates into a positive differential in the decision-making capabilities of women; and thus, empowers them in their ability to decide on a first-order choice like reproductive health services.

In order to test the study objective, I employ a Regression Discontinuity Design (RDD) on the 2018-19 Pakistan Standard of Living Measurement (PSLM) survey.

BISP recipient and non-recipient households are identified by constructing the Proxy Means Test score⁷.

“Women's access to financial resources can improve their well-being and position; this notion is generated from household bargaining theories that assert access to monetary resources as a significant factor which influences power dynamic in a household.”

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Image: Documentary - Benazir Nashonuma Program

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Results show an insignificant impact of BISP on the utilization of reproductive health services. Which implies that increasing women's access to monetary resource does not have any influence on their utilization of reproductive health services', a first order strategic life choice.

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Results show an insignificant impact of BISP on the utilization of reproductive health services. Which implies that increasing women's access to monetary resource does not have any influence on their utilization of reproductive health services', a first order strategic life choice. This could potentially be because in such cases it is typically the mother-in-law who makes decision on whether the young women should even avail these services⁸. Moreover, the norms prevailing in a society like Pakistan follow the notion of 'purdah' and 'izzat', which are often associated with women of the household and restricts their mobility above.⁸ Another potential reasoning could be the socio-economic conditions of the household which would not allow prioritizing health services as a necessity⁹.

While the results were not significant, I hope this research could prove as a stepping stone for further in-depth research in the area, potentially a qualitative one to explore in detail, recipients' point of view. Moreover, future research should also keep in mind that monetary transfers alone often do not lead to a change¹; thus, other aspects that influence decision-making of an individual should be considered.

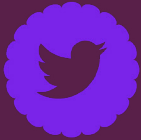
Adeen Saeed is currently working as a Research Associate at a Population Research Centre situated at NUST, with research interests in gender, financial inclusion and development economics.

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Saida Waheed
Gender Initiative