

# SAIDA WAHEED GENDER INITIATIVE

FALL 2024 NEWSLETTER

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LUMS | Saida Waheed  
Gender Initiative

# Overview

## IN THIS ISSUE

1. **Events** Page 02
2. **Gender Bi-Annual** Page 12

The Saida Waheed Gender Initiative (SWGI) had an exciting Fall semester filled with many important and engaging conversations. We are very grateful to our audience from within the LUMS community and beyond for their time and active participation in all discussions.

# Events

## Dance is Important for the Feminist Movement *A Practice by Sheema Kermani*

Our first event was a conversation and movement practice with renowned activist and classical dancer Sheema Kermani. She is also the founder of a feminist theatre group 'Tehrik-e-Niswan'. In her conversation, Sheema shared her own experience as a dancer and an activist in Pakistan, especially what it has been like to perform under patriarchal surveillance that actively curtails any liberatory embodied movements and wants to distance itself from South Asia's "immoral past".



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**DANCE IS IMPORTANT FOR THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT**

Sheema Kermani  
**12 September | 6.30 pm**  
LLI Classroom, LUMS

\*Registration closes on 11 September

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She discussed how dance as an explicitly political and feminist practice did not just help her build a discipline, but also allowed for healing and spiritual growth in times of crises. The audience was encouraged to explore and sustain a relationship of trust and joy with their bodies, especially for women and queer folks, who occupy a specifically gendered and embodied reality.

She welcomed the audience to participate in some body work and introduced the audience to a few, traditional practices in classical dance, and talked about the loss of cultural memory in a very commercialised present.



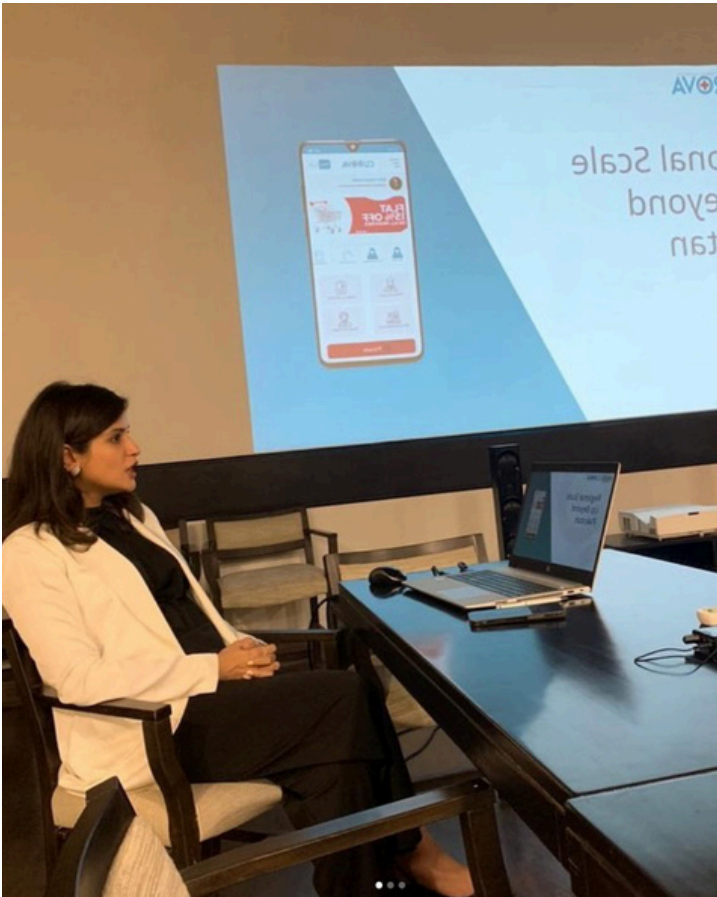
## Innovating Health: Sehat Kahani & the Era of Global Digital Healthcare

### *A Talk by Dr. Sara Saeed*

Dr. Sara Saeed, co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of Sehat Kahani joined us for our second talk. She completed her MBBS from DOW University of Health Sciences and has over 8 years of experience in the field of digital healthcare. In this conversation, she shared how her personal journey as a working woman doctor and a mother led her to build a telemedicine platform like Sehat Kahani.

With this endeavour she not only wanted to make affordable healthcare services accessible to people living in rural areas or situated in remote locations, but she also wanted to provide women doctors the opportunity to work from home.





Sharing some statistics, she expanded that Pakistan has approximately 245,000 doctors out of which 80% are women, yet due to patriarchal social norms only 40% women practice. Sehat Kahani provides women doctors an opportunity to practice through the app and provides patients accessibility to doctors from the comfort of their homes. Telemedicine became more of a norm during the initial years of covid-19 and has given Sehat Kahani the opportunity to reach out to people across the country, extending them the healthcare they direly need.



## Women's Labour Force Participation in South Asia

*A Talk by Margaret Triyana*



Margaret Triyana, a Senior Economist at the World Bank's Office of the Chief Economist, South Asia Region joined us to discuss women's participation in the labour force in South Asia. Margaret shared that over the past three decades, South Asia has benefited from strong economic growth, accompanied by a shift toward the services sector, growing exports, and stronger legal protections for women. She asserted that these changes have expanded opportunities for all, including for many women. However, women's employment has remained a source of untapped potential and South Asia's female labour force participation remains among the lowest in the world, far below the emerging market average.

She emphasised how this low participation rate represents a costly misallocation of resources, and raising this rate to that of men could boost per capita incomes by up to one-half. Speaking on the wide range of policies that could help women enter the workforce, Margaret shared that, legal reforms to improve gender equality, faster job creation in the non-agricultural sector, and the removal of barriers to women working outside the home could play an integral role to bolster labour force participation. She emphasised that such measures will be more effective if accompanied by a shift in social norms toward greater acceptance of women's employment.





# Vulnerability, Resilience, and Unequal Impacts: The Gendered Experience of Climate Change and Health in Pakistan

## *A Talk by Neha Mankani*

Neha Mankani, a midwife and founder of the Mama Baby Fund, joined us at SWGI for a powerful session on "Vulnerability, Resilience, and Unequal Impacts." Drawing from her extensive work in midwifery and climate justice, she highlighted how climate change disproportionately affects women, especially pregnant and postpartum mothers, as well as newborns. "Climate change doesn't affect everyone equally," Midwife Neha Mankani says. She shared stories from her work on Baba Island, a densely populated fishing community off the coast of Karachi, where rising sea levels, extreme heatwaves, and polluted water create insurmountable challenges for women's health.



In these communities, expectant mothers often lack access to timely healthcare, leading to devastating outcomes such as miscarriages, preterm births, and stillbirths, particularly during the scorching summer months. Neha highlighted her initiatives, including setting up the island's first maternal health clinics and launching a free 24/7 boat ambulance, which has been lifesaving for women previously unable to access emergency care.



She also spoke about the daily struggles women face, such as cooking in extreme heat and caring for newborns without clean water or electricity, and shared practical advice despite the challenges of limited resources.



## Creating Safety for Survivors of Domestic Violence

### *A Talk by Zohra Ahmed*

At SWGI we value practitioner knowledge and endeavour to learn from people outside of academia and this time, we thought a conversation on helping survivors of domestic violence was necessary. Zohra Ahmed, a social entrepreneur and an advocate for women's rights in Pakistan who runs The Jugnu Project, a digital resource platform dedicated to supporting survivors of domestic violence joined us for this talk. Zohra expanded on the types of domestic violence and abuse, focusing most of her time on sharing lessons learnt through dealing with numerous cases. She wanted the audience to learn how to support survivors and in that pushed us all to introspect about our biases when engaging with survivors, who could also be our friends, family, or anyone we may know.



Throughout the session Zohra emphasises how patience is an essential part of working with survivors as we need to hold space for them in their difficult time without pushing them. She also explained how as a part of the support mechanism survivors should not have to confront judgement on our part as that would exacerbate any feelings of shame and signal to them that we are not a safe space. We also learnt how we can document evidence and build escape plans safely to support survivors. The session was insightful and heavy; however, we left the space having learnt how empathetic care and safety can provide unvaluable support to survivors during a time of crises.



# Gender Bi-Annual

We released the seventh issue of our Gender Bi-Annual in July. This issue had a diverse set of topics, and a deeper dive revealed a common thread of rigid gendered social norms that shape and exacerbate existing inequalities. In Academic Work, our first contributor shared insights from her book *Swept Aside, A Story of Christian Sweepers in Lahore* speaking on the marginalisation experienced by Christian women sweepers. Contributors in our second piece shared insights from their research and explored the gendered norms that can impede social progress in communities by looking at young women and men’s education.

The Gender and Design section featured a critical reflection on government data in Pakistan, specifically the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (PSLM). Our last section featured three pieces by our Student Research Grantees 2023–2024. The first piece was based on research that delves into the professional and personal lives of sex workers in Heera Mandi, Lahore. The second piece investigated variation in competitive behaviours and negotiation practices in young women and men about to enter the workforce. The last piece evaluated the impact of the Orange Line Metro Train on the mobility of working women in Lahore.





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