

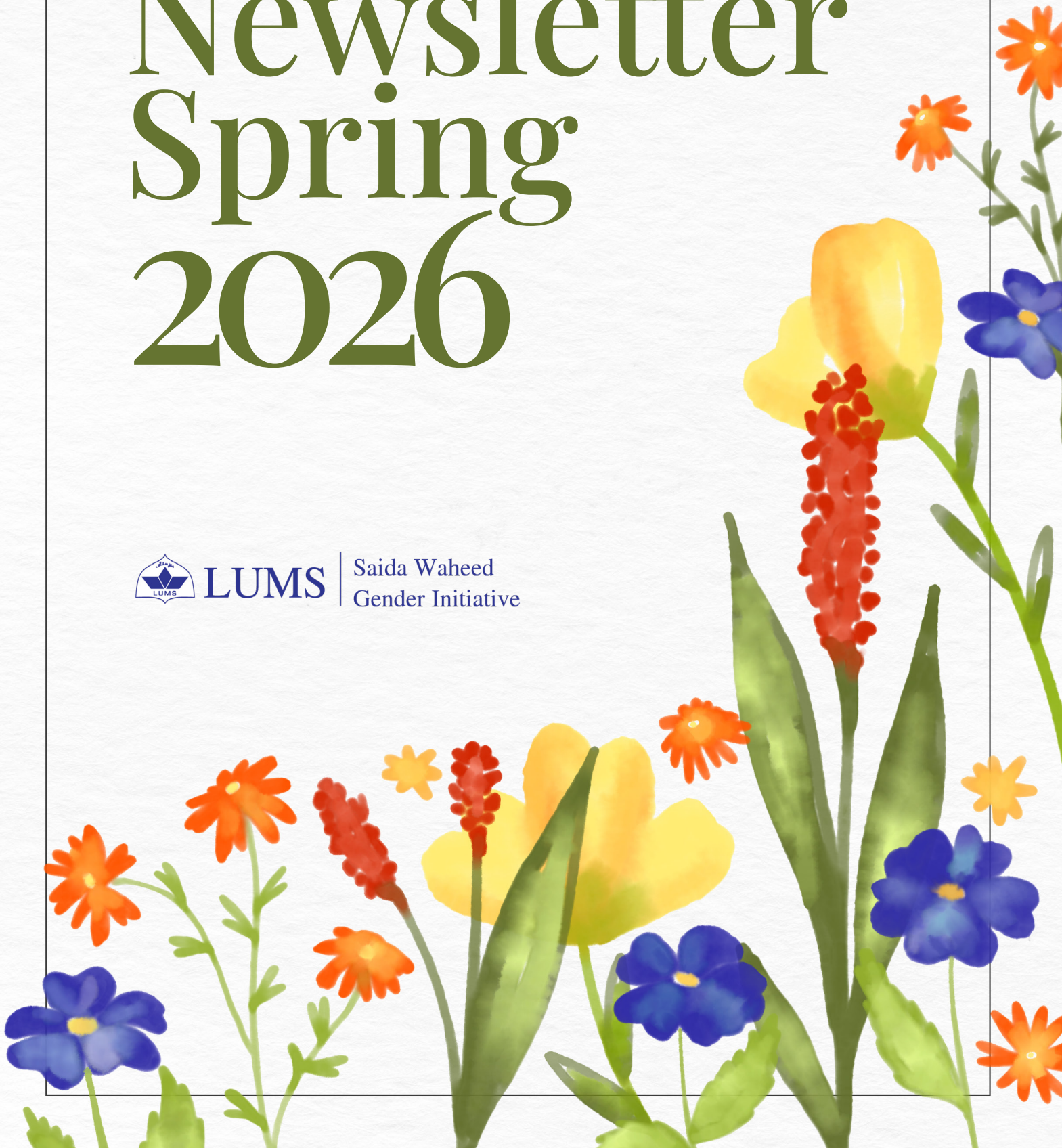
SAIDA WAHEED  
GENDER INITIATIVE

# Newsletter Spring 2026



LUMS

Saida Waheed  
Gender Initiative



# OVERVIEW

## IN THIS ISSUE

Events	03
Research	08
Gender Bi-Annual	09

The Saida Waheed Gender Initiative (SWG I) wrapped up another engaging and intellectually rich semester marked by a series of critical conversations and collaborative exchanges. We are grateful for the continued support and participation of our audiences, both within the LUMS community and beyond, whose presence and insights have meaningfully shaped each session. Anchored in an intersectional approach to gender and social justice, SWGI remains committed to fostering interdisciplinary dialogue by bringing together scholars, practitioners, and emerging voices. This semester's programming reflects our ongoing dedication to creating spaces for critical inquiry, collective learning, and engagement across diverse perspectives.

# EVENTS

## SWGI AT 10: FEMINIST LEGACIES AND FUTURES

In February 2026, the Saida Waheed Gender Initiative marked its tenth anniversary with a panel discussion reflecting on key developments in gender rights over the past decade, while also examining emerging challenges and opportunities for feminist scholarship, advocacy, and community engagement. The event brought together scholars and activists to reflect on feminist legacies in Pakistan and to consider future pathways for advancing gender justice.

The panel featured Khawar Mumtaz, Ismat Shahjehan, and Fariha Aziz, with guest appearances by Nighat Said Khan and LUMS Vice Chancellor Ali Cheema. Dr. Cheema emphasized the structural constraint of limited mobility on women's participation in education, skilling, and the labour force, and commended the SWGI platform for fostering critical dialogue, particularly in the presence of prominent

feminist voices such as Nighat Said Khan.

Drawing on decades of experience in feminist organising, policy advocacy, and civil society work, the speakers offered both a retrospective on progress made and a candid discussion of the structural barriers that continue to shape gender inequality in Pakistan. In her remarks, Khawar Mumtaz framed the contemporary women's rights movement as an extension of earlier struggles for women's empowerment, expressing optimism about social change while emphasizing that meaningful transformation emerges through collective action rather than individual efforts.

Ismat Shahjehan highlighted multiple layers of patriarchal oppression affecting women across Pakistan, including the impacts of militarization and conflict in Pashtun regions, state repression and enforced disappearances in Balochistan, and feudal structures affecting Sindhi and Punjabi women,

alongside broader class-based inequalities intensified by privatization and economic pressures.

Fariha Aziz discussed the social stigma attached to feminism in Pakistan, noting how it is often mischaracterized as anti-men, and reflected on historical and ongoing struggles against restrictive legislation and patriarchal norms, particularly in relation to women's rights activism and movements such as the Aurat March.



# UNPACKING THE NIKAHNAMA: NAVIGATING THE CLAUSES, CODES, AND CONSEQUENCES

This discussion, led by Marva Khan Cheema (Assistant Professor, School of Law, LUMS) and Maria Amir (Faculty, Humanities and Social Sciences, LUMS), addressed the widespread lack of awareness in Pakistan around the issue of marital rights and the marriage contract, especially with regards to Haq Mehr and the proceedings of divorce. A general lack of knowledge and occasionally, deliberate obfuscation around the marriage contract leaves many women economically vulnerable and fuels systemic problems like unpaid dower claims, contested property rights, and limited access to remedies after dissolution.

The speakers mapped these systemic harms by demonstrating how incomplete or improperly filled Nikahnama clauses can reinforce existing patriarchal structures. They also discussed recent legal and policy developments

aimed at strengthening the enforceability and clarity of marriage contracts. These included landmark judicial decisions affirming that Haq Mehr and explicitly recorded property clauses are legally binding, judicial recommendations encouraging the simplification and accurate completion of Nikahnama columns, and federal and provincial government initiatives focused on standardising and modernising the Nikahnama form. The speakers also offered a hands-on read-through of

the Nikahnama itself, explored practical negotiation strategies for brides and their families, and shared drafting tactics to secure enforceable protections.



# BEYOND SELF-SACRIFICE & SUPERHEROISM: CARE AND THE IMAGES AND IMAGINARIES OF THE MOTHER

Popular culture is full of imaginaries and images of mothers. Good mothers, bad mothers, mothers who are a mess. Mothers who work tirelessly to secure their children's education, mothers who stay in bad marriages for the sake of their children, mothers who work juggle fulltime work and then return home to take care of the family. Through these stories the figure of the mother gets simultaneously exceptionalised while acts of 'mothering' get naturalised as women's work.

Through this interactive workshop led by Dr. Amalie Goul Dueholm (LUMS), participants examined the stories media tells about mothers and considered the knowledge and values these images and narratives produce. They then engaged in personal storytelling practices to imagine alternative kinship structures and forms of care that are often elided by dominant maternal imaginaries.



# PERIOD POVERTY: ACCESS, EQUITY, AND THE LAW

Period poverty is a multidimensional structural inequality shaped by social norms, economic barriers, and legal frameworks, and is further intensified in contexts of climate crisis. To understand this, it is essential that we situate menstruation within its broader social and economic context, while interrogating its cost. In this regard, the taxation of period products emerges not merely as a fiscal issue, but as a reflection of how menstruation itself is perceived within society.

Drawing on field-based experience, our speakers, Bushra Mahnoor ([Mahwari Justice](#)) and Ahsan Khan (Advocate High Courts / [JJ & Co.](#)), highlighted the links between period poverty and climate-induced disasters, particularly flooding, demonstrating how displacement and disrupted

infrastructures exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and render menstrual health needs even more precarious.

Complementing this, they also examined how period poverty is a fundamental rights issue not only as a matter of survival, but as the right to live with dignity and fully participate in social life. By challenging the taxation of menstrual products and advocating for policy reform, this approach positions menstrual health as integral to equality, dignity, and substantive citizenship.

Together, the speakers reframed period poverty as a systemic issue that extends beyond access to products, calling for a shift from charitable responses to rights-based, structural solutions grounded in social justice, legal accountability, and inclusive policy design.



# DIGITAL ABUSE, DEEP FAKES, AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN PAKISTAN

Cyber-crime, online stalking, deep fakes, doxxing, social media harassment – these are some of the new kinds of abuse that make up and feed into gender-based violence (GBV) in today’s digital world. In this panel, our discussants, Moneeza Hashmi ([Kashf Foundation](#)), Hyra Basit ([Digital Rights Foundation](#)), and Ramma Shahid ([Chayn](#)), addressed the impact of digitality and tech (focusing on social media and AI) on GBV in Pakistan, discussing a range of concerns from policymaking and

developing feminist resources, to the healing of survivors and finding effective means to have difficult conversations around these issues. While these conversations addressed the larger global context, the panelists highlighted what recent South Asian scholarship has shown – how digital visibility has exacerbated honor, faith and caste-related surveillance, with social media becoming a new trigger for gender-based violence.



# ROUNDTABLE ON EMBEDDING GENDER JUSTICE IN ISLAMIC FAMILY LAW

The Saida Waheed Gender Initiative (SWGI) in collaboration with [Women in Law Initiative Pakistan](#) and Professor Dr. Zubair Abbasi of Royal Holloway, University of London, convened an interdisciplinary roundtable discussion titled Embedding Gender Justice in Islamic Family Law at LUMS. The roundtable brought together academics, judges, lawyers, and legal researchers to critically engage with questions surrounding women's financial rights within Islamic family law and to explore pathways for bridging legal theory, judicial practice, and policy reform.

The discussion focused on three key themes. First, participants examined the economic value of women's unpaid domestic and caregiving labour, considering whether existing legal and doctrinal frameworks adequately recognise such contributions in the attribution

and distribution of marital assets. Second, the roundtable addressed structural inequalities arising from women's limited access to independent income and property ownership, which often results in unequal access to marital assets and insufficient safeguards upon marital dissolution. Finally, participants reflected on the financial vulnerabilities faced by women after divorce, including challenges relating to maintenance, recovery of mahr, and the absence of equitable asset-sharing mechanisms.

Through these discussions, the roundtable highlighted the urgent need for a more coherent and gender-just legal and policy framework that strengthens women's economic security and enhances access to justice within the context of Islamic family law.



# STUDENT RESEARCH 2025-26

SWGfI offers small grants for student-led research projects that use gender and/or sexuality as a central analytical lens. Each year, we host a two-day event where grantees present their work to the LUMS community and receive feedback from peers and faculty. This year's cohort showcased rigorous and theoretically engaged research exploring the intersections of gender, power, and social life in contemporary Pakistan. The projects examine how structural inequalities across bureaucracy, law, economy, and culture, shape lived experiences, offering nuanced insights into pressing social and cultural issues while imagining more inclusive and equitable futures. The student grantees of 2025-26 are:

“Main Chakar Lagati Rahun Ge”: Bureaucratic Attrition and the Slow Abandonment of GBV Survivors in

Punjab, Pakistan  
**By Rida Fatima**

The Discontents of Agency-Women, Law and Negotiations at Punjab Women's Welfare Authority Centers  
**By Fatima Sarfraz**

Gender Pricing in Pakistan: Do Women Pay More for Everyday Consumer Goods?  
**By Taqwa Binte Fayyaz**

Slashing the Painting: An Analysis of Gender, Imperialism, and Resistance in River Spirit  
**By Ammar Ahmed Bilal & Sehar Nadeem**

How Structural Economic Transformations Deepen Inequality and Reinforce Gendered Marginalization  
**By Sadia Haseeb**

Digital Performativity of Weddings and the Social and Gendered Pressures on Brides  
**By Iman Tahir & Zainab Rana**

Piety in Practice: The Social Life of Women-led Dars  
**By Tooba Adina Naeem**

Making Queer Worlds and Narratives: Art, Identity, and Community in Lahore  
**By Brood & Hassan Khalid**

Women in the Bazaar: Spatial Negotiation and Public Life in Anarkali, Lahore  
**By Raiha Zainab Shah**

The Husband's Signature: Class, Consent, and Reproductive Healthcare in Lahore  
**By Hamna Mahmood & Aleeza Maryam**



# GENDER BI-ANNUAL

We recently published the ninth issue of our Gender Bi-Annual. As always, this issue brought together voices from academia, civil society, and professional spaces, reflecting a wide range of perspectives and lived experiences. Grounded in multifaceted inquiry, the articles engaged critically with gender as a social and economic construct that shapes everyday life. Gendered realities influence experiences within the household, structure participation in the workplace, and determine access to opportunities. Through research and practice, our contributors invited readers to reflect on how gender equity can be meaningfully advanced across diverse contexts.

In Academic Work, our contributor shared insights

from an experiment that examines how individuals make consumption decisions for themselves and for others within the same household. The piece highlighted what these choices reveal about agency, control, and recognition.

Practitioner Voices featured two compelling pieces. The first drew on professional experience to examine the continued underrepresentation of girls in Pakistan's technology education landscape and explored pathways for change. The second focused on the distinction between workforce diversity and genuine inclusion. Drawing on her own work experience, the contributor demonstrated how policies that respond to women's work lives can help build a truly inclusive workplace.

The Gender and Design section highlighted the application of a critical lens to how organisational culture, institutional practices, and policy frameworks within advertising agencies reproduce or challenge gendered norms. The piece highlighted the potential for intentional design of work cultures and policies to address structural inequalities and promote more equitable professional environments.

Student Features carried a piece that unpacks the impacts of digitisation on women's entrepreneurial ventures. In this issue, we also included excerpts from the cohort of SWGI Student Research Grants of 2024-2025.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE ISSUE	03
ACADEMIC WORK DR. FARAH SAID - SMALL BUSINESS, BIG CHANGES: WHAT PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPTS REVEAL ABOUT GENDER AND INEQUALITY	04
PRACTITIONER VOICES HAFSA MUBSHAH - TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION LANDSCAPE AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR GIRLS IN PAKISTAN	07
PRACTITIONER VOICES AMMAM AMAM - DESIGN TO EXACT	10
GENDER AND DESIGN AMMAM AMAM - DESIGN TO EXACT	13
STUDENT FEATURES AMMAM AMAM - DESIGN TO EXACT	16
STUDENT RESEARCH GRANTS 2024-25 AMMAM AMAM - DESIGN TO EXACT	19
STUDENT RESEARCH GRANTS 2024-25 AMMAM AMAM - DESIGN TO EXACT	20
STUDENT RESEARCH GRANTS 2024-25 AMMAM AMAM - DESIGN TO EXACT	21

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HOPE YOU  
HAVE A GREAT  
SUMMER!



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