



The Status of Women's Right to Work in Gilgit Baltistan: An Analysis in the Socio-Cultural Context

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Abstract

Among human societies, the debate over gender equality in the workforce has long been a crucial topic. Each society presents different challenges to gender equality in the workforce, according to each society's social, cultural, religious, geographic, and other unique features. This study examines such challenges to women's rights to work in Gilgit Baltistan - the northern part of Pakistan - in the context of socio-cultural factors and within the domain of national and local legal framework in the region. Despite legal guarantees like the Gilgit-Baltistan Order 2018 and the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2013, women in Gilgit-Baltistan face many obstacles to exercising their right to work. These obstacles are deeply rooted in the social and cultural norms, including the patriarchal principles, superstitious beliefs of gender roles and institutional discrimination, etc. To determine these factors, this study analyzes survey responses from 412 participants from all the districts of Gilgit Baltistan on the one hand and conducts a systematic review of the existing literature and legal framework in the region on the other. The survey findings revealed a complex scenario: the respondents on the one side believed the notion of women's right to work is generally accepted in the region and workplaces are safe and inclusive. Yet, simultaneously, they acknowledged the existence of patriarchal family structure, traditional superstitious beliefs regarding women's roles in the workforce, fear of harassment, and gender discrimination in recruitment, promotions, and wages at workplaces. The study underlines the difference between this abstract acceptance of the notion of female rights to work in Gilgit Baltistan and the practical obstacles in the way of exercising this right. It contributes to the discourse on women's right to work in Gilgit-Baltistan and other marginalized societies of Pakistan, and advocates for translating legal rights into tangible outcomes.

Keywords:

Women's Rights, Women's Employment, Socio-Cultural Challenges, Gilgit Baltistan.

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1. Introduction

Gender disparity is the most ancient form of social injustice (Zaiats, 2024), among which the injustice created due to the disproportionate employment opportunities and hostile working environment for women are the most critical ones. Providing women an employment with safe work and a non-discriminatory environment is a fundamental human right. which in turn empowers them to live fruitful and satisfying lives. This basic right is encompassed in numerous, interrelated international and regional labor and human rights norms. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) suggests state actors and social partners to undertake comprehensive measures to address the matter of sex discrimination. It broadly recognizes women's right to work as follows: a) ensuring a safe and healthy working environment b) safeguarding protections against discrimination based on pregnancy, family responsibilities, or biological differences, and c) preserving women's fundamental labor rights, such as the freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining (Cornish, 2008).

Several International covenants, treaties, and accords focus on the elimination of gender-based discrimination. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979, and the Beijing Declaration, adopted during the UN Fourth Conference on Women in 1995, are important instruments. Pakistan, a state party to CEDAW and a signatory to the Beijing Declaration has made substantial efforts to align its legislation and policies with international standards (Gondal, 2023).

In most of the gender-based debates in the international sphere, Pakistan is considered a flash point. Regrettably, this is generally due to the blatant infringements of women's rights in the country. The plight of women here is not limited to their deprivation of equality with men, rather they are also subjected to physical violence and cruelty (Muneer, 2017). In comparison to other developing countries of the world, women in Pakistan are more underprivileged. They are exposed to higher workloads than their male counterparts and scarcely have access to education, health care, employment, and other source of income. The Labor Market Assessment (LMA) revealed that, in Pakistan, the male and female percentages of paid labor participation are 41% and 17% respectively (Khan, 2015).

However, in the previous two decades, Pakistan has enacted certain laws that are specifically pro-women in nature and challenge gender-based discrimination (Alam, 2021). Pakistani society is still in the process of evolution, of which the constitution of the country is evidence that establishes the basis for the equal status of every citizen. After the acknowledgment of the factors which are impeding the protection of women's rights, certain laws have been enacted and the process of legal reformation is still in process (Rehman, 2024). Notwithstanding the significant progress made by women activists since Pakistan's inception, particularly in response to the discriminatory laws of Zia's regime, a truly democratic and safe Pakistan for women, where human rights are fully enforced, remains an elusive goal (Noreen, 2013). Many barriers are still on the way. The rate at which violence against women is taking place is alarming. Discrimination based on sex still exists in jobs, as well as in housing, education, disaster assistance, politics, inheritance, health system, food access, and a variety of other areas (Farrior, 2009).

The situation in Gilgit-Baltistan, being an underprivileged part of Pakistan, is no more an exception. The conservative male-dominated mindset, Cultural hinderances, social barriers, and the harsh geography of the region are making the lives of women more miserable in this region. Men's decisions still have a significant impact on women's lives, limiting their potential (Murtaza, 2012). However, unlike the pro women legislation at the federal level, the government of Gilgit-Baltistan has shown carelessness towards women's empowerment. The Gilgit-Baltistan assembly has not only shown negligible contribution in legislating and implementing pro women laws but also failed to provide any adequate economic opportunities and resources to women (Khan, 2015).

Nevertheless, to some extent, Gilgit-Baltistan is also witnessing a gradual development of pro-women legislation, especially regarding women's freedom to work, at the local level - the quantity and pace of which are insufficient. Locally, The Government of Gilgit-Baltistan Order 2018 and The Gilgit-Baltistan Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2013, are the two mother legal sources for the protection of Women's Rights in the region. Though the implementation of these laws is often hindered by traditional norms and societal resistance, they are the footsteps to pro-women

legislation. Women's access to legal recourse is further complicated by limited awareness and resources, leaving many vulnerable to exploitation.

This work aims to analyze the public's perception about the major hindrances to women's right to work in Gilgit-Baltistan. The study specifically highlights the crucial social and cultural challenges women have to face while adopting and continuing any profession in Gilgit-Baltistan. This work also explores pro-women laws in Gilgit-Baltistan, which aim at facilitating equal employment opportunities and maintaining a conducive work environment for women at the workplace.

Research Objectives

- **To assess the** socio-cultural factors in Gilgit-Baltistan that contribute to the marginalization and oppression of women in the fields, including the influence of traditional norms, social barriers, and the institutional factors of organizations in the region.
- **To examine\explore** the existing national and local legal frameworks aimed at protecting women's rights to freedom of profession in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Research Questions

What are the socio-cultural challenges the women of Gilgit-Baltistan face in the way of exercising their right to work?

What National and Local pro-women laws, which specifically related to women's right to work, are at play in Gilgit-Baltistan?

Literature Review

The issue of gender inequality is highly researched in academic studies and professional practice. Zaiats (2024) argues that the male and female disparity is the most ancient form of social injustice, hence, it is desirable to identify the essential components which contribute to gender inequality and women's rights protection. Important elements of gender inequality and women's rights can be categorized into four major parts, i.e. inequality in education and social conditions; inequality in participation in the economy and the labor market; inequality in the expansion of political rights and opportunities; and inequality in health protection. The study suggests implementing gender-oriented reforms to increase women's legal empowerment (Zaiats, 2024).

On the same footing Qaisrani (2016) asserts, comprehending the root causes that lead to violence against women is more important than the mere understanding of the extent of such violence. The patriarchal culture, societal norms, traditions, religious misinterpretations, quality of education, feudal mindset, and lack of access to justice are the major instigators of violence against women (Qaisrani, 2016). To understand the level of women's empowerment, it is crucial to understand how women's rights are legally framed. (Weiss, 2012).

In Pakistan since its inception, major legal developments regarding women's rights have taken place. In 1961, women empowerment made significant headway via the Muslim Family Law Ordinance; however, the progress was halted by the discriminatory regulations of the Zia regime. In addition, the Women Protection Act 2006 and various other pro-women laws have also contributed to the empowerment of women legally. Yet, despite this sufficient legislation, violence, harassment, and many other discriminations against women still exist, which owes much to their ineffective implementation (Noreen, 2013).

The challenges for the effective implementation of pro-women laws have been further elaborated by Muneer (2017) by categorizing them into two major groups; Intrinsic challenges and Extrinsic challenges. Intrinsic challenges are those that are inherent in human nature, arising from an individual's characteristics and disposition, which force men to adopt aggressive and harsh attitudes towards women, disrupting the process of legal protection. In contrast, extrinsic factors are those challenges that impact a person from outside like culture, religion, society, and environment. Effective implementation of current legislation is undermined extrinsically by bad media depictions and institutional prejudices and by informal justice systems. The fragmented legal environment resulting from the coexistence of Islamic, traditional, and state laws also made the legal protections less effective. There is a need for comprehensive reforms that encompass the legal as well as cultural and religious dimensions to curb the injustices against women (Muneer, 2017).

(Alam, 2021) draw attention to the disparity between existing laws and their implementation in Punjab Province. Women still experience widespread violence notwithstanding the legal advancements against forced marriages, harassment, honor killings, and domestic abuse. The study highlights the legal

gaps and enforcement issues. It emphasizes the need for more effective implementation and additional legislation. Apart from Punjab, Sindh Assembly has proved itself to be the most progressive, in the context of enacting pro laws in Pakistan (Rehman, 2024).

According to (Zubair, 2023), besides the implementation challenges, there are also legal lacuna in the legal framework of Pakistan. Throughout Pakistan, there are many parallel justice setups to the formal system with different names e.g. Panchayats, and Jirgas. These setups are male-dominated and generally have anti-women mindsets. Besides, there exist gender-based discriminatory laws, the most prominent among which are the concepts of Qisas and Diyat allowing pardoning of the accused which is generally misused in honor killing cases. Some of the evidence law provisions are also discriminatory, making the testimony of a woman less valuable. The Guardian and Wards Act of 1890 also discriminates against women by giving precedence to the father of a minor in cases of guardianship.

(Hussain, 2020), while evaluating the prevalence of domestic violence in Gilgit-Baltistan found domestic violence in GB highly prevalent (88.8%). The study revealed that, of the many forms of abuse, psychological abuse (69.4%) was the most common, followed by physical abuse (37.5%) and sexual assault. Zaeem yasin (2023), while analyzing the challenges faced by women journalist in Gilgit-Baltistan concludes that gender discrimination is not only limited to the society but also within the organizational structures where they work. In the fields, they face harassment in the form of biased remarks about their bodies, abusive words, unwarranted staring and blackmails. Sexual Harassment at the work places is the hallmark of disproportionate power distribution within a patriarchal system where women's bodies, profession, employments and careers are controlled by the men (Zaeem Yasin, 2023).

History of legal framework in Gilgit-Baltistan

Back to 1947, as soon as the people of Gilgit-Baltistan got rid of the Dogra rulers, they decided to accede themselves with Pakistan. Intriguingly, Pakistan merged the region with its North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and announced the promulgation of the Frontier Crimes Regulation as the first legal framework for the region. In November 1970, the military government under Yahya Khan introduced an Advisory Council for Northern Areas (Iftikhar, 2020). However, FCR still remained in force.

FCR was ultimately abolished by the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (Ullah, 2021). For the first time, political, judicial, and administrative reforms were introduced on a large scale by Bhutto in 1975 through the Northern Areas Council Legal Framework Order. This was further intensified by Benazir Bhutto during her second term of premiership via Legal Framework Order (LFO) 1994.

Under these legal frameworks, there was a lack of any democratic setup that could give favor to the consent and will of the people of the region. Political as well as judicial powers were squeezed into the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas (KANA). Hence, the rights and perks enjoyed by other citizens of Pakistan were not conferred on the people of Gilgit-Baltistan (Mahmud, 2008).

In this regard, the Supreme Court of Pakistan gave a landmark judgment on May 28, 1999 on the constitutional status of Gilgit-Baltistan in the *Al Jihad* trust case. It observed "People of Northern Areas are citizens of Pakistan for all intents and purposes and like other citizens of Pakistan have the right to invoke any of the fundamental rights and are liable to pay taxes and other levies competently imposed. Said people are also entitled to participate in the governance of their area and to have an independent judiciary to enforce, inter alia, the fundamental rights."

The Supreme Court gave the Federation of Pakistan the necessary administrative and legislative actions to guarantee that the people of the Northern Areas exercise their fundamental rights (Holden, 2019). This decision assured the people of Gilgit-Baltistan that, like any other citizen of Pakistan, they are legally entrusted with the fundamental rights, including freedom of speech, freedom of faith, the equality of all people, the freedom of association, the freedom of trade, business, or profession (Hong, 2012).

After this decision of the Supreme court, endeavors have been made by various governments to address the conundrum of the legal framework of the region. In 2007, Military Ruler General Pervaiz Musharraf introduced a package by amending the Legal Framework Order 1999. The Legislative Council was upgraded as the Legislative Assembly (Mahmud, 2008). However, there was no major development in this regard until the government announced the GB Self-Governance ordinance 2009, which was later replaced by GB order 2018.

The Gilgit-Baltistan (Empowerment and Self-Governance) Order, 2009 and Women's Rights

The first genuine work for the empowerment of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan was carried out in 2009 by the Pakistan People's Party government. The package was named "Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009" (Iftikhar, 2020). In February 2018, the Federal Government approved the Gilgit-Baltistan Order 2018, which replaced the Self-Governance Order 2009 (Holden, 2019). However, the order was suspended by the Supreme Appellate Court Gilgit-Baltistan in July 2018 on the petition of a Council's member, where he asserted that the order should not be introduced before the completion of their current tenure. However, the order was restored later on by the Supreme Court of Pakistan (Joshi, 2019).

As for as fundamental rights are concerned, there are no differences in the provisions of the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self Governance Order 2009 and Gilgit-Baltistan Order 2018. The Gilgit-Baltistan Order 2018 provides multiple provisions regarding women's rights. Section 18 of the order ensures all citizens their "right to enter upon any lawful profession or occupation, and to conduct any lawful trade or business. Similarly, section 17 deals with the equal status of every citizen before the law. It renders all citizens "equal before the law" and "entitled to equal protection under the law". It further states that "there shall be no discrimination on the basis of gender". The article also specifically refers to women, asserts "nothing in this section shall prevent the Government from making any special provision for the protection of women and children".

Section 28 prohibits discrimination on the basis of "race, religion, caste, sex or place of birth," regarding any public entertainment or resort. Section 29 safeguards women against discrimination in the service of Gilgit-Baltistan. It states that "No citizen otherwise qualified for appointment in the service of Gilgit-Baltistan, shall be discriminated against in respect of any such appointment on the ground only of race, religion, caste or gender". This order also set 6 reserved seats for women in the Legislative assembly of 33.

The Gilgit Baltistan protection against harassment of women at the workplace Act 2013 (ACT NO. I OF 2013)

The United Nations General Assembly enacted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 in order to safeguard fundamental rights, especially those of women and children. The General Assembly subsequently enacted resolution 48/104 on the Elimination of Violence and Harassment Against Women. Article 2 of the declaration states that sexual harassment is forbidden in workplaces, educational institutions, and other places. Article 4 of the declaration suggests each state to implement preventive measures and impose administrative, civil, or criminal sanctions should be imposed to end violence against women (Razi, 2015). Similarly, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on December 18, 1979. According to Article 11 of the Convention,

state parties must take all necessary steps to end discrimination against women in the workplace in order to guarantee gender equality. According to article 11 (a), everyone has the inalienable right to work, and article 11 (f) guarantees everyone the right to health and safety protection at work.

Singla, N., & Kumar, M. (2014). The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 in India: An Analysis.

In compliance with these recommendations, Pakistan has taken significant legislative measures, one among which is the enactment of "The Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010" in March 2010. Workplace harassment has now been declared an offence a crime. This act is primarily aimed at forbidding sexual harassment at the workplace. It defines harassment as "any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favors or other verbal or written communication or physical conduct of a sexual nature or sexually demeaning attitudes, causing interference with work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment". The act obliges all organizations to form an "Inquiry Committee" "for investigating complaints concerning harassment cases. It provides provisions for the punishments. Employers who fail to comply with may also be fined. The act also establishes an "Ombudsperson" in Gilgit-Baltistan to adjudicate appeals from the organizational inquiry committee and to enforce decisions. The ultimate aim of the act is to create a safe, inclusive, and harassment-free environment for women at workplaces.

Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed (qualitative and quantitative) research method to comprehensively analyze the status of women's freedom to profession and employment in Gilgit-Baltistan. Both primary and secondary sources have been used for data collection. Primarily, the opinion of 412 respondents from Gilgit-Baltistan has been gathered via structured questionnaire circulation. Simple Random Sampling method has been used in sample selection, with representation from each district of Gilgit-Baltistan. However, the two major cities, Gilgit and Skardu, are the primary targets due to their vast population and working opportunities for women as compared to others. This helped to determine the actual hindrances in the way of women's employment and the challenges that women face while getting into any profession or at workplaces.

The Likert Scale Method has been used while designing the questionnaire, so that the opinions of the respondents could be measured. In order to gauge the intensity of each of the responses of the respondents, all the questions contain a Five-point scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Besides, this study also focuses on a systematic literature review of existing research papers, pro-women laws or provisions, and reports related to women's rights in Gilgit-Baltistan. This approach facilitates an in-depth understanding of women's socio-cultural challenges and explores the legal framework protecting their rights in Gilgit-Baltistan.

The questionnaire consists of four sections: i) General perception of women's rights to work in Gilgit-Baltistan, ii) Social Barriers to women's employment, iii) Cultural factors that influence women's employment and iv) Institutional and workplace factors

Results Demographic Statistics of the Respondents.

As the Simple Random Sampling method is used to gauge public perception about women's rights to work, responses were received from the following demographic categories:

The structure questionnaire was shared online with 500 survey samples and 412 responses were received. As shown in Table 1, out of the total 412 respondents, the majority were male, with a frequency of 294, while the remaining respondents were female, with a frequency of 118.

Table 2: District-wise statistics of the respondents

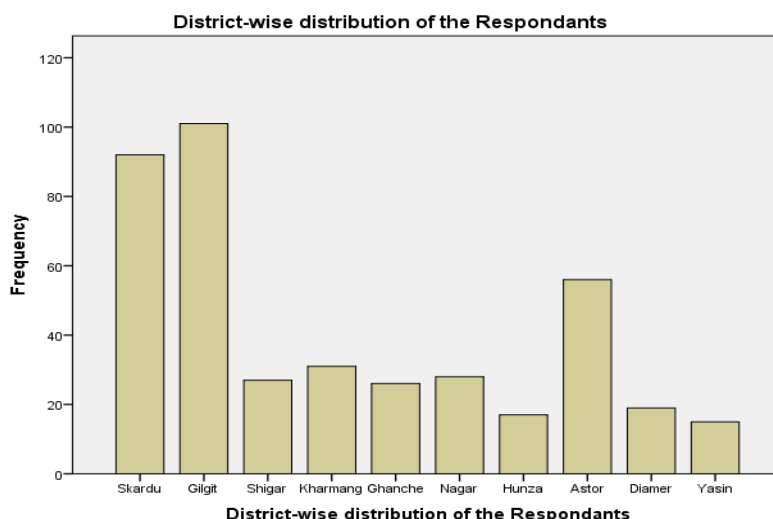
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	294	71.4	71.4	71.4
Female	118	28.6	28.6	100.0
Total	412	100.0	100.0	

(Source: Survey conducted by the author)

Gilgit-Baltistan has three divisions: Gilgit, Baltistan, and Diamer. The Gilgit and Baltistan divisions each encompass four districts. Gilgit Division includes the districts Gilgit, Hunza, Nagar, and Ghizer, while Baltistan Division comprises the districts of Skardu, Shigar, Kharmang, and Ghanche. In contrast to these two divisions, the Diamer Division has only two districts: Diamer and Astor (Hussain A. K., 2022).

Although the Random Sampling Method was used for population selection, representation from each district of Gilgit-Baltistan was ensured. However, the two major cities (Gilgit and Skardu) had the highest responses, with frequencies of 101 (24.5%) and 92 (22.3%), respectively, as demonstrated in Graph 1. From the Diamer Division, the highest number of responses was received from the Astor district, accounting for 13.6% of the total responses.

Graph 1: District-wise distribution of the respondents



(Source: Survey conducted by author)

As far as the employment status of the respondents, the majority of the respondents were students, with a frequency of 196 out of the total, followed by employed respondents, who numbered 111. Details of the respondents' employment status are demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Employment status of the respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Employed	111	26.9	26.9	26.9
Unemployed	58	14.1	14.1	41.0
Self-employed	47	11.4	11.4	52.4
Student	196	47.6	47.6	100.0
Total	412	100.0	100.0	

(Source: Survey conducted by the author)

General perception about women's right to work in GB

The first section of the questionnaire was related to people's general perceptions regarding the status of women's employment in Gilgit-Baltistan. Out of 412 respondents, around 65% agreed with the statement that women have the right to work outside their homes in the region, and it is generally accepted there. Similarly, 68% of the respondents were of the

opinion that, in Gilgit-Baltistan, Workplaces are safe and inclusive for females. On the question about recent developments regarding women's rights to work in the area, 77% of the respondents reacted positively and opined that the perception of women's rights to work in GB has become more positive in the previous few years.

Social constraints on women's employment

The second section of the questionnaire consisted of seven questions structured to gauge the perception of the population regarding social constraints on women's right to work in Gilgit-Baltistan. As shown in Table 4, 58% (with the frequency of 239 out of 407) of the population concurred with the statement that family expectations or responsibilities cause to restrain women from employment, while 22% disagreed. On the same footing, 60% of the population were of the opinion that society expects women to prioritize marriage and household duties over working as an employee in any organization.

Table 4: Family expectations or responsibilities prevent women from working.

Valid	407
Missing	5
Mean	3.4595
Median	4.0000

(Source: Survey conducted by the author)

However, for the question regarding support and acceptability of working women by their families, 58 percent of respondents held the view that women are fully supported and accepted by their families. 25% preferred not to respond to this question, and the rest reacted negatively. On enquiring whether working women face social stigma or negative labelling in Gilgit-Baltistan, the responses were almost equally divided. 37% endorsed this statement, 36% dissented, while 25% remained neutral.

Another social factor that was fully recognized by the population was the fear of harassment at workplaces (Table 5). 52% of the population believed that the fear of harassment is a major social restraint for women in seeking and continuing employment. 25% disagreed with this argument, while the rest remained neutral.

Table 5: Fear of workplace harassment prevents women from seeking and continuing employment.

Valid	407
Missing	5
Mean	3.3243
Median	4.0000

(Source: Survey conducted by the author)

Cultural Barriers

Third section of the questionnaire contained 6 structured questions about the cultural factors that may potentially constrain women's employment. Regarding the traditional belief about women of being a weak creature mentally and physically, the majority of the respondents

were convinced that this belief play a role in discouraging women from seeking employment (Table 6).

Table 6: Traditional beliefs (e.g. women being a weak gender physically and mentally) discourage women from seeking employment.

Valid	409
Missing	03
Mean	3.2445
Median	4.0000

(Source: Survey conducted by the author)

On the question concerning the patriarchal mindset, one of the most important cultural factors, the overwhelming majority of the respondents reacted that the decision of whether women can work is influenced by the male elder of the family (Table 7).

Table 7: Male elders of the family influence decisions about whether women can work.

Valid	407
Missing	5
Mean	3.7150
Median	4.0000

(Source: Survey conducted by the author)

Another dogmatic belief of certain jobs, like army, police and politics being considered inappropriate for women was mostly recognized by the respondents. 64.5 % of the respondents were of the opinion that, in Gilgit-Baltistan women are considered inappropriate for these jobs due to the long-standing traditional belief (Table 8).

Table 8: Certain jobs (e.g., police, army, politics) are considered inappropriate for women

Valid	407
Missing	5
Mean	3.6634
Median	4.0000

(Source: Survey conducted by the author)

Similarly, greater part of the respondents were convinced that working women considered as a direct challenge to local culture. Similarly, they also concurred with the statement that the notion of family Honor impedes women from freely exercising their right to work.

Another cultural factor acknowledged by the respondents was the notion of family honor. 52 % thought that this notion restricts women from pursuing employment, 21% remained impartial while the rest disagreed (Table 9).

Table 9: The concept of family honor is used to restrict women's employment.

Valid		407
Missing		5
Mean		3.3415
Median		4.0000

(Source: Survey conducted by author)

Organisational and workplace factors

The last portion (5 questions) of the questionnaire was related to workplace factors in Gilgit-Baltistan, which influence women's right to work. Concerning the question of whether there are adequate working opportunities for females in Gilgit-Baltistan, the majority of the respondents answered negatively, and they thought that the job opportunities are not enough (Table 10).

Table 10: There are enough job opportunities for women in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Valid	407
Missing	5
Mean	2.8993
Median	3.0000

(Source: Survey conducted by the author)

Two questions in this part were related to discrimination between women and men in recruitment, promotion, and wage payment, etc. 33% of the respondents do not concur with the statement that women in Gilgit-Baltistan are treated equally to men in recruitment, promotions at workplaces. However, 45% thought that there was equal treatment. On the question regarding wage payment, 43% is of the opinion that there is discrimination in wage payment for doing the same work. Women are paid less than men for similar work (Table 11).

Table 11: Gender based discrimination in recruitment, promotion, and payment at workplaces.

Valid	408
Missing	4
Mean	3.1054
Median	3.0000

(Source: Survey conducted by the author)

Discussion

As evidenced by the results, it seems that the acceptance of female employment is growing in the region, especially in recent years, the development has been significant. On the other hand, the long-standing patriarchal principles and traditional biased gender-based work distribution is also posing a threat to women's right to work. This contention between the progressive and retrogressive attitudes means that the region is in a transition state as far as gender dynamics is concerned. Modernisation and education are reshaping the dynamics, yet social challenges and cultural barriers are the main hurdles in this way.

An important insight from this study is the complex nature of family support to working women. The majority of the respondents said that women's employment is generally accepted in Gilgit-Baltistan and families approve of their right to work. However, this support coexists

with the expectation of prioritizing marriage and domestic duties by women. This is a dual and paradoxical situation. This implies that the support and acceptance for women's employment is conditional in the region, influenced by the traditional gender-based norms. This contradiction draws attention to distinguish between just abstract approval of some right by the society and practical support for their workforce participation.

One of the paramount hurdles for women's employment in Gilgit-Baltistan is the cultural factors. The strong observance of the patriarchal decision-making structure, the notion of family honor, and the traditional beliefs concerning gender-based work distribution highly influence women's employment. Male elders of the family decide whether women in that family can work or not. There is also the deep-rooted notion about women being an infirm creature, both physically and mentally. This further caused the men to keep their women away from certain jobs that demand physical and mental strength, for example, police, army, politics, etc. From this, one can easily predict how occupational discrimination is culturally sanctioned, limiting women's career choices and economic empowerment. These findings well align with the broader literature on women's employment in Pakistan.

The turmoil created by the social and cultural barriers to women's employment is further exacerbated by the limited job opportunities for women on the one hand and gender-based discrimination in the workplace at the other. As reflected by the survey data, even if a women managed to get herself in the job market despite the huge challenges, she has to face discrimination in wage payments and many more unequal treatments at the workplace. Such discriminatory activities at the workplace indicate the necessity of targeted policy interventions besides the efforts to shift cultural norms.

Given these findings, this study contributes to the existing literature regarding the status of women rights, especially their right to work, by highlighting the major social and cultural hurdles in the way of women's employment. The findings of the survey quantitatively provide an understanding of the general public perception about women's rights to work in Gilgit-Baltistan on the one hand, and highlight the key obstacles to women's employment on the other. However, there remains limitation of self-reported data and the gender imbalance in respondents, which suggests caution in generalizing these findings. Further studies overcoming these limitations with more broader perspectives would provide a deeper understanding the status of women right to work in the region.

Besides, a legal framework exists in the region to protect women's rights, though it's application is often obstructed by these cultural and social barriers. Engagement of community leaders, women employees, families, and employers in dialogues regarding gender roles will help to bridge the gap between the existence and application of these laws.

In addition by addressing the gender based discrimination at workplaces and making the work environment more inclusive for women would encourage more female labour-force and help bridge the gap between progressive attitudes and actual workplace participation. Ultimately, it would not be possible at all to transform the socio-cultural landscape without efforts at individual, community, and policy levels to ensure that women's right to work are just recognized abstractly, rather than realized in practice.

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