



# WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN TEXTBOOKS IN PAKISTAN: IMPACT ON CAREER AND STUDY CHOICES OF FEMALE STUDENTS ENROLLED IN THE POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES

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## Abstract

The present study explores factors that contribute to the making of career and study choices of female students enrolled in postgraduate programmes in Pakistan. This study collected data from students enrolled in Masters and MPhil programmes using a focus group discussion data collection strategy. The focus of data analysis was to unearth reasons given by the participants of their career choices and discover factors that influenced their career choice. The focus group discussions revealed that family and female representation in textbooks were the main reasons for their choices. Female role models that could inspire them to select a particular profession were missing in the textbooks. To address this gap and omission and to help female students in making better study and career choices, this study suggests that the textbook regime in Pakistan should make more space for female-centered content and present to pupils the life stories of successful women in different fields.

## Keywords

Textbook representation, career choices, study choices, women role models, women's education in Pakistan

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## Introduction

It is a well-documented fact that Pakistani society is a male-dominated society, where men are given more importance than women in all spheres of life, be it social, cultural, religious, and political. The lives of the majority of Pakistanis (97% of Pakistan's population declared Islam as their religion) are shaped by Islam and the State of Pakistan is responsible for the preservation and propagation of Islam in Pakistan. The Constitution of Pakistan stated that "Whereas sovereignty over the entire Universe belongs to Almighty Allah alone, and the authority to be exercised by the people of Pakistan within the limits prescribed by Him is a sacred trust" (GoP, 2012, p. 1) thus setting the foundations of Pakistan's structure and system of governance. The document continues to state that the State will ensure that the principles of democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance and social justice, as enunciated by Islam, shall be fully observed"; the State will create an environment to enable Muslims to "order their lives in the individual and collective spheres in accordance with the teachings and requirements of Islam as set out in the Holy Quran and Sunnah" The Preamble of this document also shows that the State is aware of the existence of non-Muslims in Pakistan, and the constitution framers would like to protect them. For this, they suggested that "adequate provision shall be made for the minorities freely to profess and practice their religions and develop their cultures" (GoP 2012, p. 1).

The most recent education policy, approved and adopted by the Government of Pakistan in 2009, presented the following objectives of the education conceived and implemented in Pakistan.

Our education system must provide quality education to our children and youth to enable them to realize their individual potential and contribute to the development of society and nation, creating a sense of Pakistani nationhood, the concepts of tolerance, social justice, democracy, their regional and local culture and history based on the basic ideology enunciated in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (GoP 2009, p. 17).

At the same time, acknowledging the pluralistic aspect of Pakistani society, this policy also declared that the State's education system should be framed "to promote national cohesion by respecting each other's faith and religion and cultural and ethnic diversity" (GoP 2009, p. 17). The State, thus, perceives the people (men and women) of Pakistan living in a harmonious relationship in the patriarchal structured society. This so-called harmonious relationship is entrenched in biases against women, such as religious, cultural, social and political prohibitions imposed upon them, thus limiting their complete integration in Pakistan's religious, cultural, social and political life.

### Islamization and Education in Pakistan

The Islamization of every aspect of Pakistani society, including education and curriculum, started in the late 1970s, and this policy resulted in several changes in the main document, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, affecting all aspects of social, cultural, legal and political life in Pakistan. This Constitution also declares who will be considered a Muslim and a non-Muslim. A Muslim is someone,

who believes in the unity and oneness of Almighty Allah, in the absolute and unqualified finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him), the last of the prophets, and does not believe in, or recognize as a prophet or religious reformer, any person who claimed or claims to be a prophet, in any sense of the word or of any description whatsoever, after Muhammad (peace be upon him) (GoP 2012, p. 155).

While “a person of the Qadiani group or the Lahore group (who call themselves ‘Ahmadis,’ or by any other name)” (GoP 2012, p. 156) should be considered a non-Muslim and will be treated as a religious minority group in Pakistan. The other religious minorities are Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, and Zoroastrians or the Parsis, Buddhists and those belonging to any of the scheduled castes. The Constitution also allocated a certain number of seats to religious minorities, both in the National and the Provincial Legislative assemblies. The Constitution framers also treated women (Muslim women), as they treated the minorities, and allocated a certain number of seats for them, ensuring their representation in the National and the Provincial assemblies (GoP 2012).

Zia’s era created hurdles in changing the content and outlook of textbooks when the textbook regimes around the world were recognizing women and giving them more space in stories and texts found in the textbook and making the textbook production more inclusive. The textbook writers added more women in their stories and textbook regimes became added women in their pool of textbook writers, reviewers, approvers and editors. The efforts on the part of the textbook regimes, around the world, were insufficient because many disciplines and professions still remained male-centric and male-dominated with little female representation (Junk, Romeijn, & Rasmussen 2020; Perez, 2019; Sarseke 2018).

The Islamization process initiated by Zia also influenced curriculum and textbooks, as suggested by Afzal (2015). She referred to a 1981 directive sent by the University Grants Commission (now known as the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan) to textbook boards, directing them to write textbooks in such a way as to “guide students towards the ultimate goal of Pakistan- the creation of a completely Islamized State” (p.5). The textbook regime in Pakistan is comprised of curriculum bureaus and the textbook boards

constituted by each provincial ministry of education in its domain. The most recent studies (R. Ali & Hussain 2019; Iqbal, Saleem, & Ahmad 2019; Sultan, Shah, & Fazal 2019; Waqar & Ghani 2019) highlighted how the textbook regimes in Pakistan perceived women in Pakistani society and ascribed to them stereotypical roles in different stories found in textbooks. These findings were not different from the earlier studies that analysed textbooks (Aziz 1993; Mirza 2006; Nayyar & Salim 2005) in spite of more women taking up the role of textbook writers and editors but still the leading roles were given to male writers and editors.

### **Gender Representation in Textbooks**

Gender equality became the focus of the international community when the World Declaration on 'Education for All' (UNESCO 1990, 2000) reinforced the importance of education for women. The 'Education for All' (UNESCO, 1990) focused more on quantity, which included access to basic education, asking its member states to focus on providing more educational opportunities to increase women's literacy rate; While the latter, the *Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments* (UNESCO 2000), focused more on ensuring gender equality, women empowerment, and provision of equality of opportunities for women in all areas, especially in the area of Science and Technology.

The researchers had tried to trace the roots of the underrepresentation and stereotypical representation of women in textbooks to Zia's drive to Islamize curriculum but a few studies conducted in the 1980s (Anwar 1982; Zeenatunnisa 1989) found that women were underrepresented not only in the stories and texts found in textbooks but also in the textbook production process. Anwar's (1982) study underlined gender bias in the textbooks, found that only 22% of school textbooks published by different textbook boards in Pakistan had female authors, comprising 6% books by female-only authors while the remaining 16% books were co-authored and lead by the male writer. He also identified that most of the female characters were shown doing domestic chores like cooking, cleaning, child-rearing and caring, or working as domestic help or as seasonal labour in the agriculture sector, picking cotton and fruit all non-occupational type of work. On the other hand, the texts provided to the male pupils a broad array of occupational avenues to explore their potentials by presenting a variety of categories of jobs and professions women ns. This, Anwar, argued, restricts the occupational and intellectual development of female pupils. This harmful misrepresentation of women, causing restricted choices for female students, however, did not change. Zeenatunnisa (1989) found that the percentage of female characters in the textbooks, written both in English and Urdu languages, was as low and discriminatory. Zeenatunnisa also emphasised the gender-based categoriation and sexual divisions of allocation of work, depicting women working within their houses

(household chores); men, on the other hand, work outside the house, performing a wide range of both physical and intellectual activities. The females working outside the house were shown working as teachers and nurses, reinforcing and extending the very conservative and patriarchal perception of women as caregivers and nurturers.

The Aurat Foundation (1989; Jafri 1994; Shafi n.d.), a non-profit body for a critical assessment of women's needs and for finding efficient and practical strategies to address these needs through women-participatory strategies, remains constantly engaged in analysing textbook contents to evaluate fair and equitable female representation in the textbooks. The findings of the wider studies of the Aurat Foundation, however, are not different from the earlier studies. Indeed, a persistent pattern of misconstrued perception of women and the potential of women remains the hallmark of textbook production. A detailed study by Mirza (2006) showed a small percentage increase in the number of women textbook writers, reviewers and editors. She also observed that though the textbook writers were willing to assign professional roles to women, however, discrimination against women by reinforcing sexual division of labour remains persistent. Thus, women, in these textbooks, mostly remained confined to education, health, and farm-related jobs (Mirza 2006). The latest researchers (Adil & Yasin 2018; Aghaa, Syed, & Mirani 2018; R. Ali & Hussain 2019; Iqbal et al. 2019; Sultan et al. 2019) have found the following regarding female representation in the textbooks in Pakistan:

1. "female gender representation was much below the desired standards of gender equality" (p. 390).
2. "women are portrayed in traditional 3Cs (Cooking, Cleaning, Childrearing)" (Sultan et al. p. 67).
3. "females are excluded in several ways. The main characters are often assigned to boys; the major themes in textbook portray boys/men; important roles in text are assigned to boys/men and finally major responsibilities are attached to boys/men... boys seem to be engaged in more important masculine tasks" (R. Ali & Hussain, 2019 p. 96).
4. "Girls were highlighted to be involved in gender segregated activities fit for women according to the standards of the Pakistani society. The adjectives used for women too were sexist, conservative and showed gender bias, reinforces the existing patriarchal structure of the country" (R. Ali & Hussain 2019, p. 96).
5. "There is an unequal representation of both genders in the said textbook where males are shown in dominant and influential positions whereas, females have been shown in comparatively dependent and inferior positions. Thus, the content of the textbook seems to be systematically manipulated in favour of male" (Ahmad & Shah p. 17).

6. “men are the ones considered wise, brave and competitive...Men are portrayed as being physically and mentally energetic, superior in strength and economy, and more technological than women” (Aghaa et al. 2018, p. 22).
7. “The textbooks... are not gender sensitive and lack the meaningful representation of women in the public domain” (Aghaa et al. 2018, p. 22).
8. “There is a need to incorporate gender awareness in the contents of the textbooks that may enhance gender identity, human rights, gender equality; women empowerment and reduced violence against women” (Adil & Yasin 2018, p. 52).

### **Gender Construction in School Textbooks**

Gender roles that are portrayed and reinforced through teaching material, shape pupils' thinking and behavioural patterns regarding their roles in society, in community, and in their homes. This analysis of gender roles and their impact on pupils' behaviour is founded in the social learning theory (Bandura 1977, 2001), which explains psychosocial development under personal, behavioural, and environmental domains. The pupils imitate the roles portrayed in textbooks, in different settings, home, work, and leisure (Foroutan, 2012; Litosseliti 2006) because they view textbooks as authoritative, presenting the authentic and correct information (Lee & Collins 2010; Mustapha 2012). They accept, absorb, and assimilate the gender roles and their description presented in the form of written texts and images. The textbook content studied and learned during schooling years produce and sustain the ideas about their society, social values, social structure, and equality (social, gender and economic). The textbook content also creates biases towards minority and weak groups in society, including women, as these ideas stay with the pupils for the rest of their lives (Amare; Mukundan & Nimehchisal 2008).

Textbook writers use different strategies to create and reinforce gender biases. For example, the frequency of male to female characters mentioned in any text or the textbook (Mirza 2006) suggesting male dominance in social, cultural, and business settings; the usage of language lexicon, for example, linguistic sexism through using males-as-norm making women invisible and thus, diminishing their presence in the textbook; through using masculine pronoun and the usage of words as a postman, fireman, foreman, policeman, chairman; adding suffixes to nouns to highlight professions, as actress, waitress, authoress, stewardess though many of these words are being discouraged and replaced with the neutral vocabulary, as actor, writer, inventor, author, etc. (Lee & Collins 2008; Pauwels & Winter 2006); another form of creating gender biases is arranging and placing male terms before female terms, showing the secondary status of women (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013; Stokoe & Weatheral 2002), for example, Adam and Eve, Romeo and Juliet, Mr. and Mrs. etc.

## Research Method

This study needed data from female postgraduate students, and there were two options available to the researcher, individual interviews with the participants, and a group interview. The time constraint on the part of the participants made the researcher select the FGD method. It is defined as “a qualitative research method and data collection technique in which a selected group of people discusses a given topic or issue in-depth, facilitated by a professional, external moderator” (van Eeuwijk & Angehrn 2017, p. 1). This data collection technique enables a researcher to “identify and clarify shared knowledge among groups and communities, which would otherwise be difficult to obtain with a series of individual interviews” (van Eeuwijk & Angehrn 2017, p. 1). FGD also allows participants to participate in an open discussion, to support and present her/his opinion, which might be different from the other participants. There are possibilities of heated exchanges and debates between and amongst participants, but the debate and heated exchanges also provide rich data to a researcher (Krueger & Casey 2014; Liamputtong 2011; van Eeuwijk & Angehrn 2017)

I would add some details about the efficacy of the use of the FG in my research as this research aims to study students' perceptions through their voices. The FGD makes the data collection efficient and easier from a larger number of participants, and it is also a 'highly standardized' data collection (Nancarrow, Vir, & Barker 2005). FGD is also chosen by the researcher as it enables participants to describe their ideas closer to their 'naturally occurring' circumstances than an ordinary research interview circumstances (Denzin & Lincoln 2018). This method proved advantageous because the interaction between and amongst the interviewees would produce rich information, especially when the interviewees are “similar and cooperative with each other” (Creswell & Poth, 2018 p. 231) as some of the interviewees might be reluctant to provide information if interviewed one-on-one basis.

The role of the moderator in FGD is critical as his/her role can ensure that the collected data is rich because of the “flexible, iterative, reflective” (van Eeuwijk & Angehrn, 2017 p. 5), nature of the moderator as she/he comes prepared with a well-framed research question and also because of her/his ability to modify questions and formulate sub-questions, if needed, during the session. The skills and experience of the moderator of FGD can change the quality of data as his skills of “thinking, listening and managing time at the same time” (Lewis 2003) and ensuring a balanced and inclusive discussion between and amongst group members. The moderator should share the discussion template and rules before starting the session and avoid dominating the conversation at every stage of the session.

Documenting the FGD data is an essential step as it provides the researcher and the moderator to meet and look at the data analysis phase of the research. The ideal documentation mode is either audio recording or video recording of the session, but for this, the moderator should have permission from the group members. The moderator should adopt the traditional note-taking technique in case of discomfort felt by any of the group members. The moderator should take notes of whatever is being discussed and said without mentioning the names of the participants. The moderator should assign a number to each participant for note-taking purposes.

### **Questions**

The following questions were asked in the focus group discussions,

1. How did they decide to enrol in the degree programme, that is, what factors influence their decision and choice?
2. Will they have chosen a different career choice, if they have found a diverse set of women role models in their textbooks?
3. What changes will you like to see in textbooks about the representation of women, their roles, and responsibilities?

### **Participants and procedure**

The sample of this study was female students enrolled in postgraduate degree programmes (Master and MPhil). The researcher approached both public and private sector universities, but only private sector universities responded and allowed the researcher to meet students and conduct focus group sessions with female students.

### **Sampling**

FGD sampling, as is the case in a qualitative study, 'absolute representativeness' is not desired as other means such as methodological triangulation, systematic analysis is used to validate data. The participants are selected to meet the established criteria of research participants, also called purposive sampling, as the researcher aimed to gather people with common characteristics. For example, enrolment in a particular degree programme is one of the shared characteristics of participants in this study. A group should be consisted of 6 to 12 participants, though smaller groups also work as participants in smaller groups get more time to share ideas and thoughts as compared to those who are part of a bigger group. This study opted for a smaller group, and each group consists of 5 to 6 participants and the participants were divided into eight focus groups.

The researcher aimed for a diverse group of students, that is, to collect data from students belonging to minority groups (religious and ethnic) and also from students

enrolled in diverse degree programmes, that is, enrolled in degree programmes offered by all faculties (science, arts, and humanities, etc.). The researcher wanted to have students from minority groups believing that their perspective, experiences, and background would produce “varying and broad-ranging, yet robust and meaningful results”(van Eeuwijk & Angehrn 2017, p. 7). The participants would also share a sense of belonging and homogeneity due to their shared experiences, as their increased level of comfort with other participants helped them to share their deep experiences but also to “reach some consensus on the subject” (van Eeuwijk & Angehrn 2017, p. 7).

The number of FGD sessions was open to the researcher and the moderator, and it was suggested that the number of sessions could not be decided in advance as the researcher would like to continue talking to the group and letting them speak and share their experiences. The time to stop FGD was explained by the concept of ‘saturation’ explained as “subsequent group discussions no longer provide new insights or outcomes” (van Eeuwijk & Angehrn 2017, p. 7), and “a clear indication that data collection can come to an end” (p. 7).

## **Procedure**

This study adopted the FGD procedures from (HERD 2016), which has systematically organized a research project undertaken using the FGD research method (see Figure 1).

### **Figure 1: Major steps involved in FGDs adopted from (HERD, 2016)**

#### **First Phase: Selecting Research Participants**

This study used HERD (2016, see Figure 1) framework and selected graduate students (enrolled in Master and MPhil programmes) who were willing to participate in this research project. The participants were informed about the objectives of the research project, research questions, and data collection method. The option to select a wide range of participants could not be materialised due to factors, such as, participants’ availability on the campus and the time they could spare for each FGD session. They could not stay longer than their class timings as one of their family members was waiting outside the university, to take them back home after their classes. The number of students who joined this research project was 52 from four universities, two from Lahore, one from Rawalpindi and Karachi. There were eight focus groups each group comprising of 5 to 7 members, depending on the number of research participants from each university (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Details of Research Participants**

University	Number of Participants	Number of Focus Groups
1 (from Lahore)	12	2 (each of 6 members)
2. (from Lahore)	15	2 (one group has 7 members and the other group having 8 members)
3. (from Karachi)	14	2 (two groups each having 7 members each)
4. (from Rawalpindi)	11	2 (one group has 5 members and the other group having 6 members)
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>8</b>

### Second Phase: FGD sessions

There were eight focus groups, and each session of focus group discussion lasted about 30-35 minutes. The Focus group sessions took place on the university premises, and the time for the meeting was decided by the participants, which usually was when they did not have any class. The researcher visited the university as a visitor and met the members of the focus group, and after finding a suitable place, most often a playground, the formal FGD started. The researcher introduced himself and the purpose of the research and shared with them the timeline followed in this research. The participants introduced themselves, other than their names; they also shared information about their family members. The researcher also answered participants' questions about privacy as all participants wanted to remain anonymous.

A list of the latest researchers about women representation in textbooks was shared with the participants (see Table 2) two weeks before the FGD session, and they were suggested to read the Findings section of these studies.

The formal discussion started after the informal introduction, and the researcher started the session by asking the first question, that is, the factors that contributed to their selection of the area of study and their profession. The participants shared the reasons with the group, and this was concluded in 13 minutes. The researcher asked whether the textbooks they read while they were studying in schools and college contributed in any way to the selection of their choices. All of them said 'yes,' and they also gave reasons which are discussed in the Third Phase. The researcher asked students to share their favourite story or character they would like to follow. The participants could not identify any character they would like to follow, except Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah, sister of the Quaid-e-Azam, who was represented as an ideal sister, sacrificed her life for her brother and for her brother's work and mission, that is, Pakistan.

The researcher asked about the female characters they would like to see in textbooks, and the participants struggled to identify women who have excelled in different fields in Pakistan. The researcher suggested some names of famous women in different fields such as Malala Yousafzai, Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, Ayesha Farooq, Muniba Mazari, Asma Jahangir (Late), Hina Jilani, Abida Parveen, Maria Toorpakai, Samina Baig, Maria Umar, Dr. Sania Nishtar, Maliha Lodhi, Tania Aidrus, Ms. Tasnim Aslam, Ms. Saima Saleem, Rubina Saigol, Noreen Durrani, Fatima Bhutto, Kishwar Naheed, Bapsi Sidhwa, Tehmina Durrani, Fahmida Riaz, Fatima Surrayya Bajia, Razia Butt, Bano Qudsia and Parveen Shakir. The participants shared some reservations about including some of the women (Malala Yousafzai, Asma Jahangir and Hina Jilani) because they believed that they were either not the true representative of Pakistani women. Most of the participants did not know many of these women and their work.

**Table 2: List of Studies Shared with the Research Participants**

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Waqar, S., & Ghani, M. (2019). Gender exclusion in textbooks: A comparative study of female representation in provincial ELT textbooks of Pakistan. <i>International Journal of English Linguistics</i> , 9(5), 377-391.
Ali, R., & Hussain, L. (2019). Gender representation in primary level English and Urdu textbooks in Pakistan. <i>Pakistan Journal of Applied Social Sciences</i> , 10, 83-100.
Sultan, R. S., Shah, N., & Fazal, A. (2019). Gender representation in public schools' textbooks of Balochistan. <i>Pakistan Journal of Applied Social Sciences</i> , 9, 55-70.
Iqbal, H. S., Saleem, M., & Ahmad, H. M. (2019). A qualitative study of gender analysis in curriculum at secondary level in Punjab textbooks. <i>Al-Qalam</i> , 24(1), 761-768.
Ali, A., Hassan, S., & Hanan, F. (2019). Propagation of ideologies through textbooks: A study of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa English textbooks. <i>Global Regional Review (GRR)</i> , 4(1), 55-61.
Ahmad, M., & Shah, S. K. (2019). A critical discourse analysis of gender representations in the content of 5th grade English language textbook. <i>International and Multidisciplinary Journal of Social Sciences</i> , 8(1), 1-24.

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For example, none of the participants had heard about Maria Toorpakai, Samina Baig, Maria Umar, and Bapsi Sidhwa, though they have heard about female writers (prose and poetry). This was also discussed in the Third Phase as the researcher asked participants the reasons for not knowing these famous women and their work. The last part of the focus group discussion was how they would like to see the textbook change to make room for more female characters and including successful women in different fields in textbooks. The researcher, at the end of the session, thanked the participants for becoming part of this research project and sharing their views. The researcher ensured the participants that their identity (name, university name, programme they were enrolled in) would not be disclosed to anyone and the recording will be transcribed and shared with the participants

to seek their approval of what was transcribed and whether it reflected what they said in the session.

### **Third Phase: Reporting and Analysis of FGD sessions**

The following themes emerged from the focus group discussions

#### **Family influence**

The family came out as the most influential group dictating participants' choice of their career and their education path, that is, the subjects or the degree they should study. The participants were from the Humanities and Social Sciences faculties, and not a single participant from Science and Technology field agreed to join the focus group session, though the information of focus group discussion was shared with students of all faculties and departments. The participants saw female students enrolled in different Science Programmes, such as Biotechnology, Chemistry, and Biology, but theirs was a minuscule group. They did not know any student enrolled in Mathematics, Physics, and Computer Science programmes reflecting either the invisible existence of female students enrolled in these programmes.

The participants emphasized that the factors contributing to their choice of subject and career were family and their idea of security in numbers, that is, the presence of many females in those professions. The male family members wanted them to pursue a career where they were among other female colleagues and not among many male colleagues. The research asked if they heard it from their family members and all of them responded, 'yes'; their family emphasized joining a profession considered a respectable profession for women because there would be time for the participants to look after their family (husband and children, after marriage) and do all the necessary chores, what Sultan et al. (2019) called "3Cs (Cooking, Cleaning, Childrearing)" (p. 67). A few of the participants believed that this reduced the choices available to them as some of the participants shared their dream, of becoming a lawyer and a social activist, just like Asma Jahangir and Hina Jilani, but family pressure made them choose their current field of study.

#### **Female Representation in Textbooks**

The participants were surprised to hear the names of so many successful women, and they also acknowledged that many of these names were unheard and unknown to them. They agreed with the idea that if they had read stories of successful women in textbooks, working in different fields, especially, Information and Communication Technology, diplomatic services, and Sciences, they would have thought about choosing it as their career. They also believed that some of the names, especially, Malala Yousafzai, though she was given space

in the textbook and the participants knew her story, but they did not consider her a role model for Pakistani women. They considered her an enemy of Pakistan and Islam, a foreign agent, being paid to malign Pakistan and Islam. When probed further on women being represented doing only domestic chores and rearing children only, the participants believed that it was an out of date representation of women, and the textbook regimes should listen to the researchers' findings and include successful Pakistani women from different fields, whether Muslims or non-Muslims in textbooks.

The participants were astounded to read the findings of the research articles shared with them because this was what they read women doing in textbooks during their school years. They believed that the Pakistani education system, especially its textbook regime, had to rethink its narrative of what women do, can do and should do. The participants read the research articles shared with them (Ahmad & Shah 2019; A. Ali, Hassan, & Hanan 2019; R. Ali & Hussain 2019; Sultan et al. 2019; Waqar & Ghani 2019) suggesting that the textbooks "are gender biased" and "there is an unequal representation of both genders" (Ahmad & Shah 2019, p. 17). The two authors rightly observe that,

Thus, the content of the textbook seems to be systematically manipulated in favour of males. This practice is against the fair-treatment principle of both genders. Therefore, special measures should be taken to eliminate gender bias from the textbooks so that we might have a sound society where both genders be treated equally (Ahmad & Shah 2019, p. 17).

The participants also agreed with the suggestions by (Waqar & Ghani 2019) that "the fair representation of the feminine gender... will make the students appreciate the contribution and worth of women as a productive and important component of the society" (p. 390). Ali and Hussain's suggestion (2019) that "to reduce the gender biased attitude in textbooks" the policymakers should revisit the "policies related to education... on urgent basis" (p. 96) was also supported by the participants. The participants were in agreement with the suggestion that to address issues related to women the textbook regime should consult women "while developing the policies and laws regarding education, otherwise, women would be victimized and would be most disadvantaged group in the society" (Sultan et al. 2019).

## **Conclusion**

This study suggests that the textbook regime in Pakistan should be made aware of the fact that the lack of female role models working in different fields in textbooks, is affecting the career and academic choices for women intending to continue their study at the postgraduate level. The presence of these role models will help the patriarchy to see

successful women also contributing to keeping the family together and its socio-economic development. Some of the participants suggested that the textbooks showed that women had done nothing for Pakistan and their contribution to zero in Pakistan's socio-economic development. They wanted to see women working as change-makers in different fields given space in textbooks for all (men and women) to know and appreciate women's contribution to Pakistan's development.

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