



Original Research

Exploring the Experiences of Male Faculty in Gender-Disparate Basic Medical Sciences Faculty: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract.

Objective: The study aimed to explore the experiences of male faculty members currently working in female-dominated basic sciences departments of different private and public medical & dental colleges in Karachi.

Materials and Methods: This qualitative study employed an empirical phenomenological approach and was conducted from January 2021 to 2022. A total of 10 participants were interviewed, ranging from senior lecturers to professors. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were approved by the respondents to ensure clarity and rigor in the study. Three independent researchers conducted inductive data analysis and final themes were decided with consensus among six authors.

Results: Two main themes with three subthemes were generated. Most interviewees agreed that working in female-dominated basic science departments had its advantages. However, most of them still seemed dissatisfied with their workplace. Issues such as gender bias, culturally based privilege abuse, perceived competitiveness among female colleagues, and concerns about female bosses' ability to handle stress and criticism were identified as the main reasons for their dissatisfaction.

Conclusion: Most of the participants were not satisfied with the female-dominant work environment. However, further research is required to eliminate the culture-based issues where society still struggles with accepting female dominance in workplaces.

Keywords: Gender Inequality, Gender Bias, Workplace Abuses, Work-related Stress, Social Dominance.

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1. Introduction

Historically, gender stratification in the employment sector is a deep-rooted norm of gender role stereotyping. Professions such as teaching, nursing or even cooking used to be feminized, such that, the males entering these professions were challenged for their masculinity ^{1,2}. On the contrary, professions related to construction and managerial tasks were considered exclusively for males ³. Feminized professions usually included attributes such as empathy, care, and support, whereas the masculine profession's typical attributes were competitive, dominant, and aggressive ⁴. Such labeling and gender typecasting forced people into an unprogressive and restrictive box.

The advancing world has gradually been able to break such gender-related stereotypes and barriers once considered unbreakable. Through the past feminist movements, the literature now very commonly addresses the issues faced by a female working in a male-dominant profession such as pay-gap, discrimination, organizational bias against mothers, inflexible policies, patriarchal organization ⁵.

Structures, inadequate resources, lack of childcare facilities, & negative work-identity perceptions ⁶⁻⁹. Not surprisingly, attributes such as 'Put Work First' & 'Show No Emotions' of male-dominated workplaces have also been reported to have negative psychological and physiological repercussions on males ⁷.

Whereas only minuscule literature can be found exploring the experiences of men working in a female-dominant environment ¹⁰⁻¹². In health science, studies are mostly focused on 'Male nurses' and their inevitability to adapt to the female identity in terms of linguistic behavior, to fit effectively into the nursing identity ¹⁰. As far as education goes, having both male and female teachers in a department may positively impact the student's interest in a subject as same-gender faculty groups may be formed for some topics ^{13,14}. In Pakistan, gender stratification is obvious in the medical universities where basic science departments have an obvious majority of females, with a few males working alongside them. This research aims to explore and signify the experiences of male faculty working in the female-dominated Basic Science departments in the medical colleges of Karachi. It is anticipated that the findings of this study will help implement institutional policy reforms, which may have a favorable impact and make the environment gender friendly.

2. Materials and Methods

This is an empirical phenomenological study, the phenomenon being 'male faculty members working in a female-dominant environment.' The study was conducted in Karachi from January 2021 to October 2022.

A total of 10 male participants from different medical colleges in Karachi (public and private) were interviewed using non-probability purposive sampling and a semi-structured questionnaire, Supplementary file 1. Data saturation was achieved after eight interviews; however, the authors continued until no new themes were observed i.e., till the 10th interview. All these participants were working in the basic science departments of different private and public sector medical & dental colleges in Karachi. The faculty members, ranging from senior lecturers to professors,

excluding those who were currently working as heads of departments, were interviewed. Each interview was given at least 15 minutes and was conducted in participant's respective institute.

Ethical approval was given from the institutional review board. The interviews were conducted face-to-face by three researchers (one male & two female) and were audio-taped using a voice recorder. Written consent was taken from each participant before the interview. A detailed briefing about the study was given to participants. Each participant was assured that their responses would be kept anonymous and confidential. Only the primary interviewer knew their identity and the data with the rest of the researchers were shared anonymously. Additionally, the data was kept secure in a password-locked file on each of the researcher's laptops. Researchers were MHPE trainees with 3-4 years of experience working as lecturers in their respective departments. This research was conducted under the supervision of a Ph.D. holder with more than 10 years of experience as a professor.

The transcription of interviews was done verbatim using both audio tapes and notes. The interviews were conducted mostly in both languages (English and Urdu) according to the convenience of the participant and were translated in cases where the participants used Urdu and checked thoroughly for errors. The participants were then sent a copy of their transcripts for their approval and changes were made if errors were made. Coding was done by the three researchers individually for all 10 interviews through inductive data analysis which was then discussed, and final themes were generated with the consensus of all six authors.

3. Results

Two main themes were generated from the data i.e.; double-edged sword and females are not good bosses; these themes were further divided into subthemes with the consensus of the researchers (Figure 1).

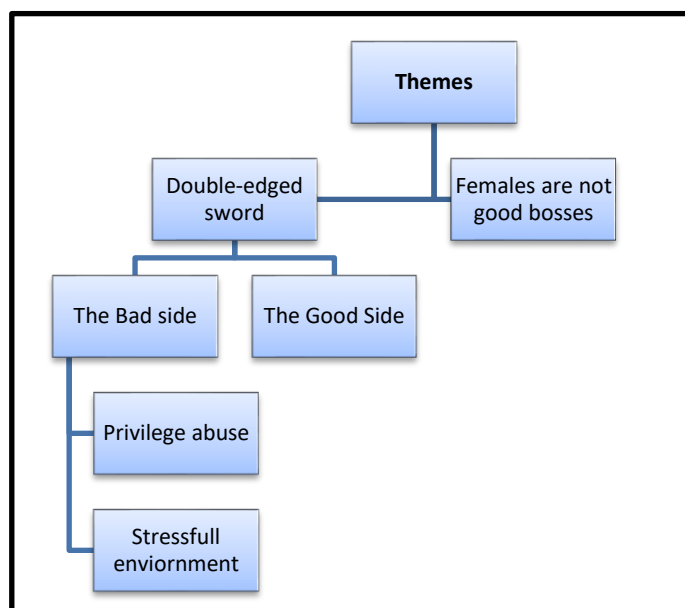


Figure 1: Themes tree

Theme #1: Double-edged sword

The theme embodies the intricate nature of the experience, which is not exclusively positive or negative but rather encompasses both favorable and unfavorable aspects. This overarching theme was further subdivided into two distinct sub-themes: the good side and the bad side. The themes and subthemes are represented in Table 1.

Subtheme # 1: The bad side

Under this sub-theme, the responses were further split into two categories i.e., privilege abuse and stressful environment.

Privilege abuse

The phrase 'privilege abuse' refers to 'someone misusing the legitimate rights that have been granted to them by the culture and society.'

Seven out of ten participants spoke about experiencing privilege abuse at the hands of women in their careers. The problems were mostly related to females trying to play the victim using their gender privileges based on Pakistani culture. These included but were not limited to issues such as accusing males of having a bad attitude and disrespecting them, using pregnancy or personal issues to take relief from other duties, taking early offs, avoiding outdoor campus activities, or attending evening classes.

Table 1. Distribution of themes and subthemes		
Themes	Subthemes	Statements
Double-Edged sword	1. Bad Side	This subtheme has further been categorized into 2 parts
	Privilege Abuse	<i>Statement#1: 'The males feel that if they use even a slightly harsh tone with the female staff, the female gender commonly gains others' sympathy. The others will always accuse me as the male that I am being disrespectful, and they will not notice how the female behaves with the male staff. '</i> <i>Statement#2: 'Females are more compliant, and dutiful, but one thing I have noticed is that they are not so regular and are getting more leaves because of the home-domestic problems.'</i>
	Stressful environment	<i>Statement#1: 'Working in a female-dominant environment means that jealousy is very common among females, due to which they get jealous of the males extraordinarily. If you work at the same level as them, they give the males a very tough time.'</i> <i>Statement#2: 'The females will keep on interfering a bit in every work you do, the politics will be like that the things you wouldn't even have thought about will be passed to the head of the department and so on obviously if you don't keep clarifying yourself you will have a tough time and people will not be happy and You will need to keep providing explanations for your actions.'</i> <i>Statement#3: 'Information is leaked from one person to another, so some issues come up due to that. Rather than working on productivity, these unnecessary issues would be surfaced there, so because of that I found it to be very difficult to adjust there.'</i>

		<i>Statement#4: 'Psychologically, there is a lot of impacts because you need someone to vent out but when here you don't have anyone, so obviously you are a little upset and psychologically there you are impacted a little bit, you feel isolated and certain times females they try to belittle you.'</i> <i>Statement#5: 'If you work with more women and you work in a lower position than them, they tend to have many impulsive decisions that you have to face which I think that maybe if there was a male instead who has seen more or absorbed more of the society, sometimes it seems that you are working in an environment that is more of an emotional and less of a stable environment.'</i>
	2. Good side	<i>Statement#1: 'I believe the benefit is that some women can recognize your problems better, and if you share your problems with them in the working environment, they understand even more.'</i> <i>Statement#2: 'What my personal experiences have been, I have always been responded well by the females, they accommodated me, helped me and they treated me, like a good colleague, and respected me.'</i> <i>Statement#3: 'We, the three males used to feel proud rather privileged among them because we were in the minority and they used to give us some sort of privileges in every aspect such as adjustment of classes, tea service, short leaves, leaves and then I generally found that the females are more cooperative.'</i>
Females are not good bosses		<i>Statement#1: 'Female bosses give weightage to female's family problems. So, their problems are problems, but our problems are not.'</i> <i>Statement#2: 'If a female head of the department is put under a lot of the workload, then I notice that maybe they are unable to absorb all of that workload easily.'</i> <i>Statement#3: 'No matter how independent women become, no matter how professional they become, they have this element in them that leads them to run the professional environment a little like their home environment. They are more reactive, more impulsive; they tend to be more sensitive. I think males can withstand more pressure and stay more composed. When women have more freedom and they get some power or authority, I think somewhere along the way they take back the revenge for the unfair and cruel treatment that they might have suffered from previously. Firstly, they are unable to use their authority properly, and secondly, they are unable to absorb the pressure of the same level as the males can.'</i> <i>Statement#4: 'But there is some difference in the decision making. A male can withstand whatever decision is right or wrong but the females think that they have made a decision yet there is nobody there to support them.'</i> <i>And</i> <i>'The difference in that was that I was able to speak up in that place and even if I would get a 'no' in return it was okay because he was the boss. He has his own experiences that make him wiser than us. But at least I could confidently, like I was freely able to speak up! Here I feel that I have to consider whether what I am about to say is going to be perceived in a negative aspect. You don't have to worry about this with a male if something happens, you can just apologize to your superior 'Sorry sir this happened' and that's it. You can't do that on</i>

		<i>the female side because your 'sorry' has no value, it goes straight to; 'how could you think that way?'</i> <i>Statement#5 'Actually, I have worked with two or three female bosses, and believe me there is a 50% proportion of some females bosses who don't know how to tackle the pressure and how to manage the department, but some females are the very good female boss and they are very good managers. They used to run the department very efficiently and with equity and equality. So, I think there is a 50-50% chance of a female boss whether she can do better or she can make it worse. I am a very fortunate person because my bosses are always very good to me but if I compare male bosses and female bosses, I would definitely-definitely-definitely choose a male boss because they are more understandable. They used to make good decisions and the most important thing about a male boss is they will fight for you, but a female boss usually cannot fight.'</i> <i>Statement#6: 'But I am more comfortable and satisfied with male bosses. But the female bosses throughout my teaching career, I am not much satisfied with the females as a boss. But as a colleague, they are nice, they are good, they are helping, they are positive, they are facilitating and even their social behavior and contacts and responses are appreciable. My female boss I cannot praise them as compared to the males otherwise they are good, they are nice, and I appreciate it.'</i>
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Stressful Environment

According to our interviewees, work politics is nasty everywhere but is greatly fueled by the tight community women create among themselves, flamed by their nature of jealousy and insecurity that is directed at their opponent irrespective of gender. Many of our interviewees raised issues such as jealousy, always complaining and remaining unsatisfied, the habit of interfering in matters that are not of their concern, spreading false rumors, the habit of exaggerating things to seek attention, panicking at times of stress, finding an easy way out and therefore cultivating an unstable emotional working environment.

Subtheme # 2: The good side

Despite all the negative comments they had stated earlier, the interviewees when asked about the benefits of working in a female-dominated environment, seem to value a variety of aspects of working in a female-dominated environment.

Most of our interviewees appreciated facts such as feeling heard and understood, getting respect and support from their female colleagues, being humble, and cooperative, and generating a comfortable working environment which is important for the creativity and personal growth of an individual.

One interviewee mentioned a unique aspect of being invited to a lot of home-cooked food breaks, which made him feel a very homely environment away from home.

Contradictory to the experiences of other interviewees, an interviewee mentioned that he experienced a sense of privilege being just a few males in a female-dominant workplace and was given priority over others for being a minority.

Theme # 2: Females are not good bosses

Most interviewees seemed unanimous in their belief that females are not good bosses. They identified several problems as the main causes of their dissatisfaction, including gender bias (favoring females over males), weak decision-makers, their impulsive/emotional nature, hesitation to communicate with males, inability to handle stress, overreacting to minor situations, unable to accept their mistakes or taking criticism and difficult to communicate with being the major issues for their dissatisfaction.

Although, most of them agreed that this is a subjective problem and supported the fact that being a good or a bad boss is a 50-50 thing. However, none of them seemed to prefer a female boss over a male boss.

4. Discussion

In a world where the feminist movement has taken all the hype, little attention has been given to the issues related to men. This study is one of the few studies conducted in Pakistan that addresses the issues of male faculty members working in female-dominated departments. It was assumed by the researchers that the males working in female majority environments would be satisfied with it considering they would be free of the competitiveness, and male office politics, and would stand out with the privilege of being a male. But to their surprise, the result was not the same and a lot of unexpected aspects showed up which were not identified in the literature.

In our study, male interviewees voiced concerns about female colleagues exploiting culture-based privileges, a departure from previous research that did not report such issues among male teachers in female-dominant settings ¹⁻³. Furthermore, contrary to studies such as Palmer et al.'s, which indicated greater male satisfaction stemming from attention and support as a minority, our findings unveiled a cultural variation in these dynamics ^{1,2}. This novel finding may be attributed to cultural variations in the regions where the studies were conducted. It is worth noting that studies on male teachers' satisfaction in Pakistan have primarily focused on schools or colleges, which could contribute to the disparity in findings.

Participants reported feelings of insecurity and jealousy among females toward their male counterparts, a phenomenon not substantiated by existing literature. This could be attributed to the 'glass escalator' theory, which suggests preferential male advancement, aligning with Pakistan's patriarchal societal norms ³. Additionally, participants' unexpected assertion of feeling isolated at work due to cultural norms around opposite-gender interactions in Islam provides an unexplored perspective. This isolation, compounded by workplace politics, contributes to the heightened stress levels reported by male participants, impacting their psychological well-being. These results are similar to a study by Sorbiraj et al, where a positive correlation between increased social stresses on males in the female-dominant workplace was reported ¹⁴.

Within the 'the good side' subtheme, contrasting viewpoints emerged among participants, highlighting both stress-inducing aspects and positive attributes of female colleagues. While some found female coworkers stressful and competitive, others emphasized their role as empathetic listeners and sources of support during times of stress. These opinions echo Simpson's findings yet diverge on aspects of competitiveness¹⁶.

The notion of males receiving special attention as workplace minorities align with existing studies, indicating a 'special status' attributed to their authoritative skills, albeit with differences in promotion perspectives^{1,15,16}. They believe as far as promotion to leadership roles goes; they believe it depends on the college administrations as they do end up preferring females due to their obedient nature.

Interestingly, most interviewees expressed discomfort with female bosses due to perceived weak decision-making skills, inability to manage stress, and fostering a hostile environment. Similar to a study where the study participants preferred male over female bosses by a ratio of 2:1¹⁷. However, the literature has been contrasting in this point of view where few males have preferred female bosses as well^{18,19}. It, therefore, seems that being a good boss is a matter of choice and not dependent on gender. This might also be a variant of the culture as in Pakistani culture, there is a general trend of males dominating females in almost every aspect²⁰. Additionally, as a part of a patriarchal society, it might be difficult for males to accept being led by females, hence they all agree with females not being good bosses.

5. Conclusion

Although participants highlight certain benefits of males working in female-dominated basic sciences departments, job satisfaction is lacking among male employees. This discontent originates from the perceptions that female colleagues leverage gender-based cultural privileges for reduced workloads, generate workplace stress due to envy, and biases encountered by them from both female coworkers and supervisors. Furthermore, most participants expressed dissatisfaction with female bosses, attributing this sentiment to perceived stress-handling inadequacies, intolerance towards decision critiques, and prioritization of feminine concerns over male issues. To authenticate these findings, further research encompassing diverse regions of Pakistan is essential.

Declarations:

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval has been obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Jinnah Sindh Medical University (JSMU/IRB/2021/-405).

Informed consent statement

Written consent was taken from each participant before the interview.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials

The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Competing interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Author Contributions

Conceptualization, G.-D, A.-A, S.A.A.-Z, S.-S. A.-S, and M.-M; **metodology**, G.-D.; **software**, A.-A, S.A.A.-Z and S.-S; **formal analysis**, A.-S, M.-M and L.A.-B.; **investigation**, A.-A, S.A.A.-Z, S.-S. A.-S, and M.-M; **resources**, A.-S, M.-M, and L.A.-B.; **data curation**, L.A.-B and N.-A; **writing—original draft preparation**, A.-A, S.A.A.-Z, S.-S, A.-S, M.-M, L.A.-B. and M.A.A.-S; **writing—review and editing**, G.-D and M.A.A.-S.; **validation**, L.A.-B and M.-M.; **visualization**, G.-D and M.A.A.-S.; **supervision**, M.A.A.-S.; **project administration**, A.-A, S.A.A.-Z, S.-S. A.-S, and M.-M, and G.-D.; **funding acquisition**, G.-D. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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