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Pay Inequity and Promotion Barriers for Female Journalists in Pakistan: Empirical Evidence from Punjab Media Organizations

Faiza Bajwa[1], Kanwal Zahra[2], Muhammad Javed Iqbal[3]

[1]Assistant Professor, Centre for Media and Communication Studies, University Of Gujral, Punjab, Pakistan, Email: faiza.bajwa@uog.edu.pk
[2]Associate Professor, Centre for Languages and Translation Studies University of Gujrat
[3]Lecturer, Centre for Languages and Translation Studies, University of Gujrat

ABSTRACT

Unequal pay and obstacles to advancement are two of the most important structural forms of gender discrimination in the workplace. These phenomena are pervasive and systematic for female journalists in Pakistan and are reflective of broader patterns of gender-based economic disadvantage in Pakistani labor markets. Using a survey of 250 respondents, this study investigates the wage disparity and promotion barriers among female journalists in Punjab. Findings showed that 78.4% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they get equal remuneration as compared to male colleagues, 74.4% did not get any allowances from their media organizations, 41.6% were not paid for overtime, 74.8% perceived journalism as not a financially strong profession and 55.6% reported not having equal promotional opportunities as compared to male colleagues. The study frames these results in the framework of Feminist Theory and Glass Ceiling Theory and argues these economic and promotional disparities are structural and need comprehensive policy intervention at the organizational, regulatory and governmental levels.

Keywords: pay inequity, gender pay gap, promotion barriers, female journalists, Pakistan, glass ceiling, media organizations, occupational segregation

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Corresponding Author's Email: faiza.bajwa@uog.edu.pk

Introduction

There are many studies on gender and economic outcomes in professional settings and the finding is consistent: women earn less, are promoted less often, and are concentrated in lower-status positions in every professional sector that has been examined (Eagly and Carli, 2007). According to the Pakistan

Federal Union of Journalists (Rehmat, 2017), women comprise just five percent of the total number of journalists in Pakistan. The women who are employed in journalism face constant and documented inequalities in terms of pay, benefits, and promotion.

Despite possessing qualifications equivalent to or exceeding those of their male colleagues, female journalists in Pakistan are paid less, receive fewer allowances, are denied overtime pay, and are promoted less frequently. Not only this, but females had to bear the gender pay gap even though they are more qualified and talented than their male counterparts. The Women Journalists Convention (WJC) held in Lahore demanded equal salary distribution without differences, equal work hours, and insurance facilities without gender discrimination — demands that collectively reflect a situation in which none of these equalities currently exist in practice.

The present study provides systematic empirical documentation of these inequalities using survey data from 250 female journalists across Punjab. The study also examines the related question of legal agreements between journalists and media organizations — a dimension of economic security that has received relatively little attention in the existing literature but that directly affects female journalists' ability to enforce their rights to equal pay and benefits.

Statement of the Problem

Female journalists in Pakistan are paid less, get fewer allowances, less overtime pay, and have fewer promotional opportunities than their male counterparts. These inequalities are not incidental, nor are they the result of individual choices, but are rather a reflection of structural patterns of gender discrimination in Pakistani media organizations. Understanding the extent and mechanisms of these inequalities is important if effective policy interventions are to be developed.

Research Questions

RQ1: Do female journalists receive equal remuneration compared to their male colleagues?

RQ2: Are female journalists paid for overtime duty hours?

RQ3: Do female journalists receive allowances from their media organizations?

RQ4: Do female journalists consider journalism a financially strong and secure profession?

RQ5: Do female journalists have equal promotional opportunities compared to male colleagues?

Objectives

The objectives are to analyze inequalities experienced by female journalists in Pakistani media; to evaluate the extent and nature of gender pay gaps in the Pakistani media industry; to examine promotion barriers and their relationship to the glass ceiling effect; and to develop recommendations for achieving pay equity and equal promotion in Pakistani media organizations.

Review of Literature

Short (1986) examined the gap between equal pay legislation and existing pay practice in many occupations and concluded that equal pay is a legal principle rather than an operational reality. De la Rica et al. (2005) found that

women have less opportunities for job advancement than men in equivalent positions, through less frequent promotion rather than through less performance - a finding consistent with the glass ceiling literature. The work involving interpersonal skills (which is central to journalism) is systematically valued less than the technical and financial work (Gavray, 2004). Even when women do this work effectively, their chances for career development and promotion are lower than those of men in equivalent roles.
Ojala (2011) found that not only are female journalists paid less than their male counterparts, they are often not paid for working overtime, and cannot fight for that payment because of the precarious nature of their employment. Ash, Carr, Goldstein and Friedman (2004) showed that most female professionals in demanding careers were not offered satisfactory allowances. Australian women journalists are largely low-paid and in lower-status positions than their male counterparts (Byerly, 2011). Kanyika Shaw (2013) found that in Thailand, female journalists are generally disadvantaged in terms of work quality and salary, and many also experience discrimination and harassment in addition to pay inequity. This pattern of compounding disadvantage is similar to the findings in Pakistan in the present study.
In Pakistani context, Women Journalist Convention (WJC) demanded that it is the right of female journalists to get three months maternity leave with complete pay package. But documented that most of the media organizations violate law by relieving pregnant employees without pay. This particular violation is indicative of a larger trend; that Pakistani media houses do not always adhere to the most basic legal standards of equal treatment, and that women journalists are not provided organizational and legal support to claim their rights. Sanchez Abril, Levin and Del Riego (2012) stated that media houses must have legal agreements for their workers and it must be compulsory, a point directly pertinent to the legal agreement data in this study.
To conclude, Downie and Schudson (2009) have found journalism to be a financially stressed profession that should be stronger for its workers. The overall condition of female journalists in Pakistan is one of utter economic insecurity because of low base pay, no allowances, no overtime pay and no formal legal contracts, making it difficult to build and maintain professional careers.

Theoretical Framework

Glass Ceiling Theory

Glass Ceiling Theory provides the primary framework for understanding promotion barriers in this study. The glass ceiling was defined by the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) as the unseen yet unbreakable barrier keeping minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements. In Pakistani media, the glass ceiling manifests through beat assignment patterns concentrating women in low-prestige areas; through promotion decisions favoring male colleagues regardless of performance; and through informal exclusion of female journalists from senior editorial networks. Morrison and colleagues (1991) described it as that which ostracizes a person's progress simply for being a woman rather than for any inadequacy of potential or performance. Gneezy and colleagues (2003) performed tests showing that competitive environments often entirely exclude women as a quintile group, though some studies argue that females are given equal opportunities where specific supportive policies exist (White, 1992).

Feminist Theory

Feminist Theory situates pay inequity and promotion barriers within the broader context of patriarchal economic structures that systematically devalue women's labor. The wage gap is not an accident or the product of individual choices but reflects the organized undervaluation of female professional contributions embedded in the structure of labor markets, the design of organizational hierarchies, and cultural assumptions about which kinds of work deserve the highest rewards. In journalism specifically, the association of hard political and crime reporting with masculinity, and of soft beats with femininity, is a cultural construction that justifies paying female journalists less by defining their work as less serious,

less risky, and less valuable.

Research Methodology

Research Design and Sample

Data was collected through quantitative survey from 250 female journalists selected from 6 cities of Punjab through simple random sampling. Islamabad (46%), Lahore (29.6%), Gujrat (7.6%), Rawalpindi (6.8%), Wazirabad (5.6%) and Gujranwala (4.4%) The sample comprised of female journalists, editors, sub-editors and reporters of electronic and print media organizations. The ages of the respondents ranged from 23 to 45 years, 52% were married, 33% were single, 7.6% were widowed and 6.4% were divorced or separated. Importantly for the pay inequity analysis, the sample includes a range of roles – editors and sub-editors, as well as reporters and general journalists. This enables the study to investigate whether pay differences occur throughout the spectrum of journalistic jobs, or at particular rungs of the professional ladder. Attitudinal items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Agree to 5 = Strongly Disagree) and factual items were measured Yes/No .

Key Variables and Analysis

The pay and promotion related variables analyzed are: equal remuneration with male colleagues (Likert), paid for overtime duty hours (Likert), female workers' allowances (Likert), journalism as a financially strong profession (Likert), legal agreement with media organization (Likert), equal promotional facilities with men (binary). Frequency statistics and descriptive statistics were performed using SPSS. Higher mean scores on the Likert scale (closer to 5) indicate greater disagreement with the positive proposition; means above 3.0—the neutral midpoint—indicate that the majority of respondents disagree that the proposition is true. The means of all six pay and promotion variables in this study are above 3.0, confirming a consistent pattern of disagreement on every dimension of economic and promotional equality measured.

Limitations

This study has a number of limitations. Because pay data are self-reported, respondents are reporting their perceptions of pay equity rather than verified salary comparisons. In principle, this could reflect misperceptions rather than actual disparities. However, the scale of the findings makes perceptual bias an implausible explanation for the results, as the findings on pay inequity are so overwhelming, with 78.4% reporting unequal pay, and 74.4% reporting no allowances. Nor does the study compare the pay data of male and female journalists working in the same organization, the kind of comparison that would provide direct evidence of pay gaps. Future research should incorporate administrative salary data to complement the survey data. Despite these limitations, the quantitative data from 250 respondents from six cities provides the most comprehensive empirical picture of pay inequity and promotion barriers for female journalists in Punjab available in the literature so far.

Results and Findings

Equal Remuneration Compared to Male Colleagues

Table 5.7 addresses the fundamental question of whether female journalists receive the same pay as male colleagues doing equivalent work.

Table 5.7: Equal Remuneration as Male Colleagues0

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	16	5.7	6.4	6.4
Agree	12	4.3	4.8	11.2
Neutral	26	9.2	10.4	21.6
Disagree	101	35.8	40.4	62.0
Strongly Disagree	95	33.7	38.0	100.0
Total	250	88.7	100.0	—

Findings: Table 5.7 shows whether females are receiving equal remuneration compared to male colleagues. The result reveals that most female journalists are Disagreed with 101 frequency (40.4%), 95 frequency Strongly Disagreed (38.0%), 26 Neutral (10.4%), 16 Strongly Agreed (6.4%), and 12 Agreed (4.8%). The results show most females did not get equal remuneration as compared to male colleagues. Short (1986) elaborated in 'Equal Pay' that equal pay is not happening in many professions.

Payment for Overtime Duty Hours

Table 5.8 examines whether female journalists are compensated for working beyond their contracted hours — a dimension of economic fairness directly linked to the professional demands of journalism.

Table 5.8: Paid for After Duty Hours (Overtime)

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	20	7.1	8.0	8.0
Agree	44	15.6	17.6	25.6
Neutral	82	29.1	32.8	58.4
Disagree	68	24.1	27.2	85.6
Strongly Disagree	36	12.8	14.4	100.0
Total	250	88.7	100.0	—

Findings: Table 5.8 shows whether female journalists are paid for overtime duty hours. Most go with Neutral option at 82 frequency (32.8%), Disagreed shows 68 (27.2%), Agreed 44 (17.6%), Strongly Disagreed 36 (14.4%), and Strongly Agreed 20 (8.0%). Half of them are Agreed and half chose Neutral. Ojala (2011) concurred that females are not paid for overtime and are also unable to stand up for that payment.

Allowances Provided to Female Workers

Table 5.9 examines the provision of allowances — including transport, medical, and other professional allowances — to female journalists by their media organizations.

Table 5.9: Allowances Provided to Female Workers

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	16	5.7	6.4	6.4

Agree	12	4.3	4.8	11.2
Neutral	36	12.8	14.4	25.6
Disagree	104	36.9	41.6	67.2
Strongly Disagree	82	29.1	32.8	100.0
Total	250	88.7	100.0	—

Findings: Table 5.9 elaborates the frequencies of allowances given to female workers. Most respondents are Disagreed with 104 frequency (41.6%), 82 Strongly Disagreed (32.8%), 36 Neutral (14.4%), while Strongly Agreed shows 16 (6.4%) and Agreed shows 12 (4.8%). This concludes that 74.4% did not get any allowances from media houses. Ash, Carr, Goldstein, and Friedman (2004) found in their study that most females did not have any allowances.

Journalism as a Financially Strong Profession

Table 5.10 examines female journalists' overall perception of journalism as a financially strong and secure profession, providing a summary measure of economic satisfaction with the profession.

Table 5.10: Journalism as a Financially Strong Profession

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	16	5.7	6.4	6.4
Agree	12	4.3	4.8	11.2
Neutral	35	12.4	14.0	25.2
Disagree	111	39.4	44.4	69.6
Strongly Disagree	76	27.0	30.4	100.0
Total	250	88.7	100.0	—

Findings: Table 5.10 shows results for journalism as a financially strong profession. Disagree shows 111 frequency (44.4%), Strongly Disagreed 76 (30.4%), Neutral 35 (14.0%), Strongly Agreed 16 (6.4%), and Agreed 12 (4.8%). The result clearly defines that most female journalists do not consider journalism a financially strong profession. Downie and Schudson (2009) concluded that journalism is a financially stressed profession that should be stronger for its employees.

Legal Agreement with Media Organization

Table 5.11 examines whether female journalists have formal legal agreements with their media organizations — a critical dimension of employment security that directly affects their ability to enforce pay equity and other rights.

Table 5.11: Legal Agreement with Media Organization

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	38	13.5	15.2	15.2
Agree	36	12.8	14.4	29.6
Neutral	78	27.7	31.2	60.8
Disagree	42	14.9	16.8	77.6
Strongly Disagree	56	19.9	22.4	100.0

Total	250	88.7	100.0	—

Findings: Table 5.11 shows findings on legal agreements given by media organizations. The highest frequency of 78 goes with Neutral (31.2%), showing that some are provided legal agreements but some are not. Strongly Disagree shows 56 (22.4%), Disagree 42 (16.8%), Strongly Agree 38 (15.2%), and Agree 36 (14.4%). Sanchez Abril, Levin, and Del Riego (2012) explained that media houses need to provide proper legal agreements to their workers and it should be compulsory.

Equal Promotional Facilities Compared to Men

Table 5.16 addresses the promotional dimension of workplace inequality, examining whether female journalists have equal access to promotional opportunities compared to their male colleagues.

Table 5.16: Equal Promotional Facilities Like Men

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	111	39.4	44.4	44.4
No	139	49.3	55.6	100.0
Total	250	88.7	100.0	—

Findings: Table 5.16 shows the frequency of female journalists' promotional facilities compared to men. The No option shows 139 frequency (55.6%), indicating most did not get equal promotional facilities like their male colleagues, while 111 (44.4%) said they did. Female journalists are still treated with unequal promotional rights. Priyadarshani (2011) confirmed gender inequality in journalist promotion.

Discussion

The Structural Logic of Pay Inequity

The pattern of pay disadvantage recorded here – low base pay, no allowances, no overtime, no financial security, inadequate legal protections – converges not as the result of a series of independent organizational choices, but as a coherent structural logic that positions female journalists as contingent, temporary or second-priority employees. This structural logic is reproduced not by explicit policy but by informal organizational norms: no Pakistani media organization would explicitly agree to pay women less than men for the same work, but the aggregate data shows this is exactly what happens across the sector. Therefore, 78.4% of female journalists report a pay disadvantage compared to male colleagues – a figure so high that it cannot be attributed to organizational error or individual prejudice, but must be understood as a systemic characteristic of the Pakistani media industry.
This means that female journalists may be working considerably more hours for considerably less money than their male counterparts, due to lower basic pay, no allowances and unpaid over-time. Short (1986) studied the discrepancy between equal pay legislation and practice. She learned that equal pay is a legal principle in many professions but not an on-the-ground reality. Ojala (2011) found that female journalists are not only underpaid, but often work overtime without pay and are unable to demand pay due to the precarious nature of their employment. The data at hand offers strong confirmation for both patterns in the Pakistani context.

Legal Agreements and Employment Security

Table 5.11 Legal agreement data offers another dimension of economic insecurity. The high neutral response rate (31.2%) to the question of whether respondents have legal agreements with their organizations indicates a situation where many female journalists are not sure of the basic terms of their employment. This uncertainty is a subjective experience and an objective vulnerability: female journalists who don't know if they have formal employment contracts are essentially working as informal workers who can be fired with impunity. Sanchez Abril, Levin and Del Riego (2012) emphasize the need for media houses to provide their workers with proper legal agreements and that this should be made compulsory. The absence of formal employment contracts is particularly damaging in the Pakistani context as it eliminates the primary mechanism for female journalists to claim their rights to equal pay, allowances, overtime compensation and maternity leave.
The Women Journalists Convention (WJC) demanded three months of maternity leave with full pay package for female journalists and documented that most media organizations violate the law by dismissing pregnant employees without pay. This particular violation is indicative of a larger pattern. Pakistani media outlets regularly fail to meet even the minimum legal standards for equal treatment. The combination of no formal employment contract, no allowances and no overtime pay creates a situation of comprehensive economic insecurity for female journalists in Pakistan that makes it difficult to build and sustain professional careers over the long term. This economic insecurity feeds directly into the pattern documented in the broader literature of women leaving journalism in mid-career, and thus reduces the pipeline for female advancement to senior editorial positions.

Promotion Barriers and the Career Ladder

Read in conjunction with the pay inequity data, the data on equal promotional opportunities (55.6% reported unequal access, Table 5.16) are equally troubling. In the Pakistani media, the glass ceiling is not at the top of the organizational hierarchy, but over the career ladder. Women journalists are underpaid at the top, but also everyplace. "They don't receive the allowances that their male counterparts do, they are not paid for overtime and then they are overlooked for promotion that would give them better paid work." The glass ceiling is not a single barrier at the top, but a series of interlinking barriers that combine to create an overall career disadvantage.
74.8% feel journalism is financially unstable, which has major implications for retention. The case for staying in journalism is weakened when journalism doesn't pay, when female journalists are paid less, get fewer allowances and no overtime. Other professional opportunities have an economic advantage over journalism, which fuels careers. This may be especially true for married female journalists (52 percent of respondents) who may be sharing household financial responsibilities. This is directly related to the research of Reinardy (2009) that found female journalists are more likely to leave the newspapers. The material explanation for that pattern of behavior is rooted in the structural economic disadvantages documented in this paper.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that pay disparity and promotion barriers are widespread, systematic and institutionally rooted in media organizations in Pakistan. Pay disadvantage (78.4%), no allowances (74.4%), no overtime (41.6%), no equal promotional opportunities (55.6%) and financial insecurity in journalism (74.8%). There is evidence in economic terms of systematic discrimination against women. These inequalities are not peripheral but structural, reflecting organizational cultures that devalue women journalists' labor relative to that of equivalent male labor.
The study concludes that: 1. 1. PEMRA should require mandatory pay equity audits for licensed media organizations, with organizations required to report salary data broken down by gender and show equal

pay for equal work. In particular, the government should expand and strengthen equal pay legislation for the media industry by providing enforcement mechanisms and penalties for non-compliance. Media organizations should have clear criteria for promotion that apply equally to all candidates and are reviewed by an independent committee with significant female representation. The female journalist is entitled to the same overtime pay, allowances, medical insurance and maternity leave as her male counterpart. It is a matter of respect of the law and professional respect. All female journalists should be on formal contracts that outline their entitlement to equal pay, benefits and legal protection. The Women Journalists Convention's call for 33% reserved seats for female journalists in all media regulatory bodies, press clubs and unions should be implemented as a structural measure to ensure pay equity and promotion policies are developed with adequate female representation in the decision-making bodies that develop and enforce them.

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