

**ROLE OF SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS,  
INTERSECTIONALITY AND AGENCY IN DETERMINING  
OCCUPATIONAL CHOICES: AN ANALYSIS OF WORKING  
WOMEN IN ISLAMABAD**



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**CERTIFICATE**

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## Author's Declaration

I Hisham Abbasi hereby state that my PhD thesis titled "Role of Sociocultural Factors, Intersectionality and Agency in Determining Occupational Choices: An Analysis of Working Women in Islamabad" is my own work and has not been submitted previously by me for taking any degree from Pakistan Institute of Development Economics or anywhere else in the country/world.

At any time if my statement is found to be incorrect even after my graduation the university has the right to withdraw my PhD degree.

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Hisham Abbasi

## *Dedication*

To my grandfather, for his unconditional love and never-ending affection.

To *Amna*, for being here always.

To my sisters, for inspiring me every day.

And to my parents.

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## Abstract

This study explores the role of sociocultural factors, intersectionality, and agency in determining occupational choices for women using a qualitative research strategy and an explanatory research design. The conceptual framework used in the study is Pierre Bourdieu's theory of Field and Habitus. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews from working women in the fields of Aviation, Engineering and Architecture, both in the field and the academics. Thematic analysis was carried out on the data to derive themes and sub-themes. Findings of the study suggest that sociocultural factors including family support, established precedence and patriarchal norms and traditions play a significant role in shaping the occupational prospects of women. Patriarchal norms create hurdles such as gendered notions of occupations, preconceived notion of women's primary role as homemakers, traditional expectations of female modesty, inherent gender bias regarding their capabilities, and misperception of an unsafe choice for women. The findings suggest that for unmarried women, and married women with spouse support and no children, intersectionality of their marital status and expected family role positively impacts their occupational choices and enables them to pursue their career aspirations. On the contrary, for married women with children, the intersectionality of their marital status, motherhood status, spouse support and expected family role affected their occupational choices in two ways; either they had to take a break from their career, or they had to switch their occupations. The findings suggest a strong linkage between family support and agency. Although women's agency played an important role in overcoming and resisting the sociocultural hurdles, without the presence of this support, their agency regressed, and their career choices were compromised. Therefore, women's agency is significantly influenced by other sociocultural factors, spouse support, motherhood status and expected family role. The primary motivation for women employing their agency was the fulfillment of their career aspirations and inner-satisfaction. Women who do not conform with the traditional sociocultural cultural expectations, family values and norms are often subjected to labelling. Based on the research findings, the study recommends STEM friendly curriculum reform, career counselling programs, grants and scholarships, collaboration initiatives between educational institutes, government and private organizations, mentorship programs, female teachers' quota, gender sensitization and awareness campaigns.

**Key Terms:** *Agency, Intersectionality, Occupational Choices, Sociocultural Factors Working Women*

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## List of Abbreviations

IT	Information Technology
PBS	Pakistan Bureau of Statistics
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Math
WB	World Bank
WEF	World Economic Forum

# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

In a rapidly modernizing world, economic progress is key for a country's survival. A lot of research, therefore, has primarily focused on determining ways to maximize a country's economic potential. A country's labor force is its primary tool to achieve progress, as it entails the available human capital, which is why it has historically been subjected to extensive research in order to facilitate and enhance labor force participation rates. The participation rate is even more important for developing economies, especially that of Pakistan, which lags far behind even in regional comparisons. It is established that without all-inclusive labor force participation, economic progress remains a far-fetched reality, considering women constitute approximately half of the labor force, yet their participation rates are extremely low. Low participation of women in the labor force stifles a country's growth, stifle women's empowerment, and limit children's outcomes. Women's increased engagement in the work force has a social and economic consequences (Rami, 2018).

According to the data released by the World Bank, female labour force participation rates in Pakistan have been abysmally low. Since 1995, the participation rate has increased from 12 percent to 24 percent approximately in 2021, a meagre increase in more than a quarter of a century (World Bank, 2023). Furthermore, according to the statistics published by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) for the year 2020-2021, female labourforce participation in Pakistan is segregated in terms of Industries and Professions.

Majority of the female labourforce, approximately 15 percent is employed in the Agriculture, Fishing and Forestry sector, followed by 3.24 percent in Manufacturing. On the contrary, only 1.79 percent of the employed female labourforce are involved in Education. These numbers are even

lower in Professional, Scientific, and Technical activities (0.03 percent), and Art, Entertainment and Recreation (0.01 percent). In terms of occupations, an overwhelming majority are constituted of skilled agriculture, forestry and fishery workers (13.80 percent), elementary occupations (3.13 percent), craft and related trade workers (2.81 percent). On the contrary, only 0.14 percent are managers, and 1.93 percent are professionals (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2022)

This segregation of occupational fields is based on gendering of various occupations. This in turn has facilitated a wide gender gap. The World Economic Forum (WEF) publishes a Global Gender Gap report. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2022, Pakistan's rank on the Gender Parity Index is 145<sup>th</sup> out of 146 countries, only above Afghanistan. In the sub-index of Economic Participation and Opportunity, the South Asian region overall made a slight improvement of 1.8 percent, however, that was driven by an increase in the share of women in professional and technical roles in Nepal, Bangladesh and India. In Pakistan, the share actually regressed from last year (World Economic Forum, 2022). According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2021, Pakistan's rank on the Gender Parity Index was 153<sup>rd</sup> out of 156 countries. In South Asia, it was ranked at 7<sup>th</sup>, just above Afghanistan. The report specifies the final ranking of countries on the basis of four sub-indexes; health and survival, economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, and political empowerment (Iqbal, 2021). Globally, the dimension in which this gender gap has the highest spread is Economic Participation and Opportunity sub index (Bilan, Kożuch, & Ślusarczyk, 2020).

This aspect is closely related to occupational and profession-based segregation that is prevalent in Pakistan. Pakistan was ranked 152<sup>nd</sup> in economic participation and opportunity. Although efforts have been made to come up with policy solutions to reduce the gender gap, the report suggests that

Pakistan has been unsuccessful at improving its score in the past sixteen years. In 2006, the gender parity score was 0.553, while in 2021, it was 0.556.

In comparison, Bangladesh's score has improved from 0.627 to 0.719 during the same time period, and the country stood 65<sup>th</sup> in a total of 156 countries. Likewise, Sri Lanka and India also have a relatively improved ranking (Iqbal, 2021). Most of the prior research has predominantly committed to income and wage gaps, along with problems of sexual harassment in organizations in recent times. However, not much research has been conducted regarding the occupational segregation in Pakistan as highlighted by the labor force statistics from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

Various micro-level (individual), meso-level (organizational) and macro-level (societal) factors are responsible for such occupational discrepancies (Ali, 2013). However, multi-level studies are lacking on it. Although these problems were subjected to research in the industrialized countries in the West, these investigations are relatively lacking in context of Asian and African countries. Furthermore, exclusively focusing on organizations, and projecting the brunt of the burden on them for such occupational segregation by inadequately providing equal opportunities may be inefficient as it ignores the role of both macro (societal factors) and micro (individual) factors. Similarly, external factors such as social, legal and economic factors also vastly affect diversity management, in addition to intra-organizational factors (Dass & Parker, 1999). On the individual level, the notions of intersectionality and agency are important. Intersectionality takes into consideration the relationships amongst different forms of identity to understand and simultaneously examine the manifestation of power and procedures between ethnicity, gender orientation etc. (Sustainable Development Policy Institute, 2008).

The dynamic and complex individual identities, alongside individual circumstances impact people's occupational experiences and ambitions (Syed, 2008). The notion of agency holds that individual action is often guided by an individual's choice by using their own individual initiative and critical thinking. Individuals do not always act strictly according to institutional rules or cultural norms. Women do employ choice in their decisions related to the labor market (Ali, 2013).

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

The labor force statistics published by Pakistan Bureau of Statistics for the year 2020-2021 show the prevalence of occupational segregation in Pakistan. Female labourforce participation in Pakistan is segregated in terms of Industries and Professions. Women are predominantly employed in Agriculture and Manufacturing while they are absent from scientific and technical occupations. Various macro, meso and micro level factors are responsible for these occupational discrepancies. However, these issues have not been extensively researched in Pakistan. This study will focus on exploring the role of sociocultural factors (macro-societal level), and the role of intersectionality and agency (micro-individual level) in determining occupational choices for women for scientific and technical professions.

It is expected that this multi-level approach to understand occupational choices for Pakistani women would aid in better understanding of the deep-rooted structural problems in our society, and how they affect the female segment of our burgeoning population in choosing their career paths. The findings of the study are expected to have supplementary value to understand the decisions and practices of the organizational actors as well. Since organizations are anchored firmly in society and its institutions that guide and direct the decisions of their individual components, and their actions (Powell & DiMaggio, 2012). Organisations often adopt structures that are in compliance with the relevant cultural norms (Johnson & Stone, 2008)



## **1.2 Research Problem**

Based on the narrative of SoP as stated in the preceding text, it is evident that female labor force is segregated in terms of industries and professions. Various macro, meso and micro level factors are responsible for these occupational discrepancies. However, these issues have not been extensively researched in Pakistan. Predominantly, the existing literature has focused on meso (organisational) level issues faced by working women. Sociocultural factors (macro-societal level), intersectionality and agency (micro-individual level) play a crucial role in determining occupational choices for women for scientific and technical professions in Pakistan. Sociocultural factors such as patriarchal norms and traditions influence the presence and absence of women from certain occupations. Furthermore, the intersectionality of different roles played by women, in public and private spheres of their lives affects their autonomy in making their occupational choices. Agency plays a significant role in determining occupational choices. Whether working women in Pakistan, specifically Islamabad are able to exercise their agency when making decisions about their career choices is debatable. In order to delve deeper into the importance sociocultural factors, intersectionality and agency with respect to determining women's occupational choices, I have operationalized my topic into the following research questions and objectives.

### **1.2.1 Research Questions**

- i. What is the role of sociocultural factors in determining occupational choices for women?
- ii. How does intersectionality affect occupational choices for women?
- iii. What role does agency of working women play in their choice of profession?

## **1.2.2 Objectives of the Research**

Based on the research questions, the research objectives of this study are as follow:

- i. To understand how sociocultural factors such as traditional norms, values, customs, and beliefs shape occupational choices for women.
- ii. To understand the extent to which intersectionality of women determines their occupational choices
- iii. To understand the role of agency of women, in terms of career orientation and resistance, in their occupational choices

## **1.3 Explanation of the Key Terms/Concepts**

### **1.3.1 Occupational Choices**

According to the Cambridge dictionary, in the simplest terms, occupation is defined as the job or type of job that a person has (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). It is an individual's standard work or business, particularly for making money and earning a livelihood. Therefore, occupational choices may be defined as the process of choosing a specific line of work by individuals, to improve their standard of living.

Based on the labor force statistics published by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), various occupations employ female labor force including Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, Mining and Quarrying, Manufacturing, Education, Healthcare, Financial and Insurance Services, Real Estate, Administrative and Support services, and Information and Communication. For the purpose of this research, occupational choices are *operationalized* as Professional, Scientific and Technical occupations as the study focuses on women's absence from scientific and technical fields. The chosen occupational fields are Engineering, Aviation and Architecture.

### 1.3.2 Sociocultural Factors

The term sociocultural refers to characteristics that are both social and cultural. These include shared traditions, habits, customs, and beliefs of a group of people. Predominantly referred to in sociological contexts, it is used to refer to the most driving factors that guide and shape individual decisions and behaviors (Forsyth, 2022).

For the purpose of this research, sociocultural factors are *operationalized* as the traditional, patriarchal norms, values, beliefs, and traditions, specifically related to women in a Pakistani society that is predominantly patriarchal. Norms are unwritten expectations and rules governing social behavior. These include gender roles, modesty and purity, restricted mobility and family hierarchy. Values are the guiding principles and core convictions that are collectively embraced and upheld by a society. These include family honor, respecting elders and religious piety. Beliefs encompass deeply held and internalized convictions and ideas held at the individual and collective level. These include convictions such as women's inferiority in the public spaces, gender stereotypes regarding professions and domestic roles being women's primary role. Traditions are the customary rituals and practices passed down various generations. These include arranged marriages, conservative dress codes, and traditional gender roles. These patriarchal norms include societal expectations of how women should behave, act and direct their actions in accordance with these expectations of female modesty and appropriate female behavior that is mansplained to them. These also include societal mindsets of what professions are respectable for women, the type, kind and nature of their work and how it complements their work-life balance. Furthermore, these include religious and cultural expectations of a woman's character.

### **1.3.3 Intersectionality**

Intersectionality may be defined as a method for dealing with numerous, crossing and complex social relationships (McCall 2005). The concept of intersectionality refers to the interlinked nature of social categorizations such as gender, class, and race that are applied to a particular individual or group of individuals. These social categorizations are regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination, disadvantage or advantage (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, 2022).

For the purpose of this research, intersectionality is *operationalized* as the linkage between women's expected family role, marital status, motherhood status, and spouse support. The expected family role pertains to the role women are expected to play and give priority to, such as domestic role of a caretaker, a wife, public role of financial support or shared family roles. It helps explore how these various aspects intersect and interact, leading to overlapping and independent systems of advantage, disadvantage and discrimination in context of the working women, shaping and impacting their career prospects in scientific and technical fields.

### **1.3.4 Agency**

Agency is defined as an individual's capacity, in terms of free will and determination, to actively choose, affect change and to make their own choices. It's a major thematic contrast with structure, symbolizing the range of human freedom in terms of their actions (Oxford Reference, 2022). It is a social engagement process that is influenced by the past experiences, and involves envisioning different possibilities for the future, while evaluating present circumstances in order to achieve desired outcomes (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

For the purpose of this research, agency is *operationalized* as the ability of women to assert their autonomy and resist the influence of sociocultural factors that shape their occupational choices. It

encompasses their ability to challenge and navigate traditional gender norms, redefining their own career orientations based on personal aspirations and capabilities. Through agency, the study aims to gain insights into how women actively challenge societal expectations, breaking free from restrictive gender roles and advocating for their professional interests to pursue diverse and fulfilling career paths.

#### **1.4 Significance of research**

Various micro-individual, meso-organizational, and macro-societal factors are responsible for the prevalent occupational discrepancies (Ali, 2013). Although these issues have been subject to research in the industrialized countries in the West, these investigations are relatively lacking in Asian and African countries. Multi-level studies are lacking on it. Therefore, there exists a research gap regarding the role of multi-level societal and individual factors in determining occupational choices for women in Pakistan as existing research has predominantly focused on income and wage gaps, along with the issue of sexual harassment in organizations. Furthermore, exclusively focusing on organizations, and projecting the brunt of the burden on them for such occupational segregation by inadequately providing equal opportunities may be inefficient as it ignores the role of both macro-societal sociocultural factors and micro-individual factors.

With an aim to fill this research gap, this study will focus on exploring the role of sociocultural factors (macro-societal) as well as the role of intersectionality and agency (micro-individual) in determining occupational choices for women in context of Pakistan, a Muslim majority country with conservative and patriarchal sociocultural traditions. It is expected that this multi-level approach to understand occupational choices for Pakistani women would aid in better understanding of the deep-rooted structural problems in our society, and how they affect the female segment of our burgeoning population in choosing their career paths. This study is significant to

help fulfill the existing research gap, in a dimension other than the purely economic income and wage gap, as well as the dimension of sexual harassment.

The findings of the study are expected to have supplementary value to understand the decisions and practices of the organizational actors as well. Since organizations are anchored firmly in society and its institutions that guide and direct the decisions of their individual components, and their actions (Powell & DiMaggio, 2012). Organisations often adopt structures that are in compliance with the relevant cultural norms (Johnson & Stone, 2008)

Additionally, in the modern day and age, a lot of focus is being put on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to the United Nations (UN), these seventeen global goals are a universal call to action regarding issues that transcend the boundaries of a single state.

**SDG 5** aims to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.” Its target **5.5** aims to “ensure women’s full and active participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political economic and public life.” (National Initiative for Sustainable Development Goals, n.d)

This study has policy significance related to the SDG targets. The cause-centric nature of the study is expected to help understand the absence of women from certain occupations. Without having insight of the interrelation between sociocultural factors, along with intersectionality and agency of women, it is realistically not possible to meet the relevant sustainable development goal. This is evident from the existing ranking of Pakistan on the gender parity index. Despite various policy solutions aimed at increasing representation through legislation, the ranking of Pakistan has dropped. Furthermore, in Pakistan, there exists a lack of contextualized policy solutions to effectively address and cater to these issues. Therefore, the suggested policy solutions could help

facilitate eradication of these underlying structural problems, and in doing so, help towards the attainment of the relevant SDG targets.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Existing literature sheds some light on the distribution of women across various occupations in line with the data from the labor force survey. (Ahmed & Hyder, 2008) investigated the factors that encourage occupational segregation in the labor market. Their findings established that the female participation has been extremely low, especially in high paying occupational categories such as professionals, managers, legislators and senior officials.

Women and men have a different occupation distribution (Nasir, 2005). Gender plays a part in the labor market, with males being sorted into high-paying jobs while women continue to be employed in meagre, elementary low-paying jobs.

Irfan, Anwar et al., (2013) investigated gender division in the Pakistan labor force market by calculating the segregation index using nine professions employing the Duncan Index Technique. Their findings depicted that there was relatively high segregation in managerial professions.

Women in Pakistan have fewer and less diverse occupational choices than men. In metropolitan regions, the top five occupational categories account for two-thirds or more of women's employment, but men's work is more diverse (Amir & Kotikula, 2018). Traditional 'feminine' vocations, such as domestic help or fashion and textiles, are occupied by urban women. Men work in construction and services, which are considered "masculine" jobs. The education sector is the leading employment for urban women at higher education levels.

A work-life balance is when one can balance their energies to do what matters the most with both physical and emotional involvement, whether it is a task provided by the office or the duties that need to be fulfilled at home. The employees need to maintain both the sides and makes sure they



run well by keeping a balance between work-life and personal life, this is called a work-life balance (Setyorini & Shodiqoh, 2023). For women, balancing both lives are usually difficult. Interviewing multiple women showed that to be able to achieve work targets within the allocated time by the office, they would sometimes have to work overtime which would lead to their coming home late. This caused their home tasks neglect, such as washing clothes, cooking, cleaning, taking care of children etc. (Setyorini & Shodiqoh, 2023). All these factors come under the sociocultural factors that affect working women.

Depending on these sociocultural factors, there are multiple issues women face as they try to manage their homes as well as their jobs, leading to mental and physical health issues. These also cause relationship problems with their spouses, children and other family members. The reason is the cultural factor of south Asian countries where the women are expected to manage the kitchen and house chores but same cannot be said about western cultures. Individualism is more prevailed in the western societies so the norms for women are not the same as East. If both husband and wife are job holders, they would likely divide the house chores and duties for children as well but this kind of practices are not a routine in our culture. This shows the burden of working women in our society.

## **2.1 Sociocultural factors**

According to Choudhry et al. (2019), the sociocultural factors effecting women empowerment in Pakistan are educational barriers, decent work, access, and control over poverty. Decent work is equally important for men and women weather their participation in labor force or not. The actual participation of women in labor market in Pakistan relies on cultural, traditional, and religious thoughts. It was noted that the labor provided by the women was predominantly restricted to the limited opportunities available within their community. The data further confirmed that the 80

percent of the women employed in agriculture and 60 percent of women engaged in non-agricultural labor were working in their native areas (Choudhry, Mutalib, & Ismail, 2019). The root cause for this is not the low demand for women in work but the sociocultural practice, which is restriction of women for travelling as easily as men for their jobs, for women to leave their children and household duties as it is easy for men. Men can have good job opportunities in any area while women must be considerate of the off-site jobs.

At the macro-societal level, various studies have sought out to highlight and address the role of sociocultural factors and their relationship with occupational segregation and defining career choices for women.

In Ferdoos' seminal work published in 2005, the author delved into the persistent challenges faced by Pakistani women. These challenges stem from deeply ingrained traditional patriarchal attitudes and a number of cultural and structural barriers that continue to plague Pakistani women (Ferdoos, 2005). Such impediments have hindered women empowerment and their advancement across various spheres of life, affecting their access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities as well as their participation in decision-making processes. Ferdoos highlights that such traditional patriarchal attitudes, with roots tracing back across generations, perpetuate the belief in male dominance and women's subservience, creating an imbalanced power dynamic and limiting women's agency. Consequently, women in Pakistan have struggled to break free from traditional, restrictive gender roles that relegate them primarily to domestic responsibilities. Endorsed and enforced by families, communities and institutions, it becomes difficult for women to challenge and overcome these limiting expectations, affecting their ability to fully participate in the public sphere.

It is essential to consider the various ways by which societal factors such as gender, culture, religion, and also legal and economic factors, influence employee career paths (Syed & Ali, 2005). The authors conducted a study examining the intricate dynamics that shape employee career trajectories, including the interplay of societal, legal and economic factors. The research sheds some light on how deeply entrenched societal norms and expectations often mold individuals' career choices and opportunities. Sociocultural norms and gender stereotypes may influence the perception regarding suitability and accessibility of certain career paths, restricting career options for both men and women.

Socio-cultural and economic factors heavily influence the nature and scope of women's engagement in the labor market in the country. Due to societal and cultural restraints, as well as intrinsic gender prejudice in society and the labor market, their career options are constrained. Because of employers' preconceived notions of women's primary position as homemakers, their human capital is regarded as inferior to men's (Ali, 2013).

Even professional women have the difficulty of being unable to live independently and needing a male to look after them (Alavi, 1991). Alavi's study highlighted the rigidly patriarchal nature of Pakistani society, where even women with careers cannot set up a home without a male's protection. Despite their education and careers, the persistence of traditional societal expectations fosters a reliance on male counterparts for emotional, practical and financial support. If a woman is a widow, she would have to seek help of her father, brother or her grown-up son.

Family factors such as support and encouragement, their views about science, education, background and demands influence women's career choices (Avolio & Chavez, 2020). Family's influence on women's career aspirations is extremely significant as career choice is not just a personal decision. Parents who encourage their children to pursue a science career shaped their

interest in these fields. In presence of support from parents or family, women are more likely to opt, retain and eventually succeed in science careers. Similarly, in wake of parents having a scientific background, or with family contacts and acquaintances linked to these fields, young women as well as men are more likely to opt for a similar career.

The influence of religion and culture on emotional labor and societal standards of female modesty has also been highlighted. While Islamic law allows women to work, the actual expectations of Islamic regulations for female employment and female workplace behavior are more stringent than those for men (Syed & Ali, 2005). Women are expected to suppress emotions and exhibit restraint, traits that are discouraged by modern work culture in organizations that encourage women to be bold, aggressive and assertive. Even the feminine expectations including affection and encouragement cause a conundrum as the two sets of expectations are opposite of each other. A courteous rendered by a female customer service representative might be misinterpreted as a sign of interest and sexual encouragement, perplexing her regarding what a good customer service provider might mean (Mann, 1997). This creates tension between workplace role, cultural expectations and wider sociocultural contexts, affecting women's participation in the formal sector of employment.

Purdah observance and ideals also have an impact on women's participation in modern vocations. Because of the specific needs of a female population in a sex-segregated system, medicine and teaching were the most significant high-status vocations for educated women (Papanek, 1971)

The multilevel career prospects of women in Pakistan have previously been explored by (Sarwar & Imran, 2019). The authors used a relational framework of diversity management and social role theory in context of a patriarchal Pakistani society. The study identified an interplay of various macro, meso and micro level factors that cause hindrances to women's career progression. At the

macro-level, it highlighted religious misinterpretations and sociocultural factors as major obstacles faced by women. Despite educational attainment, women's workforce participation in Pakistan is disproportionate as cultural traditions, customs and religious beliefs play a detrimental role in shaping their career prospects (Sarwar & Imran, 2019).

Various individual, family, educational, social and economic-labor factors impact and shape women's presence and representation in science careers (Avolio & Chavez, 2020). Highlighting the social and cultural factors, the authors described the attribution of gender to professions terming science professions as masculine. Other social factors include the underestimation of their scientific abilities, as well as the stereotype associated with scientific fields being extremely demanding for women.

Women engineers in the US continue to be underrepresented in their field and often face obstacles in their career development (Khilji & Pumroy, 2019). These obstacles include gendered social and organizational norms such as women being too feminine and women not being engineers. Further, it also includes stereotypes and biases, including their outlook as an engineer, their behavior and their capabilities.

In developing countries, social norms particularly impact women's employment opportunities (Jayachandran, 2021). The author highlighted various social and cultural factors contributing to gender inequality in the workforce. Despite progress in closing the gender gap in education, women in many developing countries continue to face significant barriers to employment. Among others, these barriers include prevailing cultural attitudes that prioritize men's work over women's work

Previous research has endeavored to offer some insight on the underlying causes the long-term stagnation in female labor force participation in India. It was primarily conducted using a stylized scenario to demonstrate the negative impact of occupational segregation on women's employment prospects. Women in India have limited options in terms of career due to a variety of factors such as societal standards, religion, and women's social perceptions. Women in India face additional challenges as a result of social norms, such as gender-based discrimination and vocational segregation (Kapsos, Bourmpoula, & Silberman, 2014) .

In Bangladesh, the high-tech industry has experienced significant growth. However, women remain underrepresented in this field, facing a range of barriers that prevent them from entering and advancing in this field. Although some of the barriers are common across different contexts, most of the barriers women professionals face arise due to the interaction between situated sociocultural practices and gender. Among these barriers include cultural attitudes that view women as less capable in technical fields (Saifuddin, Dyke, & Hossain, 2019) . The dynamics of sociocultural and patriarchal norms reinforce gender biases and gendered practices that afford men with greater control over resources and systematically limit women's access to opportunities.

In Mauritius, participation of women in STEM professions is quite low, and women with careers in STEM professions face significant challenges compared to their male colleagues (Tandrayen-Ragoobur & Gokulsing, 2022). The authors also investigated the gender gap in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) tertiary education enrolment and career choice, through a mix of personal, environmental and behavioral factors. The findings revealed the existence of a gender disparity in the choice of STEM-related degrees, with the probability of a female student to enroll in a STEM degree lower than that of a male student. The findings also

demonstrated that young women are relatively more likely to choose STEM degrees than their male counterparts when they are supported by their family, school and teachers.

Women continue to be underrepresented in STEM fields in Lebanon. In a study conducted by (Mozahem & Ghanem, 2019), the authors shed light on the experiences of female engineering students and their decision-making processes. Female engineers faced a number of social and professional hurdles. In addition to multiple forms of discrimination, the women also faced opposition from their extended family and friends of the family despite the existence of support from their nuclear family.

Religious women work less than their non-religious counterparts (Davis & Gao, 2020). To understand whether it is due to their preferences or the influence of patriarchal societal norms, the authors estimated 'employment happiness premium', which is the happiness gain associated with being employed, for men and women belonging to six different religions and the non-religious. The results indicated that 'employment happiness premium' is higher for men across all religions, however it cannot account for the gender gap in employment across all religions. Preferences explain the employment gap for Buddhists, Orthodox Christians and the non-religious. However, it only accounts for 30-45 percent of the gender employment gap for Muslims, Hindus, Catholics and Protestants. The findings suggest that patriarchal social norms may significantly influence female employment outcomes in these religious traditions. The findings of this study show that it is predominantly the patriarchal social norms that shape the absence of women from work as compared to the religious preferences.

Thus, existing literature shows the importance of sociocultural factors on the occupational choices and employment opportunities available to women. Further, it also highlights how patriarchal norms shape and determine their choices, manifesting themselves in multiple facets. Although this

issue has not been extensively researched in Pakistan's context, the available literature, combined with relevant studies conducted in other developing countries, neighboring countries and Muslim countries that possess a similar societal construct such as India, Bangladesh, Lebanon and Mauritius shed some light on the issues faced by women living in patriarchal societies.

## **2.2 Intersectionality**

Intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, has deep historical roots in the work of Black feminists, Latina, post-colonial, queer, and Indigenous scholars (Hankivsky, 2014). The black feminist writers and activists were excluded from the mainstream and anti-racism movements and for this reason intersectionality came to life. This term represents erasure of difference where there is an implicit critique of exclusion (Kelly et al., 2021). Intersectionality may be defined as a strategy for dealing with several intersecting and complex social ties (McCall, 2005). The core idea of intersectionality is based on the notion that individuals possess several intersecting identities. The interaction of these identities, which include gender, race, religion, class, sexuality and geography among others, determine an individual's experiences and social position. Further, this interaction is situated in a context of various interconnected systems and power structures (Hankivsky, 2014).

Intersectionality takes into consideration the connections between multiple kinds of identity and can be defined as a theory that examines how the formation of power and processes involving gender, class, ethnicity, and other factors are explored simultaneously (Sustainable Development Policy Institute, 2008)

Initially, it was established as a response to address the limitations of unitary-axis analyses which failed to encompass and reflect the distinctive experiences of individuals possessing several



marginalized identities (Al-Faham, Davis, & Ernst, 2019). With the passage of time, intersectionality has made inroads into several contexts including academic research, social justice and law. Its application has been extended by scholars beyond the experiences of women of color, advocating its potential to become a wider research paradigm that can offer a more thorough understanding of issues related to social justice, the dynamics of power, oppression and government functions. However, this claim is also contested by some scholars who argue that it might prioritize certain kinds of oppression over others and might not be applicable in different contexts. However, works of scholars including Junn (2017) and Strolovitch (2007) suggest how intersectionality may successfully be utilized as a research paradigm. It may direct research, influence coalition-building efforts, and lead to an equitable and inclusive society by comprehending the complex intragroup differences, understanding power dynamics within and across identity groups.

The aforementioned conceptualization of intersectionality holds implications in two areas. As an academic tool, it facilitates the analyses of sociopolitical problems stemming from different categories of identity as interrelated. However, broadening its scope across groups and disciplines risks exclusion of marginalized groups and conceptual ambiguity. Furthermore, intersectionality's use as an academic tool does not imply a critical-praxis, or guarantee any automatic transformations of prevalent forms of inequalities. Thus, the second key area is its ability to engage in critical-praxis. In doing so, intersectionality can preserve its transformative potential and address power dynamics and social inequalities.

Intersectionality is based on certain key principles which aid in the understanding of how it can be applied in policy, research and also practice. These include intersecting categories, multi-level

analysis, dynamics of power, reflexivity, time and space, the knowledge of diversity, social justice, equity, resistance and resilience (Al-Faham, Davis, & Ernst, 2019).

These principles recognize that human lives have multiple dimensions and they are shaped by intersection and interaction of them all. It is not possible to predetermine the significance of any category or structure; it must be learned through research. Power relations inside and across social contexts are intertwined and evolve through time and geography. Individuals can experience power and oppression simultaneously, they are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, it is important to conduct multi-level analysis to encompass the broad spectrum of individual experiences. It is also necessary to maintain reflexivity, to recognize the dynamics of power and consideration and incorporation of diverse knowledge. Intersectionality places an emphasis on equity and social justice, questioning the traditional idea of equality. Understanding the intricacies of human lives also require considering factors such as time, space, resilience and resistance. The understanding of these key principles ensures the comprehension of the complex and interconnected nature of these tenets, forming the base of application of intersectionality.

Intersectionality is a widely accepted theoretically orientation in women and gender equality studies. It has transformed the field of women's studies on a greater level, before that the only focus used to be on gender. Due to the popularity of intersectionality now the studies are moving towards macro-level forms of privilege and oppression, such as racism and sexism. All this directly effects the conditions for working for women with careers.

As evident from the labor force statistics published by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), there exists occupational segregation in Pakistan, whereby majority of the 21 percent female labor force is employed in the Agriculture and Manufacturing sector. Furthermore, only a negligible

percentage of the female labor force in employed in managerial, professional, and technical positions.

Existing literature sheds some light on how various components of intersectionality such as family role, marital status, religious ethos, ethnicity, educational attainment, and socioeconomic status help shape women's occupational choices.

Women show some sort of link between their gender, marital status, and employment practises. Especially married women, who often endure a cultural conflict between their private and public lives (Ali, 2013) . It's also critical to comprehend how employees' dynamic, complicated, and intersecting identities, as well as their specific circumstances, shape their work experiences and goals (Syed, 2008) . It is the husband's responsibility to financially support his wife and children in Islamic traditions, therefore, women have lesser incentive and opportunities to get involved in paid work (Syed & Ali, 2005) . Women may face additional restraints as a result of marriage, such as greater responsibility for childcare and housework, as well as limitations on movement and the ability to make autonomous choices. Furthermore, if the men in the household believe that married women should be permitted to work outside the home; women are more likely to join in the labor force. Household attitudes, social norms and behavior, all have a role in deciding if, what, when, and how women may work for a living (Irfan, Anwar, Akram, & Waqar, 2013). The working experience of Pakistani women vary based on socioeconomic status, marriage, religion and individual identity factors, all of which intersect with gender to influence their career outcomes (Sarwar & Imran, 2019).

Social norms can exert significant influence on shaping women's choices and opportunities due to their deeply ingrained, change resistant nature. For instance, societal expectations surrounding

marriage and child-rearing often curtail women's ability to pursue full time employment (Jayachandran, 2021).

According to Barhate et al. (2021), Married women in India face numerous challenges in maintaining their careers. These include, among others, cultural expectations around women's roles as wives and mothers, lack of childcare and support services. Married women possess low autonomy over their career-related decisions, and they largely depend on spouse and his family's support to continue their careers. Additionally, women internalize traditional gender roles and identity as mothers and wives, causing disruptions in their careers

Women's household roles involving caretaking of the young or the elderly affects their careers. To address the conflict between family and professional duties, women often have to make compromises including abandoning career, pursuing relatively modest and manageable careers, delaying motherhood and surrendering personal time. For married women, their responsibility towards their spouse also requires them to strive for creating a balance between their professional and private lives (Avolio & Chavez, 2020).

Women engineers in the US continue to be underrepresented in their field and often face obstacles in their career development (Khilji & Pumroy, 2019). These obstacles include gendered social and organizational norms such as pre-eminence of social roles like responsibilities towards family and children. Women employ different coping strategies to overcome and maneuver these challenges. Married women's coping strategy is significantly determined by the role of their spouse and his support. It allows them to adopt a flexible strategy and overcome these challenges better.

In a study conducted by Mozahem and Ghanem (2019), the authors shed light on the experiences of female engineering students and their decision-making processes in Lebanon. Female engineers

faced a number of social and professional hurdles. In addition to multiple forms of discrimination, and lack of support from extended family, the women also faced compromises between family and career at some point. They termed it as a norm for women to have to make sacrifices in terms of their professional careers and to prioritize the work of the men of the family, or their spouse.

Evidence from existing research highlights how intersectionality of women's various roles shapes, determines and guide their decisions related to their careers. Although it has not been subject to detailed research in Pakistan, the research that has been carried out, along with evidence from other countries establishes the significance of women's multiple roles in the public and private sphere causes strain on their career. Women continue to have to struggle trying to balance their work and domestic duties, while sharing majority of the domestic burden. This is closely linked to the patriarchal structure of our society, however, for this research a distinction has been drawn between the two.

### **2.3 Agency**

Amartya Sen defined agency as what a person is free to undertake and accomplish in pursuit of the aims or ideals they deem to be essential. Agency refers to the capacity to overcome obstacles, challenge oppression and deprivation, and to have influence and voice in society, whether in an individual or collective capacity (Hanmer & Klugman, 2016).

Agency has inherent worth; it is significant in and of itself, regardless of whether exercising it results in improved wellbeing. Women's agency results in empowerment when it is used to challenge or alter regressive institutions and norms that uphold women's subordination (Kabeer, 2008).

Women may exercise their agency in several contexts. They may exercise it in an individual or collective capacity, such as within their families, engaging in politics, markets and various formal and informal institutions (Hanmer & Klugman, 2016). It can be said that agency is both an absolute and a relative concept. Relatively, it can be compared with the agency of men, or in fact other women. Further, agency of women may increase or decrease over time, depending upon their circumstances, as well as the context in which it is being viewed (absolute or relative).

The notion of agency holds that individual action is often guided by an individual's choice through exercising their personal agency and thinking. Individuals do not always act strictly according to institutional rules or cultural norms. Women do employ choice in their decisions related to the labor market (Ali, 2013). Women's agency, self-confidence, and perseverance are all significant factors in encouraging local women to pursue entrepreneurship and overcoming obstacles (Tlaiss, 2014).

The experience of working women in Pakistan was investigated by Ali (2013). The author adopted a multilevel, relational approach to observe the problems and obstacles faced by women employed in the formal, documented sector of the economy. The findings highlighted several legal, structural and sociocultural issues shaping the work experience of Pakistani women. She highlighted the role of women's agency in negotiating these barriers and continuing their career experience.

Women engineers in the US continue to be underrepresented in their field and often face obstacles in their career development (Khilji & Pumroy, 2019). These obstacles include gendered social and organizational norms such as pre-eminence of social roles like responsibilities towards family and children, women being feminine and women not being engineers. Further, it also includes stereotypes and biases, including their outlook as an engineer, their behavior and their capabilities. The study highlights the significance of women's strength and resilience (agency) in navigating

through these challenges, describing how different women employ different strategies to overcome those hurdles depending upon their circumstances. These strategies exhibit the extent of their agency as some play by the rules, some work their way around them while some defy the existing rules.

On perhaps the other end of the spectrum in terms of country is Lebanon. It cannot compare to the US in any sphere in terms of progress and development. However, when it comes to women in STEM fields, there exists a similarity. Women continue to be underrepresented in STEM fields in Lebanon. In a study conducted by Mozahem and Ghanem (2019), the authors shed light on the experiences of female engineering students and their decision-making processes. Female engineers faced a number of social and professional hurdles, including multiple forms of discrimination, opposition from their extended family and friends of the family despite the existence of support from their nuclear family, and compromises between family and career at some point. However, they were able to navigate through these hurdles with the help of their agency and the aid of nuclear family support.

Prior research has recorded how parents' beliefs influenced how they behaved with their children, which subsequently influenced the children's self-perception (Simpkins, Fredricks, & Eccles, 2012). Women are more likely to follow in the footsteps of a role model, which often tends to be someone from their parents. Furthermore, the presence of support from their parents encourages and facilitates their own decision-making abilities in their career choices (Mozahem & Ghanem, 2019).

Various individual, family, educational, social and economic-labour factors impact and shape women's presence and representation in science careers. In the literature review conducted by (Avolio & Chavez, 2020), the authors highlighted how the individual factors were primarily based

on women's agency, which plays a significant role in determining their presence and progress in scientific fields. Women employ their agency to navigate through the various sociocultural and family factors posing a challenge to their careers.

Previous research highlights the negative impressions formed about successful, agentic women in traditionally masculine occupations. These women are considered hostile and unlikable not just by men but also by their fellow women (Lawson & Lips, 2014). The authors investigated the negative impressions formed about these women. Their findings indicated that for women, those having a higher self-perceived agency were less likely to pillage other women as they considered masculine professions as more attainable. However, women with lower self-perceived agency were more likely to form negative impressions regarding agentic, successful women. On the contrary, the results showed that men created such impressions not because of self-perceived agency. Instead, the base for men was the traditional gender attitudes prevalent in the society that downplay the abilities of women to make a career in masculine professions.

There is a dearth of existing literature exploring the agency of women and its effects on women's navigation through various social and cultural hurdles in Pakistan. However, existing literature from some other countries highlights the importance of women's agency in countering the hurdles they face in their employment and career experiences. Agency is primarily employed as a strategy to address and navigate the barriers and issues that cause hindrance to their careers.

## **2.4 Agency versus Structure**

Within the domain of social theory, the agency versus structure debate has served as a crucial and persistent discourse. It is concerned with comprehending the interplay between individual agency: the individuals' ability to act and make choices, and social structure: the patterns of social



arrangements which mold and affect individual actions and behaviors. This debate aims to address the complex relationship that exists between individual agency and the wider societal factors that influence and limit human behavior.

The concept of “structure” in social sciences represents a versatile and powerful notion. It can encompass numerous facets of social existence, such as class, gender, modes of production, or rhetorical traditions. Structure is employed as a metonymic method in social sciences discourse to describe complicated social realities by identifying particular elements as emblematic of the whole.

Structural arguments frequently presuppose a strict causal determinism, presenting structures as primary and immovable while neglecting the role of human agency. This can lead to a reduction of actors to mere automatons. Furthermore, the concept of structure implies stability, making it challenging to explain changes over time within structural discourse. Change is often attributed to external factors rather than inherent within the structures themselves.

Broadly, two distinct approaches can be identified that explain the relationship between the individual and society (Elliott, 2009). Society-dominated accounts emphasize that common culture, socialization, and overall social structure shape individual practices. Individuals are seen as "supports" or "bearers" of larger social processes in this perspective, where society has a dominant influence on individual behavior. This view has been represented in certain aspects of the Frankfurt School as well as different forms of structuralism and post-structuralism.

Structuralism, rooted in anthropology and linguistics, emphasizes the study of underlying structures that shape human behavior and culture. It often posits deep structures or binary oppositions that give rise to diverse cultural manifestations. Structural functionalism focuses on the interdependence and functions of social structures in maintaining social order and stability.

Structural functionalists view society as a complex system of interconnected parts, with each part contributing to the smooth functioning of the whole. Individual actions are seen as shaped by social norms and roles within these structures. Marxism emphasizes the primacy of economic structures and class relations in shaping society. Marxists argue that economic systems, such as capitalism, fundamentally determine the distribution of power and resources, leading to social inequalities. Individual agency is often seen as constrained by economic forces and class interests.

In contrast, individual-dominated accounts focus on individuals as the source of broader social relations. Here, the emphasis is on how people, through their personal strivings, cultural creativity, or interactions with others, generate actions that lead to wider social patterns and cultural relations. The process of how individual actions contribute to collective social habits has been explored through various conceptual frameworks, including psychoanalysis and certain strands of feminism. Social theorists favoring this perspective, argue that the agency of individuals plays a crucial role in creating patterned social life. They stress the systematic study of reasons, motives, beliefs, emotions, and desires of people to develop critical social analysis. Understanding how individual actions lead to collective social habits over time is essential to grasp the fundamental conflicts in values, ethics, and morality of our time. This viewpoint values the complex ways in which individual actions contribute to shaping social life, challenging the idea that society is solely reproduced by impersonal structures.

## **2.5 Bourdieu's theory of habitus and field**

The extent to which people may act autonomously (agency) or are molded and limited by social structures can also be analyzed using Pierre Bourdieu's field and habitus theory, which offers useful insights into this debate. Bourdieu was amongst the first social theorists who attempted to

reformulate the primary distinction between human agency and structures. Instead, he opted to view them not as polar opposites but interrelated.

Bourdieu suggests that people are not merely passive recipients of social structures. Rather, societal actors (individuals) demonstrate detailed, sophisticated understandings of social circumstances that influence, and are influenced by, their own decisions and private lives (Elliott, 2009). Actors actively interact with and negotiate numerous social fields. Fields are structured space of positions which include a variety of social features and characteristics in which an individual is located. A field denotes a distinct social domain in which individuals compete for resources and power. Examples of fields can include education, politics, art, law, economic, culture and many more. Every field has its own set of laws, hierarchies and types of capital that govern how people act within that field and the opportunities available to them.

Simultaneously, Bourdieu outlined his concept *habitus* in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977); the molding of a set of individual characteristics intertwining with the specific cultural traits of the society, to explain how well-practiced habits connect individuals and the larger social entities of which they are a part (Elliott, 2009). Habitus refers to the internalized dispositions, preferences and thought processes that people acquire through the process of socialization. An individual's socioeconomic status, upbringing and their diverse experiences influence their habitus, which drives their behavior and decision-making inside different fields. It is both an outcome of social structures, as well as a mechanism of reproduction and sustainability of the same social structures by the individuals.

It is crucial to understand the interplay between field and habitus in order to address the agency versus structure debate. Actors are neither just support for social processes nor the basis of all social phenomena. On one side, individuals' habitus, molded by their social standing, influences

and impacts their conduct and choices within a field. Due to their habitus, individuals are predisposed to specific behaviors, certain preferences and strategies that are consistent with their cultural background and their social class. This indicates that social structures impose certain rigidity and restriction on individuals.

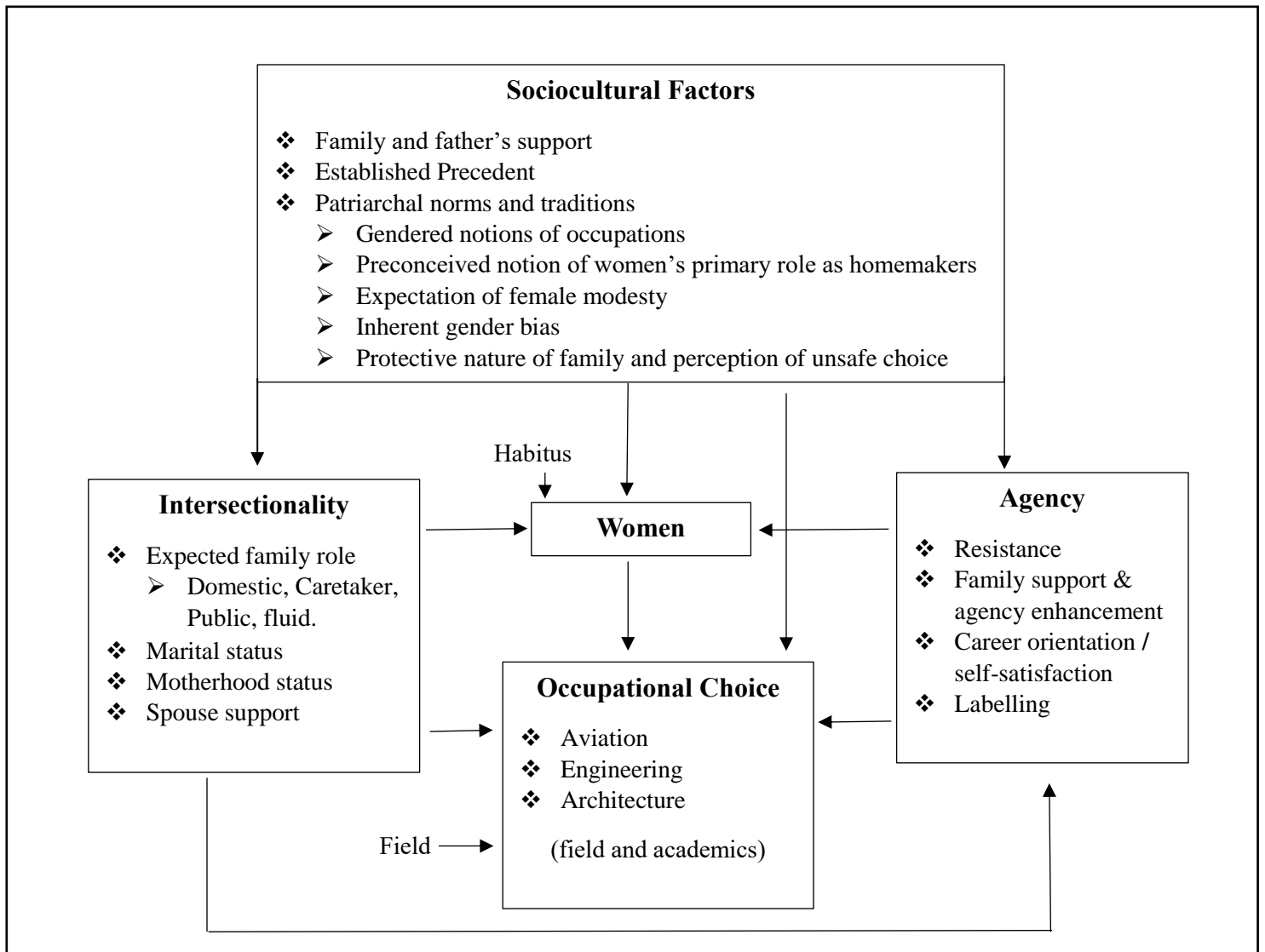
However, simultaneously, Bourdieu argues that individuals also exercise their agency within fields (Elliott, 2009). They undertake strategic actions to attain advantages and navigate within a field, such as networking and accumulating cultural capital associated with specific fields. According to Bourdieu, individuals with greater cultural capital such as knowledge, skills and cultural tastes valued within a specific field consolidate a greater advantage and agency within that field. However, not all individuals possess the same level of agency since it is determined by their habitus and the resources they own.

Agency and structure are not forces with an opposing nature in Bourdieu's framework. Instead, they are interrelated and intertwined. Individuals exercise agency within the restrictions and possibilities offered by social structures, while structures are reproduced, sustained, and transformed by individuals' actions. The agency vs. structure issue then becomes a matter of how much agency individuals have in certain fields and how social structures and institutions affect and constrain their choices.

As a whole, Bourdieu's field and habitus theory provides a nuanced understanding of the agency vs structure argument. It underlines the intricate interplay between individual actions and social structures, emphasizing that agency is influenced not just by individuals' habitus but also by the unique social fields in which they exist and operate.

## 2.6 Conceptual Framework

This section discusses the conceptual framework that has been adopted for the study. I have used Pierre Bourdieu's theory of field and habitus to provide theoretical foundation, support and context to the findings of the study. Pierre Bourdieu was amongst the first social theorists who attempted to reformulate the primary distinction between human agency and structures. His theory of field and habitus is one of the most significant works in this regard.



*Figure 1: Conceptual Framework*

Based on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, human agency and the interrelation between them, it is possible to address how sociocultural factors, intersectionality and agency exhibit an interplay between them to shape women's occupational choices.

The working women's habitus refers to the internalized dispositions, preferences and thought processes that they have acquired through the process of socialization. Sociocultural factors such as family support, established precedence, and patriarchal norms and traditions play a significant role in shaping their habitus. The expectations around women's role as a caretaker, a wife, and a mother also play a major role in their upbringing, ultimately influencing their habitus. The habitus guides and directs women's behavior and decision-making within a field. Thus, sociocultural factors and intersectionality of women's multiple roles, the expectations surrounding them, and the support offered to them helps shape their habitus and determines the occupational choices they make, and the fields they opt for.

Fields preexist the individual and have their own specific sets of rules and hierarchies that govern how people act within that field and the opportunities available to them. A field, according to Bourdieu can be any distinct social domain. The field in this case is the occupation of the working women, and the broader societal context where they are located. The selected fields of Aviation, Engineering and Architecture, alongside their corresponding academic disciplines constitute the occupational 'field.'

However, women are not just mere recipients of social structures. They demonstrate detailed, sophisticated understandings of social circumstances that influence, and are influenced by their own decisions and private lives. They actively interact with and negotiate the fields, not just as supports or bearers of the social structures guided by their habitus, but also as actors having agency.

Women exercise their agency within a field that enables them to take strategic actions to gain advantages and navigate through challenges.

However, not all women possess the same level of agency since it is determined by their habitus and the resources they own. Further, they exercise agency within the restrictions and possibilities offered by social structures. Thus, women's agency does not exist mutually exclusive of the sociocultural factors, the intersectionality of their expected social roles, the support extended to them, and the broader societal contexts in which they are situated. The interplay between women's habitus, field and how they employ their agency ultimately determines the occupational choices they make.

## **Chapter 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter discusses the research methodology used for this study. Research methodology is a framework to assure valid and stable results that address the aims and objectives of the research. Methodology lays out how researchers articulate research problems and objectives and explore results from the data gathered during the study period (Bryman, 2012)

#### **3.1 Research Strategy**

This study employed a qualitative research strategy, as it involved the collection and analysis of primary, non-numerical data in order to understand and gain insight into the opinions and experiences of working women to attain a better understanding of the research problem. Qualitative research allows for collecting rich, in-depth, non-numerical data that facilitates a comprehensive understanding and interpretation of the experiences and perspectives of individuals or groups. It helps capture the complexity of individual human behavior, aiding in better understanding the reasons behind it. Since the study explored the role of sociocultural factors, intersectionality and agency in determining occupational choices for women, qualitative research strategy was better suited for this purpose as these are complex phenomenon that cannot be easily quantified. Furthermore, analyzing them required depiction, description and explanation (Bryman, 2012), hence qualitative research was chosen as the study's research strategy.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

The study followed an explanatory research design, as it aimed to delve deeper into the complex interplay between the sociocultural factors, intersectionality, and agency of women, and how it shapes their occupational choices. It is a type of research design that is used when the research



aims to understand the relationships between different variables, identify how they affect each other in numerous ways, and determine the interplay between them (Bryman, 2012) . By adopting an explanatory research design, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the underlying reasons behind women’s occupational choices and the nature of the relationship between these three variables. Further, with an explanatory research design, the study aimed to bridge the gap between existing literature and contribute to a better understanding of the multifaceted factors that influence women’s occupational choices.

### **3.3 Methods of Data Collection**

This study used conversational method of data collection, that is, interviews. The type of interview used was semi-structured, as it allowed for flexibility in either of the following: researcher’s positionality, number of questions, their sequence and the nature of questions (Bryman, 2012). Semi-structured interviews allowed staying relevant to the issues under discussion, instead of a general discussion on all kinds of issues and factors that helped shape women’s occupational choices. Further, semi-structured interviews allowed for probing through open ended questions to gain a comprehensive understanding of each woman’s specific, individual experiences. It also allowed them the necessary freedom to express themselves on relevant aspects of their experiences. Since the research involved primary data collection from working women in the fields of engineering, aviation, architecture and their corresponding educational disciplines, the method of data collection was the same across professions. This consistency allowed for a comparative analysis of the factors influencing women’s occupational choices across different professions.

### **3.4 Sampling**

This study used purposive sampling to select the participants of the study. Also known as judgement, selective or subjective sampling, it is a non-probability sampling technique employed

when the researcher must rely on their personal judgement when selecting participants of the study (Bryman, 2012). Since the women are extremely underrepresented in the scientific and technical professions in Pakistan, purposive sampling allowed a more efficient participant selection by selecting women who have the experience of working in Aviation, Engineering Architecture and their corresponding academic field of teaching. It also allowed me to ensure sample diversification by selecting participants with different backgrounds, age and different levels of experience in the field. Furthermore, selecting participants through purposive sampling also ensured relevancy, reliability and accuracy of the acquired data.

### **3.5 Units of Data Collection**

This research involved primary data collection, with the help of semi structured interviews conducted from the working women in the field of Aviation, Architecture and Engineering. The women were working in the field or teaching in the academics of the same discipline. This was to compare the experiences of the two groups, however, all of them were required to share their experiences and there was no distinction between women working in the academics, or across professions. The details of the respondents are provided in the respondent's table, alongside their occupation.

### **3.6 Locale**

The primary data was collected from working women in the fields of engineering, aviation, and architecture in Islamabad. Islamabad was chosen as the locale of the study because being the federal capital, it represents one of the very few cities in the country where women are employed in scientific and technical professions. Further, it attracts professionals belonging to various fields and diverse backgrounds, making it a blend of different cultural backgrounds and experiences. Additionally, being the country's political and administrative center, most of the government

initiatives relevant to women empowerment and participation are centered here. Furthermore, owing to my own limitation of being located in Islamabad, it was relatively convenient to get in touch with working women within the same locale.

### **3.7 Procedure of Data Collection**

For the process of data collection, it was initialized by identifying the specific scientific and technical fields from which the working women were to be selected. The fields chosen were Aviation Sciences, Engineering and Architecture. Afterwards, the respondents were contacted, and interviews were scheduled at a date and time of their choosing, as per their convenience. The universities, or the organizations where the women are employed were not formally contacted as I managed to access the required number of respondents through referrals from some friends who have studied at the respective universities, or have worked with the participants of the study. A total of 16 interviews were conducted. The average duration of each interview was thirty (30) minutes. No interviews were outrightly rejected, however, due to the busy schedules of the participants, some interviews could not take place. Point of saturation was reached well before the 16<sup>th</sup> interview, therefore the delayed interviews were then cancelled after 16 interviews. The interview type was semi-structured interviews. No other sampling techniques were used except purposive sampling. Sample diversification was ensured by selecting women across three different occupational fields; Aviation, Engineering, and Architecture. In order to understand and compare the experiences of women working in the field, the corresponding academic fields were also selected where women who were not working in the field were teaching. Further, sample diversification was also ensured by selecting women from different age groups. The details of the respondents are provided in Table 1: Respondent's information. (page 42)

The interviews were conducted online due to the busy schedules of the respondents, as it allowed more flexibility in terms of date and time setting of the interview. The online interviews were conducted through google meet except two which were conducted through WhatsApp. Three interviews were conducted in person as well. The languages used in the interviews were English and Urdu. The questions were asked in English; however, the respondents were requested to answer in whatever language they were comfortable speaking. It was entirely their discretion. Additionally, it was considered that some participants may not feel comfortable disclosing sensitive, personal information regarding family, their attitudes towards them, and the difficulties they faced. Therefore, owing to the sensitive and personal nature of the research, they were provided with the option of a female conducting the interview, in case they were uncomfortable giving one to a male. The respondents did not express any reservations; therefore, all the interviews were conducted personally by me. Personally, I did not feel any limitations caused by online interviews as the participants felt more comfortable that way, and were able to participate comprehensively without any worries about time constraints.

The interviews were recorded digitally, and transcribed verbatim. Those parts of the interviews where the respondents spoke Urdu were translated into the Roman English version of Urdu. Afterwards, they were translated into the English language with a special consideration towards preserving the essence of their story. Verbal consent was taken from each respondent to use their statements as quotations to facilitate the analysis, as well as to record the interviews in the first place. Only one respondent expressed their reservation about the digital recording. Respecting their choice, their interview was not recorded digitally. Instead, their statements were recorded manually by taking detailed notes. The respondents requested that their names may be kept confidential, therefore, a specific coding scheme was devised to allocate a unique code to each

respondent. The respondent codes, along with the rest of the details of the respondents' demographics are provided in the following table. A total of approximately 20,700 words comprised the data after the translation and transcription. The codes for themes and subthemes were developed manually using the data from interviews. After extensive data familiarization themes and subthemes were developed manually. These were then cross checked and finalized.

### 3.8 Respondent's Information

**Table 1: Respondent's Information**

Serial No.	Code	Occupational Field	Marital Status	Age	Education	Designation
1	R1	Aviation	Married	40-46	BS Aviation Sciences	Wing Commander
2	R2	Aviation	Married	32-39	BS Security Studies	Wing Commander
3	R3	Engineering	Married	32-39	BS Aeronautical Engineering	Program Manager
4	R4	Aviation (Academics)	Married	32-39	BS Aviation Sciences	Demonstrator
5	R5	Engineering	Engaged	25-31	Master's Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering	Senior Design Engineer
6	R6	Engineering (Academics)	Married	32-39	PHD France MS Mechanical BS Material Sciences	Assistant Professor
7	R7	Engineering (Academics)	Single	25-31	MS Mechanical Design Analysis	Lecturer
8	R8	Engineering (Academics)	Single	25-31	MS Mechanical Engineering	Lecturer
9	R9	Engineering (civil)	Married	40-46	BS Civil Engineering	Senior Engineer
10	R10	Engineering (civil) (Academics)	Single	25-31	MS Civil Engineering	Lecturer
11	R11	Scientist/ Academics	Married	40-46	M Phil Biotechnology	Chairperson
12	R12	Architecture	Married	32-39	MS interior design (Florence Design Academy)	Temporary VF, Owner of Architectural Firm
13	R13	Architecture (both)	Single	25-31	MS Cultural Heritage Management and Policy (CEU AUSTRIA)	VF, Cultural Heritage Consultant
14	R14	Architecture (academics)	Single	25-31	MS Architectural Design (US)	Lecturer
15	R15	Architecture	Married	25-31	MS Digital Media Design (Edinburgh university UK)	Own Architectural Firm
16	R16	Architecture	Married	25-31	BS Architecture	Own Architectural Firm

### **3.9 Researcher's Positionality**

Having women at home being an only brother to five sisters, and female friends and colleagues, I have witnessed the differential treatment extended to women by the society, as well as their own household, based on certain societal standards and expectations. Women are often not extended the necessary support by their male counterparts. Thus, I wanted to understand the causes for this differential treatment, in the context of determining their occupational choices. As a heterosexual man, it was considered that the nature of the research may have implications on eliciting sensitive information from women. Owing to the societal pressures associated with opening up, and the stigma attached with mixed gatherings and male-female friendships, some women may not feel comfortable sharing such personal information with a male who's also a complete stranger in which case, it was ensured that a female would conduct their interview. However, the respondents did not express any reservations in being interviewed by me, and I conducted all interviews except one myself. Hence, me being a heterosexual man did not bring any changes in the research findings.

### **3.10 Analysis**

This research used the thematic analysis approach for data analysis, as it is a qualitative study based on interviews. Scattered, disorganized and disintegrated data was organized into different themes and subthemes. The tool of analysis was Framework Analysis, which follows a very procedural way of analyzing data (Bryman, 2012). The steps of the procedure are as follow:

The first stage is referred to as verbatim transcription, which involves transcribing the data in the same language as it has been collected in, in the same way without any punctuation marks and stylistic notes. The second stage involves transcription convention which constitutes applying stylistic notes to the transcribed data. The third step involves word by word translation of the data,

followed by making sense of the translation. The next step involves Indexing/ Coding of the data. Based on coding, thematic charts are constructed for the collected data, which is also referred to as thematic charting. Finally, the data is organized into various themes and sub-themes.

### **3.11 Ethical Guidelines**

The study followed established ethical guidelines in order to ensure compliance with ethical standards of research. During the process of data collection, the participants were made fully aware of what the research would encompass. All the participants gave their verbal consent before the interviews and pledged that they were participating voluntarily. They were informed that their statements would be used in the study. Additionally, in order to safeguard their confidentiality, their original names were kept out of the study and replaced with assigned codes for each participant. Their workplace and universities were also kept confidential. Lastly, all of the data was collected and interpreted objectively and honestly, without any biasedness.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter discusses the findings of the study. Multiple readings of the transcriptions paved way for the identification of key emerging themes and sub-themes. These themes are categorized at two levels; Macro-societal and Micro-individual-level factors and influences, that shape up women's occupational choices, specifically pertaining to the chosen scientific and technical fields. At the macro-societal level, various sociocultural factors influence the occupational choices of women. At the micro-individual level, women's intersectionality and agency play an important and vital role in the determination of their occupational choices and whether they choose to adopt these scientific and technical fields. While analyzing the various themes that emerged from this study, there are multiple quotations listed from the interviews to enhance their validity and authenticity. The research questions of the study were addressed within the emerging themes and subthemes from the interviews conducted with the respondents.

## 4. Themes and Subthemes

**Table 2:** Themes and Subthemes

<p><b>4.1 Job Satisfaction and Career Choice</b></p>	<p>4.1.1 Current job satisfaction 4.1.2 Preferred choice of Occupation 4.1.3 Opting for a different occupation</p>
<p><b>4.2 Sociocultural Factors</b></p>	<p>4.2.1 Family support     4.2.1.1 Father’s support 4.2.2 Established Precedence 4.2.3 Patriarchal norms and traditions     4.2.3.1 Gendered notions of occupation     4.2.3.2 Preconceived notion of women’s primary role as homemakers     4.2.3.3 Sociocultural expectation of female modesty     4.2.3.4 Inherent gender-bias     4.2.3.5 Protective nature of the family and Perception of Unsafe Choice for women</p>
<p><b>4.3 Intersectionality</b></p>	<p>4.3.1 Marital Status and Expected family role     4.3.1.1 Unmarried Women and expected Family Role     4.3.1.2 Married Women and expected family role         4.3.1.2.1 Married women with Spouse support and without children         4.3.1.2.2 Married woman with spouse support and children</p>
<p><b>4.4 Agency</b></p>	<p>4.4.1 Family support and Agency Enhancement 4.4.2 Career Orientation and Self-satisfaction 4.4.3 Labelling</p>

## **4.1 Job Satisfaction and Career Choice**

The first few questions of the interview were designed to acquire data about the respondents' job and occupational satisfaction. This information served as the foundation for exploring the influence of the sociocultural factors, intersectionality, and agency on the working women's occupational choices. The following themes emerged out from it consequently.

### **4.1.1 Current Job Satisfaction:**

Out of the total number of respondents, all except one expressed their satisfaction with their current job. The only exception is currently teaching as a demonstrator. According to her, she intended to become a fighter pilot, however, due to certain sociocultural and intersectionality influences, she had to give up on her dream and settle for the teaching role.

*“To be honest, no. I’m not happy or satisfied. It was not my first choice, I wanted to become a fighter pilot.” (R4, Demonstrator)*

On the contrary, her counterparts in the Aviation, who were working in the field, were extremely satisfied and content. One of the respondents, when asked whether she was satisfied with her current job said,

*“Oh, yes! No other question. I am damn satisfied Alhamdulillah Alhamdulillah!”*

*(R1, Wing Commander)*

The reason for this level of satisfaction was primarily attributed to them being the first one in their families to opt for such a specialized occupational field. It was completely unprecedented.

*“There wasn’t such a precedent in our family where they had moved out in such a professional branch.” (R2, Wing Commander)*

Not only were they the first ones in their respective families to opt for this profession, they also happened to be amongst the first few women who were inducted into the Pakistan Airforce.

*“We were one of the first lady officers to be inducted in the Pakistan Air Force in regular courses, which undergo the training of four years in academy. We were the first of 20 and I would say we were the first in Pakistan.” (R1, Wing Commander)*

Their experiences depict a realistic picture of occupational segregation in Pakistan; a country amongst the world’s most populous countries, where these women were the first few after the turn of the century. Similarly, other respondents from the other two selected occupational fields expressed their job satisfaction in glowing terms. However, the smooth and straightforward nature of job satisfaction cannot be implied on the second theme which we will discuss next.

#### **4.1.2 Preferred Choice**

The second theme that emerged out from the respondents’ data was whether their current profession and occupational field was also their preferred choice. Based on the analysis of the theme, it might seem that the answers to this question would be quite simple and straightforward. However, surprisingly, the findings suggest a more complex relationship in this regard. This relationship can be better analyzed by breaking down the preferred choice into multiple facets.

To begin with, only 2 respondents outrightly said that their current occupational field was not their preferred choice. On the contrary, the rest of the respondents expressed their satisfaction with their current occupational field. Although their respective occupational fields were their preferred choice, it does not imply that it had always been the case.

Out of the 14 respondents, only 31 percent (5) said that their preferred choice of profession was always the same. Neither was it different when pursuing the relevant degree, nor did it change later, when they decided to work, whether in the field or the academics.

3 respondents confessed how their current occupational field was initially not their preferred choice when they enrolled in the relevant degree, however, later it became their preferred choice. This inclination was their own choice later, however, initially, they chose their field because of their parents. When asked if Architecture was what she always wanted to do, a respondent had the following response:

*“My mom realized early on, like in 6th, 7th grade, that architecture would be a nice fit for me. And I was not as ambitious a child as I should have been, so I was fine with them paving the way for me. I ended up in architecture, but I ended up really liking it. I genuinely love architecture.”*

***(R16, Own Architectural Firm)***

Half of the respondents out of those who were in the Academics said that initially, their preferred choice was to work in the field, however, it changed towards Academics due to various sociocultural factors and notions intersectionality.

*“Basically, during my bachelors I decided that I would work in the industry. However, during the last semester I changed my mind and decided to pursue a Master’s degree and pursue a career in the Academia.”* ***(R8, Lecturer)***

To put it further into a perspective, only one respondent, out of all those who were teaching instead of working in the field, said that it was always her preferred choice of occupation.

*“I’m currently acting as a teacher for many students and as a mentor in their fyp projects and researches. Teaching was something that I always wanted to do. It fascinated me.”*

*(R6, Assistant Professor)*

Two respondents who're currently working in the field, as well as teaching the same discipline at the university expressed how their preferred choice was to work in the field, however, they also developed an inclination towards Academia owing to certain research gaps and lack of opportunities and other field-related socio-cultural obstacles. *(R14, R13)*

When asked if teaching was what she had a liking for, a respondent had the following response:

*“I never thought that I would be in teaching profession or academia. However, now that I am doing it, I feel that I'm doing it well and I can do it. I enjoy it as well, because while you teach, you learn yourself as well.” (R13, Visiting Faculty, Cultural Heritage Consultant)*

From these statements, it is evident that women who are teaching instead of working in the field have had their choices influenced by various factors that made them switch from the field to the Academics. Furthermore, women who are working in the field have also had their share of influences that later determined their preferred choice. The phenomenon of preferred choice of occupational fields is multifaceted. In order to develop its holistic understanding, all the considerations need to be catered to. On the surface, it might seem like the final preferred choice is a smooth, streamlined process. However, it is greatly influenced by various sociocultural factors, notions of intersectionality and agency. These will be discussed in detail in the upcoming sections.

#### **4.1.3 Opting a Different Profession**

The third theme that emerged out of the data was their willingness to opt for a different profession. Upon being asked the question of whether they would switch their occupations if given a chance, only three respondents expressed their interest in doing so. Out of these three, only one belonged to the field, while the other two were from the Academia. All other respondents said that they

wouldn't choose a different occupation, including those who switched to Academia even though it wasn't their preferred choice of occupational field. When asked this question, one of the respondents had the following response:

*“Now even if I had the opportunity I would stick to the academia. I want to pursue my PhD and grow professionally.” (R10, Lecturer)*

Similarly, other respondents expressed their determination to stay in their current occupational field citing its influence on shaping them as a person.

*“I am what I am because of this journey.” (R6, Assistant Professor)*

Some respondents also expressed their willingness to stay in the same occupation because of the time and effort it has taken them to establish themselves in the field. When asked if she would change her occupation to her childhood dream job instead of her current occupational field, this is what the respondent had to say:

*“I faced a lot of problems and difficulties during my career, to prove that I could do what this profession required. I would not change my profession, even if I was given a choice because I have worked very hard to establish myself in this profession.” (R9, Senior Engineer)*

The women have overcome a lot of obstacles in their career to be where they are, and for those reasons they would not opt for a different occupation even if given the choice. As for those women who are in the academics, they also seem to have developed a liking for it even if it wasn't their initial choice. The factors influencing these choices are dissected and analyzed in the following themes and subthemes that have emerged from the data.

## 4.2 Sociocultural Factors

The first research question explores the role of sociocultural factors in determining occupational choices for women working. The following themes and subthemes emerge out of it.

### 4.2.1 Family Support

Family's influence on women's career aspirations is extremely significant as career choice is not just a personal decision (Avolio & Chavez, 2020). Consistent with this, the first theme that emerged out of the respondents' interviews was support from their immediate nuclear family. Considering the dynamics of Pakistan, a multi-ethnic country with entrenched patriarchal norms and traditions across various ethnicities, it is a common for women to experience a lack of support from their families when choosing their preferred occupational field. Often, women are discouraged from working in the first place. Therefore, for them to have any chances of making it into scientific and technical fields, it is vital that they have their family's support. When asked about their family's stance on their preferred choice of occupation, majority of the respondents unequivocally expressed the presence of their family's support.

*“There was no resistance. They've always been very supportive, and whatever idea I had that this is what I want to pursue, they always work, back me up and hype me up; That you should go for it.” (R10, Lecturer)*

*“I had absolute support from my own family. They were very happy. I didn't have any pressure from their side.” (R3, Program Manager)*

Their responses depict a sad truth about our social fabric, where it is often the case that the women face intense pressure and resistance from their families when they decide to opt for such fields that usually women in Pakistan do not opt for. In fact, one respondent who had to compromise on her



occupational field and had to switch from the field to the academics cited lack of family support as the primary reason for her decision.

*“My parents were always saying family first. I had no support from them.” (R4, Demonstrator)*

Thus, it can be concluded that family support is essential if women are to make a career in their preferred occupational fields. It is consistent with the work of (Avolio & Chavez, 2020), who highlighted the influence of family factors on women’s career aspirations. In presence of support from parents or family, women are more likely to opt, retain and eventually succeed in science careers. It is also consistent with the work of (Tandrayen-Ragoobur & Gokulsing, 2022), who demonstrated that young women are relatively more likely to choose STEM degrees than their male counterparts when they are supported by their family. Family support greatly influences their decision to opt for a scientific and technical field as a career. The presence of strong family support acts as a shield for women against various other sociocultural hurdles that are discussed ahead. Without the presence of family support, their occupational choices would have been different. Instead of pursuing a career in scientific and technical fields, they would also have opted for other professions that are considered suitable for women.

#### **4.2.1.1 Father’s Support**

Prior research has recorded how parents' beliefs influenced how they behaved with their children, which subsequently influenced the children's self-perception (Simpkins, Fredricks, & Eccles, 2012). A key distinction within family’s support is support of the father. It emerged as a subtheme within family support after the analysis of the respondents’ interviews. Often, women faced resistance from within the family, such as their mother. However, with their father’s staunch support, they were able to overcome it. When asked about her family’s reaction to her preferred choice of occupation as a fighter pilot, one of the respondents said:

*“At first instance it was like a shock for everyone. Mix and match reaction. As usual, we are living in an eastern society. A few of the people, including my own mother, she was totally against this. But on the other hand, my biggest support was my father. It makes me emotional because my father’s categorical support did wonders for me taking my own decision, and to feel that I could do something meaningful for my inner self, for my inner satisfaction.”*

**(R1, Wing Commander)**

Their father’s support was not only instrumental in resisting the internal family pressure, it was also key to overcoming other sociocultural pressures as well.

*“I have a good understanding with my father. He always says that you need to make your own position wherever you go. There were loads of people who said this is not a woman’s field. Many suggested I should do BA but my father denied everyone.”* **(R6, Assistant Professor)**

Father’s support was the most recurring subtheme in all the interviews. The challenges posed by the demands and requirements of the field jobs, where there are often no fixed times and the onsite visits are at various locations, could not have been overcome without the support of their father. One of the respondents, who is working in the architectural field, explained her father’s support in the following words:

*“I was surrounded by men all the time. But my father, of course, I’m dead sure he had his reservations, but he was, and still is Alhamdulillah such an amazing person that he used to drive me to places. He used to drive me to Lahore and to Abbottabad, to all my meetings.”*

**(R12, Own Architectural Firm)**

Another respondent described the importance of her father’s support in the following words:

*“Some people in my family are conservatives, but my father is not. He has always been our defense against the conservative family norms and values regarding women working.”*

**(R7, Lecturer)**

Thus, it can be concluded that before everything else, and where all else fails, it is the support of a woman’s father that enables her to make professional inroads in the field of her choice. If they have their father in their corner, having their back, the sociocultural hurdles do not seem as gigantic as they would without the support of their father. The presence of father’s support acts as a shield for women against sociocultural obstacles they encounter. The respondents revealed how if it wasn’t for this support, they would not have been able to be where they are today. Neither they would have had a career in the field of their choice. These sociocultural factors are discussed ahead in detail.

Analyzing it from the perspective of Bourdieu’s theory of field and habitus, the ‘field’, which in this case is the preferred occupational field has certain characteristics, dynamics, and aspects. It has its own set of hierarchy, norms and values associated with it. The habitus refers to the individual’s own internalized set of beliefs, norms, and values that they have acquired over the years from socialization. It helps us understand how an individual’s socialization and cultural background shapes their perceptions, aspirations and behaviors related to occupations. In case of father’s support against the sociocultural hurdles, the fathers’ habitus matches with their daughter’s habitus. His unwavering support rendered to her daughter against the patriarchal norms and traditions enable her to face and overcome these challenges, encouraging her to persist in pursuing her career goals.

#### 4.2.2 Established Precedence:

The second key theme that emerged from the data was the presence or absence of a precedent in the family of someone else having been in a similar occupational field. It affected the occupational choices of women in two ways.

For those women who did not have an established precedent, it was the cause of resistance and obstacles as their family was rather skeptical of their preferred occupational choice. As one respondent said:

*“Nobody from my paternal or maternal side of the family was in the forces. I was the first one.”*

***(R1, Wing Commander)***

Due to this unprecedented decision, she faced a lot of resistance from within the family and her extended family. It was against their expectations that the youngest one in the family would move out at such an early age and in such a professional field.

Similarly, another respondent who did not have any precedence of someone moving out into the same line of work as her, expressed it in the following words:

*“There wasn’t such a precedent in our family where they had moved out in such a professional branch.”* ***(R2, Wing Commander)***

Consequently, she faced extreme pressure from her family and extended family to drop it and move into a more acceptable field. However, as aforementioned, the support of their father and brothers, male members of the family, enabled her to resist the family pressure and pursue her dream.

On the contrary, those women who had an established precedent in the family where a family member, a relative or any cousins were working in the same field, or similar fields, they faced less resistance and had more acceptance regarding their own occupational choice. Furthermore, not

only did it help create more acceptance, in most cases it shaped up their choice of occupation as well.

*My father was a civil engineer as well so he was extremely happy with my decision.*

**(R9, Senior Engineer)**

In case of one of the parents working in the same field, more importantly a male, the women found it relatively easier to convince their parents of their own inclination towards the same field. Their decision was met by general content and satisfaction by their parents.

The presence of a precedence also drove expectations regarding their occupational choice. One of the respondents, who's working in the architectural field, expressed how her parents' occupation drove the expectations for her occupational choice as well.

*I think there are a lot of factors, mostly family. Both my parents are engineers, so it was sort of an expectation, I guess, that eventually we had to do something of the sort.*

**(R16, Own Architectural Firm)**

This does not imply that the women themselves were forced into the same occupational choices. In fact, it created the opportunity for them to be able to pursue a similar occupation due to the expectations, with more freedom to choose.

Often, the presence of a precedence drove the expectations and shaped up the preference of the women, simultaneously. One of the respondents who pursued Mechanical engineering expressed her reason for opting that field as:

*“My father wanted me to become an engineer because one of my relatives was a mechanical engineer, PhD professor, first PhD professor at UET Lahore. That mesmerized me as well. I wanted to become like him.”* **(R7, Lecturer)**

Thus, it can be concluded that an established precedence or lack of one influenced the occupational choices of the women. In case it existed, women faced less resistance and more acceptance for their occupational choices. These findings are consistent with the work of (Avolio & Chavez, 2020), who highlighted that in wake of parents having a scientific background, or with family contacts and acquaintances linked to these fields, young women as well as men are more likely to opt for a similar career. Similarly, (Mozahem & Ghanem, 2019) also highlighted that women are more likely to follow in the footsteps of a role model, which often tends to be someone from their parents. Further, established precedence also shaped their preference as it provided a role model to look up to. However, if their occupational choices were unprecedented, they faced resistance from within the family as well as outside. In case they did not have a strong support of their father, it would have been difficult for them to continue pursuing the same field. Analyzing it from the lens of Bourdieu's theory of field and habitus, it can be said that in case of the presence of an established preference, there exists a similarity between the habitus of women and their parents. The internalized belief that a woman could make a career in a similar occupational field following in the footsteps of their parents, or whoever is working in a similar field. It enables them to pursue a career in a similar field. On the contrary, in the absence of an established preference, there exists a clash in the women's habitus compared to the habitus of their family. This clash of habitus causes resistance and reservations within the family, preventing the women from effectively pursuing her own career aspirations.

#### **4.2.3 Patriarchal Norms and Traditions**

The third theme that emerged out of the data was Patriarchal norms and traditions. Patriarchal norms and traditions significantly influence and shape women's occupational choices. Unsurprisingly, it emerged as a key theme from the interviews of the working women. These norms

comprise of societal expectations and beliefs that are deeply entrenched in our social fabric, where men's roles and efforts are greatly valued, while those of women are devalued and limited. These patriarchal norms include societal expectations of how women should behave, act and direct their actions in accordance with these expectations of female modesty and appropriate female behavior that is mansplained to them. These also include societal mindsets of what professions are respectable for women, the type, kind, and nature of their work and how it complements their work-life balance. Furthermore, these include religious and cultural expectations of a woman's character. One of the respondents who experienced it during her career said:

*“There's no socioeconomic gap in the mindset of the general Pakistani population which is patriarchal through and through.” (R15, Own Architectural Firm)*

Moreover, these patriarchal norms are internalized by women as well, particularly in the older generations, who then reproduce them with their own actions and beliefs. When asked about experiencing resistance from the women of the family regarding their occupational choice, one of the respondents had the following response.

*I do believe that even men who are, let's say from this generation have more acceptance for women doing whatever they want to do. It's mostly the elders, even women themselves, who are pulling other women down. It's ironic but it is what it is.” (R15, Own Architectural Firm)*

This was evident from the statements of some other respondents as well. When one of the respondents decided to opt for Aviation, the first person to resist her was her mother. Despite being a professor herself, with an overall teaching experience of more than two decades, she was not open to her daughter opting for such a field. Not only that, she involved the respondent's aunts, who are also working women themselves, in order to stop her. Furthermore, it was not like the overall dynamic of the family was conservative or religious.

*“Typical taboos of our families, I was facing day and night. Even though my family was very broad minded. We are not conservative. Our parents provided us with a modern, standard lifestyle. Despite this, my mother had her serious reservations which were the biggest mental barrier I was facing at the time.” (R1, Wing Commander)*

Patriarchal norms and traditions have been highlighted as obstacles facing women not just in Pakistan, but also India and many other third world countries. Previous research supports the presence and prevalence of patriarchal barriers to women not just in employment but various other spheres of their lives (Ali, 2013; Ferdoos, 2005; Alavi, 1991; Sarwar & Imran, 2019; Syed & Ali, 2005).

Analyzed within the framework of Bourdieu’s Field and Habitus, the internalization of these patriarchal norms and values shapes the habitus of the women’s family. However, the women’s habitus is different as their socialization has brought them to disagree with these traditional patriarchal norms. Instead of conforming to these norms, their habitus has made them challenge the prevalent patriarchal norms and traditions. This causes a friction between the two, creating hurdles for the women who want to pursue a career in these fields.

Various subthemes emerged out of the interviewee data regarding patriarchal norms. These norms influenced and shaped their occupational choices. These were amongst the biggest sociocultural hurdles faced by these women throughout their careers. These subthemes are discussed next.

#### **4.2.3.1 Gendered Notions of Occupations:**

The first subtheme that emerged from the data was gendered notions of occupations. This primarily involves the preconceived notion of certain occupations being appropriate and suitable for women. These include medical, teaching, and administrative roles. On the other hand, women are actively



discouraged from opting for a career in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). If they opt for a career in these fields, they are faced with a lot of resistance. They are provided with limited exposure and most of the women, therefore, decide to opt for a career in those fields which are deemed appropriate for women by society. This gendered notion of occupation is also systemically internalized by women, which ends up limiting their aspirations and goals. One respondent who has a successful career in Architecture, who also had the complete support of her family, expressed how societal expectations and their internalization affected her inclination towards a different field:

*“Although initially I was leaning towards the medical profession. That was because of the societal expectations more than any other pressure. And as soon as I discovered that it's all internalized, you know, that you must choose between the two professions, my immediate family did not put any pressure on me.” (R15, Own Architectural Firm)*

When asked about the primary concerns of her family regarding her preferred choice of occupational field which was Aviation, a respondent had the following response:

*“It was the perception that girls should become doctors. My father was a pilot in the air force, so is my husband. My brother was also in the academy at the time. My father said that it was a field for men.” (R4, Demonstrator)*

When asked about the presence of other working women in the family, she reiterated:

*“Yes, there are women who work but they're either doctors or teachers. These two fields are considered appropriate for women in our family.” (R4, Demonstrator)*

Consequently, since she did not have the support from any male members of the family, she had to switch to the Academics. It goes on to show that this mindset does exist regardless of the level

of education and exposure people have. If the supposedly educated men, who have made grand, successful careers have a mindset that is distinctively patriarchal, then it truly depicts how deeply rooted the problem is.

Another respondent who has made a successful career as a senior design engineer expressed that although her family supported her decision, they were not completely happy with her choice because:

*“My family was more inclined towards me being a doctor. as we know that in our culture, it is considered as a very safe profession for females. Engineering is more suited towards boys.”*

***(R5, Senior Design Engineer)***

Similarly, another respondent who has had a career spanning over fifteen years as a civil engineer confessed how her extended family and family friends would ask her father questions about her preferred occupational field.

*“Many relatives expressed their concerns to my father about the field that I chose. They would come to my father and ask him why he was letting me choose this engineering field and what I was going to do after it. Basically, at the time medical was considered an appropriate profession for women.”* ***(R9, Senior Engineer)***

When asked about other working women in the family, she described that although it was a norm for women to work in her family, there were limitations and a great level of conformity to the appropriateness of the profession for a female.

*“My mother is a teacher. There are other working women in the family as well. They are mostly doctors or teachers.”* ***(R9, Senior Engineer)***

Another respondent who is a PhD from France and currently teaching at IST, in the mechanical department, described her experience in the following words:

*“There were loads of people who said this is not a woman’s field. Many suggested I should do BA.” (R6, Assistant Professor)*

These responses describe how women must face gendered notions of occupations when choosing or opting for a career in STEM. Their own choices and judgments are considered inadequate and ideas about appropriate professions are mansplained to them. Majority of the respondents described the inclination towards medical and teaching profession as they are considered appropriate for the, Engineering and Aviation were termed as masculine professions. It is consistent with the work of (Syed & Ali, 2005), that highlighted that sociocultural norms and gender stereotypes influence the perception regarding suitability and accessibility of certain career paths. Medicine and teaching were the most significant high-status vocations for educated women (Papanek, 1971), however, even after almost half a century, the two occupations are perceived as the most suitable and appropriate for women. Avolio and Chavez (2020) also shed light on the attribution of gender to professions terming science professions as masculine. Khilji and Pumroy (2019) also highlighted that women engineers in the US continue to be underrepresented in STEM fields due to gendered social and organizational norms such as women being too feminine and women not being engineers. The analysis also shows how all these women who have successfully made a career in these fields faced these patriarchal perceptions throughout, and if it weren’t for their family and especially their father’s support, it would have been extremely difficult for them to pursue their own choices. One can only imagine how many women succumb to these gendered notions of occupations and the sociocultural pressures associated with them because they do not have the support of their family, especially their father. As discussed, the one respondent that did

not have her father's support, she had to compromise on her career and switch to a more appropriate and acceptable profession of teaching.

Applying Bourdieu's theory of habitus and field to this context, the dynamics can be explained better. According to Bourdieu, fields preexist the individuals and have their own set of characteristics. These guide the behavior of individuals within those fields who navigate through them guided by their habitus. However, Bourdieu also highlighted that individuals are not mere recipients of structures. They employ their agency to take strategic decisions within the field. STEM fields, which constitute the field in this context have historically been considered as masculine professions more suited to men. Since the family's habitus is shaped by internalization of traditional patriarchal beliefs and values, they tend to conform with this notion and with the wider patriarchal stereotypes associated with the 'field' itself. Furthermore, male-domination within the field and limited representation of women within these occupational fields further reinforces the family's beliefs. On the contrary, the women's habitus shaped by their own socialization process is different. They have not internalized the gendered notion of occupations. Their beliefs include a more contemporary notion about occupations that is not defined by gender. Thus, their habitus differs from the habitus of their family members which creates friction between the two and create hurdles in their pursuit of career aspirations. Again, the recurring theme is the support of their father and the presence of a shared habitus that creates space for them to employ their agency to face and overcome this resistance posed by other members of the family.

#### **4.2.3.2 Preconceived notion of women's primary role as Homemakers:**

Another subtheme that emerged from the data of the respondent interviews was the preconceived notion of a women's primary role. This primary role is limited to the private sphere of their lives, as the homemaker. This role of a homemaker is a centuries-old phenomenon, that has evolved over

time and forms a major part of societal expectation from women. Traditionally, women have had the role of raising children, taking care of household work as well as being a source of emotional support to the family. However, over time, these roles or expectations were associated solely to women, and reinforced through multiple sociocultural factors.

Although these expectations and norms have changed in some parts of the world, especially the first world countries, the situation is still quite dire in the third-world countries, especially Pakistan. In our country, with a predominantly Muslim population, a heliocultural blend has made the situation even worse. Patriarchal societal expectations are justified using religion in most parts of the country. The knowledge of religion is sourced primarily from clerics, who have got their own vested interests.

When asked about the sociocultural hurdles that our respondents faced while opting for their respective occupational field, majority of the women said that they experienced the notion of women's primary role as homemakers. One of the respondents who is now working in the Academics had the following response:

*“In my extended family there are many people who are against women working. They believe that girls shouldn't be highly educated because you must marry them so you should not invest too much finance on them. Even if they're highly educated, they shouldn't work after marriage. A lot of people used to come to my parents and tell them that it was our age to get married, that they should get us married and that it was our time to hold the kitchen.” (R10, Lecturer)*

Another respondent, who went for her Master's to the US, said that this was something she experienced not only here, but also over there, that:

*“There’s this preconceived idea about women and they must support their families. They must be the primary caretaker of their family, so they might not be able to give ample time to the profession that they are working on.” (R14, Lecturer)*

Another respondent described how in her in-laws; this was quite common amongst the elders.

*“In my in laws, there are some elders who look down upon working. They think that women should stay at home, look after the kids.” (R15, Own Architectural Firm)*

Consequently, she described how that thinking has affected the career prospects of various women in her family as they face resistance, often choosing to forego ideal employment opportunities because it wouldn’t align with this expectation. Another respondent who has had an extremely successful career as an engineer described how her career was affected because of this mentality in her in-laws:

*“In their family, the thinking is women should not work. Women should stay at home and typical male chauvinism type of mentality. Because of that he said you are not allowed to work.”*

***(R3, Program Manager)***

Another respondent who is in Aviation described the reason behind her mother’s lack of support for her ambition in the following words:

*“In our Eastern society and eastern families, we as kids are expected to learn household work at a very young age because of the perception that we have to get married and go to a new house.”*

***(R1, Wing Commander)***

This is supported by the existing literature on barriers being faced by women in context of Pakistan and India. Since the two countries have similar patriarchal characteristics, cues can be drawn from work carried out in India as well. Ali (2013) highlighted that the human capital of

women is considered inferior to men due to employers' beliefs regarding women's primary role being that of a homemaker. Jayachandran (2021) also described how women face barriers to employment including cultural attitudes that prioritize men's work over women's work. Ferdoos (2005) also highlighted that women in Pakistan have struggled to break free from traditional, restrictive gender roles that relegate them primarily to domestic responsibilities. These are endorsed and enforced by families, communities and institutions.

The preconceived notion of a woman's primary role of a homemaker, entrenched in our social fabric and in the minds of the women's family and people around them is evident from these statements. It is a part of their habitus, which has been shaped and influenced by the internalization of these patriarchal beliefs. The women's habitus, that is shaped by contrasting beliefs that do not conform to these traditional notions makes them challenge these stereotypes. As described by Bourdieu, an individual's habitus guides and shapes their behavior however, individual's also exercise their agency to negotiate challenges and hurdles. The women's habitus includes the aspiration to pursue a career in these occupational fields. Challenging these stereotypes that have been prevalent for centuries cause a rift between the habitus of the two, creating hurdles for women who want to pursue a professional career, especially in STEM fields.

All these instances are from the interviews of women who are highly educated and skillful. They have still managed to make a successful career despite all these hurdles. The primary reason that can be attributed is the support of their father. They also expressed how without that support it wouldn't be possible for them to overcome these challenges. After marriage, however, the circumstances are different, and women often must compromise on their careers.

#### 4.2.3.3 Sociocultural expectation of Female Modesty:

Another subtheme that emerged out of the data was the sociocultural expectation of female modesty. This primarily relates to the appropriate female conduct. It has two facets; one is the societal expectation of appropriate female dressing, and the other is their interaction with others. Multiple respondents described the obstacles they faced regarding the dress code.

*“The dress code was also an obstacle as women aren’t encouraged to wear uniforms in our family.” (R2, Wing Commander)*

*“My father said that it was a field for men. That when you wear the overhaul 200 people will stare at you.” (R4, Demonstrator)*

Another respondent who is now working in the academics described how she almost couldn’t join the university for her degree because some people had reservations about co-education. She came from a background where there was no inclination towards higher education. She was the first person who took an admission in the university.

*“When I was about to take admission in university, there were some friends of my parents who had their reservations about co-education. They were skeptical about the prospects of how I might conduct myself.” (R8, Lecturer)*

Another respondent who is working in the architectural field expressed her opinion regarding appropriate dressing and conduct in the following words:

*“You have to be dressed in a way that demands respect so that men take you seriously rather than thinking about something else, rather than the words that you’re saying. The second thing is that you have to remain very firm. In our society, if a woman talks to you nicely and makes a casual joke, it is perceived wrongly.” (R12, Own Architectural Firm)*



Another respondent who is currently working in the academics described the views of her extended family regarding a woman working in the field, being away from home, and given the freedom for her own decisions in the following words:

*“They [extended family] believe that if you give a woman too much freedom, she will do something wrong and bring shame to the family. They also say that a woman who works is away from home for 8-10 hours and what she’s doing, parents don’t know.” (R10, Lecturer)*

In our society, in which religion has a dominant role in shaping people’s thoughts and perceptions, perhaps the clearest manifestation of it is how women must conduct themselves. It is often men who tell women what they can wear, and what they cannot wear based on the thoughts and perceptions they have built regarding the societal view of women. Furthermore, how women interact with others, especially males, is greatly sexualized. A woman simply being courteous and casual is considered an invite. This was also highlighted by Mann (1997) in his research where he described how a mere courteous smile from a female customer representative might be misinterpreted as a sign of interest and sexual encouragement. It is something that women have to experience every single day. And it is something that influences their occupational choices too. In male-dominated fields such as STEM, women are surrounded by men and more susceptible and vulnerable to these advances. Therefore, they are often cautious themselves, and more so, even if they decide to advance their careers in such fields, the notions of how they will conduct themselves properly and dress always pose some serious reservations from their families. As highlighted by Syed and Ali (2005), religion and culture have influenced the societal standards of female modesty. Women are expected to suppress emotions and exhibit restraint. Analyzing the sociocultural expectation of female modesty and appropriate female conduct according to Bourdieu’s theory of field and habitus, it could be said that the habitus of the women’s family and the people around

them is shaped and determined by the internalization of such misogynist stereotypes regarding female modesty and what defines appropriate conduct for a female. Although these stereotypes are prevalent throughout our society, and embedded in our social fabric, they are particularly true for certain occupations as well, as the statements of the respondents depict. Societal norms and expectations define certain behaviors as appropriate for women, and what constitutes a modest female. Deeply ingrained, these expectations also influence what occupational choices are appropriate for women in terms of how women would conduct themselves according to the requirements of those occupations and their dress code. Therefore, these expectations can perpetuate the idea that certain career paths are incompatible with traditional norms of femininity. The women's habitus, on the contrary, does not have internalized these notions. They refuse to adhere to such expectations of modesty and appropriate female conduct. Instead, they aspire a career in such occupational fields that may require deviation from the traditional expectations of their dressing and conduct. This conflict between the habitus of women and their families or the people around them creates barriers for women to enter scientific and technical occupations that they have to overcome. Of course, the women's behavior and conduct is still guided by their habitus in a manner that does not completely defy the rigid structures of the field or the society, however, employing their agency, they negotiate and develop adequate responses to these barriers.

#### **4.2.3.4 Inherent Gender-Bias**

Another subtheme that emerged out of the data was the existence of an inherent gender bias regarding the women's capabilities, adequacy, and limitations. These subconscious prejudices and stereotypes exist within individuals, institutions and our society as a whole. This is consistent with the work of Avolio and Chavez (2020), who described that social factors including underestimation of women's abilities impact and shape their presence and representation in science careers. This

inherent gender bias can manifest in various ways and lead to discrimination, unfair treatment and unequal opportunity. Multiple respondents faced this obstacle. One respondent who is currently working in architecture described how she faced the problem of inherent gender bias:

*“In my field, where you have to meet a lot of people, a lot of men, contractors, engineers, civil engineers and they have this preconceived idea that she's a girl and she might not be able to or she might not be capable of working alongside us.” (R14, Lecturer)*

Another respondent expressed a similar opinion where she described how men would feel that their ego was hit if they were to take orders from a woman more capable than them.

*“And we have this problem that men do not like taking orders from women.”*

*(R12, TVF, Own Architectural Firm)*

Another respondent who works in the aviation put forth the gender-biasedness she faced in her line of work. According to her, male pilots just had this perception that women could not become as good a pilot as them, that they were not capable enough, not mentally strong enough to become one.

*“The work environment was also a bit difficult due to the low number of women and male officers not being ready to accept female pilots.” (R2, Wing Commander)*

Another respondent, who is currently serving as a chairperson of a university department, who was previously a scientist at the Atomic Energy Commission, expressed the gender bias she faced when she wanted to switch from the field to the academics:

*“I faced many problems just because I am a woman. I had to go to the High Court and spend money worth millions to get where I am today. All my male colleagues gathered against me, they had no acceptance or tolerance.” (R11, Chairperson)*

Another respondent who is working in the field of architecture described how she had to face resistance and discrimination just because of her gender. Even though she always had her family's support and she came from a privileged background.

*“No matter how privileged you are, there are certain times that you face resistance or you face any sort of discrimination nation for just being a woman.” (R15, Own Architectural Firm)*

This inherent gender bias is a key reason for lack of diversity in occupational fields, causing occupational segregation. It is supported by the work of Khilji and Pumroy (2019), who investigated the underrepresentation of women engineers in the US and highlighted that they face gender stereotypes and biases including their outlook as an engineer, their behavior and their capabilities. It is also consistent with the work of Saifuddin, Dyke et al. (2019) who investigated the underrepresentation of women in Bangladesh's high-tech industry despite its growth. They cited cultural attitudes that view women as less capable in technical fields as a major barrier to women's entry in the high-tech industry.

The misogynist views about women that are profound amongst the general population are then depicted in the occupational fields as well, where educated men with established successful careers often exhibit the same mindset. In doing so, it creates difficulties for women to make inroads in those occupational fields. Ultimately, some women leave, and watching them leave creates a ripple effect, discouraging more women from opting for such fields in the first place. The inherent gender bias faced by women aspiring for a career in scientific and technical fields reflects the broader societal and cultural norms prevalent in the society. The habitus in this case encompasses the entrenched societal expectations and stereotypes that influence people's perception of women's capabilities in these occupational fields. This gender bias associated with such occupational fields is further reinforced by the low representation of women and male domination, that women can't

work in these occupations. This can influence the habitus of the people around them too. However, their own habitus that challenges these gender stereotypes is shaped by the internalization of such beliefs and norms that are in contrast with the traditional beliefs and dispositions. Consequently, this difference in habitus causes conflict and creates obstacles for women to make professional inroads and achieve their career goals.

#### **4.2.3.5 Protective nature of the family and Perception of Unsafe Choice for women:**

The last subtheme that emerged from the interviewee data is overprotectiveness exhibited by the women's families, and the general perception that STEM fields are an unsafe choice for women. This protective nature, combined with the misplaced perception creates a significant sociocultural hurdle for women whose preferred choice is to work in the field. Multiple respondents expressed how it has affected their career. Some respondents have had to resign from their jobs, some have had to switch from the field to the academics. It is normal that field jobs often do not have fixed timings or working hours. Then there are site visits that are often away from home. Often women are discouraged from working if the job requires them to stay away from home. This is consistent with the work of Choudhry, Mutalib et al. (2019) who highlighted the sociocultural restriction of women for travelling as easily as men for their jobs. Men can have good job opportunities in any area while women must be considerate of the off-site jobs. Alavi (1991) also described how even professional women have the difficulty of being unable to live independently and needing a male to look after them.

These attitudes primarily stem from the sociocultural traditions that are rooted in patriarchy where women's choices are decided more by the norms and traditions than the women themselves. One of the respondents had to resign from her job because her family's overprotective nature and her being away from home for work meant that she couldn't share anything with them without being

told to resign and come home. Furthermore, she got a really good job opportunity abroad, however, she couldn't join because of similar issues.

*“If I was to sit late at work for a couple of hours to finish my side task, I would have to be very careful telling my family about it because they would simply feel stressed out about their daughter being in a workplace for too long. Whenever I would be facing some issues, they would ask me to resign and come home. I came to a point where I had to quit my job because of the same issues.” (R5, Senior Design Engineer)*

*“I got a job offer, which was not in the country, it was outside of Pakistan. It was a big question mark if I should pursue that job. And I actually ended up dropping that job because it was really not in line with our values and comfort level of everybody.” (R5)*

Another respondent who is now employed in the academics described her initial desire to work in the field as a mechanical engineer, however, the general perception about the field and her professors' advices regarding it influenced her to such an extent that she switched to academics.

*“I wanted to become an engineer but my preference changed to teaching. Some of my Professors also suggested that I stayed in the academics rather than being in the field with male workers. The environment is pretty much like only men could deal with that kind of environment.”*

**(R7, Lecturer)**

This view was reiterated by another respondent who also switched to Academics from the field for similar reasons.

*“There is this perception regarding the industry that it poses many hurdles for women; It includes not having a particular time of work. Whenever you are called, you have to go. The environment is different for women, and not too safe.” (R8, Lecturer)*

Another respondent whose initial preference was to work in the field described her family's concerns as the reason for her switch to the academics.

*“I had my interest in the field but after my Bachelor's it became difficult because of various of issues. It took around an hour to travel to Islamabad. Then there were no fixed timings and this concerned my parents. I joined in a few places but due to these family restrictions and concerns I had to resign.” (R10, Lecturer)*

She then went on to describe her reason for staying in the academics, which was that it addressed the concerns of her parents. Later, she found it feasible as well.

*“Due to family restrictions I had to join and after I did, I found it feasible. It provided pick-and-drop, had fixed timings, the environment was very secure and there is a factor of respect associated with this profession. It addressed my family's concerns as well so I continued it.”*

**(R10)**

Thus, it can be concluded from the experiences of these women that the protective nature of the family, and this perception that for women, working in the field is an unsafe choice often influences their decision of continuing a job, or continuing in the field for that matter. Analyzing it under Bourdieu's framework of field and habitus, it can be said that the field in this context is the occupational domain in which the women want to work. These occupational fields often do have inconsistent working hours, site visits and working away from home; factors or characteristics of the 'field' that can be perceived as unsafe by the women's families. This perception reflects their habitus, shaped by traditional notions of gender roles and safety of women. It is in contrast with the habitus of the women whose own habitus might be shaped by gender-neutral notions of occupational requirements and safety. This difference between the perception of women and others causes a habitus conflict, which is likely to cause obstacles in women's path to entering and then

sustaining careers in scientific and technical occupations. There is also a factor of internalization and that women cannot afford to keep going against their families if they have no support from them regarding a certain job. As we have seen before, if a woman had her father's support, she would likely stay in the field and not resign or switch. That support would enable her to overcome these sociocultural hurdles. However, if the support is not there practically, once they are done with education and start their careers, it is more likely that their choices are going to be influenced. However, it is not entirely the influence of these sociocultural factors, because often women decide based on their own agency as well. This is explored in later in the chapter.

### **4.3 Intersectionality**

The second research question intends to understand how intersectionality of women affects their occupational choices. For the purpose of this research, intersectionality is *operationalized* as the linkage between women's expected family role, marital status, motherhood status, and spouse support. The expected family role pertains to the role women are expected to play and give priority to, such as domestic role of a caretaker, a wife, public role of financial support or shared family roles. The following key themes emerged out as a result that aided in developing a better understanding of how their intersectionality impacts their occupational choices.

#### **4.3.1 Marital Status and Expected Family Role**

Out of 16 total women that I interviewed, 10 were married, 1 was engaged, while 5 were single. Based on the information provided by them, the first key theme that emerged was a linkage between their marital status and expected family role. In Pakistan, women are primarily expected to assume the role of a caretaker. They provide emotional support to the family, take care of managing the household tasks, and are responsible for upbringing their children. Men are responsible for earning, they assume the role of a bread earner and primary financial support. These



roles are sharply defined and often there is a clear distinction between the specified roles and who they are assigned to.

#### **4.3.1.1 Unmarried Women and Expected Family Role**

Since majority of the women had the support of their nuclear family, especially the support of their father, the findings suggest that for unmarried women, the expected family role is rather fluid, shared, or independent. Yes, they are expected to have a caretaker role, however, it does not seem to affect their occupational choices. This allows them to pursue their preferred occupational choices as they are neither expected to provide for the family, nor are they told to prioritize their private household role of a caretaker. When asked about her expected family role, a respondent had the following response:

*“Despite working, we are not expected to financially support our family. We’re doing it to establish ourselves and become independent. As for caretaker, I think all women have that role but it didn’t affect my choice of profession.” (R10, Lecturer)*

Another respondent, who’s currently teaching Architecture while also running her own architectural projects, expressed a similar opinion. When asked if she was expected to have a caretaker role in the family, she described how her parents’ primary focus was on her and her siblings’ education, while they shared the roles amongst them.

*“I have seen both of my parents work equally to support our education, which for them was the foremost concern. Even if it was a supporting role or caretaker role, it was something that was shared between them.” (R14, Lecturer)*

Another respondent who is also teaching Architecture while continuing to work in the field as a consultant reiterated the presence of shared family roles with her mother, as they are living alone

in Islamabad. She further revealed that she has never had an expectation of playing out the caretaker role in the family, which was always her mother's domain.

*“I haven't had any caretaking responsibility. It was always my mother. Even my sisters had this freedom.” (R13, VF/Own Architectural Firm)*

Thus, it can be concluded that for unmarried women, the intersectionality of their marital status and expected family role, and their educational attainment did not adversely impact their occupational choices. Instead, it enabled them to pursue their career aspirations in their respective occupational fields.

#### **4.3.1.2 Married Women and Expected Family Role:**

Amongst the women who are married, the expected family role however, further depends on two factors; Spouse Support and their motherhood status. These two factors determine whether, and how their occupational choices might be affected due to their expected family role after marriage.

##### **4.3.1.2.1 Married women with Spouse support and without Children**

A key subtheme that emerged out of the respondents' data was how women who did not have children yet also seemed to have a great understanding with their spouses, as they married someone they wanted to, by their own choice. It was not forced on them. The support from their partner enables them to continue pursuing their careers without making a compromise as the family roles are shared. This is consistent with the work of Khilji and Pumroy (2019) who highlighted the significant role of spouse support in determining how women overcome the barriers related to pre-eminence of social roles like responsibilities towards the family and children. When asked about whether marriage affected her occupational choice, a respondent who currently works in the architectural field had the following response:

*“I married somebody that I wanted to so all of these things were already laid out.*

*He was ready to support me with that. And even now, he goes out of his way to manage things for me work wise.” (R16, Own Architectural Firm)*

Another respondent also described how her choice to marry someone she wanted meant that her occupational choice was not affected:

*“Not at all. It didn't because I married one of my business partners and he's also an architect so things are working very smooth I'd say.” (R12, TVF, Own Architectural Firm)*

The findings suggest that younger women who had the freedom to marry someone they wanted to, and who had no children yet continued to progress professionally. Their occupational choices are positively impacted as they are provided the encouragement to prioritize their careers.

#### **4.3.1.2.2 Married women with Spouse support and Children**

Another key subtheme that emerged from the data was how women who had children were more likely to have their occupational choices affected. All of them acknowledged their primary caretaker role being mothers, having to raise their children. Spouse support continued to play a vital role in the extent to which their choices were affected. Most married women with children acknowledged the presence of family pressure, or pressure from their in-laws. They also acknowledged assuming the primary caretaker role. Out of seven respondents who were married and had children, only two women did not have their occupational choices affected.

When asked about her expected family role after marriage, a respondent who went for her PhD to France and is currently teaching at IST, revealed that despite a dominant role in the household being the mother, the family roles are still shared between her and her spouse. Her husband does

not expect any financial earnings from her, yet he still makes sure to take care of the children and manage household work in her absence.

*“I am the dominant role in our household being the mother. It doesn't mean that my husband doesn't help with household errands. Also, I lived alone for 3 years with my daughter while my husband was abroad. That was a huge factor as over there, both husband and wife take equal household responsibilities. In our household, we try to make each other comfortable.”*

**(R6, Assistant Professor)**

The second woman who did not have to make a compromise on her career is working as in Aviation as a pilot. She acknowledged her role of a caretaker at home being a mother. She revealed that it was her who had to manage everything for her son when she would have to leave for duty.

*“We are living in such an eastern society where women carry most of the household burden. It was true for me as well. With my nature of job where I had to leave at the first light for mission, I had to manage everything for my son; where I'd keep him since everyone would be asleep at home, arranging a maid for him while I was away, and everything else too.”*

**(R1, Wing Commander)**

She admitted that it was extremely challenging, however, with continuous support from her husband, and with the comforting thought of her father's support, she managed to create a balance that enabled her to continue in her profession without making a compromise.

*“However, my husband was always supportive, and he never stopped me from anything. He always encouraged me to manage things my way. But my son was primarily my duty and my call. Again, my father's support meant that even though I managed everything myself, if I did feel*

*stuck somewhere, I always knew that I had their backing and support. This enabled me to create a balance between my professional and household responsibilities.” (R1)*

Five respondents out of seven acknowledged that they had to make a compromise on their careers because of their expected family role being a mother. Some of them had the support of their spouse and some did not. The effect on their career had two facets; either they had to switch their job to one that suited their family responsibilities more, or they had to take a break from their careers for a few years. Out of these five women, two had to switch their occupations.

One respondent who works in Aviation revealed that she had to switch her job because of the family pressures and commitments, and that it was not her own choice to do so.

*“Initially, when I got married, I continued in the fighter line, but my posting was at a place where my husband was a civilian and he couldn’t adjust to the place. It was all influenced because of the family pressures or third-party pressures.” (R2, Wing Commander)*

Another respondent who was previously working as a scientist at Atomic Energy Commission revealed that she switched to the Academics because of her family and her children. However, it was her own choice to do so.

*“At that time, I had a daughter and I was expecting my second child. My husband lived in Islamabad and I was in Faisalabad. I did not want to choose departed upbringing for my children, so I considered this (teaching) option.” (R11, Chairperson)*

One of the five respondents revealed that she had to take a break from work after her marriage. Later on, when she started working again, she also had to switch her profession and opt for teaching as it was better suited to her family life. She did not have much support from her spouse or parents.

*“I had a little kid and everybody including my husband and my parents said that I should not work until my kids reach school-going age. I had to raise them and send them to school. The timings were eight to two in this teaching profession. I opted for this because it suited my family life as it spared me for the evening tasks.” (R4, Demonstrator)*

The remaining two respondents revealed that they had to take a break from their careers in order to fulfill their expected family role of a caretaker. One of those two women is working as an aeronautical engineer. She revealed that her in-laws were expecting her to stay at home and not work in order to look after her child. She further revealed that her spouse forbade her from working because in his family, there was this perception that women should stay at home.

*They were expecting me to be a caretaker/housewife role. I would take care of the house and it doesn't matter whatever degree I have or what specialty I have. I have to take care of the house and I have to stay at home.” (R3, Program Manager)*

She took a break of approximately seven years, and rejoined after her child was old enough to go to school and they ran into some financial problems.

*“I rejoined just recently, just two or three years back. I left in 2013. And then I rejoined in 2020.” (R3)*

Similarly, the other respondent who is currently working as a Civil Engineer revealed that she had to take a break of ten years because of her family commitments. She had to take care of her children's upbringing, and move abroad with her husband because he got a job there.

*“Although I started working after I got married, I took a break for almost 10 years. Being a wife and being a mother, you have responsibilities that you have to fulfil. I took a break because I had to move abroad with my family.” (R9, Senior Engineer)*

She further revealed that it is quite often that women have to take a break from their careers in order to fulfill their family responsibilities. That causes them to lag behind in their careers, however, it cannot be denied that their lives revolve around their expected family role especially after conceiving a child. If they do not make that compromise, whether it is out of their own choice or forced upon them, it affects the upbringing of their children as in our society, it is primarily the woman's responsibility to manage the household and take care of the children. These findings are consistent with the existing literature that highlights that traditional gender roles involving preeminence of women's social roles as wives, societal expectations regarding child-rearing and motherhood, taking care of their spouse, the young and the elderly pose significant obstacles in their careers, leading to career disruption or career abandonment (Avolio & Chavez, 2020 ; Barhate et al. 2021; Jayachandran, 2021; Mozahem & Ghanem, 2019).

Thus, it can be concluded that the intersectionality of women's marital status, expected family role, spouse support and motherhood shapes and defines their career prospects in different ways. For unmarried women, the odds of compromising on their careers are often quite low as long as they have the support of their family. Family support enables them to have a more fluid, balanced and independent expected family role, enabling them to continue pursuing their preferred profession. This points towards a similar habitus of the women and their family, with priority given to their career aspirations and belief in shared family roles. On the other hand, married women are more likely to make a compromise on their careers, however, it depends on the level of understanding with their spouse, and their motherhood status. The findings suggest that married women having spouse support are less likely to have their careers compromised. This points towards a similar habitus of the women and their spouse, shaped by the norms and values of shared family role and a priority afforded to women's occupational choice and career too, instead of just

the spouse's career aspirations and occupational choice. As for women who are married and have children, their careers are more than likely to be affected in two different ways. Although spouse support continues to play an important role for them, their motherhood status defines how their occupational choices are affected. The either have to switch to occupations that enable them to spare more time for their family commitments, or take a break for a few years to raise their children. Furthermore, this decision may be forced upon them, in case they do not have their spouse's support, or it could influence their own choice to switch professions or to take a break, despite the presence of spouse support. The effect of motherhood status on women's occupational choices can be analyzed using Bourdieu's theory of field and habitus. For married women with children who do not have their spouse's support in terms of working, a clash of habitus between the women and their spouse is evident. Based on traditional norms and values regarding a woman's primary role as a homemaker or caretaker, the habitus of the spouse, or his family is different from the habitus of the women. The women's habitus might encompass shared family roles, however, with the absence of shared family roles, their career and occupational choices are affected as they cannot risk the upbringing of their children. Consequently, they end up taking a break or switching professions, sometimes both. This further results in social reproduction of structures within the field, characterized by inequalities, skewed power distribution and traditional gender roles. All the women who were married also acknowledged the dominance of their household/caretaker role after marriage, especially after conceiving a child.

#### **4.4 Agency**

Another micro-individual factor that this study sought to understand with respect to women's occupational choices is agency. For the purpose of this research, agency was *operationalized* as the ability of women to assert their autonomy and resist the influence of sociocultural factors that



shape their occupational choices. It encompasses their ability to challenge and navigate traditional gender norms, redefining their own career orientations based on personal aspirations and capabilities. the resistance to sociocultural factors, women's ability to change this narrative and career orientation of women under consideration. The third research question intends to understand the role of agency in women's occupational choices. The following key themes and sub-themes emerged out of it.

#### **4.4.1 Family Support and Agency Enhancement**

The findings of the study suggest a strong linkage between women's agency and the presence of family support, especially their father's support. As we have discussed previously, almost all the women who were selected for interviews revealed the presence of nuclear family support, specifically the support of their father. Thus, no women have gone completely against their nuclear family's expectations. However, majority of the respondents further stated that without that support, it would not have been possible for them to be where they are today. It would be highly likely that their careers would have been compromised. Instances where women's occupational choices were not in line with their immediate family values, especially that of their father, their occupational choices were impacted. Additionally, majority of the respondents faced various sociocultural hurdles and employed their agency, backed by the support, to overcome those obstacles. All respondents agreed that the presence of family support enhanced their agency. One respondent, who has had a successful career as a scientist and now holds the position of chairperson in her department at the university acknowledged agency enhancement in the presence of family support:

*“In my opinion, I would say that it is enhanced. Although I am very resilient, it was my family's support that helped me reach where I am today.” (R11, Chairperson)*

Similarly, another respondent described how when she was facing some obstacles during her career, her family extended their full support to her if she wanted to do something different, despite having spent a few years in Architecture.

*“I think enhanced my agency, that I could choose to do something different if I wanted to.”*

**(R16, Own Architectural Firm)**

Another respondent had the following response when asked about the impact of family support on her agency:

*“If your brothers or your immediate family do not support your decisions, you won't be able to achieve the things you have the potential to achieve and exercise the choices that would be beneficial for you.” (R2, Wing Commander)*

One respondent who had to switch her profession due to lack of support from her father and spouse revealed that had it not been for her father and husband's reservations, she would have realized her dream of becoming a fighter pilot despite the rest of the pressures.

*“I would have realized my ambition to become a fighter pilot if it wasn't for the compromise that I had to make for my family and my kids.” (R4, Demonstrator)*

Based on these statements, it can be concluded that women's agency is not independent of other factors. It relies on family support, especially father's support to be more effective. By effective, it is implied that it is effective enough to bring a change. This is consistent with the findings of Mozahem and Ghanem (2019), who highlighted that women are more likely to follow in the footsteps of a role model, which often tends to be someone from their parents. Furthermore, the presence of support from their parents encourages and facilitates their own decision-making abilities in their career choices.

The extent and intensity of the sociocultural hurdles that they face require some sort of agency enhancement in order to pursue their occupational fields. The fact that neither of the women have gone against their father's expectations, or have had their father's support points towards the interplay of field and habitus. Firstly, it points towards the presence of a similar habitus of the women and their family. This facilitates them to continue the pursuit of their career goals. Secondly, it points towards the conformity of their habitus with certain family values and expectations, especially with that of their father. Thus, the field, which is the social and cultural context in which the individuals are placed, influences the habitus of the women to an extent where it conforms with some of the internalized dispositions of the habitus of their family members, especially of their father. Within the field, women's habitus guides them to conduct themselves accordingly. Although women's agency plays a part in how they negotiate these hurdles, it is done within the limits of the structures where the women are located, which is consistent with Bourdieu's view that individual's habitus guides their behavior and also allows them to take strategic decisions by employing their agency to navigate challenges and obstacles within the field. However, agency is employed within the wider social structures where the individuals are situated, which guide and constrain it.

#### **4.4.2 Career Orientation and Self-satisfaction**

The second key theme that emerged out of the data was the primary motivation behind women employing their agency. Despite the sociocultural hurdles and the restrictions caused by their intersectionality, the respondents revealed that they employed their agency because they wanted to pursue a career that they preferred, and do something for their inner-satisfaction.

One of the respondents described how reservations of her extended family and family friends created doubts in her father's mind, however, she employed her agency and convinced him about the choice of her career.

*"I had taken a firm decision and I convinced him that this is what I wanted to do."*

**(R8, Lecturer)**

Similarly, another respondent described how she resisted all the sociocultural pressures, especially after marriage and having children in order to continue pursuing her career goals because it was something that she wanted to do for herself.

*"I just wanted to do it for myself. To do something for my inner self, my inner satisfaction. I was earning well, I was flying, I was being discussed in sessions at the UN, so I did finally feel like I had truly done something."* **(R1, Wing Commander)**

Another respondent who faced a lot of reservations and her character seemingly questioned because of her field job described how she wanted to prove all those assumptions wrong and make a career for herself instead of succumbing to that pressure. She revealed that people said vile things such as bringing shame to the family when afforded too much freedom, questioning her whereabouts when away from home, and disregarding her parents. Instead, all she wanted was to do something that she desired, and choose her career herself. This finding is consistent with the work of (Ali, 2013) and (Mozahem & Ghanem, 2019) who highlighted the career orientation of women as the basis for their resistance to the barriers they faced.

To conclude, women's career aspirations play an important and vital role in the employment of their agency to overcome hurdles and make professional inroads. Aided by family support, it points out the presence of a habitus shaped by internalized notions of career progression, success and

self-contentment. This enables them to overcome the sociocultural hurdles associated with the field, which in this context is their occupation.

#### **4.4.3 Labelling**

It is common for women to face labelling when going against family expectations and exercising their right to make their own choices. Again, this is entrenched in the patriarchal social fabric of our society. It is something that I have experienced personally as well happening around me. The findings of this study suggest that more than half of the respondents faced some sort of labelling in their careers.

*“I was labelled as a potential rebel and outcast and people said a lot of things.” (R10, Lecturer)*

Another respondent revealed that she experienced labelling for taking a break, as her family was not in favor of her leaving her job.

*I definitely had to face the labeling but it was the other way around. My family was not in favor of me leaving this job. Therefore, I was termed as extremely stubborn; that she doesn't listen, does whatever she wants. (R3, Program Manager)*

Another respondent revealed how her agency resulted in her getting labelled in her family.

*“My mother wanted me to get married after Fsc. But I resisted because I wanted to make myself independent, not just financially, but in all ways. Yes, everyone in my family used to call me Asma Jehangir. But, I am very proud of it.” (R11, Chairperson)*

While discussing her family's request to get married, one respondent revealed how she wanted to wait until she finished her Master's. Even though her parents were okay with her decision, she started getting labelled by her relatives and cousins as being too rebellious.

*“My first cousins, my maternal and paternal relatives started to believe that I'm being too rebellious about it. And they said that this is what happens when you send your kid away for too long and you let them make your own decisions. My parents had to go through hell. Everybody instantly assumed that I was being stubborn.” (R5, Senior Design Engineer)*

It is a norm for women to face labelling in their lives, especially successful women. This finding is consistent with the work of (Lawson & Lips, 2014), who investigated the negative impressions formed about successful agentic women in traditionally masculine professions and found that such women are attributed to hostility by men and women both. For men it was due to the internalized patriarchal beliefs, while for women it was due to their self-perceived agency. This also is consistent with Bourdieu's view about agency that it is not the same for everyone. Some people have more agency and some have less, based on their circumstances.

Other respondents who did not face labelling of this extent provided various insights on how they managed to avoid it. For some, it was because their family was overall quite supportive. For others, it was because they either had an established precedent in the family, or that they had the support of male members especially their father, who played a vital role in their defense. Some respondents revealed that they faced initial labelling but it changed because of the respect and honor associated with their profession. However, it is observable that going against societal and cultural expectations, especially those associated with family values and norms results in women being labelled just because they refuse to conform to those standards of compliance and subservience.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that women's agency is influenced by other sociocultural factors, such as the presence of family support, or spouse support. Many respondents expressed that it was their own choice when taking a decision related to their career, whether it was opting for a particular occupational or whether they wanted to switch their jobs or take a break

for their family. However, the findings suggest that their agency was influenced by several factors. First and foremost is their family support. Secondly, it is the presence of an established preference; whether it was their parents or a relative. Furthermore, their agency was also influenced by their family role and its expectations. Then the support of their spouse was key in allowing them to make an appropriate decision. Thus, agency is shaped by the other two factors, and it cannot function independently of them. This is also consistent with Bourdieu's theory of field and habitus in which he advocates for individual agency. Although he says that individuals can exercise their agency to negotiate challenges and not be mere recipients of social structures, it does not exist independently and is always guided by the habitus of an individual while remaining within the social structures in which they are situated or operating. Women assess their circumstances and their options. Based on these they employ their agency to make their own choices, whatever choices they may be.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter I conclude the study and list policy recommendations for policymakers.

#### 5.1 Conclusion

There exists a research gap regarding the role of multi-level societal and individual factors in determining occupational choices for women in Pakistan. With an aim to fill this research gap, this study set out to focus on exploring the role of sociocultural factors (macro-societal level) as well as the role of intersectionality and agency (micro-individual level) in determining occupational choices for women. For this purpose, three objectives were set out for the study which have been analyzed in the form of themes and subthemes. The occupational fields selected were Engineering, Aviation and Architecture.

The first objective was to understand the role of sociocultural factors in determining occupational choices for women; to understand how sociocultural factors such as traditional norms, values, customs and beliefs shape occupational choices for women. The findings suggest that sociocultural factors play a significant role in shaping the occupational prospects of women. Patriarchal norms and traditions, entrenched in our social fabric create hurdles for women wanting to opt for a career in scientific and technical fields in the form of gendered notions of occupations, preconceived notion of women's primary role as homemaker, sociocultural expectation of female modesty, inherent gender bias regarding women's capabilities and protective nature of the family and perception of unsafe choice for women. These hurdles prevent women from opting for a career in scientific and technical fields. Evidence from existing research from patriarchal societies such as Bangladesh, India, and Lebanon support these findings as well. Even in the US, a developed



country, shows that women face these obstacles. These findings are also consistent with Bourdieu's description of the interplay between field, habitus and agency. The analysis further suggests that family support, especially father's support is vital if women are to make a career in STEM fields. It acts as a shield against all these sociocultural hurdles and enables women to opt for a career in these fields and then continue pursuing it.

The second objective of the research was to understand how and to what extent intersectionality of women determines their occupational choices. The findings suggest that for unmarried women, intersectionality of their marital status, expected family role which is shared, and educational attainment positively impacts their occupational choices and enables them to pursue their career aspirations in their respective occupational fields. Furthermore, for married women having spouse support and no children, intersectionality does not have an adverse impact as the presence of shared family roles and spouse support provides them the encouragement to prioritize and pursue their careers.

On the contrary, for married women with children, the intersectionality of their marital status, motherhood status, spouse support and expected family role which is predominantly that of a caretaker affected their occupational choices in two ways; either they had to take a break from their career, or they had to switch their occupation to one that better suited their family commitments. Evidence from existing literature from countries having a similar social fabric as ours supports these findings as married women also faced career disruptions in those countries. Sometimes they had to do both. Spouse support continued to play an important role, however, it was the motherhood status and the family role associated with it that determined their decision making regarding their occupational choices. The pre-eminence of social roles, and the

expectations attached to them shape women's habitus, and ultimately has an impact on their occupational choices.

The third objective of the research set out to understand what role women's agency plays in determining their occupational choices, in terms of resistance and career orientation. The findings suggest a strong linkage between family support and agency. Although women's agency played an important role in overcoming and resisting the sociocultural hurdles, it was aided by strong family support, especially support of their father or spouse. Without the presence of this support, their agency regressed and their career choices were compromised. Existing literature and evidence from countries having a similar societal composition supports the linkage between women's decision-making abilities and the support extended to them by the family. Therefore, women's agency is significantly influenced by other sociocultural factors such as family support and presence of an established precedent. It is also influenced by spouse support and their expected family role and its expectations. The interplay between women's agency and other factors is consistent with Bourdieu's proposition that actors exercise agency within the limits of broader social structures in which they are situated, and that agency does not exist mutually exclusive of them. Further, the findings suggest that the primary motivation for women employing their agency was the fulfillment of their career aspirations and inner-satisfaction; to do something that they wanted to do, for themselves. The findings also suggest that women who do not conform with the traditional societal and cultural expectations especially those associated with family values and norms are often subjected to labelling by the people around them.

To summarize, this study demonstrates the significant effect of sociocultural variables, intersectionality, and women's agency on their occupational choices. Overall, this study sheds light on the complex interplay of sociocultural factors, intersectionality, and agency in shaping women's

occupational choices, emphasizing the need for a more inclusive and supportive environment that empowers women to pursue their career goals without jeopardizing personal and familial responsibilities.

The present study attempts to bridge the gap in existing scholarship on prevalent occupational discrepancies in Pakistan. There is a dearth of studies on it, especially multilevel studies that simultaneously take into account various micro, meso and macro level factors that might be responsible for occupational segregation. Further, existing scholarship is lacking even further when it comes to focusing on women. Existing literature has focused predominantly on issues of workplace harassment, income and wage gap, and domestic violence when it comes to women. On the contrary, cause-centric studies that attempt to understand the reasons that lead to these issues are few. By adopting a cause-centric approach, this study, despite its limitations, can serve as a stepping stone for further research in this arena, on a larger scale and across different professions and provinces. Furthermore, the issue of occupational segregation studied under the theoretical framework of Bourdieu's theory of Field and Habitus alongside the significance attributed to agency allows for a better understanding of these multi faceted relationships between sociocultural factors and intersectionality and agency. No previous research has endeavoured to employ Bourdieu's theoretical framework in context of occupational segregation. In this regard, the present study adds a unique, unprecedented perspective to the existing scholarship.

## **5.2 Limitations of the study**

It is acknowledged that the resource and time constraints have put certain limitations on the study. The study may not fully capture the experience of all female employees as it focused on women who were highly qualified and already working. Women who are not employed may have different experiences. Additionally, the current study had a small sample size and focused on three fields;

Aviation, Architecture and Engineering. Future research can use this study as a stepping stone for conducting research in other scientific and technical fields with a larger sample size. Furthermore, the current study focused on working women in Islamabad. It is acknowledged that women in other provinces and occupations may have varying experiences as Pakistan is a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic country.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Based on the research findings, I propose the following recommendations.

- From the interviews, it was found that women often lack knowledge about scientific and technical fields when they pursue a bachelor's degree. There is a complete lack of career counselling programs in our schools and colleges. Majority of the students don't have any sound knowledge of the disciplines they opt for. Mostly their decisions are based on misperceptions or on the opinion of someone else. Often, students are unhappy with their selection and soon opt out of the field. Career counselling programs must be initiated to facilitate students in discovering their strengths and interests, and to inform them of the career prospects in various scientific and technical fields.
- From the interviews, it was found that there is a completely skewed ratio of boys to girls in scientific and technical fields at the university level. In order to address this disproportionality, a comprehensive framework needs to be established starting from grants and scholarships offered to female students, facilitation and guarantees in finding employment opportunities near graduation, especially internship opportunities at various public and private organizations. This involves female centric collaboration initiatives between educational institutions and public and private organizations, development of mentorship programs where women who have made successful careers in these fields are

invited to mentor young female aspirants. They would also serve as their role models, enhancing their aspirations and interest to join these fields.

- There is a dearth of female teachers in STEM fields at the higher education level. Mostly, women who have a degree in any of the scientific disciplines end up opting for teaching, predominantly at school level. At the university level, there are very few female teachers. I have experienced this personally while conducting my research, where in certain STEM departments there were one or no female teachers. Quotas must be initiated to have a certain percentage of female teachers to address this gender exclusion, and protection must be afforded to female teachers who face a lot of sociocultural hurdles such as lack of acceptance from male colleagues. Educational institutions and the Ministry of Education have a key role to play as in this regard. This will also encourage more girls to follow in their footsteps.
- At the national level, a comprehensive collaboration framework is a primary need to address the problem of occupational segregation. Partnerships and collaborative initiatives need to be put into place, involving various government bodies, academic institutions, the industry and private sector, and female-led associations to forge an environment that enables highlighting and creating employment opportunities, knowledge-exchange, experience-exchange, and career development opportunities.
- Furthermore, country-wide public awareness initiatives that challenge the existing gender stereotypes and highlight the importance of sending girls to STEM fields can be launched. These can debunk the myths of women being incapable of working in these professions, owing to the inherent gender bias in our social fabric. Further, such initiatives can also foster crucial family support for women. The role of the central and provincial

governments, alongside other stakeholders including NGOs working towards women empowerment and alleviation of their status is key in the development, implementation and sustainability of these initiatives.

- As a society we are in dire need of a cultural transformation. Our social fabric has deteriorated substantially over the past six decades. A prime reason for this corruption of social fabric is the misuse of religion to attain personal and vested interests, making money off ruining our collective mindset. In order to address the sociocultural hurdles that have been highlighted in the findings, it is important that concrete steps be taken to sensitize these misconceptions. Gender sensitization programs must be launched at the national level to address the existing belief system. The government's role is key as it holds the capacity to launch initiatives at a grand scale. Religious scholars can play a vital role in gender sensitization and raising awareness as our general population's religious inclination is evident. People are more likely to accept something that has a religious undertone to it.
- Majority of the women end up switching occupations because of their family commitments, especially after they have children. Women also take year-long breaks from their careers because they must raise their kids. In order to minimize the impact of motherhood, establishment of affordable childcare initiatives is a viable option. Women do not have anyone to look after their infants and toddlers. Affordable childcare and establishment of organizational daycares may encourage women to continue working without taking extended breaks spanning half a decade to a decade. Additionally, legislation can be carried out to facilitate women in finding career opportunities after disruptions in their careers. Men need to be educated on shared family roles as well as the study found that shared family roles aided the women in pursuing successful careers.

- To address the misperception that it is an unsafe choice for women to be working in the field in any scientific and technical profession, the establishment of a women-friendly, inclusive workplace culture is key. Issues of transport and safe housing for women working away from home need to be taken into consideration. Further, flexible work hours and remote work options may be explored to foster a sustainable work culture for women. These initiatives can be encouraged via incentives such as tax benefits to the organizations implementing inclusive work environment.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

### Research Questionnaire

#### Demographics

Name	Occupation	Education	Marital Status	No. of Children	Ethnicity	Age
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#### Interview Questions

1. Are you happy/satisfied with your current job?
2. Was opting for this profession your preferred choice?
3. Why did you need to consider it?
4. Given a choice, would you have chosen a different profession?
5. Was this a safe choice for you at the time? Wasn't this an unsafe choice for you at the time?
6. What was your family's stance on your preferred choice of Profession?
7. What difficulties did you face if your family did not approve of your choice of profession?
8. Any hurdles you want to share otherwise?
9. How much did your family's support mean to overcome the hurdles?
10. IF (6) What was your family's primary concern about your preferred profession?
  - a. Was it the nature of occupation?
    - Did they deem your preferred choice a profession for men?
11. Are there other working women in your family?
12. What are the norms and values followed in your household regarding working women?
13. IF (10) Is it a normal occurrence for women to work in your family?
14. In case of family support, do you think your agency is enhanced? Or is it suppressed/regressed?
15. Do you believe that if you decide to employ your own agency, then based on your abilities, you'd have better prospects than your current job?
16. Are you expected to have a caretaker role in the family?
17. Do you have a more significant financial support role in your household?
18. Did your expected family role have an influence of your choice of profession?
  - a. Did your marital status influence your choice of occupation?

19. When going against family expectations while choosing your profession, what was your primary motivation?
20. How did going against expectations, and employing your agency, reflect on you?
21. Did you experience any labeling as a rebel, or an outcast?
22. Is there anything you'd like to share about your journey that you consider important?