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# Dignity at Workplace: A Study of Female Employees at Allama Iqbal Open University Pakistan

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## ABSTRACT

This research collected evidence about the workplace environment-related experiences reported by female employees at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), Islamabad. A total of 100 female faculty members and administrative staff were included in the sample of the study. A survey questionnaire was used to collect data. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse data from a questionnaire collected from university female employees including faculty members and administrative departments of AIOU. The findings of the study reported overall positive experiences of female employees regarding gender parity, civility and the overall workplace environment at AIOU. An Independent sample t-test was conducted and on the subscale of gender parity, a significant difference was found ( $p=.020$ ) in the experiences of teaching and non-teaching females was observed and females from non-teaching departments reported positive experiences regarding gender parity at the workplace. In addition to this, there was no significant difference in the workplace experiences of married and non-married female employees at the university level. Similarly, no significant difference in workplace experiences of female employees from four different age groups was found in this research. Based on the findings, it may be recommended that females be given more awareness regarding their rights in the workplace.

**Keywords:** *Female employees, Women respect, Workplace environment, Workplace harassment, Workplace rights*

## INTRODUCTION

Dignity is a phenomenon that evokes deep desires and injuries. Its complexity and salience in the human experiences can be seen and described in multiple ways. In some situations, its outcomes are psychological or cognitive whereby people achieve a 'sense of' dignity. Hence the way, dignity is experienced, perceived, felt, pursued, realized or found and in other cases, dignity is a quality of interaction (Lucas, 2015). People might possibly be treated with grace, treat others with dignity, convey themselves with nobility, or act with respect. In different situations, dignity is something intrinsic to individuals; it is a powerless and esteemed piece of their being. Nobility might be secured, guarded, kept up with, protected, or reclaimed by oneself. It could be regarded or recognized, yet harmed, abused, injured, or denied by others.

Whether or not it is viewed as a result, a nature of communication, or the pith of one's humankind, nobility assumes a part in how people insight and get a handle on their position on the planet. One space of life in which nobility assumes an especially remarkable part is the work environment, as it is a site where poise can be both accomplished and seriously endangered (Sayer, 2007, 2011). To this point, Bolton (2007) keeps up with that respect is a useful way for understanding contemporary work, making sense of that nobility "envelops issues that have practiced researchers of work for quite a long time and offers a comprehensive focal point through which working environment issues may be inspected" (p. 7). However, this broad focal point is far from being fully understood. Despite the fact that distinguished scholars have long used the word dignity

to convey concerns about work, they rarely have made poise itself a point of convergence of consideration or have precisely defined it (Bolton, 2013; Lee, 2008; Sayer, 2007).

While poise will in general be introduced as a self-evident term that needs not a great reason, estimated clearness is fundamental for propelling exploration. Besides, nobility isn't simply an academic term, yet one that is by and by huge for individuals in the labour force, as permeated with 'genuine world' implications reflect how respect is capable and perceived. Thus, more significant information on labourers' points of view can impact hierarchical endeavours to cultivate nobility, as well as give a premise to considering respect results of hierarchical practices, work environment experiences, and such. In this manner, for motivations behind both research and administrative practice, it is essential to have a thorough understanding of dignity, particularly one that privilege workers' perspectives. Hence this study may help to understand the phenomenon in the context of country where gender biases and socio-cultural scenario is strong.

### Problem Statement

Investigating workplace dignity for women in Pakistan is essential for fostering an equitable and productive work environment. Despite progress in gender equality, women in Pakistan often face significant barriers, including discrimination, harassment, and a lack of opportunities for advancement. These challenges not only undermine the dignity of female employees but also adversely impact organizational performance and economic growth. The significance

of this investigation lies in its potential to uncover the systemic issues that hinder women's participation in the workforce and contribute to a culture of inequality. By exploring the experiences and perceptions of women regarding dignity at work, we can identify the specific challenges they face and develop targeted strategies to address them.

Enhancing workplace dignity for women is crucial for promoting inclusivity and ensuring that all employees can contribute their skills and talents without fear of discrimination. Furthermore, fostering a culture of dignity can lead to improved employee morale, retention, and overall productivity. Ultimately, this investigation aims to inform policymakers, employers, and stakeholders, driving initiatives that support women's rights and contribute to the broader goals of social justice and economic development in Pakistan.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Dignity at workplace refers to a set of practices and policies designed to ensure that everyone in the workplace is treated with respect and dignity. This includes providing a safe and comfortable environment, respecting individual differences, offering equal opportunities and avoiding any form of discrimination or harassment. It also involves recognizing the rights and contributions of all employees, encouraging respectful communication and cooperation between colleagues, and promoting collaboration and understanding of different perspectives.

Workplace dignity has its roots in the field of sociology and philosophy. In the late 1700s, the philosopher Immanuel Kant explained that everything thing has either a dignity or a price. He placed humans as having dignity, meaning that they are "above all price" and possess intrinsic worth (Sayer, 2007). Years after that, political and sociological theorists extended this discussion to human workers. In 1930s, Émile Durkheim was also concerned with workplace dignity, drawn attention to a nation of normlessness in institutions that led to physical and emotional abuse of employees (Hodgkiss, 2013). The basic ideas remain connected to current understanding of workplace dignity. Émile Durkheim had similar concerns with respect in the workplace in the 1930s, he highlighted a lack of norms in organizations that resulted in the mistreatment of employees on physical and an emotional level (Hodgkiss, 2013). The recent perceptions of workplace dignity remained largely based on these basic principles. Contemporary research in humanistic

management has focused on the origins of workplace dignity.

Recent research in the area of humanistic management has focused on the origins of workplace dignity. The commitment to support management practises that uphold human dignity and advance wellbeing is at the core of the humanistic management philosophy. Humanistic management experts like Pirson (2017) asserted that companies and managers have a duty to uphold and advance individuals' dignity by drawing on Kant's theory of dignity.

The first principle of dignity at work is its propensity to be socially connected and obvious in engagement (Lucas, 2015). The second rule of workplace decency is arbitrary and based on one's own interpretation. Workplace dignity is a self-explanatory term, similar to workplace autonomy, which is a professional experience that is subjectively seen, situationally affected, and both an outcome and an antecedent (Deci & Ryan, 2013). The third tenet of workplace decorum survived in its seemingly incompatible form. The fact that workplace dignity comes from two independent sources of worth sets it apart from personal dignity. The foundation of human dignity is the inherent dignity principle, which holds that merely by virtue of being human, every person ought to be valued equally and without condition. In contrast, workplace dignity is established on inherent dignity and earned dignity, which is the worth accumulated through instrumental contributions on the job and, as such, is variable and conditional (Hodson, 2001).

The final principle of workplace dignity is divalent in its nature. As Lucas (2017) stated, dignity "tends to be understood and experienced by its absence rather than its presence" (p. 2551). This means people normally cannot conceptualize dignity without attending to indignity. Workplace dignity is related to construct of status. Here, status is defined as the admiration and respect that an individual has in the eyes of others (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Blader and Yu (2017) argue that status and respect are inextricably entwined, as the extent to the individuals understand themselves to be respected (i.e., included, worthy, and valued) is largely contingent to their status within their group.

Civility at the workplace is about treating each other with respect, regardless of our differences. This includes being polite and courteous in all interactions, both in person and online. It also means listening to and understanding each other's perspectives, while avoiding derogatory language and personal attacks. Additionally, civility means being mindful of our words

and actions, and being considerate of others' feelings (Nelson & Lewis, 2016).

When civility is present in the workplace, employees are more likely to work together cooperatively and respect each other's ideas. It creates an atmosphere of trust, collaboration and respect. Civility also enhances productivity, as employees are more likely to focus on their work and less likely to be distracted by conflicts and tension. Civility can be demonstrated in a variety of ways. For example, employees should be respectful of one another's time by arriving to meetings on time and notifying others if they are running late (Nelson & Lewis, 2016). They should also be mindful of their behaviour, such as refraining from gossip and avoiding offensive language. Additionally, employees should be willing to listen to their colleagues' ideas and be open to constructive criticism. Civility also applies to how employees interact with customers. Employees should be polite and professional, and should strive to provide excellent customer service. This includes being patient, understanding and helpful, no matter the situation. It's also important to remember that customers may not always be aware of the rules and regulations of the workplace, so employees should be willing to explain these rules in a polite and respectful manner.

Gender biasness at the workplace can take many forms and can result in unequal treatment of men and women. Examples include unequal pay, promotions and access to career advancement opportunities, unequal access to resources and training, and unequal access to leadership roles. Gender biasness can also manifest in more subtle ways, such as through micro aggressions, expectations of gender roles, and stereotypes (Nelson & Lewis, 2016). It is important to recognize and address gender biasness in the workplace in order to create a more equitable and inclusive environment.

Discrimination against female employees in the workplace can take many forms. This includes unequal pay for the same job, less access to training, promotion and job opportunities, unequal access to benefits, and a hostile work environment. Discrimination against women in the workplace can also manifest through direct and indirect forms of harassment, such as unwanted physical contact, verbal abuse, and the use of derogatory language. Additionally, female employees may face obstacles to career advancement due to gender stereotypes and an unconscious bias against female leadership (Yu, 2016).

Employers can take steps to prevent discrimination against female employees in the workplace. These include creating a workplace culture that is inclusive

and respectful of all employees regardless of gender, offering equal opportunities for training and promotion, providing equal benefits and pay, and having a zero-tolerance policy for any form of harassment or discrimination. Additionally, employers should actively identify and address any forms of gender-based discrimination and ensure that procedures are in place to investigate and address any complaints (Gunn, 2011).

Despite the fact that dignity is typically thought of as democratic and universal (Brennan & Lo, 2007), there is a wealth of studies showing that different people in different groups or workplaces feel dignity in different ways. The research is implicitly focused on the threats faced by workers with inferior social, professional, or organisational ranks. Furthermore, study is required in poorer nations because these factors affect how employees experience bias and issues with dignity at work.

### Research Questions

- What is the level of gender bias reported by female employees and administrative staff at workplace?
- What is the level of civility reported by female employees and administrative staff at workplace?
- What is the overall workplace environment reported by female employees and administrative staff at workplace?

### Hypotheses

H<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant difference in workplace experiences of teaching and non-teaching female employees at university level.

H<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant difference in workplace experiences of married and non-married female employees at university level.

H<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant difference in workplace experiences of female employees from different age groups at university level.

## METHODOLOGY

Research was quantitative in nature. Survey design was used to conduct this study. All female employees working in administrative and academic departments of the university were included in the population of this survey study. 150 females were selected conveniently based on their willingness to participate in this research. The questionnaire was distributed among female employees and received back from 100 respondents.

### Instrument of the Study

A survey questionnaire was used to collect data for this study. A predesigned questionnaire, as used by Sturm and Dellert (2016) based on the Dignity of Women in Workplace was used. This questionnaire consisted of 33 items. Items were scored on a seven-point scale of agreement. There were three main constructs of the questionnaire i.e. gender bias, civility and overall workplace environment. The overall reliability of the

scale was found .762 Cronbach's alpha.

## RESULTS & FINDINGS

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse data of questionnaire collected from university female employees including faculty members and administrative departments of Allama Iqbal Open University.

**Table 1**

Subscale wise Mean Score Analysis of Dignity of Women in Workplace

Subscales	N	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Gender Bias	84	21.1667	3.94490	-.624	-.155
Civility	84	63.1905	6.00096	-.108	-.052
Workplace Climate	84	17.3333	3.71040	-.012	.224

The overall item wise and subscale wise analysis of skewness and kurtosis values are under the acceptable range of +3 to -3 standard deviation in social sciences

research. This preliminary analysis confirmed the normality of data and conditions of inferential statistics.

**Table 2**

Department wise Mean Score Comparison of Workplace Experiences of Female Employees

Subscales	Department	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Gender Bias	teaching	62	20.9677	4.14874	-2.475	28.125	.020
	non-teaching	8	22.7500	1.38873			
Civility	teaching	62	62.7097	6.28917	-.778	36.998	.441
	non-teaching	8	63.5000	1.77281			
Workplace Climate	teaching	62	17.0968	3.96174	-1.144	68	.257
	non-teaching	8	18.7500	2.65922			

Independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the mean score difference between the workplace experiences of women employees working in administrative and academic departments of university. It was found that on the subscale of gender bias there was a significant difference (p=.020) in the

experiences of female employees and females from non-teaching departments reported better experiences as compared to females from teaching department regarding gender parity at workplace. Therefore, null hypothesis is rejected.

**Table 3**

Marital Status and Mean Score Analysis of Dignity of Women in Workplace

Subscales	Marital Status	N	M	SD
Gender Bias	Married	66	21.0303	3.69186
	Unmarried	16	21.5000	5.13809
	other	2	23.0000	.00000
Civility	Married	66	63.0909	5.37438
	Unmarried	16	62.8750	8.33367
	other	2	69.0000	.00000
Workplace Climate	Married	66	17.6970	3.65837
	Unmarried	16	16.0000	3.93277
	other	2	16.0000	.00000

**Table 4**

## Marital Status and Mean Score comparison of Dignity of Women in Workplace

	Subscales	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Gender Bias	Between Groups	9.727	2	4.864	.307	.736
	Within Groups	1281.939	81	15.826		
	Total	1291.667	83			
Civility	Between Groups	69.748	2	34.874	.968	.384
	Within Groups	2919.205	81	36.040		
	Total	2988.952	83			
Workplace Climate	Between Groups	40.727	2	20.364	1.497	.230
	Within Groups	1101.939	81	13.604		
	Total	1142.667	83			

One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare the mean score difference among the workplace experiences of married and unmarried and women employees with other statuses employees working in university. It was found that

there is no significant difference among the females' experiences on all subscales of gender bias, civility and overall work climate experiences of female employees. Therefore, null hypothesis is accepted.

**Table 5**

Age wise Mean Score of Workplace experiences of Female Employees

	Subscale	Age	N	M	SD
Gender Bias		18-30	6	23.0000	3.09839
		31-40	42	20.9524	4.50989
		41-50	26	21.0769	3.52049
		51-60	10	21.2000	2.93636
		<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>21.1667</b>	<b>3.94490</b>
Civility		18-30	6	64.3333	4.92612
		31-40	42	63.5714	5.09970
		41-50	26	63.3077	7.80138
		51-60	10	60.6000	4.69515
		<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>63.1905</b>	<b>6.00096</b>
Workplace Climate		18-30	6	19.3333	.51640
		31-40	42	17.3810	3.59507
		41-50	26	16.5385	4.42927
		51-60	10	18.0000	2.90593
		<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>17.3333</b>	<b>3.71040</b>

**Table 6**

Age wise Mean Score Comparison of Workplace experiences of Female Employees

	Subscale	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Gender Bias	Between Groups	22.316	3	7.439	.469	.705
	Within Groups	1269.351	80	15.867		
	Total	1291.667	83			
Civility	Between Groups	81.395	3	27.132	.747	.528
	Within Groups	2907.558	80	36.344		
	Total	2988.952	83			
Workplace Climate	Between Groups	44.967	3	14.989	1.092	.357
	Within Groups	1097.700	80	13.721		
	Total	1142.667	83			

One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare the mean score difference among

the workplace experiences of women employees from four categories of aged between 18-60 years working in administrative and academic departments of university. It was found that there is no significant difference among their experiences of females from different age groups on the all subscales of gender bias, civility and overall work climate experiences. Therefore, null hypothesis is accepted.

## Discussion

According to findings it was found that, a significant difference on the sub scale of gender parity ( $p=.020$ ) as reported in the experiences of teaching females were observed and females from non-teaching departments reported better experiences as compared to females from teaching department regarding gender parity at workplace. Gender biasness at the workplace is an ongoing problem that affects female employees. It can manifest in a variety of ways, from subtle exclusion or micro-aggressions to outright discrimination. This bias can be seen in decisions about promotions, salary, job assignments, and more. It can also take the form of sexual harassment or other forms of abuse. In order to address gender biasness and ensure a safe and equitable workplace, employers should have policies and procedures in place that protect female employees from discrimination, harassment, and other forms of bias.

Additionally, employers should provide training and education on gender biasness to all of their employees. Finally, employers should also encourage a culture of inclusivity and respect, and foster an environment where female employees are respected and valued. Women who do enter academia have not seen equal progress in recruiting and promotion to professor and administrative roles, it has been noticed. In spite of the difficulties women frequently face, notably racism, sexism, ageism, and classism, these leadership gaps have given institutions a chance to enhance the advancement and mobility of women. Males typically hold managerial roles because they have more social networking opportunities and more decision-making power than females (Gracia, 2009). Female representation still needs improvement in key positions in institutions and the way in which an equitable education contributes to fairer and less biased academic and professional environments worldwide. The phenomenon should be more investigated with culture specific influencing variables. According to research findings there is no significant difference in overall workplace experiences of married and non-married female employees at university level. Hence the phenomenon is equally experienced by females in

institutions. Further, according to findings there is no significant difference in overall workplace experiences of female employees from different age groups at university level.

## CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of gender biasness is more observed in academia as males occupy more administrative position and hence share more role in decision making and overall social networking opportunities. Females' representation is still need improvement on the key positions in the field, and the way where equitable education contributes towards less biased and fairer academic and professional working environments worldwide may be more helpful to investigate the phenomenon.

## Recommendations

Based on findings, it may be recommended that:

Females may be given more awareness regarding their rights at workplace.

The female participation in all professional activities may be encouraged and made sure through providing them equal opportunities.

## Competing Interest

The authors had no competing interests.

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