Challenging Gaslighting of Women in Academia: A Call for Gender Equality and Inclusive Environment

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Abstract

Gaslighting is a pervasive form of manipulation that psychologically dents its victims. In the context of academia, women frequently face gaslighting. Unfortunately, only a few women are cognizant of this psychological abuse. This research explored the concept of gaslighting, its manifestations in academic settings, and its detrimental impact on women's experiences along with the possible solutions. Therefore, this research emphasizes the importance of challenging gaslighting behaviors, fostering gender equality, and creating inclusive environments that empower women in academia. During the research mostly primary data along with secondary data were used, because the actual victims can more effectively describe the issues. Therefore, it includes interviews with working women in academia from sampled institutions. Findings showed that, 33% of participants reported direct experiences or witnessing instances of gaslighting in the academic workplace, with an additional 21% admitting to experiencing gaslighting to varying degrees, while a notable proportion of participants (32%) reported challenges in accessing equitable resources, opportunities, or support compared to male colleagues, highlighting systemic gender disparities in academia. This research has recommended that the vicious circle of gaslighting can be controlled if academic institutions prioritize the creation of supportive and empowering spaces that value and amplify women's contributions.

Keywords: Gaslighting, Women's Empowerment, Women's Rights, Psychology, Gender inequality

1. Introduction

In the realm of academia, women are still struggling to gain equal representation and acknowledgment. Notwithstanding the significant progress in recent decades has highlighted gender disparities, particularly in higher academic positions and institutional leadership roles. Gaslighting, a form of psychological manipulation, has gained significant attention in recent years for its detrimental impact on individuals' mental well-being and self-perception (Siddiqui & Azmat, 2019). However, the challenges faced by women in academia extend beyond the dominions of institutional prejudices and explicit discrimination. A prevalent and

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sinister form of psychological manipulation, known as 'GASLIGHTING', has arisen as a significant barrier to women's empowerment and development.

Gaslighting is a form of psychological abuse in which the victim's experiences and reality are distorted or undermined, leading them to doubt their abilities, feelings, and perceptions. The situation leads the victim towards vulnerability and disadvantage. Although, gaslighting can occur at any place with anyone but the impact on women, particularly in academia is more concerning, because it directly affects the mental health, self-esteem, and career of women (Ahmed, 2017).

In Pakistan, a country with a rich academic tradition, this issue takes on added dimensions due to the intricate interplay of cultural norms, patriarchal structures, and institutional dynamics (Hadi, 2019). Therefore, this research paper seeks to shed light on the pervasive gaslighting experiences faced by women in Pakistani academia and to highlight the urgent need for gender equality and inclusive environments within academic institutions. The academic context of this research paper is located in various cities across Pakistan, encircling academic institutions in areas including Narowal, Sialkot, Lahore, Multan, Bahawalpur, Shakargarh, Kharian, Gujrat, Islamabad, and Rawalpindi. These varied regions of Pakistan having cultural, educational, and social dynamics pose diversified representations of educational institutions. The purpose of this multi-city research is to address a wide range of perspectives and experiences related to gaslighting in academia. Hence investigation specifically through academic context is vitally important because it is one of the elusive yet powerful mechanisms that perpetuate gender disparities in society. Academia as an institution is the second most important institution after family institution in bringing up an individual and society, Moreover, if the working environment is not conducive for employees, it will directly impact not only the victim but the whole social setup. Therefore, this research aims to signify the gap in understanding the extent, impact, and underlying causes of gaslighting experienced by women in academia with favourable recommendations. Moreover, gender inequality is a prevalent issue in academia, by probing into the various indicators of gaslighting in educational settings and its negative effects on women's progress, and mental well-being, this study aims to raise awareness and promote change. The research shows that psychological attacks like gaslighting have severe consequences on an individual's mental health which directly influences their performance in professional and personal life.

Through a comprehensive review of existing literature, personal narratives, and case studies, this study explore the intricacies of gaslighting and its implications for women in academia. This study also explores the various

forms of gaslighting, including dismissive attitudes, minimizing achievements, intellectual devaluation, and the silencing of women's voices. Furthermore, it probes the intersectional nature of gaslighting, considering how women from marginalized backgrounds face unique and compounded challenges.

Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on gender equality in academia and psychology. It also inspires concrete steps toward dismantling the structures that perpetuate gaslighting against women. With the focus on gaslighting in academia, the research adds a nuanced perspective to discussions, aiming to address the issue of gaslighting in a targeted and actionable manner.

1.1   Objectives of the Study

Objectives of the study included to;

1. assess whether the women from selected institutions are aware of the term 'Gaslighting" and its psychological attack in their academic setting.
2. analyze the validity of the socially accepted reality that working women are more psychologically molested in socially conservative areas like Multan, Bahawalnagar, Shakargarh, and Narowal.
3. examine the presumed social narrative in the context of academia in Pakistan, that working women are safer in academic sectors.

1.2   Significance of Study

By addressing these objectives, this study contributes valuable literature on gaslighting, gender inequality, and workplace psychological abuse of women. As of the research paper, there is very limited literature available on gaslighting especially in the context of Pakistani academic sectors. Therefore, the research will provide treasured insights and recommendations for researchers, policymakers, and academic stakeholders.

This research paper has much significance for many audiences including, policymakers, scholars, institutional leaders, advocacy groups, academicians, etc. As the research paper highlights the critical issue of "Challenging Gaslighting of Women in Academia: A Call for Gender Equality and Inclusive Environment", therefore it has relevance not only for women or a single group or people but for the whole world. By offering insights from the lived experiences of women and strong applicable recommendations, the paper contributes to important discussions and actions in various ways.

This research is crucial for policymakers because it highlights the loopholes in administrative policies toward gender equality and gaslighting prevention. It provides empirical evidence of gaslighting in academia, promoting the need for policy reforms and institutional guidelines.

2. Literature Review

To construct a nuanced argument regarding gaslighting in Pakistani academia, it is imperative to draw upon a multi-dimensional theoretical framework that encompasses various intersecting perspectives. This framework integrates feminist theory, power dynamics, and cultural contextualization to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon: Incorporating psychological theories, particularly those of Gaslight Syndrome (Stern, 1997) and Traumatic Bonding (Dutton & Painter, 1993), this framework delves into the emotional and psychological impact of gaslighting on victims. It examines how gaslighting tactics can erode self-perception and exacerbate mental health vulnerabilities.

Drawing on Sandra Harding's (2004) standpoint theory, this approach asserts that the experiences of marginalized groups, particularly women, offer unique insights into the structures of power and knowledge production. By privileging the standpoint of women scholars in Pakistan, this perspective provides a more nuanced understanding of gaslighting within the academic context. While feminism is indeed diverse and heterogeneous, for this study, the chosen feminist theories and theorists are selected based on their relevance to the specific context of Pakistani academia. These theories converge to offer a comprehensive understanding of gaslighting that considers the complexities of gender, culture, power, and resistance within this unique setting. By synthesizing these intersecting feminist perspectives, this theoretical framework provides a robust analytical lens through which to examine gaslighting in Pakistani academia. It allows for a nuanced exploration of the multi-dimensional nature of gaslighting experiences, considering the intersecting identities, power dynamics, and cultural nuances that shape the phenomenon within this specific context. This intersectional approach is essential for uncovering the intricate web of factors that contribute to and mitigate gaslighting behaviors in Pakistani academic institutions.

The available body of literature on gaslighting in Pakistan provides a comprehensive understanding of this form of psychological manipulation within the unique cultural and social context of the country. Various studies have illuminated different aspects of gaslighting, including its prevalence, manifestations, and repercussions: Research conducted by Ahmad, Mahmood, and Khan (2016) highlights how Pakistan's societal structure, which leans towards a patriarchal framework, contributes to gaslighting behaviors. They emphasize how traditional gender roles and power imbalances play a significant role in rendering women more susceptible to gaslighting, particularly within familial and marital relationships.

Ali and Kausar (2018) explore the intersectionality of experiences, considering factors such as class and urban-rural divides. Their study acknowledges that gaslighting impacts individuals differently based on their unique identities and social positions, revealing a complex interplay of power dynamics. However, this research paper highlights that women even in metropolitan also faced issues of gaslighting similar to women in backward areas. Research by Siddiqui and Azmat (2019) emphasizes the profound psychological consequences of gaslighting. Their findings indicate elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and emotional distress among women who experience gaslighting in marital relationships. Contemporary studies by Gaikwad and Sharma (2023) address the emergence of gaslighting in online spaces, particularly on social media platforms. This dimension of the literature recognizes the evolving nature of gaslighting in the digital age and its implications for mental health and social well-being. Zia (2018) examine the legal and ethical dimensions of gaslighting, particularly within the context of domestic violence. Their research calls for legal protections and support systems for victims, emphasizing the broader implications for policy and legislation in Pakistan.

Studies by Sanghai (2023) emphasize the importance of resilience and coping strategies for individuals experiencing gaslighting. The research underscores the role of social support networks, therapy, and self-empowerment in mitigating the effects of gaslighting. Studies by Bhatti et al. (2022) explore gaslighting within educational and workplace settings in Pakistan. They highlight the detrimental impact on professional development, mental health, and overall well-being of individuals, particularly women. The narratives of survivors, as documented by Abramson (2014), provide valuable insights into the emotional journey of victims. Their research highlights the importance of amplifying the voices of survivors in research and advocacy efforts, emphasizing empowerment and agency. Research by Bukhari (2022) mentions the urgent need for gender equality and inclusivity, by establishing broader societal and academic opportunities for women in Pakistan. It communicates that the study isn't isolated but is part of a larger movement toward creating a more equitable and supportive social environment for women in Pakistan.

Yousafzai (2021) delves into the pervasive issue of gaslighting within academic institutions, emphasizing its detrimental effects on the career advancement and overall well-being of female academics. The study highlights how gaslighting behaviors undermine women's confidence and professional credibility, leading to significant barriers in their career progression. By examining personal narratives and case studies, Yousafzai (2021) demonstrates

the psychological toll and stress experienced by the victims, which often results in decreased productivity and job satisfaction. The research calls for institutional reforms and supportive measures to address and mitigate the impacts of gaslighting on female academics.

In summary, the existing literature on gaslighting in Pakistan provides a foundational understanding of this pervasive issue. It emphasises the critical need for interventions, support systems, and policy reforms to address gaslighting within various spheres of Pakistani society. This research builds upon this foundation, offering a contextually grounded exploration of gaslighting within the specific context of academia, and contributing to the broader scholarly conversation on this critical issue. In this context, by utilizing these empirical insights, this research presents a vigorous and evidence-based argument for challenging gaslighting, endorsing gender equality, and nurturing a conducive environment for women in academia. These insights contribute to the scholarly discourse and support the call for systematic change to deliver a more impartial and empowering academic milieu for all women.

3. Research Methodology.

3.1 Research Design

The study employs a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively investigate the phenomenon of gaslighting experienced by women in Pakistani academia. This design combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to provide a holistic understanding of the prevalence, nature, and impact of gaslighting, as well as the subjective experiences and coping mechanisms of women scholars.

As Gaslighting is a complex phenomenon, involving psychological manipulation and social stinginess, it is imperative to employ a multifaceted research methodology, therefore, Qualitative methods including secondary data in the form of literature, previous research, interviews, and books help to conduct an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, emotions, and perceptions. This qualitative data provides comprehensive contextual information, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the forms and implications of gaslighting in the Pakistani academic environment. While qualitative methods including direct interviews and questionnaires provide valuable information in analysing the pervasiveness and patterns of gaslighting behavior, providing a broader statistical context. These both methods help to build a multi-dimensional analysis and provide a foundation for the development of recommendations and strategies to challenge gaslighting, promote gender equality, and foster an inclusive environment for women in academia.

3.2 Population of Study

The target population for this study comprises women scholars actively engaged in academic activities within Pakistani institutions. This includes individuals from diverse disciplines, career stages, and academic positions. The focus is on capturing a nuanced perspective on gaslighting within the unique socio-cultural and academic context of Pakistan. The research samples are taken from three main sectors, schools, colleges, and universities from the cities of Pakistan including Lahore, Sialkot, Narowal, Shakargarh, Kharian, Gujrat, Bahawalnagar, Multan, Islamabad, and Rawalpindi. The research is twofold, firstly being institution-oriented and secondly individual-oriented.

A total number of 100 participants (sample) took part in this research from selected institutions including Government School Shakargarh, Government School Narowal, Quran Learning Institute Kharian, Lahore College for Women University, Government School Bahawalpur, Lahore, University of Gujrat, Kips School Gujrat, Chenab Post Graduate College Gujrat, Government College from Multan, and Private Academies. The selection of these institutions for sampling was purposeful, aiming to encompass a diverse range of cultural, social, and educational contexts within Pakistan. Lahore, as a populous and culturally significant city, represents an urban center with a rich academic landscape. The inclusion of Sialkot, Narowal, Shakargarh, Kharian, and Gujrat allows for an exploration of relatively similar yet distinct socio-cultural dynamics. Bahawalnagar and Multan, representing Southern Punjab, offer insights into gaslighting experiences within a region characterized by agrarian practices. Finally, Islamabad and Rawalpindi, as the twin cities, provide a glimpse into the complexities of a setting influenced by government institutions and diverse urban-suburban demographics. This selection ensures a comprehensive understanding of gaslighting experiences across varied Pakistani contexts.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Techniques

The total number of participants is 100 and there are three sampling techniques used online Survey Interview, Paper Questionnaire, and Face-to-Face interview. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to select participants from diverse educational institutions including governmental, semi-governmental, and, private academics (schools, colleges, and universities).

3.4 Instrumentation

The primary quantitative instrument is an online survey, featuring a structured questionnaire founded on validated scales such as the Gaslighting Scale, carefully adapted to the cultural context of Pakistani academia. This instrument aims to quantitatively assess the prevalence and impact of gaslighting, capturing the diverse experiences of women scholars. Concurrently, the

qualitative dimension is explored through face-to-face interviews guided by a semi-structured interview guide. This guide, developed with open-ended questions, serves as an instrument to delve into the personal narratives of participants, illuminating the qualitative nuances of their experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies related to gaslighting. The inclusion of a demographic questionnaire ensures a holistic understanding of participants' backgrounds, contributing to the contextual richness of the study. These meticulously selected instruments, including the informed consent form and a pilot testing protocol, collectively form a robust methodological framework, facilitating the gathering of both quantitative and qualitative data in a culturally sensitive and ethically sound manner.

3.5   Questionnaire Design and Validation

The gaslighting scale for Survey Research was also carefully adapted to the Pakistani academic context. The questionnaire underwent a rigorous validation process to ensure its applicability and reliability.

A survey through a questionnaire was formed containing the final 28 questions. The 5-point scale to measure frequency has been chosen. Moreover, the questionnaire was also designed to get the basic facts about gaslighting including, forms of gaslighting, gaslighting behavior, and its linkage to gender disparity.

3.6   Data Collection:

Standardized procedures were established for administering the survey and conducting qualitative interviews. Three types of survey techniques were used in this research (Table: 1), First, through online mode in which 75 participants (women from academia) took part, next, 20 participants (women from academia) filled out the questionnaire in hard form and lastly, 5 participants (women from academia) go through face-to-face interviews. Therefore, this research paper included informed consent, confidentiality measures, and adherence to ethical guidelines.

Table 1

Types and Modes of Survey included in Research

Survey No.	Mode of Survey	Participants
1	Online Questionnaire Survey	75
2	In-personal Questionnaire Survey	20
3	In-Personal Interview	5

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The following steps are outlined in the data analysis process:

4.1   Data Cleaning and Preparation

As cleansing was the initial step conducted on the collected data from questionnaire responses and prepared for analysis, and the questionnaire was distributed online and by physical means, some men filled out the questionnaire and even women outside Pakistan. Therefore, before conducting a contextual and thematic analysis, out-of-context samples were removed. This process also involved checking for missing data, outliers, etc.; the necessary adjustments and corrections were made at this stage to ensure the data's integrity and quality. However, at this stage, it was found that gaslighting is not only an issue of Pakistani women in academia but the issue is also affecting women from every sector and Western women are facing the issue same as Pakistani women. Though the data from outside Pakistan was deducted because of the country-oriented research and the number of participants is not very satisfactory, it still, provides a thoughtful insight that these malignant tactics are prevailing even in developing countries.

4.2   Descriptive Statistics

After cleansing of data, descriptive statistics were computed to provide an overview of collected data. The filled questionnaires from the participants were included in calculating percentages from the data. This step helps to identify the prevalence and distribution of gaslighting incidents, the demographic characteristics of participants, and other key variables. The statistical data presentation is the backbone of this research paper because the mixed-method research includes quantitative data collection. The quantitative data helped to identify the ratio of gaslighting incidents happening in Pakistani academia (in selected samples). Additionally, the statistical data (Table: 2) helps to identify that around 56% of women faced mental abuse at the workplace, in response to a question asked in the questionnaire "Have you ever faced mental abuse at your workplace?" in response to another question "Have you ever experienced or witnessed instances of gaslighting in the academic workplace? 60% of women answered, "Yes/ To some extent/Know someone facing".

Table 2

Key Results of the Study

Prevalence of Gaslighting	60%	Reported experiencing or witnessing instances of gaslighting in the academic workplace (Yes/To some extent/Know someone facing)
Mental Abuse at Workplace	56%	Reported facing mental abuse at the workplace
Impact on Mental	N/A	Identified correlation between gaslighting

Health		experiences and increased anxiety, depression, and emotional distress
Career Progression	N/A	Negative impacts on career advancement, including diminished academic output and creativity
Gender Inequality	32%	Reported challenges in accessing equitable resources, opportunities, or support compared to male colleagues

4.3 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is conducted based on qualitative data obtained from open-ended questions in the questionnaire. The responses are analyzed to identify common themes, patterns, and variations in participants; experiences, coping strategies, and suggestions for addressing gaslighting.

4.4 Triangulation of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The qualitative and quantitative findings are integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of gaslighting in academia. Qualitative insights can help explain or contextualize the quantitative findings, enhancing the overall depth of analysis.

4.5 Empirical Insight

To support this research paper on challenging the gaslighting of women in academia and advocating for gender equality and a conducive environment empirical insight from a variety of sources is gathered. The empirical insights provide evidence of the prevalence of gaslighting, its impacts on women, and result-oriented strategies to address this issue. The potential empirical insights include;

4.5.1 Survey Data

The main part of this research is based on the questionnaire survey and live interviews. A survey was conducted among the women belonging to the academic sector from different institutions. The survey captures the awareness and consciousness allowing for the analysis of whether the victims know they are being targeted by gaslighting. And does gaslighting prevail in academia, if it does, are there enough policies to handle such issues? For this purpose, two types of surveys were included in this research, firstly, through online mode in which 75 participants (women from academia) took part, secondly, 20 participants (women from academia) filled out the questionnaire in hard form and thirdly, 5 participants (women from academia) go through face-to-face interviews.

The research started with the base of knowledge to know whether women are familiar with the term gaslighting or not and resultantly found out that 25% of women in total 100 samples said, they have "NO" knowledge about gaslighting, while 17% claimed to know about it "To some extent". This means

that even in academia, where humans get enlightenment and knowledge, unawareness prevails.

Figure 1

Instances of Gaslighting in Academic Workplace
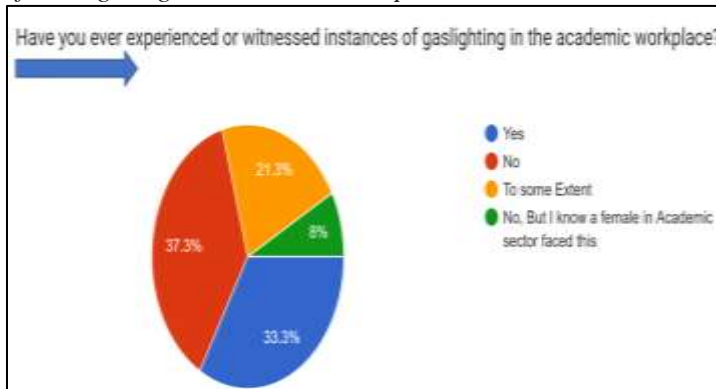
The pie chart depicts responses to the question "Have you ever experienced or witnessed instances of gaslighting in the academic workplace?" Among the respondents, 33% reported direct experiences or witnessing instances of gaslighting in the academic workplace, highlighting the prevalence of psychological manipulation. Similarly, 8% acknowledged awareness of female colleagues encountering gaslighting, further illustrating the ubiquity of these experiences. Moreover, 21% admitted experiencing gaslighting to varying degrees, illustrating the nuanced nature of psychological coercion. However, a notable portion (37%) reported no encounters with gaslighting.

Figure 2

Challenges in Resource Allocation
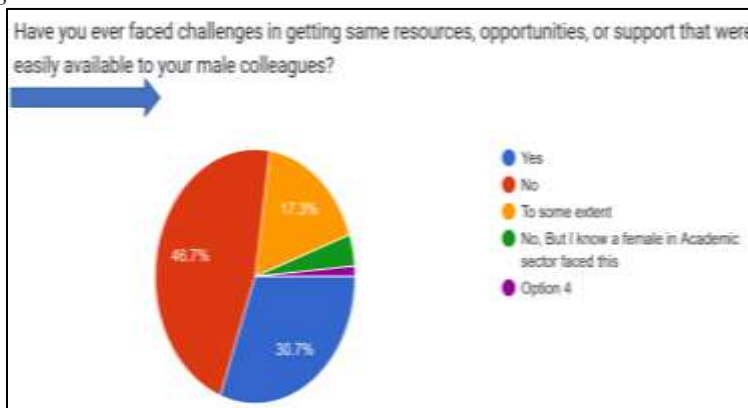
The pie chart showcases responses to the question "Have you ever faced challenges in getting the same resources, opportunities, or support that were easily available to your male colleagues?" A significant proportion (32%) of participants reported challenges in accessing equitable resources, opportunities, or support compared to their male counterparts, highlighting systemic gender disparities. Moreover, 4% acknowledged awareness of female colleagues facing similar challenges, accentuating the pervasive nature of gender-based inequities. Furthermore, 17% admitted encountering challenges to varying extents, suggesting the presence of subtle barriers to gender parity. Nonetheless, a substantial fraction (47%) asserted no personal encounters with such challenges, indicating heterogeneous experiences among participants.

Figure 3

*Unequal Criticism or Scrutiny Compared to Male Colleagues*
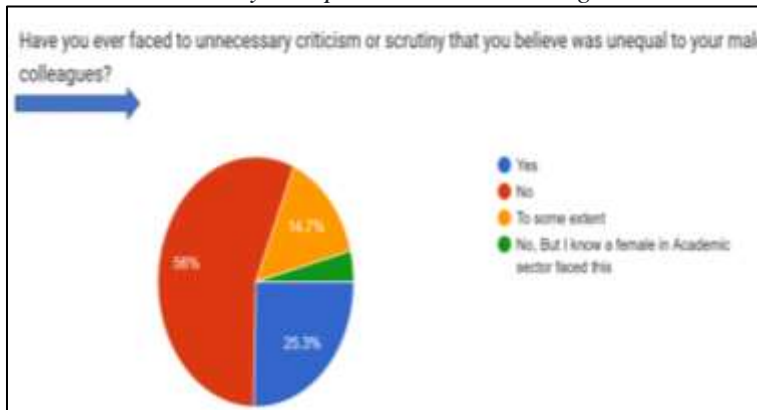
The pie chart represents responses to the question "Have you ever faced unnecessary criticism or scrutiny that you believe was unequal to your male colleagues?" Among the respondents, 25% reported experiencing unequal criticism or scrutiny compared to their male colleagues, highlighting disparities in treatment. Conversely, a majority (56%) stated they had not encountered such unequal treatment, indicating a variance in experiences among participants. Additionally, 15% admitted to experiencing unequal criticism or scrutiny to some extent, suggesting a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. Furthermore, 4% acknowledged awareness of female colleagues facing unequal treatment in the academic sector, underscoring the prevalence of gender disparities.

Further questions in this research besides showing that the issue of gaslighting is prevailing in this presumed safe working environment, also dig into the tactics and outcomes of this consistent and prevailing malice of society. It could be concluded from the research findings that gaslighting does not happen

in just one way or two it has multiple aspects and attacks through different tactics, and it is also possible that the victim faced only one aspect or the multiple. For example, the ratio presented in the following two graphs showed that women faced different tactics of gaslighting which is sometimes not easy to even identify.
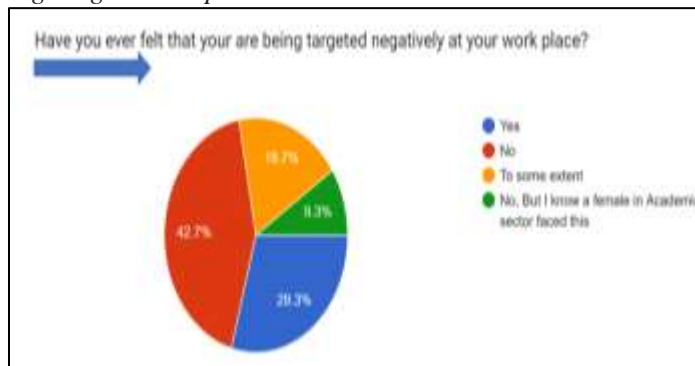
Figure 4

Experience of Mental Abuse at the Workplace
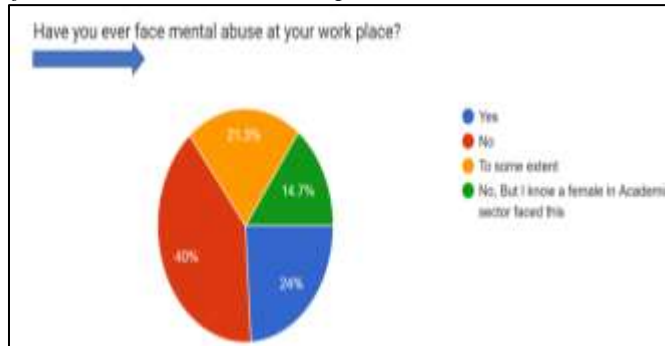
The pie chart illustrates responses to the question "Have you ever faced mental abuse at your workplace?" Among the respondents, 24% reported direct experiences of mental abuse, representing a significant proportion of participants. Additionally, 15% of respondents indicated awareness of female colleagues facing mental abuse in the academic sector, suggesting the widespread nature of this issue. Furthermore, 21% admitted experiencing mental abuse to some extent, indicating a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. However, a substantial proportion (40%) stated they have not encountered mental abuse in their workplace.

Figure 5

Negative Targeting at Workplace

The pie chart illustrates responses to the question "Have you ever felt that you are being targeted negatively at your workplace?" Among the respondents, 29% reported feeling targeted negatively in their workplace, indicating the prevalence of adverse workplace dynamics. Conversely, a smaller fraction (9%) asserted no personal encounters with negative targeting, suggesting varied experiences among participants. Additionally, 19% admitted to experiencing negative targeting to some extent, highlighting the complexity of workplace interactions. Moreover, 4% acknowledged awareness of female colleagues facing negative targeting in the academic sector, emphasizing the systemic nature of this issue.

Another objective of this research is achieved through the questionnaire survey about the reliability and strength of organizational policies to handle such issues. The participants were asked about the organizational policies for handling mental abuse towards women, unfortunately, the results were not satisfactory. Because in response to the question; "Do you know any organizational policies or initiatives to end gaslighting or supporting women in academia? There were only three people, who highlighted such policies by the academic institutions and HEC (Higher Education Commission), and 4 people replied "Don't Know", while the rest of the responses were "No" there are no specific policies to handle gaslighting. After considering the institutions of the participants and HEC policies, it becomes clear that there are certain policies for women to provide them with a safe and conducive environment at the workplace, but policies regarding mental abuse and gaslighting are not satisfactory and there is a lack of awareness among people, especially among women about their own rights and towards such policies.

The survey data also helped to analyze whether gaslighting is only an issue in backward areas or whether it does have its roots in developed parts of the country (Pakistan). The research finds out that in response to the question; "Do you face gaslighting at your workplace"? 23 out of 45 participants from different developed cities responded with "YES", which is an alarming situation that abusive behavior doesn't only belong to backward areas but it is an issue for every social setup.

4.5.2   Quantitative Findings

The quantitative analysis of the survey data revealed a significant prevalence of gaslighting in academic settings across Pakistani institutions. The findings indicated that gaslighting is not confined to specific regions but is widespread, affecting both backward areas and major cities of the country. Among the respondents, a substantial proportion reported experiencing various forms of gaslighting, including manipulation, denial, and invalidation of their

experiences and perceptions. These experiences were found to have a detrimental impact on the well-being and professional development of women scholars in Pakistan, with a notable correlation between the frequency of gaslighting encounters and heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and emotional distress.

In the examination of the quantitative data (Table: 3), it became apparent that workplace challenges, particularly those related to gender dynamics, are prevalent within Pakistani academia. Among the 100 participants surveyed, 24% reported experiencing direct instances of mental abuse in their workplace. This figure is notably high and indicates a concerning trend within academic settings. Additionally, 15% of respondents acknowledged being aware of female colleagues who have faced similar challenges, suggesting that such instances are not isolated incidents but rather systemic issues. Moreover, 21% of participants admitted to experiencing mental abuse to some extent, showcasing the nuanced nature of these encounters. However, it is worth noting that 40% of respondents stated they have not encountered mental abuse in their workplace, suggesting a spectrum of experiences among participants.

Moving on to negative targeting in workplace dynamics, a substantial proportion of respondents (29%) acknowledged feeling targeted negatively at their workplace. This sentiment was further corroborated by 9% of participants who reported awareness of female colleagues facing negative targeting within the academic sector. Additionally, 19% admitted to experiencing negative targeting to varying extents, indicating the complexity of workplace interactions. Nonetheless, a significant fraction (43%) asserted no personal encounters with negative targeting, highlighting divergent experiences among respondents.

Concerning instances of gaslighting in the academic workplace, one-third of participants (33%) disclosed direct experiences or witnessing such behavior. This finding underscores the prevalence of psychological manipulation within academic settings. Similarly, 8% acknowledged awareness of female colleagues encountering gaslighting, highlighting the ubiquity of these experiences. Moreover, 21% admitted experiencing gaslighting to varying degrees, illustrating the nuanced nature of psychological coercion. However, a substantial portion (37%) reported no encounters with gaslighting, indicating varied experiences across participants. Furthermore, 47% of respondents divulged adverse effects on their mental health and professional abilities due to workplace stress. Additionally, 5% acknowledged awareness of female colleagues facing similar challenges, emphasizing the collateral impact of workplace stress on colleagues. Furthermore, 15% admitted experiencing worsening mental health and abilities to varying extents, underscoring the far-reaching implications of workplace stress. Conversely, 33% reported no

experiences of such challenges, reflecting diverse experiences among participants.

Lastly, a notable proportion (32%) of participants reported challenges in accessing equitable resources, opportunities, or support compared to their male counterparts. Moreover, 4% acknowledged awareness of female colleagues facing similar challenges, accentuating the pervasive nature of gender-based inequities. Furthermore, 17% admitted encountering challenges to varying extents, suggesting the presence of subtle barriers to gender parity. Nonetheless, a substantial fraction (47%) asserted no personal encounters with such challenges, indicating heterogeneous experiences among participants.

Table 3

Detailed Quantitative Findings

Category	Percentage	Details
Prevalence of Mental Abuse	24%	Reported experiencing direct instances of mental abuse in the workplace
Awareness of Colleagues' Challenges	14.7%	Aware of female colleagues facing mental abuse
Extent of Mental Abuse	21.3%	Admitted to experiencing mental abuse to some extent
No Encounter with Mental Abuse	40%	Reported no experiences of mental abuse in the workplace
Negative Targeting in the Workplace	29.3%	Acknowledged feeling targeted negatively at their workplace
Awareness of Negative Targeting	9.3%	Aware of female colleagues facing negative targeting
Extent of Negative Targeting	18.7%	Admitted to experiencing negative targeting to varying extents
No Encounter with Negative Targeting	42.7%	Reported no experiences of negative targeting
Direct Experience of Gaslighting	33.3%	Disclosed direct experiences or witnessing gaslighting
Awareness of Gaslighting	8%	Aware of female colleagues encountering gaslighting
Extent of Gaslighting	21.3%	Admitted to experiencing gaslighting to varying degrees
No Encounter with Gaslighting	37.3%	Reported no experiences of gaslighting
Impact on Mental Health and Abilities	46.7%	Reported adverse effects on mental health and professional abilities due to workplace stress
Awareness of Mental Health Challenges	5.3%	Aware of female colleagues facing mental health challenges due to workplace stress

Extent of Mental Health Challenges	14.7%	Admit experiencing worsening mental health and abilities to varying extents
No Experience of Mental Health Challenges	33.3%	Reported no experiences of mental health challenges
Challenges in Accessing Resources	32%	Reported challenges in accessing equitable resources, opportunities, or support compared to male colleagues
Awareness of Resource Challenges	4%	Aware of female colleagues facing challenges in accessing resources
Extent of Resource Challenges	17.3%	Admitted encountering challenges in accessing resources to varying extents
No Encounter with Resource Challenges	46.7%	Reported no experiences of challenges in accessing resources

4.5.3   Qualitative Findings

The qualitative analysis elucidated nuanced narratives, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of workplace challenges faced by women scholars. Participants expressed feelings of frustration, stress, and disillusionment, underscoring the profound impact of these experiences on their well-being and professional trajectories. Female respondents particularly emphasized the imperative for systemic reforms and support mechanisms to mitigate gender-based discrimination effectively in the academic milieu.

4.5.4   Triangulation of Data

The research combining quantitative and qualitative data through convergent parallel design ensures comprehensive and corroborated insights. Triangulation enhances the robustness of the study. This study is not only based on already existing literature but also on the lived experiences of women, which not only enhanced the validity of its data but also helped in better triangulation of data. This research also offers cross-disciplinary insights that bridge sociology, psychology, education, and gender studies together.

4.5.5.1 Psychological Dynamics of Gaslighting

By delving into the experiences and emotions of women from academia, this study provides psychological insights into the impact of gaslighting on self-esteem, confidence, and mental well-being. To address these factors open-ended questions were also added to the questionnaire, for example; How do you believe gaslighting impacts the overall experiences and career progression of women in academia? What is the worst psychological impact of gaslighting you believe you faced? / How has gaslighting impacted your self-esteem, confidence, and mental well-being? Unluckily, the answers are not very shocking but as expected gaslighting does severe damage to the mental health and self-esteem of the

victims. In most cases, women stated that, after being a victim of gaslighting they lost their self-confidence and interest in their professional duties.

4.5.5.2 Educational Policy and Practice

The findings have direct implications for educational policymakers because the research is based on the academic sector. It highlighted an urgent need for policies and practices that foster gender equality, inclusivity, and respect within academic institutions.

4.5.5.3 Workplace Dynamics and HR Practices

The study sheds light on workplace behavior towards women within academic settings. It provides insights that can inform HR practices and policies aimed at creating a supportive environment for women in academia. Moreover, during the research, it was also found that there are very less initiatives that have been taken by academic institutions to raise awareness among women to end gaslighting, even the organizational policies are very weak in this stance. Because the negative responses to the questions like; "Do you know any organizational policies or initiatives to end gaslighting or supporting women in academia? / Do you feel comfortable in highlighting the issue of gaslighting to your organization or the head of the organization? Resultantly, it would be not wrong to say that educational policymakers and organizations should keep in mind that first of all there is a dire need to revise their policies about code of conduct and also should make more firm and rigorous policies towards any kind of mental or psychological abuse. However, firstly the women should be provided with a conducive environment that they can unhesitantly communicate over such issues to the authorities.

4.5.5.4 Societal and Cultural Context

The research also uncovers the societal expectations of gaslighting experiences. As stereotypically gender biasedness and psychological manipulation are aligned to backward areas, therefore, to find out the reality the samples are collected from developed and backward areas to analyze the role of the social environment of these areas in contributing to such issues faced by women. However, the research finds out that 39 out of 58 participants from different developed cities are facing this issue which is an alarming situation that abusive behavior doesn't only belong to backward areas but is an issue for every social setup. This cross-disciplinary understanding informs broader discussions on gender dynamics in Pakistani society.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The empirical insights gleaned from the survey data presented in this research paper resonate with existing literature on gaslighting in Pakistan, emphasizing its pervasive nature across various spheres of society. The findings

are contextualized within the broader scholarly discourse, allowing for a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between cultural norms, power dynamics, and the psychological impact of gaslighting on women.

Ali and Kausar (2018) explored the intersectionality of experiences, considering factors such as class and urban-rural divides. Their study acknowledges that gaslighting impacts individuals differently based on their unique identities and social positions, revealing a complex interplay of power dynamics. However, this research paper highlights that women even in metropolitan also faced issues of gaslighting similar to women in backward areas.

Research by Siddiqui and Azmat (2019) emphasizes the profound psychological consequences of gaslighting. Their findings indicate elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and emotional distress among women who experience gaslighting in marital relationships. Similarly, during this research in response to a question Do you feel your mental health and abilities are getting worse due to unnecessary mental tension at work place by your seniors or colleagues? About 86% of women accepted that their psychological and mental health is getting worse due to workplace pressure and tension.

Furthermore, findings highlight the detrimental impact of gaslighting on women's mental health and professional well-being, aligning with previous research on the psychological consequences of gaslighting in marital relationships. This highlights the urgent need for supportive interventions and mental health resources tailored to address the psychological impact of gaslighting in professional settings. Additionally, while this study did not explicitly explore digital gaslighting, the broader recognition of evolving forms of gaslighting underscores the importance of addressing these phenomena in both online and offline contexts.

In light of previous research advocating for legal protections and support systems for victims of gaslighting, our findings highlight the importance of creating supportive environments and promoting self-empowerment among women facing gaslighting in academia. Institutional reforms are needed to create safer and more equitable workplaces for women. Moreover, the narratives of survivors provide valuable insights into the emotional journey of victims and underscore the importance of amplifying survivor voices in research and advocacy efforts. By centering on survivor experiences, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of gaslighting in academia and underscores the importance of empowerment and agency in addressing this pervasive issue.

In summary, the discussion of this research finding highlights the critical need for interventions, support systems, and policy reforms to address gaslighting

in academia comprehensively. By building upon the insights provided by previous studies this research contributes to the broader scholarly conversation on gaslighting and supports the call for systematic change to create a more impartial and empowering academic environment for all women.

As the research is based on lived experiences and data, in conclusion, this research sheds crucial light on the pervasive issue of gaslighting experienced by women in academia within the specific context of Pakistan. The findings highlight the urgent need for proactive measures to address this insidious form of psychological manipulation. The study reveals that gaslighting significantly prevails in academic settings of Pakistani institutions. It doesn't only prevail in backward areas but also has a great impact on major cities of the country, leaving major impacts on the well-being and professional development of women scholars in Pakistan. It is exacerbated by entrenched patriarchal norms and power dynamics within academic institutions. The psychological toll on victims is substantial, leading to heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and emotional distress.

6. Recommendations

1. Academic institutions should implement clear policies that explicitly prohibit gaslighting behaviors. Awareness campaigns and workshops should be conducted to educate faculty, staff, and students about recognizing and combating gaslighting.
2. Institutions should establish accessible and confidential mental health resources for victims of gaslighting. This includes counselling services and workshops focusing on self-care and resilience-building.
3. Training programs should be mandatory for faculty and staff members to foster a culture of respect, inclusivity, and empathy. This should encompass workshops on effective communication and conflict resolution.
4. Transparent and confidential reporting mechanisms should be put in place, allowing victims to safely disclose incidents of gaslighting. Additionally, support networks within institutions can provide guidance and emotional support.
5. Recognize the intersecting identities of individuals and how they may impact experiences of gaslighting. Tailor support systems to address the unique challenges faced by individuals from diverse backgrounds.
6. Advocate for legal protections against gaslighting within academic institutions. Collaborate with legal experts and advocacy groups to ensure that victims have recourse to justice.

7. Encourage further research on gaslighting in academia, exploring its nuances and potential interventions. Continued awareness-raising efforts can sustain momentum for positive change.

8. By implementing these recommendations, academic institutions in Pakistan can take concrete steps towards creating environments that prioritize the safety, well-being, and professional development of women scholars. It is through collective efforts that can dismantle the pervasive cycle of gaslighting and work towards a more inclusive and equitable academic community.

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