

# The role and portrayal of women in the media



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## **Introduction**

Media is considered as a traditionally male job and generally it is thought that women journalists can not skip the glass ceiling phenomenon. Pakistan is another minefield of challenges for journalists, especially female journalists. The problem prevails mostly in electronic media scenario as women are making more appearances on screen with the boom of private TV channels. They are considered less prominent. Female journalists working in developed countries are also facing such problems but Pakistani female journalists are in the initial stages towards progress.

In Pakistan, with the advent of increasing number of private TV channels, female journalists quite often appear on our television screens. Anchor women, foreign correspondents, and special correspondents are omnipresent in the main broadcast news shows and in current affairs programs. They are considered beautiful and successful women, as well as trend-setters with respect to clothes, make-up and hairstyles. Print journalism, where the physical image is replaced by the reporter's name, this phenomenon is much less prominent than electronic media.

In spite of the large entrance of female personnel into the professional work of information, women on top of editorial staff are still a scanty minority: this is, however, no different to Western countries. Thanks to television, female journalists have acquired great visibility.

Recently The International Women's Media Foundation announced that Rabia Mehmood, a journalist in the Lahore bureau of Express 24/7 Television in Pakistan, has received its 2010-11 Elizabeth Neuffer Fellowship. Mehmood is

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the sixth recipient of the annual fellowship, which gives a woman journalist working in print, broadcast or online media the opportunity to focus exclusively on human rights journalism and social justice issues. Throughout her career, Mehmood has reported on topics such as women's rights, freedom of speech and political unrest. She has covered the survivors and victims of terrorist attacks, suicide bombings and hostage sieges carried out by militants in Lahore. Mehmood has also reported on internally displaced people who left Northwest Pakistan as a result of insurgency by terrorists and military offensives.

But this is not the case of every female journalist. Most of them are assigned to cover social, cultural, soft stories, day's events, or light events. But male journalists get the preference to get a significant assignment, stories which might be lead stories. With the evolution of time and in order to follow the west, Pakistani media is giving important posts to female journalists but in fact the power still lies in the hands of dominant males. Editorial Boards mostly consist of male members.

Gender discrimination in journalism is very distinct and they are given the same benefits as to their male colleagues.

Some of the most prominent women working in Pakistani electronic media are

Aasma Chuhdry

Dr Ayesha Siddiq

Katrina Hussain

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Bushra Rehman,

Najia Ashar

Naseem Zehra

Saadia Afzaal

Sheren Mazari

Asma Sherazi

Zahida Hina

Sana Bucha

Sumaira Nadeem

Sana Mirza

Ayesha Baksh

And many more

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Gender Role Theory:**

Gender role theory posits that boys and girls learn the appropriate behavior and attitudes from the family and overall culture they grow up with, and so non-physical gender differences are a product of socialization.

Social role theory proposes that the social structure is the underlying force for the gender differences. Social role theory proposes that the sex-

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differentiated behavior is driven by the division of labor between two sexes within a society. Division of labor creates gender roles, which in turn, lead to gendered social behavior.

The physical specialization of the sexes is considered to be the distal cause of the gender roles. Men's unique physical advantages in term of body size and upper body strength provided them an edge over women in those social activities that demanded such physical attributes such as hunting, herding and warfare. On the other hand, women's biological capacity for reproduction and child-rearing is proposed to explain their limited involvement in other social activities. Such divided activity arrangement for the purpose of achieving activity-efficiency led to the division of labor between sexes. Social role theorists have explicitly stressed that the labor division is not narrowly defined as that between paid employment and domestic activities, rather, is conceptualized to include all activities performed within a society that are necessary for its existence and sustainability. The characteristics of the activities performed by men and women became people's perceptions and beliefs of the dispositional attributes of men or women themselves. Through the process of correspondent inference, division of labor led to gender roles, or gender stereotype. Ultimately, people expect men and women who occupy certain position to behave according to these attributes.

These socially constructed gender roles is considered to be hierarchical and characterized as a male-advantaged gender hierarchy. The activities men involved in were often those that provided them with more access to or control of resources and decision making power, rendering men not only

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superior dispositional attributes via correspondence bias (Gilbert, 1998, p.\*\*), but also higher status and authority as society progressed. The particular pattern of the labor division within a certain society is a dynamic process and determined by its specific economical and cultural characteristics. For instance, in an industrial economy, the emphasis on physical strength in social activities becomes less compared with that in a less advanced economy. In a low birth rate society, women will be less confined to reproductive activities and thus more likely to be involved in a wide range of social activities. The beliefs that people hold about the sexes are derived from observations of the role performances of men and women and thus reflect the sexual division of labor and gender hierarchy of the society.

The consequences of gender roles and stereotypes are sex-typed social behavior because roles and stereotypes are both socially shared descriptive norms and prescriptive norms. Gender roles provide guides to normative behaviors that are typical, ought-to-be and thus “likely effective” for each sex within certain social context. Gender roles also depict ideal, should-be, and thus desirable behaviors for men and women who are occupying a particular position or involving in certain social activities. Put is another way, men and women, as social beings, strive to belong and seek for approval by complying and conforming to the social and cultural norms within their society. The conformity to social norms not only shapes the pattern, but also maintains the very existence of sex-typed social behavior.

In summary, social role theory “treats these differing distributions of women and men into roles as the primary origin of sex-differentiated social behavior,  
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their impact on behavior is mediated by psychological and social processes” including “ developmental and socialization processes, as well as by processes involved in social interaction (e. g., expectancy confirmation) and self-regulation”

## **Social Construction of Gender Difference**

This perspective proposes that gender difference is socially constructed. This perspective believes that gender is socially constructed. Social constructionism of gender moves away from socialization as the origin of gender differences; people do not merely internalize gender roles as they grow up but they respond to changing norms in society. Children learn to categorize themselves by gender very early on in life. A part of this is learning how to display and perform gendered identities as masculine or feminine. Boys learn to manipulate their physical and social environment through physical strength or other skills, while girls learn to present themselves as objects to be viewed. Children monitor their own and others’ gendered behavior. Gender-segregated children’s activities create the appearance that gender differences in behavior reflect an essential nature of male and female behavior.

Judith Butler contends that being female is not “ natural” and that it appears natural only through repeated performances of gender; these performances in turn, reproduce and define the traditional categories of sex and/or gender. A social constructionist view looks beyond categories and examines the intersections of multiple identities, the blurring of the boundaries of essentialist categories. This is especially true with regards to categories of male and female that are typically viewed by others as binary and opposites

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of each other. By deconstructing categories of gender, the value placed on masculine traits and behaviors disappears. However, the elimination of categories makes it difficult to make any comparisons between the genders or to argue and fight against male domination.

### **Feminism, masculinism and religious views**

Some feminists see gender differences as caused by patriarchy or discrimination, although difference feminism argues for an acceptance of gender differences. Conservative masculinists tend to see gender differences as inherent in human nature, while liberal masculinists see gender differences as caused by matriarchy and discrimination.

### **History of the struggle of female journalists:**

Since the 1960s, feminists have argued that “ it matters who makes it.”

When it comes to the mass media, “ who makes it” continues to be men.

Women working in the media have made some inroads. In 2001, the International Federation of Journalists reported that around the world, 38 per cent of all working journalists are women. Studies conducted by Canadian researchers Gertrude Robinson and Armande Saint-Jean have found that 28 per cent of newspaper editors are female. And according to San Diego State University communications professor Martha Lauzen, 24 per cent of American television producers, writers, and directors are women.

Denis Monière, political analyst and professor at Quebec’s University of Montreal maintains that even if the visibility of female journalists has grown in the last ten years, we shouldn’t be too quick to shout victory. In 2002, the Canadian Newspaper Association reported that 43 per cent of Canadian

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newspaper employees are women. However, they account for only eight per cent of editors-in-chief and twelve per cent of publishers. Women employed in the sector tend to work in “pink-collar ghettos”; they make up 70 per cent of the advertising department, and 80 per cent of the accounting and finance staff.

In addition to being un-represented in positions of authority, Monière thinks women are also under-utilized in covering the subjects considered most important-politics, economy and social trends. And when it comes to the evening news, women are almost invisible. The posting of Sophie Thibault in 2002 as the ten o'clock news anchor for the national French-language channel TVA is a “first” for Canada. Most often, women are consigned to noon-hour shows, local newscasts, “fill-ins” and weekend spots.

However, men continue to occupy approximately 75 per cent of the positions of power in the mass media.

The 2001 study conducted by the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania is equally damning. The Center reports that only 13 per cent of the top executives of American media, telecommunications and e-companies are female. And that 13 per cent is not concentrated at the top: women constitute only 9 per cent of the boards of directors for these companies, and they hold only 3 per cent of the most powerful positions.

## **CURRENT SITUATION:**

Women in Islamic nations are increasingly being heard, seen and listened to, thanks in part to leading female voices determined to make a difference, despite challenges ranging from motherhood to threats on their lives.

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One of the hostesses of a popular Saudi program called “ Speaking Softly” says that until recently, she did not see people like herself on television.

Muna Abusulayman is one of four anchorwomen on the show that deals with various issues in a talk format. Of the four, Abusulayman is the only one who wears a hijab, or headscarf. She is also divorced and lives alone with her child in Saudi Arabia.

Women in the Middle East actually make up the majority of anchors and presenters on television. But, Abusulayman says, they are much less prominent behind the scenes and in other media like print and radio.

Tasneem Ahmar, who runs a media and advocacy group in Pakistan as well as producing radio programs on women’s issues, agrees with Abusulayman.

With more than 25 years experience as a journalist, Ahmar says that, not unlike the West, most decision-making jobs, top executive positions, and “ tough” assignments are given to men.

“ Women normally are assigned very soft issues – social issues, cultural issues,” she said. “ There are very few women, you’ll find, who are doing hard political stories or economic stories or current affairs programs.”

Tasneem Ahmar thinks positive changes for women in the Middle East and the Islamic world are on the horizon. She predicts that a new wave of young women in the Pakistani media will have an impact in five to ten years in her country.

“ These young girls who have come in, they’re very ambitious and they’re very hard working and I don’t think anything is going to stop them from going to the top positions.”

While there is still a lot of work to be done, the women hope that their efforts and successes in the media will inspire not only women but men too. Or maybe there is truth to the old adage, “ the best man for the job is a woman.”

One woman in the Middle East who does cover tough stories and speaks out is May Chidiac. She is the host of a Lebanese TV program called “ With Audacity.”

Chidiac is known all over the Arab world for her tenacious journalism. A victim of an assassination attempt by suspected Syrian agents, she lost a hand and a leg in a car bombing in September 2005. After numerous surgeries, she went straight back to work.

Reporter of an English Newspaper from Dhaka says that in most cases, chief reporters/assignment editors (almost everyone are male) do not assign them something special/important or significant reports. They are still assigned soft stories, day’s events, or light events. But male journalists get the preference to get a significant assignment, stories which might be lead stories.

But the interesting point is that, many female journalists in our country now protesting this kind of attitudes and they are getting serious kind of assignment after fighting with their bosses.

In Bangladesh, this is a very new phenomenon to appoint female journalists in electronic media, However, critics pointed that as female is more attractive than male in electronic media, so the media owners appoints the female journalists to attract audiences. About 15 percent female journalists are now working in country's 11 state and privately run TV channels.

On the other hand, in print media, we are very few female reporters are which any working journalist can count within 10 minutes.

There are some other sectors of the media where female are more visible than reporting like hazardous and glamorous job for unknown reasons.

Anam Istafa, Sub editor, National Herald Tribune openly admits that female journalists are usually assumed to be dumb and so tender hearted for Hard news coverage especially of blasts and natural disasters. She says that very rare females are at the executive positions in media news media business. Most of them usually follow guideline and policies by their male bosses. Policy and decision makers are predominantly men.

Despite the increase of women's visibility in media organizations, journalists in South Asia are hardly seen in the decision-making positions.

This was one of the several issues highlighted by more than 200 women working in the media from every SAARC country, who came together for the first time in Lahore, Pakistan, for a two-day meeting on ' Women in Media - Challenges, Opportunities and Partnership'.

Women media persons from Maldives, Bhutan and Nepal pointed out that none of the print media in their country has ever had a female journalist  
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heading the newsroom. Participants from India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka raised similar concerns, and also pointed out that men in their media organizations outnumbered women.

Most of the participants cited long and difficult working hours, lack of incentives and appreciation to keep women working in the media, fulfilling household obligations and unequal wages as some of the reasons why women in the media are under-represented at various levels in South Asia. These were also some of the reasons why most female media persons, after working for few years, leave the profession for other jobs.

Portrayal of women in the media as victims was also discussed extensively. Some of the participants pointed out that women make news in several South Asian news media only when they are victims of conflict, crime, natural disasters or terrorism.

However, one of the guest speakers, Pakistan's federal information minister, Qamar Zaman Kaira, said: " Women journalists play an important role in voicing concerns of the victims in conflict areas, who are often women and children. Some of these victims are more comfortable sharing their experiences with female professionals." He urged women media persons to also take up more serious and hard-hitting issues relating to politics, security and conflict.

Senior journalist in Pakistan, Shehar Bano, said at the conference that international research studies indicate transformation in news content brought on by an influx of women into the news media. " Issues such as

health, education, child care and women workers have gained prominent slots in newspapers," she said.

Bandana Rana from Nepal said, however, that there are also many female media persons, who are confined to covering only feature articles on art, culture and lifestyle and very few female reporters are assigned business, economics or political stories.

It was resolved during the meeting that female media persons should be given training opportunities to enhance their skills to cover all issues, along with mentorship programmes between senior and junior female journalists.

Former Chairperson, Department of Mass Communications at University of Karachi, Professor Shahida Qazi said she is happy that more and more Pakistani women are now joining media. She recalled when in 1966 she had joined Daily Dawn Karachi as a reporter, many people were surprised. She said now more than 70 percent of Karachi University students are women. She said in the Department of Mass Communications, there are more female students than males.

Former Secretary Information Department, and TV compere Mehtab Akbar Rashdi said declaration of the state of emergency and curbs on media in Pakistan have shocked journalists, writers and human right activists. She said the dream of gender justice and equality could not materialize until change of mindset in male population. She said even today in the practical field female journalists face many problems due to this dogmatic thinking.

Rashdi said steps for empowerment of women should be taken from the home. She said parents should encourage their daughters to get higher education and work in every walk of life.

Electronic media in Pakistan is highlighting gender-related issues in a better way in comparison to print media, because more women journalists work in TV channels. Pakistani women have entered the field of journalism after a tough competition. Now women journalists and photographers could be seen working in Pakistani society and it is a welcome change.

Association of Television Journalists (ATJ) only has some 50 females among its 700 or so members around the country, but nearly half of them are concentrated in the business capital of Karachi. Women are highly visible in the Pakistani media as anchors and talk show hosts on dozens of private radio and television channels in various regional languages, besides English and Urdu.

Women are paid less than their male colleagues for equal work and have to fight harder for the political or other high profile assignments. Most identify sexual harassment as their biggest concern, according to Zebunnisa Burki, who has been coordinating South Asian Women in Media (SAWM)

## **EFFORTS /STEPS TAKEN TO PROMOTE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MEDIA**

### **Gender Equality Beyond 2005: Building a more secure future for women reporters**

To mark International Women's Day on 8 March 2005, UNESCO's Director-General, Koichiro Matsuura, launched for the fourth time the global

initiative “ Women Make the News”. UNESCO appeals to all media producing daily news to hand over editorial responsibility to women to cast the news on that day.

## **UNESCO Supports Gender in Journalism Awards in Pakistan**

The Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) organizes the “ Gender in Journalism Awards” to honour excellence in gender sensitive reporting in the country. UNESCO supports the two awards, each carrying a cash prize of Rs 25, 000 (US\$ 400), that will be given to Pakistani journalists.

One award recognizes models for excellence and best practices in coverage of gender related issues. It is open to both male and female journalists. The second award honours outstanding coverage of any issue by a female journalist. Its aim is to promote role models for women entering or planning to enter the journalism field. Journalists working in print media may nominate their own work, or editors and others may nominate articles that promote the objectives of the awards.

## **Fiji Women Community Radio Initiative**

femLINKpacific (Media Initiatives for Women), a women’s media NGO, launched in 2004 femTALK 89. 2FM, a mobile women’s community radio project. In January 2005, as a result of the grant of UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), the femLINKpacific is taking the suitcase radio to women in their communities.



The aim of the femTALK 89, 2FM project is to not only create a new space on the radio waves for community based discussion, but also to provide practical opportunities for women within their own communities to highlight and address issues relevant to them.

The main focus of femLINKpacific's range of community media initiatives is "women speaking to women for peace". The decision making structures still lack equal representation by women and the capacity of women, especially from the rural population and the poor, to communicate openly on common matters should be increased.

## **International Women's Media Foundation**

Since its founding in 1990, the International Women's Media Foundation has conducted training programs on five continents, in 26 countries and over the Internet with the goal of strengthening the role of women in the news media worldwide.

The IWMF supports women in the media through groundbreaking projects, and innovative research and training designed to help women develop their skills and become leaders in their profession. Since 1990, the IWMF has honored more than 50 extraordinarily brave and hardworking journalists with Courage in Journalism Awards. The only international awards designed to recognize the contributions of women on journalism's front lines, the Courage awards recognize women who have faced physical attacks, prison terms, beatings, rape, and death threats to themselves and their families.

## **Training Women Media Professionals**

Internews is one of the world's leading trainers of female media professionals, training more than 25, 000 women in media skills since 2003 alone.

Internews helps women get on the air and in the newsrooms in societies where their participation has been marginalized, allowing for reporting on all issues-not just women's issues-to be done through the voices of women in that society.

## **Mainstreaming Women's Issues**

To ensure that the media meet the needs of all audiences, Internews works to foster women's leadership in the media industry so that issues of vital concern to women are "mainstreamed," integrated across all programming and not relegated to a niche market.

In communities where specific gender issues are underreported, such as gender-based violence or women's health, Internews has developed special programs produced by and for women.

## **Pakistan's First Radio Program by and for Women**

In Pakistan, where only three percent of journalists are women, Internews has worked to increase the number of women working in media, training women at journalism programs established by Internews at universities from Peshawar to Rawalpindi to Balochistan. Internews launched Meri Awaz Suno (Hear My Voice), the country's first independent syndicated program that features women as both producers and subjects.

In 2003, Internews built a state-of-the-art independent radio production facility in Islamabad where women journalists are trained in radio reporting and production and work on Meri Awaz Suno.

The radio show airs on 19 independent radio stations across the country, and focuses on issues such as politics, education and health. Before Internews training, most reporters working on Meri Awaz Suno had little experience working in radio or journalism. Now they are leaders - the first women in Pakistan to work as independent broadcast journalists, and role models for young women.

### **Establishment of Forum Named : Women Journalists Pakistan (WJP)”**

The women journalists of twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad formally announced Women Journalists Pakistan (WJP) forum to address professional problems faced by them and find out ways to nurture their skills.

The ceremony was organized at the National Press Club, Islamabad in which Javed Akhtar, Director News Associated Press of Pakistan, Absar Alam, Anchor person Aaj TV, Qatrina Hussain, Anchor person Express TV and Fozia Shahid Anchor Person ATV shared their through provoking ideas and views with a large number of female journalists present there.

According to WJP members, the body is a non-political and intellectual-based forum that aims to provide platform to working women journalists in the print and electronic media.

In addition to raising a collective voice on issues faced by women journalists, the forum will initially focus on two basic aspects - networking and facilitating journalists avail media-related career-building opportunities.

The WJP hierarchy is:

Myra Imran of The News (Convener); Saadia Khalid, The News and Humaira Sharif of APP (Resource persons).

Working Group: Ayesha Habib (Dunya TV); Sehrish Majid (Apna TV), Anila Bashir- (Samaa), Asma Ghani (The Nation), Maimoona (Khabrain), Siddrah Bokhari (APP), Naheed Akhtar (APP), Shumaila Noreen (APP), Zahida Mahmood (APP), Ghazala Noreen (News-One TV), Saadia Masood (Rohi TV), Nazia Hameed (Channel 5), Afshan Qureshi (Ausaf), Rukhsana Mussarat (Radio Pakistan), Shazia Seher (Apna TV).

The WJP Advisory Board comprises the following:

Qatrina Hussain (Anchorperson, Express TV); Absar Alam (Anchorperson Aaj TV); Ghazi Salahuddin (Member Editorial Board, Jang Group of Newspapers); Javed Akhtar (Director News, APP); Muhammad Ziauddin (Executive Editor, The Express Tribune); Shamsul Islam Naz (Secretary General, Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists); Asma Shirazi (Anchorperson Samaa TV); Mazhar Arif (Executive Director, Alternate Media) and Fozia Shahid (ATV).

### **Establishment of Aasha (the Alliance Against Sexual Harrasment) and a code of conduct for workplace**

WWO is among the civil society organisations which got together a few years ago to form Aasha, the Alliance Against Sexual Harassment ([www.aasha.org](http://www.aasha.org)).

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org. pk) in collaboration with the International Labor Organisation (ILO) and Pakistan's Ministry of Women Development.

Aasha developed a code of conduct for the workplace and a procedure to deal with harassment and discrimination. Geo TV, the largest private television network in Pakistan is among the few media organisations Aasha lists as a ' progressive employer'.

" It's not necessary for every case to be a federal issue," commented a television producer who worked with Geo when Aasha started. " Often the tension arises because of the widespread gender segregation in our society - many of these youngsters don't know how to interact with each other. This leads to misunderstandings that the code helps to clear up."

Another reason for growing sexual harassment may be that, with education, more people are crossing class barriers.

" Women coming into journalism earlier were relatively well-connected and self-confident. Many now come from lower-middle class backgrounds and have less confidence. Men find it easier to take advantage of or intimidate them," observed a senior journalist.

## **Problems Faced by Female Journalists**

### **(Pakistan)**

It is an established fact that women are an integral part of the Pakistani media. Professionally, they match their male colleagues and their analytical and investigative skills are quite impressive. With their distinctive approach to political, economic and social issues, women journalists have successfully

highlighted the human angle that had previously remained neglected. They have proven themselves, both in the print and the electronic media.

Less than a decade ago, there were very few women in journalism. But things have now changed and with the opening of a string of television channels, many new faces have joined in. These motivated girls have been a valuable addition to the Pakistani media. Viewers, readers and listeners, have all appreciated their work.

However, unfortunately the working conditions in the media houses have remained unchanged. Low salaries, downsizing, lack of professionalism, non-existence of basic facilities for employees like health, old age benefits etc, no job security and non-conducive work environment in majority of media organizations especially in the Urdu print media are indeed big hurdles.

This has greatly affected women journalists because they are often the first ones to become victims of downsizing. Mainly due to social pressures, they cannot work in two or three places like their male colleagues and unlike their male colleagues women are reluctant to seek favors.

The constraints they face due to overall environment in media industry become a hurdle in their way to assume journalism as a career but another dimension of this issue is the problems female journalists face within their community - the biggest is their continuing struggle to become registered journalists within media bodies.

Unfortunately, majority of the women journalists have only been granted associate membership which is actually not regular membership. The

condition is worst in under developed areas where women, in most of cases, don't apply for membership.

This apparently small problem has long lasting effect on the overall situation of female journalists and their growth in media industry. Due to non-registratio