

Reason behind the Struggle: Aspirations of Pakistani Female Journalists behind Joining this Profession

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: Women journalists have struggled for a long time to enter and adjust themselves in the field of journalism (Ali & Nawaz, 2017), but the question arises why women are joining this profession at the first place, if they know this field is challenging for them? The aim of this study was to find the aspiration of female journalists behind joining this field.

Methodology: This study was qualitative in nature and in-depth interview methodology was used for data collection. The sample size of forty was selected using convenience sampling.

Findings: The findings showed that very few Pakistan female journalists have joined this profession by choice, majority have come in this profession coincidentally.

Conclusion: in Pakistan, female journalists join this field because of the glamour, fame or fantasy. Many of female journalists do not join this field with any proper goal or ambition, some have joined this profession coincidentally and others step in to play their positive role in the society. Those who need change in their daily life or want to do something adventurous also join this field.

Keywords: Female Journalist, Journalistic Profession, Mass Media, Attraction.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Current population of Pakistan is comprised of 49.2% of women (Country Meter), but according to the gender equality report of 2020, Pakistan ranks at 151 out of 153 countries. In overall South Asia, the situation of female journalists is more pathetic, and they have to struggle to achieve their place in the field from right after their enrolment in the organization (IFJ Report, 2014). Women's voices are rarely heard in conservative regions (UN Women, 2015; Baloch et al., 2024; Nawaz, 2023). In Pakistan, women journalists are at risk of losing jobs because of poor security and low recruitment. Then, Women are still traditionally given stereotyped beats though a few have ventured into covering sports or politics, but for many, it is still a struggle and they are regularly subject to comments or barbs that they should be devoting their time to their families, not their careers. Many researchers from different countries found, workplace harassment, glass ceiling and sticky floors are the most common workplace challenges that

female Journalist face around the globe (Jamil,2020, Iqbal, 2017, Sreedharan et al., 2019, Ali & Nawaz, 2017, UN Women, 2015; Yasin et al., 2023; Ghafar et al., 2023; Arain, 2023).

Women journalists in Pakistan also have challenges like insufficient maternity leaves, some even receive maternity leave of a month only and some have received not even a single day. Policies of organizations are not female friendly either. They face challenges like low salary, harassment, and gender discrimination. It is not easy to be a journalist, but it is not easy at all to be a female journalist (Sadiq, 2020). Challenges like risk of violence based on gender, harassment, negative attitude of the society and prominent salary gap test the patience of Pakistani female journalists who are already in minority in news media (Nusrat, 2018)

Female journalists receive threatening calls then there is a family pressure also if you are working on hard beats. Religious extremism is another major problem (IFJ Report, 2014), and till now nothing has done to provide safety to the female journalists (Iqbal & Iqbal, 2017; Sakha and Shah, 2022; Yahya et al., 2022). In soft beats, female journalists with good appearance are preferred, for example, “Iqra” an entertainment beat reporter said she was not being paid and asked to be presentable then maybe she get some space. Similarly, another one named “Mania” said that in all professions women are first being considered on the basis of their appearance. We first have to prove ourselves that we can cover the hard stories also (VOA, 2019; Asghar 2024; Fatima and Yasmin 2024; Ashraf et al., 2024). Elmore in her study published in 2007 quoted past researchers i.e. Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2003; Bulkeley, 2002; Falk & Grizard, 2003; Hemlinger, 2001; Steiner, & Fleming, 2004; Employee Departure Patterns in the Newspaper Industry. 1990; Hemlinger. 2001; Weaver & Wilhoit. 1994; Weaver & Wilhoit 1996 described that Journalism profession remain male dominating at every level because female do not stay as long in this profession. Researchers from all over the world have also stressed on the top to bottom discrimination in news media where females do not enjoy high scale and policy making jobs (North, 2014), but the question is why women are joining this profession at the first place, if they know this field is challenging for them? Recently few researches have been touched the angle of aspirations of female journalists such as, for women in UK, elements like fantasy, hard-headed behavior and journalistic socialization are inspiration for them to choose journalism but the practical exposure decreases their interest in the field, and they start to look for other career opportunities (Jackson, Thorsen & Reardon, 2019). For some Indian female journalists, aspiration behind joining this profession is the coverage of social issues like corruption and human rights violations etc. (Rajeev, Midhila & Karthika, 2019), but an explorative study related to the aspirations of female journalists, especially in Pakistan is still missing. The Researcher tried to fill this gap through this research.

1.1 Study Objective

To find out the aspirations of Pakistani women behind joining the journalism profession.

1.2 Research Question

RQ: What are the aspirations of Pakistani female journalists for choosing Journalism as profession?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Feminist Critical Theory

The feminist theories deal with the situation of women in society and condition of women in context of gender dominance in society and highlights the tools with which can transform the situation of women in society. It is important for the researchers who are engaged in feminist study to use critical approach. The researchers using this approach should generate knowledge that could be best in the use to highlight the lives of women, their circumstances and struggles etc. (Kushner & Morrow, 2003). In past studies this theory has been used to see women’s life through the inter-sectionality (Humanities, 2018). The purpose of this research was to find the aspirations of women journalists to join this field, which could be based on one or multiple factors and this intersectional approach links this study with this theory.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design, Population and Sample

Research study adopted qualitative research design. Data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interview methodology. The population of the study was female journalists of Pakistan. The sample size of forty were selected through convenient sampling of non-probability sampling technique. At the time of analysis codes were assigned to participants, to keep their identity anonymous.

3.2 Inter-Coder Reliability

Out of total forty interviews, the researcher shared approximately eight transcribed interviews with her supervisor to check the inter-coder reliability. The statements derived and highlighted by the supervisor and the researcher were almost the same which defined that researcher was working in the right direction and the analysis of interviews were reliable.

4. RESULTS

To explore the answer of research question of this study, the researcher asked the following question from all participants and their answers were of quite an interest.

Question: What was your inspiration for choosing journalism as a profession?

Some of the participants had accidentally joined this field; there is neither any beforehand planning nor preparation to be a journalist on their part, sometimes it is a senior who advised them to join this field, at times a degree requirement and for some it is a mishap or family responsibility that landed them in journalistic career. To some; it was the glitter and glamour of the screen, they were inspired by the way anchors read news and conduct programs and transmissions in a presentable look. There were several other reasons too, for example, a participant stepped into this field just because she always wanted to be a spy and another was inspired from an Indian movie character.

A01 switched from teaching to journalism and it put her mother in a concerning situation as she considered journalism rather an unstable profession. On her part, the decision to leave teaching and join practical journalism was not without a motivation, as she wanted to have a firsthand experience so that she can teach her students in more practical and better way in future. Here is what she said about her inspiration,

“I have always been interested in politics and like to read newspapers. The electronic media was in full bloom when I was in intermediate that is why I decided to study Mass Communication, then started to teach media and meanwhile I realized that if I am teaching media and news but have never worked in newsroom then how can I explain the dynamics and basic functioning of news to students?”

This is how she left her teaching career and joined this profession. Participant A02 took this field as a challenge. At first, she was aspired to be a dubbing artist. There were people who doubted her abilities, and teased her that she could be anything, a teacher or bus hostess but not a journalist. She took it as a challenge to prove all of them wrong. She recalled her memory this way,

“I have been targeted since childhood due to my voice. People used to tell me that you can work in a Daewoo Bus Service or something like that, but you can never be a journalist. So, I was like that I will be a journalist and I did it.”

About six participants joined media industry because of its screen glamour as they wanted to present news as anchors. Participant A04 has been worked as a reporter with a channel for almost nine months, she recalled,

“If I talk about the very beginning, I then joined journalism due to screen charm but it is after joining media I realized that there is a large workforce behind the content we watch

on the screen. People usually think that those who are coming on screen are the one working in media."

Interviewee A05 shared her experience in these words,

"I wanted to be a journalist, to be an anchor and to read news but when I started to study journalism then I realized that there is much more in this field than except being an anchor".

A28 had this to say about her journey,

"From my childhood we used to listen news on PTV and I was just used to say that I'll be the one who read the news."

This is how she took admission in Mass Communication,

"when we were studying Mass Communication then again further there are a lot of fields that either you want to do reporting or news, production, PR. You can get the chance to go in advertising, but my interest was to write for the people by becoming their voice."

She originally started her career as an anchor, and in the meantime, she realized that it is others content which she only reads on screen. This work does not provide her any opportunity to produce her own content and she afterwards moves to reporting news. The boom of electronic media inspired A06 to join this profession,

"In 2009 or 2010 every news was highlighted on every channel either it is small or big and it had a charm of its own, when we were kids there were not many news channels except PTV only. So, that boom of channels inspired me to work in this field."

Some interviewees answer to this question was similar as they have joined this profession for no reason in actual. They had accidentally joined this field and for some it had been the experience of internship in channels that developed their interest in this profession. A16 has been working in this field for fourteen years and in the beginning, she had no interest in this profession. She recalls,

"I never wanted to work in this field, never, I had done my master's in international relations and till last day of my final semester I did not have any plan to join journalism. I really hate when family members used to watch PTV news bulletin, I was not even used to watch that news hour. But we had a chairperson of human rights who asked me to do internship and recommended me in a national channel. But when I joined the channel and observed the work process, my interest started to develop."

And it was positive feedback from people around her that later became a source of inspiration for her to continue journalistic work.

"Biggest inspiration you have is actually when you are covering something, and you get the feedback from the public. My inspiration was people, general public, whose problem I have covered and somehow they get resolved and got praise."

A14 recounted her experience in these words,

"I studied Mass Communication in BA and then due to certain circumstances I had to do my master's in Mass Communication as well. The thought of working as a journalist never came across my mind. I did my internship then I was offered a job and that was how my journey in media started."

A18 have been in this profession for twelve years. She joined this profession because she wanted to diversify her work experience, and journalism was the best field in this regard. She even left a seventeenth scale public sector job for which she was selected. She expressed her memories in this way,

"I cannot do the same thing for years, I need something new to work every day, this is my nature and I have felt that this job is according to my nature. Secondly my father and elder brother both were journalist, so I had an idea about the workings of this field or maybe it was inherited."

Interviewee A20 had no as such inspiration for joining this field except she wanted to make her own identity and to work for people. She was also fond of doing interviews. She recalled,

"I did not have any inspiration. But I have been a talkative person since my childhood, and I wanted to make my identity in the society and top of the list I would have done something for the humanity, so, I joined this field."

A22 with sixteen years of the experience said,

"I accidentally came into Journalism; it was not my field (by choice). Basically, I studied literature and lecturer ship was more suitable for me but accidentally I came into journalism and that's it I could not leave it."

Her father passed away when she had finished her degree, her mother had died some time ago, then it was her responsibility to look after her siblings. She was the eldest one and started looking for a job. Around that time, she came across an advertisement that a newspaper is hiring. In order to get that job and secure her position there she even moved to Lahore from another city. After that she could not leave this profession and switched from print to electronic media in the meantime.

A23 had studied and joined journalism coincidentally but her interest in this profession developed after internship, and later on she moved from print media to work as a reporter for a channel. She found her inspiration in reporting news. She said that reporting makes you strong both morally and socially. She recounted,

"In our society people suppress others and kill those who does not have any power or are not fearless. To be something is very important for a woman to survive in this society and I think reporting makes you stronger".

But at first, it was nothing more than a coincidence for her to join this profession.

A24 said,

"I think journalism has chosen me. I personally wanted to be a doctor or a Chartered Accountant (CA). I just did the Master's in Journalism only to satisfy my family that I have a degree because CA is time taking."

She initially went for an admission in Human Resource Program, it was a friend who suggested her to do Mass Communication instead" and later she left CA, and so her journey continued in this profession.

A27 had this to say,

"There was no as such inspiration. I chose Mass Communication as my subject, and I just found this field interesting to work in."

She was not the only one as another interviewee A32 had chosen Mass Communication as her field of study, she recalled,

"I did not have any plan about it till my graduation, but in masters I suddenly made my mind to do Mass Communication. I did an internship which was basically compulsory to complete my degree. My interest in this field developed during internship, and then I made this field my profession as well."

Interviewee A31 had a graduation degree with double Mathematics. She was doing her Masters and needed a job, around that time a newspaper Info line had a vacancy for a part time employee and she

started working with them, and that was the beginning of her journalistic career and this beginning had no end yet, as the desire to get more and more knowledge never allowed her to leave this profession. She even left Central Superior Service for her career in journalism. She had also cleared exams for income tax officer but did not join the service. She shared her memories in these words,

“I liked this field very much at that time because you are in the hub of information and you know every happening around you. In that age you have the hunger and excitement to get to know maximum new things, and at that time we also felt we can bring some change in the society. This is what made me stay in this profession.”

A33 found this profession close to her dream job. She said,

“It was my dream job to travel at different places and to highlight the stories of different people and I got this opportunity through journalism. This was the reason I stepped into this field.”

There was an interesting case, A29 wanted to be a spy and had found journalism an interesting profession. She said,

“It is a very stupid thing but whenever someone asks, I actually tell them the truth that I originally wanted to become a spy. I was fond of spying, used to read spy novels and still read them. I was very enthusiastic, adventurous and wanted to do something exciting, so I had a feeling that in this profession I could do something and remain unbiased as well.”

Another reason for some females to join this profession was family influence. Around five participants told that they had joined this field to fulfill the wish of some family member or their inspiration was someone in the family already working in this field. A35 joined this profession to fulfill her uncle's wish. He simply wished to see someone from the family work as a journalist and she volunteered for it. A21 came into this profession on her father's advice. She recounted her memory,

“I wanted to be a doctor or a psychiatrist, but my family did not allow it. I had been writing stories in newspapers since childhood so my father asked me to study Journalism”.

The inspiration for interviewee with code A11 was her father who had worked for PTV.

Participant A25 was inspired by her brother who was a journalist. A09 has been working in this profession for more than fifteen years. She inherited the passion for journalism from her parents. Both her mother and father are journalists for almost forty years and publish their own local newspaper.

Eight participants wanted to raise voice for marginalized and voiceless people. Thus, by joining media industry they simply wanted to play a positive role in society and that became their inspiration. A03 and A38 both have joined this profession for this same reason. They not only wanted to be a voice of the voiceless but also sought to establish their own distinguished identities. A13 wanted to inspire others by producing positive content about Pakistan. Her goal was to show the progressive face of Pakistan to her fellow countrymen and to the outside world. She had joined this profession to bring about a positive change in people's general outlook and perception about Pakistan.

Participant A19 considered Journalism as the only profession that can educate people and make them more aware of themselves and their surroundings. Her source of inspiration was determined and successful female journalists who defied all odds and conquered the challenges in this field. A08, A34, and A39 had also joined this profession to play an active role to bring about positive change around them. They wanted to raise voice on issues ignored in general or not given much importance to, and their primary focus was to highlight social issues. To bring about this positive change in her life and people around her, A08 had even left her job as a banker. She shared her story in these words,

“Whenever and wherever I saw instances of injustice in society, I felt helpless as I could not do anything as a banker. On the other hand, I witnessed media persons highlighting social issues, raising voice on injustice and fighting hard to find solutions to problems faced by general public and that became my inspiration to join this profession”.

Then we have A37 with a surprising story to tell. Her case is in itself both interesting and inspiring. She had been working in this profession for almost ten years. She graduated simultaneously in Biotechnology and Mass Communication. She studied Biotechnology to please her family and Mass Communication for herself. Here is what she has to say about her experience,

“Our society suffers from the problem of stereotypes. It has some predefined roles for women and it also specifies what they should study or to which professions they should look up to as their potential careers. It has become a pattern for girls to study science in order to become a doctor or a teacher and all that. I started my Bachelors in Biotechnology only to please society and make my family happy, but I opted Mass Communication as a second major because of my interest in social sciences. When I studied one basic course of Mass Communication then I realized that this is my field. I have good skills and I can grow in it, and this will be an interesting work for me.”

Two of the participants A30 and A36 joined this profession just out of their curiosity. They wanted to know how news are gathered, edited and aired, and how news channels work. An interviewee A15 was inspired by the role of Radio Jockeys and decided to study Mass Communication and later on work in this field.

Here we have another surprising case of participant A17, she was not inspired by some real-life RJ. Her inspiration came from a movie character who played the role of RJ. She recalls,

“I do not remember what exactly was the point that inspired me this much to be a journalist, but I was fond of Bollywood movies and used to watch them a lot. I remember I was in 8th or 9th grade when Munnah Bhai MBBS released and Vidiya Balan was playing the role of Radio Jockey in that movie. I was inspired by her role and tried to practice my own introduction for the shows as an RJ in future. And to practice this I always tried to reach in the class first. There I tried to explore and master different expressions as a future RJ.”

Interviewee A12 told that she came into this field after learning that there were no female journalists in Lahore working in English medium at that time. She said,

“When I learned that there were no females in English journalism in Lahore that became my motivation. English language was not an issue for me at all, also I wanted to fill this gap and that’s how I started my career as an English female journalist.”

A40 stepped into this profession because she wanted herself to be heard. She said,

“Women face a lot of issues in this society, and it is not just limited to women, in fact people in general face a lot of challenges daily regardless of their fields, and there are very few people who are talking about these issues. So, my aspiration was to speak on these topics.”

5. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Findings highlighted that there are very few female journalists who have joined this profession by choice or with any aim or prior planning. A number of females who are working in this profession have just come coincidentally in this field for example, either they needed a job or just came to complete the mandatory internship requirement to complete their degree or any of their teacher/mentor recommended them to do internship in the news channel. Those who came by choice were appealed by the glamour of

screen or have thirst of fame. As a study mentioned in the literature review have explained the aspirations of female journalists in United Kingdom i.e., glamour, fame, fantasy or thrilling nature of this profession. Results indicated that some female journalists who have stepped in this field with such ideas in mind have been disappointed. For some female journalists' aspiration behind joining this profession is the coverage of social issues like corruption and human rights violations etc. (Rajeev et al., 2019). This research also found that some female journalists have joined news media to play their positive role in the society. Some female journalists have joined this field to fulfill the wish of any of their family member or any of the family member such as father or brother already working in this profession have also inspired some Pakistani female journalists to join this field. Some females joined this field because they were thrilled by the adventurous nature of this profession.

6. CONCLUSION

Even in the countries like United Kingdom the media students are far from the reality of journalism as profession and the hard-work, patience and struggle required to do work in this field. Similarly, in Pakistan, female journalists join this field because of the glamour, fame or fantasy. Many of female journalists do not join this field with any proper goal or ambition, some have joined this profession coincidentally and others step in to play their positive role in the society. Those who need change in their daily life or want to do something adventurous also join this field.

6.1 Limitations

Due to the coronavirus pandemic researcher was only able to collect data from a few online sources for literature review and all interviews could not be done physically also. Male journalists were not included in this study as well. The researcher used Qualitative approach to conduct this study so it may not be generalized.

6.2 Recommendations

Some recommendations for future researchers who aim to explore the aspirations and domestic challenges are as follow:

- Use quantitative research methodology to test the findings of this research thesis on the general populations.
- Find the reasons that why female journalists leave this profession.
- Future researchers can also find the psychological impact of this profession on journalists either only female journalists or on the both male and female journalists.

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