



Women becoming School Leaders in Rural Pakistan: Fighting against all Odds and Myths during Career Stages

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Abstract: Studies on women in education leadership have gained global focus in recent decades. However, in Pakistan making sense of the lived experiences of how women get into and experience the leadership role has always remained a grey area. This life history study was carried out in a remote region in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan, to explore the lived experience of the career development of women head-teachers in secondary schools. Findings highlight the role of family, society, and institutions in the journey of six women headteachers in their taking up the leadership roles. As a result, there are pertinent implications for educational leadership in the remote and marginalized regions. Factors such as the traditional perceptions about women's role in the home and society, socio-economic conditions of the society, and their educational background seem to impact their role perception as headteachers.

Keywords: Educational leadership, Gender and leadership, Life history, Women in leadership

I. INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is located in South Asia with a population of above 200 million. Among them, above 95% are Muslims. There are cultural, linguistic, sectarian, and ethnic variations and differences among the masses. Society in general is male-dominated and patriarchal where men enjoy more power in decision making at home, in society, and at the workplace.

The question of how individuals take leadership roles, is seen as an emerging focus of the study of educational leadership; however, it shows a bleak picture in Pakistan. Women in school leadership are under-represented in the country (Shah, 2016; Rareiya, 2007) and hardly one can find women in the top leadership positions. The situation is even worse in remote regions like Gilgit-Baltistan; a mountainous region situated in the extreme North of the country. When it comes to the women teachers and headteachers' lived experience in the remote and marginalized regions, there has been a little known about them (Ashraf, 2010).

Theories on teachers' socialization into the profession (Knowls, 1992) identify a three-stage model including pre-induction, during the teacher education and induction, and role continuation. However, headteachers seem to undergo a second phase of socialization into the leadership. For example, studies (Gronn, 1999; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017) highlight various stages including during childhood and schooling, during the career as a teacher, and the phase of induction into the leadership as a headteacher. McKillop and Moorosi (2017) put them in three different stages namely 'formation', 'accession', and 'incumbency'. Thus, a headteacher socializes into the leadership during childhood and schooling (family and schooling as micro agencies), during the career as a classroom teacher, and after formally induction into the leadership cadre as a headteacher. Thus, it is vital to explore how women in the remote regions get into the leadership roles and how they experience the roles (Simkins, Sisum & Memon, 2003). This paper describes the lived experience of women in their becoming headteachers in public sector secondary schools in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan, a region having low socio-economic conditions and limited educational opportunities.

The Context: Where the women headteachers live and work

Lives are always nested in the contexts. Therefore, it is imperative to portray where the women headteachers lived and worked. All the women headteachers in the study worked in public sector secondary schools in a remote and rural society in Gilgit-Baltistan, in the extreme North of Pakistan, as stated earlier. The recent government of Gilgit-Baltistan national census (2017) shows that the total population of Gilgit-Baltistan is 1.5 million and the majority of them live in rural areas in various scattered valleys.

According to a survey conducted by (Government of Gilgit-Baltistan, 2017) in Baltistan, 23% of the population live below poverty. There are comparatively lesser educational opportunities for girls. Likewise, socio-economic conditions and educational opportunities of the region vary from those of the country.

There are comparatively lesser employment and earning opportunities in the region. The first university in Gilgit-Baltistan was established in 2002. Likewise, in the Baltistan region, the first university sub-campus started functioning in 2012 and the first-degree college for girls was established in 1989.

In search of better educational opportunities, a huge influx of the youth, after completion of their secondary school certificates move to down districts from this region. However, unlike boys, girls generally have limited options to do so in pursuit of their higher education. According to a jointly conducted survey by the Planning and Development Department, Government of the Gilgit-Baltistan, and UNICEF Pakistan (2017), only 14.2% of children age 36-59 months attend the Early Childhood Education program. As highlighted by the same report, the literacy rate above 15 years old is 50.4%. Gender Parity Index at primary and secondary schools level are 0.86 and 0.75 for boys and girls respectively. Thus, the region showcases lesser educational opportunities for women till the recent decade. As a result, hardly a few women are enjoying leadership role in education.

II. THEORETICAL LENSES AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the context of woman leadership career models, Grønn's (1999) work provides a basic framework for analysis. Grønn's work on women's career development into leadership encompasses historical, societal, cultural, and individual concerns. Developing on Grønn's work, McKillop and Moorosi (2017) highlight a three-stage career model involving 'formation', 'accession', and 'incumbency' stages. They argue that in the formation stage, family; siblings; culture; and role models influence an individual to take a certain career path. Likewise, at the accession stage, besides the agency of family or role models; peers; and work experience also influence individuals. In the incumbency stage, initially, individuals come across reality shocks; feeling of lack of acceptance; and work pressure. However, such issues lessen with time.

In rural contexts, women's headteachers' leadership roles are surrounded by the problems of multiple layers of deprivation prevailing in their schools and community contexts (Faulkner, 2015). Faulkner (2015) looked at the woman's headteachers' experiences from two angles: first is, issues of authority and power contestation, and the second is, the manifestation of deeply entrenched cultural traditions and patriarchy. She observes that these factors impact adversely on the execution of principalship for women leaders in rural and traditional communities.

Shah (2016) finds that it is the discourses and practices in the male-dominated and patriarchal societies that create challenges for the women's leadership development in the societies. Shah (ibid) identifies multiple barriers for women leadership in Pakistan. According to her, the patriarchal cultural practices and power dynamics, consideration of women as the center of honor (*Izzat*) in a family, and the beliefs to keep men and women separate in routine activities, are the key hurdles in the development of women leadership. Thus, there are deeper influences of norms, values, beliefs, and ideologies that shape not only the conceptualization and practices of leadership but also people's expectations of leaders in society.

Pakistan is a patriarchal society where men enjoy superior positions and parents prefer sons over daughters. These are deep-rooted norms and values in family practices and discourses. For instance, Siddiqui (2014), sheds light on the gender stereotypes in Pakistan and mentions that parents encourage their sons to be bold and provide them with opportunities for higher studies; whereas, they would not like their daughters to talk loudly or laugh in front of strangers. Rareiya (2010) also finds that women in Pakistan generally adopt the teaching profession due to two reasons. Firstly, their parents encourage them to join the profession; and secondly, teaching is traditionally seen as an appropriate profession for women. In other words, cultural norms and values have both explicit and implicit implications for the work of men and women (Kramer 2005).

Women's role as a headteacher becomes more expanded and demanding when they work in remote and poverty-stricken areas (Sanders & Harvey 2002). In a society where women enjoy lesser power as compared to men, where people are stick to deep-rooted cultural traditions, where access to education has become a recent phenomenon (particularly for women), where working outside their homes for women is generally not encouraged (Siddiqui, 2014), the lived experiences of the women at the leadership position, would add significant value to the literature on school leadership as well on gender and leadership.

III. METHODOLOGY

The Research Process: Life History Approach

We used a qualitative life history approach to capture the lived experiences of the headteachers. We used this particular approach for several reasons. Firstly, being a widely used sociological research method (Bertaux, 1981; Denzin, 1989; Goodson, 2003; Thompson, 1981) it was an appropriate approach to study how the study participants story their experience of getting into the leadership roles. As life history

approach is rooted in real social experiences (Khan, 2020; Thompson, 1981); therefore, it is instrumental to get a holistic picture of the phenomenon under study. Thus, the life history approach was instrumental in making sense of how cultural traditions, ethnicity, religious beliefs, and occupational frames of reference (Caughy, 2006) influence woman headteachers taking up the leadership roles.

We interviewed six headteachers and deputy headteachers (in total) working in secondary schools for girls in the Baltistan region. Pseudo names have been used in the research to ensure the anonymity of the participants. Four of the study participants were headteachers, two were Vice Principals or Deputy Head Teachers. Their experience as headteachers in the leadership ranged from six years to twenty years. One of us (the First Author) visited the study participants' schools on multiple occasions in two years and conducted multiple in-depth life history interviews. He also collected documents (School Development Plan), meeting minutes, and proceedings. As mentioned earlier, the study focused on the lived experiences of the headteachers; therefore, he used mainly in-depth life history interviews for data generation. The life history interviews worked as 'grounded conversations' (Cole, 1991) that aimed at gaining insights into the study participants' experiences of transition, role conception, and practices as headteachers.

We adapted Seidman's (1998) model of interviewing, allows dividing the interviews into three phases to generate data on the study participants' past and present experiences and to make meanings of the experiences. In this phase, our role was a co-constructors and co-developers of the life history stories and a facilitator of the meaning-making from those stories.

Data analysis remained a continuous process during the study. The process focused on working on the life accounts to come up with basic themes, patterns, and categories (Huberman, 1995; Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Wolcott, 1994) to capture the lived experiences.

As for as the reliability of the study is concerned in interpretive life history studies, researchers believe that reality is a social construct and can be constructed based on individuals' interactions with others (Willis, Jost, and Nilankanta, 2007). Therefore, the findings of this study are based on my interactions with the headteachers in their schools. The stories they shared with me were reinforced by the pieces of evidence in the school, like the workshop plans, minutes of meetings, school development plans, and the records of the resource development and their utilization. The findings of this study should therefore be viewed within the ontological and epistemological boundaries of reality in the interpretive paradigm.

As the study focused on the study participants' personal and professional life experiences; therefore, we had to be vigilant and cautious during data collection and analysis (Cole and Knowles, 2001; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Plummer's (2001, p.228) five ethical principles provided a basic framework for the ethical considerations, which are:

- The principle of respect, recognition, and tolerance for persons and their differences;
- The principle of promoting the caring of others, which is also known as 'an ethic of care';
- The principle of expanding equalities, fairness, and justice;
- The principle of enlarging spheres of autonomy, freedom, and choice;
- The principle of minimizing harm.

We took care of the research ethics through taking consent, careful negotiations of entry into the field, building mutual trust and maintaining anonymity of the data.

Brief Life Histories of the Study Participants

Brief verbatim life histories of the study participants are given in this section to make sense of their lives under the pseudonyms.

Zahra

I am in my late forties and working as a headteacher in a girls high school. Before becoming a headteacher, I worked as a teacher and an Assistant Deputy Inspector of Schools. I became a teacher by chance. In my childhood, I never thought of becoming a teacher. We did not have any high school in our village; therefore, I completed my secondary school [grade 10] while staying with my uncle's family in another town. After completion of secondary school, I came back to my village. We did not have a college in the village and my parents did not want to send me to the city for college education. At that time, a primary school for girls was about to establish in the village and the community elders were looking for a woman teacher. They, thus, requested my parents to allow me to become a teacher, which my parents accepted and asked me to join the teaching profession. I was confused! I had never thought of it before! Nevertheless, I obeyed my parents' wishes. After a year of joining the school as a teacher, I got married and moved to my husband's

home in the town. My husband encouraged me to continue my education through distance education. The journey from working as the only teacher in the village primary school to become an Assistant Deputy Inspector Schools enabled me to get the courage to become a headteacher of a high school. Though the journey was very tough yet rewarding!

Zakia

I am in my late thirties and I am working as a principal of a high school for girls. My parents come from a very remote region. However, my father was working in a city in the Punjab Province and thus all of our siblings were brought up there. I received my education in Punjab up to masters' level. Due to my parents stay in the city, we had comparatively better educational opportunities. I got married after my Masters and came to Baltistan as my husband worked here.

Behind my success and career, the support of my father and husband remained always there with me. I always feel the presence of my father around me. I feel blessed that I am one of the fewer women headteachers in the region. I had never thought of becoming a headteacher, yet working as a classroom teacher made me think about the leadership role. My husband as well as colleagues in the department encouraged me to apply for the post. I feel that we as the pioneer woman headteachers need to become role models and inspirations for other such women in society. Our society has always seen men as headteachers of high schools. Common people perceive that men can only be good leaders, which is indeed a challenge for us, yet it also gives us the courage to develop on our strengths and prove ourselves as effective school leaders.

Saima

I am in my early forties and I work as a Deputy Head Teacher of a high school for girls. I was born to a family in a village where even boys did not have educational opportunities. At that time, common people would never think of educating the girls. In other words, educating the girls was like a taboo. Fortunately, my father worked in the army, thus took us with him wherever he was posted during his service. He was the first person from the village to educate his daughters. This is how we had the opportunity to be educated in various famous schools in the country.

In our society, till the recent decade, people would think that girls would marry another man therefore educating them is not a wise decision. Instead, they would prefer educating their sons. However, I salute my father who never listens to such views from the society. Because of our great father, we all siblings are lucky to get education. Our father always gave us confidence, he encouraged us and sponsored our education. This is because, my siblings work in various capacities in public and private sector. I always wanted to become a teacher. Even when I was a child, I used to perform the role of a teacher while playing different games with fellow kids.

Women in the patriarchal and traditional society always have multiple identities for example cooking, washing, gardening, and looking after the children is considered their responsibility. In the joint families of a patriarchal society, the responsibilities of women become manifold. I still live with the joint family; nevertheless, I consider it a blessing too; because it allows me to serve. Managing things in the joint family has given me strength and enabled me to manage the leadership role in the school.

Naila

I am in my mid-thirties and I work as a principal in one of the oldest high schools for girls. My grandfather had migrated to the town from a remote village. This allowed us to get an education. I was lucky to get admission to a famous private school in Gilgit. At that time this school was one of the top schools in the entire region. Children from elite families would get admission to that school. After completion of my F.Sc., I went to a College in Islamabad for my B.Sc.

I wanted to become a doctor since my childhood; however, I became a teacher by default. Due to the tough competition, I could not secure a seat in medical colleges. I joined a university for my master's in the science discipline. After my master's, I became a teacher in a private school system in Gilgit. My mother and *Khala* [sister of mother] as both of them were teachers, convinced me to become a teacher. What I am today, is due to them. Being close to my mother, I had indirect socialization into the teaching profession.

My husband works in the Baltistan region and thus I wanted to be here. I joined the government education department as a teacher some years back when certain posts of headteachers on BPS-17 were advertised. My husband encouraged me to apply for one of the posts as he thought that it was a higher position and that I had the potential to become a head teacher. I applied and luckily I was selected and thus I became a

headteacher. I feel that the practical experience in the field is worth than reading theories about leadership. Every day is a new day and new learning about my role!

Farzana

I work as Deputy Head Teacher of a high school for girls. My family comes from a village in a remote district. My father had moved to the town in search of employment. Since then, he is settled here and works as an engineer. Most of our siblings were born in the town. The settlement of my parents in the town provided us with better educational opportunities. As a result, I and my siblings were able to get education and work in various positions. Hence with better opportunities for education in the town, all of our siblings have a comparatively better position in the society. I learned hard work and compassion from my father and he always encouraged me to continue my education. Likewise, I always found the support of my mother with me. She was there to look after my children at home. Because of her support, I never got worried about my children whenever I was on professional trainings and workshops.

I became a teacher in mid eighties just after completion of my Grad 10 and joined the teaching profession. Thus, I became a teacher and continued my further education privately as well as through distance education system. I did my B.A and M.A as a private candidate and did my B.Ed from the Allama Iqbal Open University through distance education. I give credit to the family support, if it was not there, I would not have been here in this post today. I never thought of taking leadership roles in the school, our principal always encouraged me to take such responsibilities. Even for the post of the Deputy Head Teacher, she advised me to apply and encouraged me always.

Asma

I am in my fifties and I work as a headteacher of a girls high school. I was brought up in the same town. Initially, there were no colleges in the town therefore, I completed my higher education through distance education. I became a teacher after my matriculation (passing Secondary School Certificate) and joined the teaching profession. I realize that playing the role of a headteacher we need some administrative knowledge and experiences. Classroom teaching may not have a direct link to make us effective headteachers. Nevertheless, my earlier experience working as a Section Head, and Deputy Head Teacher, provided me with some relevant knowledge related to the work I am doing today. Playing the role of a headteacher in a patriarchal society in a remote context is a real challenge. The community perceptions about the leadership role and cultural restrictions always hamper the life of a woman headteacher. The journey is challenging though, yet rewarding!

IV. FINDINGS

In this section, we describe the findings of the study under various themes.

The Role of the Family in Getting into the Teaching Profession

All the study participants became classroom teachers before becoming headteachers. Almost all of them mentioned that their parents chose the profession for them and in doing so, the role of male members of the family was overarching. Zahra, a headteacher mentioned,

“My parents, particularly, my father encouraged me to become a teacher. In the first year, I was confused and did not want to continue teaching. My father encouraged me saying, “*Sabr ka phal meethah hota hay* [Long looked for comes at last]”. I reluctantly continued based on the trial-and-error basis”.

Saima, a Deputy Head Teacher mentioned,

I became a teacher after getting married. My husband encouraged me to work as a teacher. Had my husband not allowed me to become a teacher, I would not have joined this profession. Becoming a teacher was the first step to give me the strength to become a headteacher.

Farzana, another headteacher, expressed,

My husband is an educated person. He convinced me to continue my education, which I did. Had my husband not allowed me and supported me to continue my education and teaching, I would not have been at the stage where I am today.

Zakia, a principal reflected,

It is a common saying that there is always a woman behind a successful man. However, I feel that there is always a man behind a successful woman. The reason is that behind my success and career, the support of my father and of my husband are always there. I always feel the presence of my father around me.

Asma mentioned,

I wanted to continue my college education; however, given the unavailability of Girls college, I could not go to a college. At that time, parents were reluctant to send their daughters to down countries for education.

Therefore joining the teaching profession was the only option. My father convinced me to become a teacher. I then continued my education through distance education.

Naila, another principal mentioned, “my mother and *Khala* [sister of mother] both were teachers and they convinced me to become a teacher”. She further explained,

Initially, I was posted in a High School in another district and I had to stay in a guest house there. It was very difficult to live there with my infant child. Once again, my mother was with me to look after my child as she was worried that I might quit the job.

Thus, the extracts from the above-lived experience show that family members, particularly male members of the family (fathers or husbands) have influenced and/or supported the study participants in continuing their education and taking up the teaching profession. This could be due to the societal norms where the male member of a family generally holds the decision-making. Secondly, the role as a teacher seem to be instrumental for the indirect socialization into the leadership role.

The Influence of Situations and Encouragers

None of the study participants thought of becoming a headteacher during their schooling. The prospective socialization into the leadership began once they joined the teaching profession as classroom teachers. Some of them had chances to work in day-to-day administrative activities, which enabled them to think about becoming headteachers. Two of the study participants had worked as section heads and one of them as an Assistant Deputy Inspector of Schools. Asma mentioned,

I initially became a section head of the school. This experience gave me the courage to apply for the post of headteacher and I was lucky enough to get the job and became headteacher of the school.

Likewise, Zahra mentioned,

With the enhanced qualifications, I became the Assistant Deputy Inspector of the schools for girls. As this was a bigger position in my career, I faced difficulties in managing day-to-day routine supervision activities. The school teachers would consider me as an expert in academic and administrative affairs, which I thought, I was not! Therefore, it was a huge challenge for me. I had to work hard to meet the expectations of teachers and staff in the schools. Nevertheless, such a situation provided me with hands-on learning opportunities, which I feel was very important for my professional career, and got the courage to apply for the post of headteacher in later years.

Naila expressed her experience and said,

I had never thought of getting into leadership roles. I always wanted to become a lecturer in a college or university. However, during the entire period, there was a ban on the hiring and thus lecturer positions were not advertised. Meanwhile, some positions of headteachers were announced, my husband convinced me to apply for one of the posts. So, I am in this post by default. I am planning to do my M.Phil and Ph.D. and then work in a university.

Saima shared,

Initially, I did not want to apply for the post of Vice-Principal in the school. I knew that several senior colleagues had applied for the same post and I was junior to them. Some of my colleagues and family members encouraged me to apply. They said that I was competent enough for the post. When I was selected, I could not believe it! In fact, it was a stepping stone for my journey into the leadership role.

Likewise, Farzana reflected,

I had never thought of taking up the leadership role. Our principal motivated and convinced me to become the Vice-Principal. Her support is always there. She is very encouraging and cooperative. Earlier, I worked as a convener of various committees, which enabled me to develop monitoring and administrative skills.

Thus, some prior administrative tasks in the schools such as events coordinators, Section Heads, Assistant Inspectors, Assistant Head Teacher, and convenors enabled the study participants to develop repertoires of administrative knowledge and skills and thus to take up leadership roles. In addition to this, encouragement from family members, peers, and seniors colleagues provided them with the courage to move into leadership roles.

Role Continuation: Managing a Leadership Role is Like Juggling Several Balls in the Air

Stories showed that most of the tasks related to headteachers' roles were new for the study participants. Zahra, for example, mentioned, “as a novice headteacher my learning was on trial-and-error basis. I was always in the process of fighting with the realities to prove that being a woman I was also competent enough to run a school”.

Zakia, another research participant mentioned, “after joining the school as a headteacher, I felt lack of support. This is a general perception in the society that men always become good leaders and administrators”, she further explained,

People think that men as headteachers can perform better; they can monitor the teachers and staff effectively; manage schools better than the women headteachers. I felt such concerns in the school too! I felt it was there, yet no one did say it on my face.

It is a fact that people in the male-dominated society always believe that men are the best leaders. It is because they have always seen men in the school and educational leadership. Given the limited opportunities in the past for women, only men had opportunities to get education and to take the leadership position. However, the scenario has recently been changed. Now women lead schools as headteachers and take leadership up various leadership roles. "I would say that there are challenges and difficulties yet women need to be strong to face those challenges and turn them into opportunities", said Zakia.

Naila highlighted,

Communities have several expectations. They have not seen women in administrative posts in the past. Therefore they perceive that only men are the best leaders because they control and command things strongly. Likewise, the school staff seems to underestimate women's leadership in schools.

Asma highlighted,

People in the male-dominated society always think that men are always the best leaders. It is because they have always seen men in the school and educational leadership. Given the limited educational opportunities in the past men were the luckiest to get an education and to get a leadership positions.

To get the confidence of the school staff and the community, the women headteachers adopted certain strategies such as arranged meetings with the communities on different occasions. They celebrated various national days and invited parents and community members to the school. Historically, mothers would never come to schools to attend functions and meetings; therefore, most of the study participants decided to celebrate Mothers' Day and invited mothers only to the schools. Zahra mentioned, "inviting mothers to the school not only gave me confidence but also enabled me educating them about the importance of schooling and their role in the learning of their children"

Likewise, Farzana established a small welfare committee in the school and provided various stationery items to children hailing from poorer families. "We gave such items to the students in the name of rewards and prizes. Every month we generated about six thousand rupees. This month, we purchased and distributed several dozens of pencils, uniforms, pair of socks, school bags, and some other stationery items among the students", Said Farzana.

Similarly, Zahra opted for the Educational Development and Improvement Program (EDIP) offered by a university. The program focused on the enhancement of leadership and administration, curriculum enrichment, staff development, resource development and mobilization, and community involvement. Through this project, they also trained the School Management Committee. She explained,

When the SMC members realized the importance of their contribution, they started to convince the parents to come to school and contribute to school development. Slowly and gradually, parents and community members started realizing that women can also run schools effectively. Later on, they have become the key contributors to school development.

The research participants also began to learn from literature about their role. Farzana mentioned,

During a training program, I found a book in the library about dealing with difficult people. I borrowed the book and read it thoroughly. It helps me to learn something new about managing people. This year, I purchased eight books on educational leadership and management.

Thus, the struggle to learn the rubrics of the leadership enabled the women to headteachers to continue their learning. They opted for various professional development opportunities, worked with the communities, and also continued their learning through reading literature.

V. DISCUSSION

In this section, we discuss the lived experiences within the framework of the three-stage-career model (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017). The discussion, thus, involves agencies affecting the study participants' decision-making during the formation stage, and their lived experience of the accession and incumbency stages. The lived experiences as women headteachers portray the lives in transition. Factors such as the traditional perceptions about women's role in the home and society, socio-economic conditions of the society, and their educational background seem to impact their role perception as headteachers.

The Formation Stage: Family Influence on Decision

Becoming classroom teachers was the first stage to think about the role of a headteacher. Even during their schooling all the study participants, except one, never thought of becoming teachers. Most commonly it was an imposed decision by their parents, particularly by male members of the family. In some cases, the study participants did not have any option to go for further studies, because they did not have any college in their villages and their parents would not send them to other towns for college education. Therefore, they joined

the teaching out of no choice. Thus, these lived experiences reinforce findings from earlier studies in the region (Ashraf, 2010), in the country (Rareiya, 2010), and elsewhere in a similar context (Faulkner, 2015) where women have very limited or semi-autonomy to take their career decisions.

The lived experiences highlighted that the traditional role of women in families along with the professional demands and responsibilities in a patriarchal rural society (Siddiqui, 2014) put a huge burden on working women like teachers. Balancing them is like juggling several balls in the air. It means that the decisions of education, occupation, and working of women is sole responsibility of the elderly male members of the families in a traditional patriarchal rural society. For instance, in Zahra, Zakia, and Asma's cases, the role of their fathers, and after the marriage, their husbands' role seems to be key in sustaining their career as teachers. Their husbands played a key role in allowing them to continue their studies and the profession. Preferring teaching profession for the study participants is likely to be based on cultural and religious perspectives where teaching is considered the most suitable profession for women in Pakistan (Ashraf, 2010) and it has religious respect too (Shah, 2015). With the support of their fathers and husbands (in some cases) the study participants were able to continue their higher education along with teaching and thus to take leadership positions. Unlike the rest of the women in society, the study participants had opportunities to continue their education or had better quality education due to the reason that their parents had migrated to better cities or towns. In their career as teachers, various situations, coupled with family support and peer encouragement, made them take up the leadership roles.

The Accession Stage: Role Learning and Getting the Courage

Certain situations during the study participants' career made them take a leadership role in education. Almost all of the study participants had never planned to do so. Firstly, to meet the demands of teaching, the participants continued their learning as teachers. They managed such decisions based on their family's support and encouragement. Secondly, with the advancement in their qualifications, they took various administrative roles, which turned up as first steps into leadership positions. Likewise, in four out of the six cases, senior colleagues or peer encouraged the participants to apply for the posts of the principals or headteachers.

In their journey, the participants not only continued their learning but also began to take various administrative roles in the schools. In other words, taking up small administrative positions resulted in prospective socialization into their leadership role (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Peter, 2006). It provided the participants with opportunities for on-the-job learning and professional development. They learned how to work with teachers, school administrations, and communities. All such experiences were the stepping stones for their leadership role. Taking the role of the school heads, they faced several challenges, yet their commitment to learn and support from the family were facilitating factors.

Incumbency stage: Fighting with Myths and Realities

Taking the role of school leadership in a patriarchal and male-dominated society (Ashraf, 2010; Rareiya, 2007; Siddiqui, 2014) turned up as a real challenge for all the study participants at the initial stage. The schools generally had earlier seen only male headteachers; however, when the study participants became headteachers, they felt a discriminatory attitude against their gender identity (Fuller, 2017). The headteachers working with communities in a remote region faced difficulties in connection with acceptance, community relations, and cultural related challenges. Thus, in the initial phase of their role as headteachers, they came across a reality shock. The reality of the position of a women headteacher was different than what they had dreamt of before taking up the role. Shah (2016) also identifies that leadership and gender are complex and interwoven concepts depending on the multiple interacting discourses in social structure reflecting the power distribution in a society. As a result, the woman head teachers came across a reality shock and felt novice in their new positions in the leadership cadre.

All the study participants used several strategies to overcome the challenges and gain the trust and confidence of various stakeholders. As a result, their stories portray them as learners, community educators, and trust builders. They not only had to work with their students, teachers, and staff but also with the communities, particularly with the mothers to involve them in the change process and to get their acceptance among the stakeholders. As mentioned by Sanders and Harvey (2002) the contemporary educational reforms focus on the needs of community education and involvement, particularly in the marginalized, remote, and poverty-stricken areas. In doing so, they began to build external linkages in connection with school improvement and professional development of the staff (Sanders and Harvey, 2002; Shafa, 2011).

In addition to this, being novice woman headteachers in the educational leadership, the study participants faced challenges in balancing their family and professional lives (Ashraf, 2010; Faulkner, 2015; Rareiya, 2010; Siddiqui, 2014). Though the support from their families, particularly from the male members of the families has been a strong determinant in the continuation of their decision-making and taking up the

leadership roles, yet balancing family and professional responsibilities remained always a challenge for them.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Understanding women career development in education and taking up leadership roles have recently received the global attention of educational research; however, there has been scarcity of studies on this very important theme in Pakistan. In the context of developing countries and remote regions like that of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan, such studies are rare. This study; therefore, has highlighted some pertinent findings in the context of woman career development into educational leadership based on the lived experiences of woman headteachers.

Being women in a remote and patriarchal society, the study participants became teachers upon their parents' wishes. After becoming teachers, they never thought of becoming headteachers; however, certain situations and opportunities enabled them to take the leadership role as headteachers.

All the lived experiences show that the norms and values in a patriarchal society along with the low socioeconomic background of the communities, always create challenges for women headteachers to exercise their role (Faulkner, 2015). However, with a thirst for continuous learning and development and the support from the family seem to play key roles enabling the individuals taking up the role of headteachers. Continuing their learning as head teachers and working closely with the community enabled the study participants to build the trust of the stakeholders.

VII. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The lived experiences have suggested several implications for educational leadership and management, which are highlighted below:

1. All the study participants learned the rhetoric of management through trial-and-error. Hence, the arrangement of orientation workshops and seminars by the district education department before the individuals join their duties as headteachers in schools would help the individuals to cope with the professional challenges.
2. As identified by Shah (2016) "women's absence from leadership literature and theory has been conspicuous historically. The field has been dominated by the male leader and his-story" (p. 73). Therefore, there is a need to conduct more studies on school leadership from the gender perspective.
3. The context of professional socialization of headteachers is slightly different from the "teachers' localization" (Knowles, 1992) as they undergo a second-order transition in their career. Therefore, studies on woman headteachers' lived experiences on becoming headteachers would add value to the repertoire of literature on women's leadership.

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