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## Interpretive Analysis of Policies and Practices for Social Inclusion at Higher Education Institutions

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The research at hand was conducted as interpretive policy analysis to explore the foundations of social exclusion in higher educational institutions in Pakistan, prevailing in the presence of laws and policies of inclusion in place. Exclusion contributes to rising disappointment and loss of precious minds and lives in the shape of dropouts or life losses. A single dropout case due to exclusion cannot be ignored as it may discourage many others and further degrade the situation, affecting the younger generation's educational attainment.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The interpretive policy analysis demanded multiple data sources, there for the study included document analysis, desk review of available case studies, and interviews of key informants at five big universities with diverse student-population. Based on the factors given in literature and themes generated after the data analysis, implications of the phenomena of social exclusion were iterated.

**Findings:** University administration must consider the reported cases and devise a mechanism to improve the situation. Yet the higher education policies and institutional bylaws are neither responsive nor proactive to avoid exclusion in higher education.

**Implications/Originality/Value:** One major recommendation to improve the current scenario is to fill the communication gap between students and administration on the one hand; policy makers and institutional custodians on the other hand.



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### 1. Introduction

Having one of the largest populations and oldest history, Pakistan has a thick social fabric comprising threads of numerous compound and interconnected factors. These factors include demographic factors and factors related to economic conditions, behavioral patterns, social institutions, tribes, social organizations, e.g., religious or educational organizations, and societal networks or associations among people (Hayden, 2011). Social institutions,

including home or community and social organizations such as schools, colleges, universities, and prayer places, have a significant role in constructing social norms, values, beliefs, and behaviors. These institutions are expected to allow full participation of all communal groups with no threat to them and their beliefs (Lutfiyya & Bartlett, 2020). What can happen there is mentioned as *Ontological exclusion* which occurs on the basis of self-righteousness of dominant culture (Richardson, 2022). Yet in recent years more cultural and contemporary aspects have been explored to understand how the exclusion in various cultures leads to self-destructive or aggressive social behaviors (Morese & Palermo, 2019)

Inclusion in educational institutions is as important as in any other social organization. It was first identified that "social exclusion" is prevailing in educational institutions in other parts of the world, at multiple tiers in the educational system (Peter, Sonia, & Judy, 2002). Much of research in this regard is done at schools. The authors claim schools to be the first place of social inclusion and exclusion (Razer, Friedman, & Warshofsky, 2013). Yet this cannot be ignored how the university students in their early adulthood begin to develop identities via social interaction (Castells, 2001).

In Pakistan, multiple factors and actors are contributing to the current state of affairs concerning barriers to freedom of expression (Nawaz, 2016). Mainly it is restricted through tactics that include censorship, narrow legislation, and harassment/killing of journalist's/ human right activist and educators or others who voice their opinions against the dominant narratives. Other tactics are crackdown on religious minorities and suppressing free thought and religious opinion (Rahman, 2012). Rather than tackling internal security issues through a national security perspective, the government should invest in its people to benefit from the demographic dividend, stop injustice and human rights violations and build a peaceful society (Sadaf, Ayesha, & Elishma, 2016).

### **1.1 Literature Review**

Looking more closely at the Constitution of Pakistan, it provides guarantees social justice, equal opportunity, religious freedom, and safeguards against discrimination. Research studies do not build a connection between laws and institutional policies, while they inform regarding issues and challenges of discrimination (Shaukat, Siddiquah, & Pell, 2014). The education system in Pakistan is not uniform, and there are multiple streams, including but not restricted to religious seminaries/universities, elite private institutions, and government universities (Tamim & Hussain, 2015). Reports of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) indicate that the number of private universities is growing, and the ratio of public universities to private ones is decreasing over time. There are 168 public and 80 private sector universities in Pakistan (HEC, 2024), even among the public sector universities there are certain programs offered with higher fees and expenses. The increased funding for education could contribute to workforce training for targeted slots and create employment opportunities (Malik & Naveed, 2008). Many higher education institutions are out of the reach of the lower middle class because of the fee structures and indirect costs. Scholarship opportunities are scarce, and have limited funding from HEC or from Bait Ul Mall, Pakistan. (IIU, 2021).

Since 2002, HEC was made responsible to regulate the higher education institutions in Pakistan. Those who do not meet the merit criteria in government institutions and do not have funds to support self-financing are excluded. Even if some non-affluent students reach elite institutions, the elements of social exclusion cannot be eliminated (Iqbal & Khalil, 2014). Since 2010 the major initiative taken by the Government of Pakistan was to direct all public sector universities for reserving seats for the students coming from tribal areas, Baluchistan and other provinces wherever natural disaster or conflicts were reported (Musarrat, 2010). This increased conflicts on campus. The availability of seats in educational institutions is not at par with the country's population figure; therefore, many students are left behind and excluded from the desired educational stream (Tharwani, Nizamani, & Quarat Ul Ain, 2016). The policies are highly ambitious but could not be implemented in true letter and spirit

due to the vested interest of different population subgroups.

## **1.2 Theoretical Framework**

Inclusion and exclusion are not new phenomena and have been highlighted by many theorists in their ways and terms (Dave, 2000). With time, social exclusion associated with poverty and deprivation has been reassigned as social division and injustice (Pradeep & Ravindra, 2014). According to Mills, the *power elite* is composed of bureaucracy, big business, and the military, which constitute a *ruling class* that controls society (Mills, 1956). Foucault's conceptualization of power challenges traditional understandings by emphasizing its dynamic and relational nature. Foucault (1998) distinguishes between power and violence, highlighting that while violence may be a component of certain power relationships, they are not synonymous. In other words, power operates within the context of acknowledging the agency and subjectivity of those over whom power is exercised. In the context of education, the main work in this regard begins with the idea of social situational learning explained by Vygotsky and spreads over the critical theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Paulo Freire.

The *responsive theory of exclusion* proposes that in case of common interests but opposite positions, parties can get along better when sources respond to the needs of all. Yet a disparity between responsiveness to the needs of one group brings exclusion. A higher level of responsiveness yields fewer damages regarding social exclusion (Carol & Bibb, 1976). Individuals experience a threat and a desire to restore their sense of meaningful existence. Exclusion undermines an individual's sense that other people see them and acknowledge their existence (Kipling, 1997). One theory behind school shootings is that the shooters were socially excluded by their peers and sought to regain their existence (Nida & William, 2011). The *responsive theory of social exclusion* provides a starting point for studying the interactive nature of social exclusion. Psychological research can provide scientific guidelines for engaging people in social inclusion, thereby minimizing negative consequences (Freedman, William, & Jenifer, 2016). Elite theories assume that power is concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy individuals and organizations that exert inordinate influence on the government and can shape its decisions to benefit their interests (David, 2018).

Collectively these theories inform and explain the issues of power influence in societies like Pakistan where elitism in the form of feudal mindset and monarchy is prevailing. The power influence at political leadership level trickles down to institutional level. The people who are not closer to the centers of power are surviving in the peripheries and this is where the responsive theory of social exclusion unpacks the deeper levels of challenges when it comes to the educational or other social organizations.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

This study was conducted to bridge the research gap prevailing on this topic in the Pakistani context. The questions explored in the study are as under:

- What are the policy provisions at the national, provincial, and institutional levels in the last two decades (2002 to 2022), conforming or confronting constitutional clauses regarding inclusion?

## **1.4 Methodology**

The research was conducted as an *Interpretive Policy Analysis* to explore the policy provisions on social inclusion in higher educational institutions in Pakistan. Document analysis, review of reported cases, and interviews of selected informants were the main data gathering sources. Document analysis was done at the start of the study, to get the in-depth answers to the first research question. Extracting constitutional provisions helped finding conformities and contradictions in policy provisions, which are given in detail in the findings. Secondly collected and analyzed the reported cases of exclusion, violence, harassment or discrimination. Then, it was decided that the director of student affairs (DSA), who have a direct link with the students as a focal person, should be interviewed. The protocols were prepared and validated by domestic and foreign experts in the field. DSAs were

asked questions regarding policy and its implementation. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed separately. Each transcript was analyzed using a three-stage thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2009). It is the process in which we go beyond counting phrases and words. Coding, clustering, pattern recognition, and report writing from the emergent themes identified implicit and explicit underlying ideas within the dataset.

## **2. Findings**

### **2.1 Document Analyses**

#### **2.1.1 The Constitution**

The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, also commonly known as the 1973 constitution, is considered the supreme law of Pakistan, as all other laws are devised from the same document. Constitution of Pakistan went through a transformational process starting from 1948 with the Quaid-e-Azam address. In 1973 the current constitution was made, which was suspended and restored; while there have been 25 amendments till 2019 (Mazhar, Shahid, Aftab, & Saeed, 2019). As per constitution the prime minister has to be a Muslim, whereas the cabinet members and chief ministers can be from minority factions (Anwar, 2012).

##### **2.1.1.1 Basic Human Rights**

Fundamental rights include equality of status, the opportunity before the law, economic and political justice, freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship, and association given to all citizens. Article 4 guarantees the protection of the law for doing whatever is permissible and forbids forcing anything against the law. Article 9 guarantees the protection of life and liberty as per law. Article 10 provides a guarantee of trial in case of any court proceedings. Slavery and forced labour are prohibited under Article 11, forbidding underage labour. Article 12 guarantees protection against retrospective punishment. Article 13 guarantees against double punishment for one offense. Article 14 guarantees the individual's dignity and home privacy and forbids torture to extract evidence. Article 15 guarantees free movement within Pakistan and settling at the place of choice. Article 16 provides freedom of assembly without arms anywhere within the law's parameters. Article 17 provides freedom of making associations, unions, and political parties (if not in public service) within the ambit of the law. Article 26 guarantees access to all public places without discrimination of race, religion, caste, sex, residence, or place of birth. Article 26 guarantees the preservation of language and culture for any group and forming of a body. Article 33 discourages citizens' racial, tribal, sectarian, and provincial prejudices. Article 37 ensures inexpensive and judicious justice for all citizens. Article 26 ensures the provision of social and economic wellbeing irrespective of sex, caste, or creed by forbidding wealth accumulation and means of distribution in a few hands.

##### **2.1.1.2 Equal Opportunities**

Article 22 safeguards minorities from receiving compulsory religious education or attending religious ceremonies in educational institutions. Moreover, any institution receiving public funding may not deny admission based on race, religion, caste, or place of birth. Article 25A guarantees free and compulsory education from age 5 to 16. Article 37 safeguards and promotes social justice by providing conventional and technical education to backward classes and ensuring full participation in national activities.

##### **2.1.1.3 Minority and oppressed class rights**

The preamble of the Constitution of Pakistan gives adequate provisions for minorities to profess and practice their religion per their cultural norms. Moreover, it guarantees to safeguard their legitimate interests. Article 20 of the constitution of Pakistan guarantees freedom to profess religion/manage religious institutions by all religions and sects. Article 21 exempts tax and donation collection used for propagation of religions other than the contributor. Article 36 safeguards adequate representation in federal as well as provincial services. At the same time, the 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment bars minorities from becoming Prime Minister of Pakistan.

#### **2.1.1.4 Freedom of Speech**

Article 19 gives rights to every citizen for speech and expression and ensures freedom of the press. Such freedom should be linked with legal restrictions regarding Islam's glory and the country's security. Such expression may not count as contempt of court or provocation of any offense by any individual or group.

#### **2.1.1.5 Gender parity**

Article 19 gives the right to all citizens equal before law and dispensation of fundamental rights without discrimination of caste, creed, race, or sexual orientation. The state may make laws to protect the rights of women. Article 34 gives full rights to women for participation in all walks of national life.

#### **2.1.2 Paigam-e- Pakistan**

Paigam e Pakistan is a document that was developed under a joint initiative of the government of Pakistan, civil society, academia, and ulema. The provisions were supported by Qur'anic Verses where needed, along with their translation (NECTA, 2018). The document culminated with the joint fatwa, unanimously ratified by 1824 ulama, muftis, and academicians. The salient of the document are as under:

1. The basic core and ingredient of the document remained the constitution of Pakistan, which provides broad guidelines as per Islamic teachings and represents all segments of the society.
2. The groups active against the state in the name of lingual, regional, religious, and sectarian prejudices are all against the teachings of Shari'ah and are the root cause of national disintegration.
3. Section 295-298 of PPC (Pakistan Penal Code) deals with the sanctity of Prophets (PBUH); their wives, family members, and caliphs should be cared for by law enforcement agencies to provide a proper solution by redressing the grievances. The misuse of the law for indicting someone should be avoided.
4. Suicide is forbidden in Islam. There is no place for suicide, as per Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and there is no Namaz e Janaza for a person who commits suicide. At the same time, suicidal attacks are forbidden and come under unjust killing.
5. Non-Muslims living in Pakistan have equal rights as other citizens stipulated in the Constitution of Pakistan, with full rights to worship in their places, including celebrating religious festivals.
6. Sectarian hatred, armed sectarian conflict, and imposing one's ideology on others by force clearly violate the injunctions of Shari'ah.
7. Islam, as well as the constitution of Pakistan, guarantee female education. Discriminating against female students and educationists is contrary to human values, Islamic teachings, and the law of the land. The state's responsibility is to ensure women's rights in all spheres of life. At the same time, it protects the rights of women, senior citizens, and transgender.

The document elaborated that the core objective of all the educational institutions in Pakistan is enlightenment, schooling, and character building; hence should not support hatred, extremism, and violence. Institutions are to make policies to check and counter violent extremism.

#### **2.1.3 National Education Policy**

Education policies of any country depict the educational planning for some specific period. These policies play an important role in upbringing literacy rates, ensuring social justice to include all and paving the way for opportunities for economically/socially deprived classes (Akbar, Khan, Farooqe, & Kaleemullah, 2018). The National Policy document for education sector is developed in the federal ministry and the specific policies of higher education are developed at Higher Education Commission in Pakistan. In both cases the process of policymaking is pretty much centralized although the eighteenth amendment in the constitution of Pakistan gives freedom to the provinces to develop their own policies and curriculum, yet the political structures in Pakistan bring it back to the center (Rana, 2020). The National Education Policy of 2009 was implemented and the policy draft of 2017 has recently been adopted, therefore both documents were analyzed and the following themes

emerged:

### **2.1.3.1 Financial allocations**

Financial allocations to the educational sector play a pivotal role in enhancing the standard of education, thereby contributing a trained workforce to the developmental sector, which in turn increases the country's financial status. The target set for the percentage of spending in 2009 and 2017 was 4% of GDP, the recommended budget allocation for both policies was 7-8% of GDP. Fee structures of private institutions are to be within range of the ordinary person.

### **2.1.3.2 Equal Opportunities**

Giving opportunities to underprivileged groups in higher education was one of the main ingredients without specification. Preparation of 10,000 PhDs with an increase in enrollment rate from 8% to 15% is laid down as the target for the next 10 years in the proposed educational policy of 2017. At the same time status of HEC (Higher Education Commission) is standing on the 2011 Supreme Court's decision; otherwise, it would have been eliminated with the 18<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment.

### **2.1.3.3 Religious provisions and minority rights**

Since the cultural values of the majority are derived from Islam, educational interventions are supposed to be based on the core values of the Islamic religion and faith. In addition to incorporating Islamic values stipulated under articles 29, 30, 31, and 33, the policies also ensured minority rights under article 36 and fundamental rights and social justice under article 37. Ethics and moral education for minorities have been mandated. There is no mention of the segregation of minorities at the higher education level. No mention of what is to be made compulsory and what is left optional for students with other religious beliefs.

### **2.1.3.4 Inclusion**

The words exclusion and inclusion have been mentioned, but in most policy provisions, the same has been used only for special needs and handicapped children. The definition of UNESCO guidelines for inclusion is ensuring education access to all, but the scope of policy has only been limited to learners with special needs. There is a mention of marginalized communities and gender but in a generalized manner. It has been mentioned that diversity can be termed as a strength for Pakistan and, if not respected, may affect the country in terms of the loss of competitiveness, extremism, security threats, and subversion of national values.

### **2.1.4 Higher Education Policy Documents**

HEC since 2002 has issued certain policy parameters, for public and private universities and degree awarding institutions. The recent policies are aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 10 to include, empower, and promote social, economic, and political inclusion of all irrespective of age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, economic or other status. In general, the undergraduate as well as graduate policy documents mention the will for equal opportunities, in terms of access and equity but no further elaboration is found in policy provisions or guidelines for making the universities and HEIs safe and inclusive for all. The policy of campus security and surveillance speaks only about safety measures in case of physical emergency. The gist of the two significant documents with regards to social inclusion are as under:

#### **2.1.4.1 HEC Policy for students with disabilities at HEIs**

HEC made this policy in 2021 to facilitate students with special needs in the admission process, testing, and award of degrees. The clauses are binding on all universities for curricular and extracurricular activities. The initiative is a step toward an inclusive environment for students with special needs. Students with CNIC (Computerized National Identity Cards) with disability logo can benefit from the provisions. Significant provisions are as under:

1. Every HEI to form a disability committee with DSA (Director Student Affairs) as chair, two faculty

members (one male and another female), a psychological wellbeing representative from the medical center, and one staff member. Disabled students can nominate their members for the committee.

2. Committee to see the accommodation and its suitability for students with special needs. In addition, they will look after the new infrastructure and make the existing as friendly for students with disabilities. Contacts of the committee should be placed on the HEIs website to ease students.
3. The HEC will designate a Disability Officer who will guide on the matters regarding this policy and facilitate vis-à-vis disability-related interactions with the HEC. In addition, he will visit HEIs to see the implementation of policy.

#### **2.1.4.2 HEC Policy on protection against sexual harassment in HEIs**

The policy provisions are in light of the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010. The policy was made in 2020 after the lapse of a decade of issuance of the said act. The policy is necessary to protect both student/faculty and employer/employee, and any breach in the university of campus will lead to disciplinary proceedings. As per the document, each HEI has to formulate policies to supplement HEC policy provisions. The salient are as under:

- Sexual harassment means unwelcomed sexual advances or sexual favor written or unwritten, whether explicit or implicit, in terms of participation of any individual in university's activity. Such an advance may be verbal or visual signals.
- Refusal of such act by the affected individual will hamper the work or academic achievement or advancement, thereby creating a hostile environment or leading to the exclusion of the individual from mainstream
- Taking pictures and videos without consent violates the sexual privacy of any person. Pictures taken later can be used to take sexual or undue advantage.
- It is not necessary that such actions are in person but using electronic means like social media, email, text, telephone, and voice mail also comes under said act. These may be with the opposite or the same gender.
- This harassment is extremely dangerous when done by a person in authority and when submission is made a condition toward any HEI activity or benefit, e.g., when submission is made the basis of the evaluation of an individual.
- A committee to include focal persons and an inquiry bench will be made and notified on the university's website.
- All should know the complaint process and should report complaints immediately. The proceedings should remain confidential and done in the minimum possible period.
- False complaints with malafide intention to tarnish the repute of someone should be speedily concluded, and disciplinary action should be taken against the complainant to avoid further damage.

#### **2.1.5 Acts and Policies of Universities**

All universities are formed under an act or ordinance issued by federal or provincial governments. Likewise, Quaid-e-Azam University, University of Peshawar, University of Baluchistan, University of Karachi, and University of the Punjab, which are part of this study, came into existence under the acts, which have provisions upon which their functioning is based. There is only one paragraph in each university's document, mentioning inclusion, which states that no discrimination will be done concerning sex, religion, race, creed, class, color, or nationality. Moreover, no person shall be denied the privileges on these grounds. Universities do not have institutional policies for implementing these features. Astonishingly none of the policy documents are available on respective universities' websites addressing inclusion, exclusion, or harassment, although it is recommended by HEC. Only the University of the Punjab has copied the HEC policy for students with disabilities and made it available online. Universities have designated members on discipline committees, but those are also not deputed in accordance with HEC policies.

## 2.2 Significant cases of the last 3 decades (1992 to 2022)

Vulnerabilities arising from the hindering participation in any activity may lead to deprivation of fundamental human rights and make a person or group of persons liable to be excluded. Such deprivations may lead to ostracism which in turn may lead to aggression or hostile behavior towards oneself or society (Estivill, 2003). Some of the significant cases in the Pakistani context are mentioned here.

**Table 1**

*Case studies about educational entities of Pakistan*

Year	Victim and Institution	Accused
20 Oct 2009	Students and Employees of IIUI, Islamabad	2 Student Suicide Bombers (Suspected)
2 Oct 2010	Dr. Farooq Khan, Mardan	Taliban Claimed Responsibility
26 Jul 2013	Khujista Rehan	VC University of the Punjab
7 May 2014	Rashid Rehman, Advocate	Unknown Assailants
18 Sep 2014	Hafiz Dr M Shakeel Auj, KU	Alqaieda Assailants
16 Dec 2014	APS Peshawar Students	Multiple (TTP)
During 2015	Dr. Bernadette Louise Dean	Left Pakistan
20 Jan 2016	Students, Bacha Khan University	Multiple (TTP)
13 Apr 2017	Mashaal Khan, Student Abdul Wali Khan University	Multiple
23 Jan 2018	Hafiz Sareer Ahmad, Principal	Syed Fahim Ahmad
20 Mar 2019	Professor Khalid Hameed, Sadiq Egerton College	Khateeb Hussain, Student
26 Nov 2018	Roshaan Farrukh	Suicide
9 Oct 2019	Muhammad Afzal, Lecturer, MAO College Lahore	Zubia Naseem and Marriah Khawaja
31 Oct 2019	Female Students University of Baluchistan	University Administration
12 Dec 2019	A student was Killed, and 31 were Injured in IIUI	IUSF (JI) & Saraiki Student Council
7 Jul 2019	Saqib Hussain Hakro BU, Islamabad	Suicide
16 Sep 2019	Namrita Chandni Bibi Asifa Dental College	Unknown
4 Mar 2020	Female Students and Lecturers, Gomal University DI Khan	Professor Salahuddin Chairman, Islamic Studies Department
25 Nov 2021	Dr. Nosheen Kazmi, Bibi Asifa Dental College Larkana	Unknown

### 2.2.1 Highlights from cases of the last 2 decades

The cases mentioned above from 2002 to 2022 depict some sequential affiliations towards the social environments prevailing at the time of the incident. Several incidents are yet under investigation and some are reported in media, starting from harassment, violent extremism to hate killings. In Pakistan, literature is scarce, mostly these incidents were found in news articles as very few researchers ever mention these incidents.

#### 2.2.1.1 Violent Behavior

Violence linked with any of the motives is harmful to society, as it will restrict financial and non-financial activities. It hinders curricular activities in educational institutions by creating fear of the unknown. It may link with anti-state elements, ethnic factors, or other motives behind the activity. The following are significant happenings from 1992 to 2021:

- Unknown people attacked in IIUI cafeteria in 2009 with one suicide bomber stopped by a Christian sanitary worker who blasted himself, killing around six people, including the sanitary worker who stopped him.
- Dr. Farooq Khan, the Vice-Chancellor of Swat Islamic University, was killed while working in his clinic as a psychologist in 2010. He was targeted because he openly condemned militancy and suicide attacks on media and at conferences. In 2015, Dr Bernadette Louise Dean, principal of Kinnaird College, was involved in curriculum reforms and left the country because of life threats.



- One hundred and forty-nine students/teachers were killed in an attack on Army Public School Peshawar in retaliation to an operation on the western border in 2014. A similar attack was carried out in 2016 at Bacha Khan University, killing twenty-one and injuring many.
- Two student groups fought with each other in the presence of a renowned political leader from a religious, political party at IUI in 2019. One student was killed and thirty-one injured in the incident.

### **2.2.1.2 Suicide or Murder on a University Campus**

Suicide is the last resort after struggling with the miseries one is facing. On-campus suicides are alarming in HELs scenarios. Cases from 1992 to 202 present the following:

- A young girl Roshan Farrukh committed suicide by jumping from the roof of an elite university in 2018. Two girls, Namrata Chandani and Nosheen Kazmi (a Hindu and a Muslim) from Bibi Asifa Dental College Larkana, were found hanging in a college hostel, reported to have committed suicide with a gap of two years (in 2019 and 2021) and reportedly same DNA was found from bodies of deceased. The situation is creating panic among female students of the university.
- A university lecturer Muhammad Afzal of MAO College was accused of harassing BS female student, but later inquiry revealed that it was a false allegation. Despite repeated requests, neither student was expelled nor was an official acquittal issued by the university. Under social pressure, he ended his life by committing suicide.
- A final semester student, Saqib Hussain Hakro of Bahria University, committed suicide in 2019 with a note that two teachers victimized him on ethnic grounds where they repeatedly failed him four times in one subject.

### **2.2.1.3 Religious Conflicts**

Tensions between different religious or sectarian groups within universities have occasionally erupted into violence. Minority religious groups, such as Christians, Hindus, and Ahmadis, have faced discrimination and violence in Pakistan. Mob violence, including lynching, has occurred in various parts of Pakistan, often fueled by religious or sectarian tensions. These incidents may stem from disputes, rumors, or allegations of blasphemy. Pakistan, an Islamic state, has strict rules for any act against Islam covered under the state's law. Out-of-court killings of defending lawyers by emotional people are there in the news. Some of the examples from the educational context are as under:

- Advocate Rashid Rehman, a lawyer of Dr. Junaid Hafeez who was a teacher of Bahu Din Zakaria University, accused of blasphemy, was killed in his office in 2014 on the pretext of pleading the case of the accused, which killers considered against the teachings of Islam.
- Mashal Khan from Abdul Wali Khan University was lynched to death by a mob of students and people from the administration of the same university in 2017. He was accused of posting blasphemous content on social media, which his heirs denied.
- Hafiz Sareer Ahmad, a principal at Islamia College, was murdered by a student in 2018. He admonished the student for skipping classes to attend a sit-in by a religious, political party in the capital city.

### **2.2.1.4 Guising crimes under the religious umbrella (Sectoral & difference of religion)**

Many crimes have been committed under the umbrella of religion, which is not exactly a breach of religious faith or insult to religion but are executed in a way to raise the emotions of someone who kill a person purely on religious grounds. Some examples are as under:

- Hafiz Dr. M Shakeel Auj of University of Karachi unearthed some malpractices and corruption in the department, a fake fatwa against him from a renowned religious scholar Muhammad Rafi Usmani was floated, which instigated a religious cult who killed him in 2014 but later, the scholar denied issuance of any such fatwa.
- A school headmaster Niamat Ahmar was murdered in 1992 on the charge of blasphemy but later accused

killer Farooq Ahmad admitted in his confession that it was a job-related conflict where elders of the area did not accept a person from a minority.

- Professor Khalid Hameed of Sadiq Egerton College was stabbed to death in 2019 by the student Khateeb Hussain of the same college on the pretext that he was arranging a farewell of students and the mixing of males and females would occur, which, in his opinion, was against the Islamic teachings. A prominent political candidate of a religious political party was also involved in instigating the accused, as discovered by the police.

### **2.2.1.5 Workplace Harassment and Gender Discrimination**

The policy of workplace harassment is for the safety of the victim, but on certain occasions, it was used to avoid other crimes or breaches of discipline. These cases are rarely reported.

- A female lecturer Khujista at a public sector university in 2013, leveled allegations of sexual harassment on the Vice Chancellor, which were later termed false by the university. The lecturer was involved in other disciplinary violations, as stated by the university.
- In another piece of news in 2019, in Baluchistan University a private network of hidden cameras was installed to take objectionable videos, later used for blackmailing.
- A news was broken about Gomal University by one of the leading media house in 2020 with video proofs of a professor involved in harassing her female students on a plea of penalizing in examinations marks if they do not agree to the favor.

All the reported cases and many other which are mentioned here and there provide enough evidence of multiple levels and types of social exclusion at higher education institutions of Pakistan. Frustrations lead to ostracism and create hostile feelings in the individuals who inflicted casualties or suffered the same, leading to depression and even ending their own life. These incidents did highlight the inlying phenomena of exclusion but have not given it a wholesome picture in its presence, keeping in view the diverse factors prevailing in society. Thorough investigations seem absent, and those who tried to investigate the actual scenario lost their lives. Power structures play their role in supporting the status quo instead of supporting the realities of life. Who is excluded? Who is the oppressor or the oppressed? These are the questions that seem to be missing in investigations.

## **2.3 Targeted Interviews**

Targeted interviews were conducted with the Director of Student Affairs (DSA) or acting Director of Student Affairs in five major public sector universities. All the five participants were faculty members because the selected universities have given this post as an additional responsibility to faculty members. Interview protocols were generated keeping in view the data gathered from document analysis, and case studies. The salient findings from the transcriptions are as under:

### **2.3.1 Policy Provisions**

Higher Education Commission has issued comprehensive policy documents which have instructions that higher education institutions would adopt them and make their own policies so that any case falling in the domain of these subjects may be dealt with without wasting time. When DSAs were asked about the policies in place, they informed that institutional policies were non-existent; instead, a copy of the HEC policy was placed on one of the university's websites, otherwise the copy of policy documents are only available in the legal section or in registrar's department. They also told that the committees are in place, which includes the female member to address the concerns for which female students hesitate to approach male members. Committee members and their phone/email contacts were visible on only one university's website. Another university had one-decade old data and contact details given on the web page. This was the condition of five big universities which have had cases of one form or another (mentioned above).

### **2.3.2 Harassment and Discrimination**

In each of the university a committee is notified, to deal with harassment and discrimination issues. Students and faculty members know that the committee exists and they can approach the committee directly in case of any complaint or grievance. Contact details of committee members are not given on the website but the student representatives inform other students. In addition, the Anti-Harassment Committee always has a female member. The DSA is female sometimes, and every department has a considerable proportion of female faculty members with an open-door policy for all students. In some cases, the faculty of special education have differently abled members who can understand the issues of such student way better than any other. The DSAs agreed that absence of contact details and phone numbers may restrict students from contacting or informing them of some incidents. One of them mentioned that even if the information is provided not all students have the courage to meet directly with the notified members; instead, they may resort to email or phone calls. Lack of awareness and red tapism causes delay that creates resentment among the students which aggravate the situation.

### **2.3.3 Facilities for students with special needs**

DSAs initially showed satisfaction that the new infrastructure has the required facilities, which in later conversation left mere hope. Ramps are made without appropriate dimensions and students always need assistance for attending classes and events on second or third floors. Blind students also always need assistance, even the libraries do not have required software installed in computers. University transport, mainly busses, has reserved seats for special-needs students. However, the question remained unanswered: how do the students with wheelchair board the busses as busses do not have retractable platforms nor have low stars to help students with crutches reach the bus without the help of colleagues?

### **2.3.4 Redress of Grievances**

The students have numerous channels to launch complaints. For academic matters, in every department there is a person responsible who could be consulted. Subsequently, they can complain to Chairperson, Dean, and Vice-Chancellor directly. For Hostel issues, they can complain to wardens and Provost. In any case they can always submit complain to the Director of Students Affairs and Director of Academics. DSAs told that students could approach the committee members or directly to DSA in case they have any complaint or issue which is hard pressing them. The cases mentioned above though depict that the reported cases processed in these universities take a long time, and at times decisions are not made public, which leads to the dropout of students or causes fatalities in the shape of suicide by one of the faculty members of a public sector university.

### **2.3.5 Steps to Prevent Exclusion**

DSAs were of the view that provision of equal rights to all students irrespective of gender, caste, creed, or affiliations has to be ensured in all HEIs. Educational institutions aim at providing equal opportunities/rights to all students in letter and spirit irrespective of their abilities, gender, religion, ethnicity, or financial status. Some universities are being run on provincial quotas, so they receive students from far-flung areas of the country. Most of them have issues between student groups because of the previous education standard and environments in which they were brought up. Teachers give such students more attention in class, and their fellows from study circles also help them academically. As mentioned above, the university administration is taking steps to ensure that every student is included and may not feel left out or isolated. Universities do not have separate documentation but follow HEC guidelines.

### **2.3.6 Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)**

Almost all HEIs have established the Directorate of Students Affairs to provide a platform for students to address their issues. One of the mandates of DSA is to provide opportunities of creative activities so that energies are channelized into productivity. The Directorates organize multiple activities around the year to keep students busy. Moreover, the activities are guided and emphasize inter-religious, inter-ethnic, and intercultural harmony. Some

religious festivities are avoided on campus because of the pressure groups but the university in Islamabad and in Sindh celebrate more than one kind of religious festivities. DSA also hold seminars and dialogues under the initiative of Paigham e Pakistan and for educating students to become more tolerant. In addition, prominent speakers from civil society are called upon to deliver a lecture on harmony and goodwill as stipulated in the ideology of Pakistan.

### **2.3.7 Regulation of student bodies and unions**

There is a complete ban on student unions and associations in all educational institutions as per Government regulations. However, students have been provided alternate platforms by establishing institution-level student societies and department level student bodies. The societies include Debating, Arts, Music, Media, Dramatics, and many others. All departments have their own elected student body to carry out departmental-level events.

### **3. Implications**

Exclusion begins at the time of admissions. Having lesser seats in higher education institutions is directly linked with less funding in public institutions and unbearable expense in private. One of the reasons for less funding, as highlighted in National Educational Policies (NEP), was the non-utilization of funds, thereby surrendering them at the closure of each Financial Year (FY). The same was highlighted in earlier studies as well, that teaching and non-teaching staff lack knowledge about financial spending (Durrez A. , 2017). Less utilization of funds will divert the burden in the shape of fewer scholarships or more fees which may drop someone needy who may not be able to pay the fee. Poverty in a country like Pakistan has its strong impact when it comes to exclusion (Capra, 2009). Less funding may reduce the number of seats in public sector institutions, making it impossible to accommodate more applicants, thereby excluding them from their desired stream of education. Fulfilling the special needs also requires more funding.

Article 17 of the constitution of Pakistan provides freedom of making associations, unions, and political parties (if not in public service) within the ambit of the law. The same has been discontinued in educational institutions. The ban was imposed in 1979 in Sindh and in 1984 in the rest of Pakistan. Signatures of political and religious wings can be seen in public sector educational institutions, which act as power structures and influence the subordination of students to what they want. Only the fittest can survive, and the remaining fades away. Paigham-e-Pakistan is a good initiative to curb hostile feelings in response to the operation against anti-state elements by Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs). Its continuation and awareness in more educational institutions will help understand true religious teachings. Merely issuing policies without their on-ground implementation may not yield results, and victims will keep increasing.

Even if one female faculty or female student files case, the impact is huge on other females on campus and their families. Girls' face more restrictions and they themselves feel threatened after such incidents on campus. Any violent incident brings adverse effects and trauma. Counselling services and implementation of policies is the utmost requirement to deal with these issues (Nyaga, Oundo, & Kamoyo, 2014). Major reasons might be deeper, one astonishing feature is that the counseling services are neither recommended in policy documents nor maintained at HEIs. If there is no mentioning in HEC documents yet one solution can be to make clear bi-laws and appoint a full-time designated officer with a team of academic and non-academic staff members to investigate any such incident. After detailed analysis it appears that un-informed policies are made, leaving loopholes to facilitate some power structures that can bypass the rules and regulations, or influence the implementation. In this scenario it may not be possible to make the real culprits accountable ever.

On the basis of the analysis presented here, we are in a position to recommend two urgent enhancements: first there should be safe and secure modes to fill the communication gap between students and administration, so that they may not feel hesitant to report in case of any discrimination or discernment; secondly the institutional

policies are needed for addressing the context specific issues in-time and build a trust among students that the concerned committees will make just decisions. Lastly the policy makers at higher education commission and institutional custodians need to have a forum where in the light of cases being reported and challenges being faced by the administration.

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