

**IMPACT OF CAPACITY BUILDING ON ADVANCING WOMEN'S
SELF-EFFICACY AND LEADERSHIP AMBITION IN PUBLIC
SECTOR UNIVERSITIES**

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Abstract

Over the last few years, the female representation in leadership positions has been lacking in developing countries, especially within the public sector universities. The lack of self-efficacy and potential exposure to structured capacity-building programs is one of the important constraints to women's leadership advancement. This research intends to study the effects of capacity-building initiatives, including training and development opportunities, seminars, coaching and mentoring and networking to help improve female self-efficacy and leadership aspiration within academic institutions. The present research is founded on the social cognitive theory and transformational leadership theory. The research utilizes convenience sampling to collect data from public sector universities in Punjab, Pakistan. A structured questionnaire employing a Likert scale is used to assess perceptions of capacity building and leadership ambition. The present study investigates the role of institutional support toward getting the best leadership role, which is specific and helps to gain more confidence, master the skills and has a higher sense of aspiration. The findings will provide practical recommendations to policymakers and university administrators who intend

to create gender equity, advance inclusive leadership, and establish viable career pathways in academia.

Keywords: Capacity Building, Self-efficacy, Leadership Ambition, Institutional Support, Professional Development, Gender Equity

Introduction

Capacity building is a complex term used to describe a wide variety of strategies aimed at strengthening the abilities of individuals, such as training, mentoring, coaching, and networking (UNDP, 2009). At institutional levels, capacity building is a central tool to enhance professional competence and leadership preparedness, such as for marginalized groups. The structural and cultural constraints that women faculty in public sector universities often encounter are highly individualized, and they can include gender stereotypes, inability to get into decision-making forums, or the absence of professional development opportunities (Zaidi, 2022). These weaknesses do not only impair their present performances but also hamper their leadership desires and self-concepts of becoming leaders. Thus, well-designed and gender-sensitive capacity-building programs should be introduced to promote the self-efficacy of women and open the possibility to realize viable leadership opportunities in higher education. Women's capacity building in the public sector universities is a major instrument to destroy the structural and cultural problems faced by women in overcoming their way to the top leadership. It consists of strategic approach that includes professional development, mentoring, training in leadership and creating institutional networks that empower women to have the knowledge, confidence, and competence to lead in the academia (Airini et al., 2011).

Higher self-efficacy increases the likelihood that women undertake positions of leadership, are resilient, as well as overcome gender-specific obstacles in organizations (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007). In a world of conservative and male-dominated academic cultures, however, women can internalize messages of inadequacy sent to them by society, which results in

self-doubt and reduced ambition. This mental bottleneck can be overcome by subjecting them to capability-enhancing programs that demonstrate to women that they are competent and subsequently giving them a chance to practice their leadership skills in a non-threatening, affable situation (Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007).

The research is based on two underlying theories, namely Social Cognitive Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory. According to the Theory of Social Cognition proposed by Bandura (1986), there is a stress on how personal factors, environmental factors and behavior interact. It proposes that self-efficacy can be achieved by mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and psychological feedback, which involves individuals. In the meantime, Transformation Theory, developed by Bass and Avolio (1994) focuses on the talents of leaders to inspire, motivate, and personally encourage followers in order to exceed their expectations. Transformational leadership is especially applicable to the academic context where female leaders can become a leaders of change, breaking the norm of gender roles and serving as mentors of women leaders of tomorrow. Transformational leadership institutions are more likely to emphasize policies aimed at pursuing equity, likely to invest in employee development and also promote a favorable organizational culture (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). The usage of this theory will enable the study to explore how leadership styles in universities can either foster or hinder the ability of women to develop into leadership roles.

The reason for choosing this sector is that it is diverse, large in both size and number, and also due to the challenges that it faces institutionally. Despite the gains achieved in admitting women to higher education in the region, few are taking on academic leadership. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan confirms that the percentage of women in faculty is continually rising, yet less than 10 percent of females assume leadership roles like deans, directors, or vice chancellors (HEC, 2022). This

gap can usually be explained by gender biases in their recruitment and promotions, a lack of institutional support of women's development, and a lack of mentorship opportunities. Therefore, it is of critical policy and practice importance to explore how capacity-building programs can be used to fill this gap. The study is based on the quantitative approach and applies a convenience sampling procedure to collect information about academic personnel within the universities in the state of Punjab in the public sector. A set of well-structured questionnaires following a Likert scale that will examine the perception of the participants about the institutional capacity-building work, their personal self-efficacy and desire to be good leaders is implemented. The method will enable an empirical measurement of the relationship amid the variables and adds to the current body of knowledge by providing a country-specific explanation of the Pakistani higher education system (HEC, 2022).

This study has a broad range of practical implications. This way, by determining the factors of capacity building having the strongest impact on self-efficacy and ambition of women, the university policy-makers and administrators will be able to shape the interventions so that the effects can be measured. This will be in terms of coming up with leadership development programs which are exclusive to women, providing equal opportunities to train, and formalizing mentoring arrangements. The study also highlights the importance of gender-sensitive institutional cultural barriers—such as exclusion from decision-making bodies, gender stereotypes, lack of mentorship, and unsupportive work patterns—that persist in Pakistani public universities (Mahesar, 2024).

Moreover, gender equity with respect to academic leadership is not only relevant to justice but a strategic necessity in terms of institutional effectiveness and innovation. Women add their perspectives, collaborative style, and problem-solving tactics to enhance an academic environment (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). They may be put in positions of leadership where they

can disrupt status quos, encourage new generations, and change the university environment into a more inclusive and vibrant place. This study is part of the growing literature attempting to promote structural change and equitable leadership in higher education in the public sector, especially in building up capacities.

Considering that gender disparities in academic leadership have always existed in the public sector universities in Pakistan, there is an exigent importance to explore the processes that can be used to change the leadership potential of women in the sector. The purpose of the current research is to identify the effects of women participating in organized capacity-building programs on their self-efficacy and leadership aspirations, especially on the institutional support systems (including training, mentoring, and networking). Previous studies show that well-organized leadership programmes have a positive impact on confidence, skills, and interest of Pakistani women academics to take up leadership roles in higher education institutions in Pakistan (Zulfqar, Valcke, Quraishi, & Devos, 2021).

Even though the literature has reported research into the broad area of obstacles facing women to realise leadership opportunities in the academic arena, there is scarce empirical data that directly examines the relationship between institutional capacity-building programs and its relationship with self-efficacy and leadership intentions among women among public sector universities in Pakistan. Moreover, not much research addresses the intersection of Social Cognitive Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory to capture psychological processes and leadership dynamics. This paper seeks to fill the gap by conducting a quantitative analysis of the nexus between institutional capacity-building and leadership development in women within the context of a developing country. The current research integrates into the body of knowledge on gender equity and leadership in higher education by providing a situation-specific, theoretically based knowledge of how gender capacity-building strategies affect women's self-

perception and their urge to lead. This research has specific objectives, which include:

- To find out the impact of capacity-building programs on creating self-efficacy among women in the universities of the public sector.
- To examine the relationship between institutional support and the leadership ambition of women in the academic field.
- To suggest policy measures and practical guidelines for supporting women's career development and leadership progression in higher education institutions.

Literature Review

Over the last two decades, the body of knowledge on the gender imbalance in academic leadership has shifted to understand the barriers to social-cultural issues to testing intervention-specific programs. The labyrinth metaphor by Eagly and Carli (2007) has highlighted structural setbacks, although not much of the empirical data on institutional reactions are given. Although some of these studies have been done, the parameters in capacity-building measures are normally considered to be isolated, or part of qualitative studies; hence generalizability is limited. Training and development, seminars, coaching and mentoring and networking are the most explored issues in Pakistan, and not many studies have measured them simultaneously using a unified quantitative measure. In addition, the two-sided lens of Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) and Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994) has not been fully exploited with regard to integrating the influence of these two interventions towards improving the state of psychological readiness and leadership performance. The initial research (Airini et al., 2011; UNESCO, 2015) also emphasized the professional development workshops and mentoring as the promising practices but did not focus on the context-specific studies in low-income countries.

Purdy (2017) has assessed the lasting effects of the Dorothy Wylie Health Leaders Institute (DWHLI) on Canadian healthcare leaders as related to its career and professional growth effects. It was reported that the participants showed dramatic increases in their level of leadership knowledge, skills, and confidence that corresponded to increased satisfaction and involvement. The theoretical content, experiential learning and interactive sessions and mentorship were some of the key elements of design that influenced leadership development. This study is consistent with the present one since it shows that through planned leadership development programs, the individual leadership ability and aspiration can be improved. Nonetheless, the nature of the study conducted by Purdy was not gender-specific, did not include a study of the healthcare field and depended mainly on self-reported perception of the benefits of the program without focusing on how these benefits affected leadership ambition. It is in this light that the current research contributes to this view by narrowing it down to women in the universities of the public sector and quantitatively considering how leadership institutions' capacity building programs can affect the self-efficacy of such women in the realm of their ambitions as leaders through the psychological and the organizational spheres of empowerment.

Study by Al-Qahtani et al. (2021) focused on analyzing the role of self-esteem and self-efficacy in women empowerment through a cross-sectional survey conducted on 5,587 academic and administrative staff in 15 governmental universities in Saudi Arabia. The result indicated that self-esteem and self-efficacy significantly predicted women empowerment, but self-efficacy proved to be the most important as ($t = 76.049$, $p < 0.001$) having a strong contribution (73.4%) to the determination of the level of empowerment. This result is consistent with the existing literature because it highlights self-efficacy as a tremendous psychological tool that enhances the confidence of women in assuming the position of being a leader. Nevertheless, although Al-Qahtani et al. (2021) focused more on individual aspects of

psychology, they did not discuss how institutional mechanisms, i.e., structured training or development programs can contribute to improving the effectiveness of the female leadership of women. The research study fills this gap further by exploring how capacity-building interventions within public sector universities can proactively promote self-efficacy and convert the same to higher levels of leadership aspiration by going beyond psychological traits to practical institutional measures. Giuliani Coluccio et al. (2024) explored the relationship between task oriented behaviors (planning, decision making, and supervision) and self-efficacy in controlling how leadership emergence in women studying STEM attracts women. Their results indicated the positive correlation between task behaviors and self-efficacy and that self-efficacy could in turn support emergence of the leadership with the academic experience reinforcing the connection. The present study is related to the existing research as it brings to attention the positive influence of structured university education and engagement in specific tasks in building up self-efficacy within the individual that subsequently becomes leadership drive. In contrast to the general nature of institutional interventions studied by my research, Coluccio et al. directly concentrate on the experiences of students within STEM areas and can provide meaningful insight on the interaction between educational activities and self-vision to ultimately produce leadership behavior which emerges as a result.

Valerio, Spence, and Adapa (2024) conducted studies about women leadership development in the context of agricultural research institutions in Southeast Asia and Pacific by attending a Women Leadership Development Program (the Meryl Williams Fellowship). They also experienced massive improvement in self-confidence, self-awareness, professional network and visibility with a ripple effect in their respective institutions as they endeavored to pass this benefit over to others who would enhance their leadership abilities. This is allied with my research and it strengthens the view that interventions of capacity building enhance individual self-efficacy and leadership identity.

Regional context and theoretical interests are different: Valerio et al. focus on the agricultural research and perception quality but my work is carried out within the public sector universities, employs quantitative index and studies the development of ambition to become a leader due to the systematic improvement of capacity among women scholars.

Fayaz and Gulzar (2025) have empirically studied how the dimensions of the organization climate, namely autonomy, involvement, support, training and welfare in the context of the university in Jammu and Kashmir affect the self-efficacy of the women employees and their self-efficacy in turn has some effect on their work life balance. Supportive institutional climate was partially mediated with the help of self-efficacy in effective balancing of the professional and personal roles. The present research can be used to supplement my study in explaining that self-efficacy is a mediator of organizational environments and training on self-efficacy in particular. Previous studies focused on the work-life balance issue as opposed to the theme of leadership ambition. So the focus of this study is how capacity building educational programs in public university institutions can be used to develop leadership self-efficacy and ambition in women scholars. Based on the above discussion the following conceptual framework is drawn for the purpose of this study.

Conceptual Framework

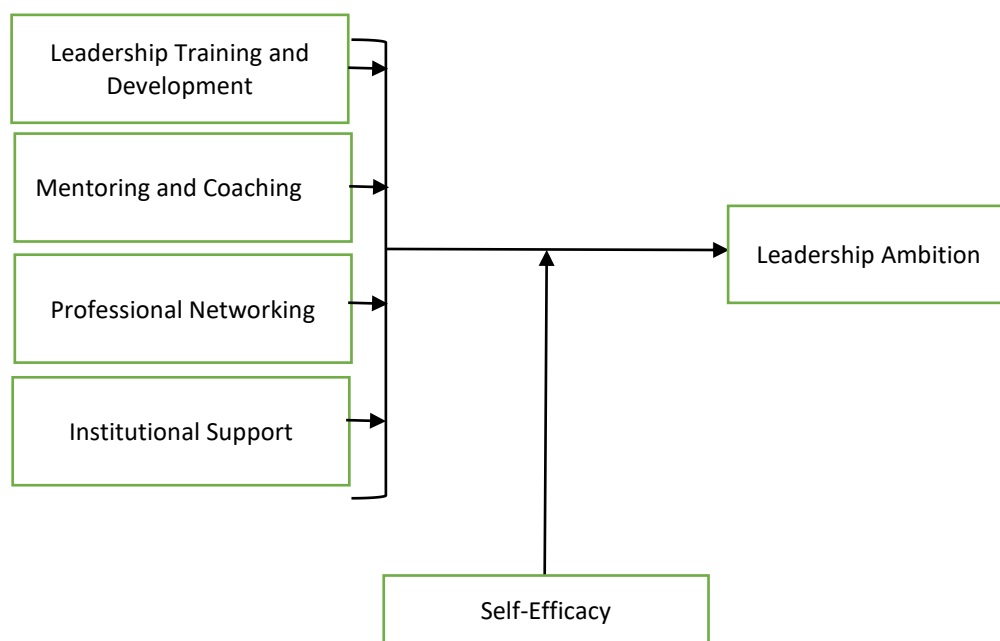


Fig 1. Conceptual Framework Of The Study

Methodology

Research Design

This study uses quantitative cross sectional survey design, to provide an empirical analysis of the data collected from female employees of public sector universities at the Punjab, Pakistan. The design is suitable to examine the correlations and predict relationships between constructs (Saba & Khan, 2023)

Sampling Method and Sample Size

Female faculty in the public universities in the state of Punjab is the target population. The study sample consists of 100 employees in various institutions who were selected using convenience sampling since it suits to a small study and in similar contexts, and is acceptable in an exploratory study (Tasneem & Hussain, 2023).

Data Collection Instrument

A questionnaire was used, consisting of the following segments:

- Age, designation, department, and experience.

- Capacity-building exposure: Items that set out participation in training, seminars, coaching, mentoring, and networking.
- Self-Leadership self-efficacy: Modified in the development scales that showed that the training experiences mediated on the effectiveness (Ahmed et al., 2023)
- Leadership aspiration: Questions on the desire to seek the position of a dean or a head of a department.

All the items are rated through a five-point Likert scale (1-Strongly disagree, 5- Strongly agree), which is a common way to measure self-efficacy at universities in a Pakistani study (Munir et al., 2025).

Ethical Considerations

This research followed the ethics of research with full respect to the rights of participants and protection of their data (Awan, Yousaf & Malik, 2024). Participation was voluntary. Consent was taken from all the participants with a clear explanation of the study purpose, procedure, and the right to withdraw at any point. Confidentiality of responses was assured. The data was collected after obtaining ethical approval of this study by the respective research ethics committee of the university.

Results and Discussions

Data collected through questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS. The analysis and their results are as under:

Table 1: *Reliability Analysis of Study Scales*

Scale	No. of Items	Cronbach's α
Leadership Training & Development	6	0.85
Mentoring & Coaching	6	0.859
Professional Networking	6	0.924
Institutional Support	6	0.874
Self-Efficacy	3	0.794
Leadership Ambition	4	0.89

All the scales applied in the study have internal consistency reliability (Cronbach-alpha) as shown in Table 1. Their values are higher than the suggested minimum of 0.70, which proves that the measurement instruments are highly reliable. The reliability of Leadership Training and Development ($\alpha = .850$), Mentoring and Coaching ($\alpha = .859$), Professional Networking ($\alpha = .924$) and Institutional Support ($\alpha = .874$) are all excellent, indicating that the items have consistently measured their respective constructs of capacity building. Self-Efficacy ($\alpha = .794$) and Leadership Ambition ($\alpha = .890$) also show high reliability proving the fact that the tools can be evaluated as successful in measuring the psychological empowerment results in women. On the whole, the large reliability coefficients prove that the scales can be used in the further statistical calculation, including correlation and regression.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

Variable	LTD	Mentor	Network	InstSupport	Self-Eff	LeadAmb
Leadership Training	1	.673***	.823***	.716***	.371***	.381***
Mentoring	—	1	.676***	.730***	.423***	.534***
Networking	—	—	1	.663***	.296***	.181*
Institutional Support	—	—	—	1	.360***	.388***
Self-Efficacy	—	—	—	—	1	.711***
Leadership Ambition	—	—	—	—	—	1

Note. N = 150.

p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.

Table 2 indicates the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables in the study. Self-efficacy and Leadership Ambition both have a significant and positive correlation with all capacity-building components. The correlation with leadership Training is also high with Mentoring ($r = .673$), Networking ($r = .823$), and Institutional Support ($r = .716$), so it is possible to assume that the capacity-building activities are more conducted as a complex of activities rather than separately. All variables of capacity-building are significantly positively associated with Self-Efficacy ($r = .296$ -. 0.423), implying that increased exposure to training, mentoring, networking and institutional support positively contributes to the feeling of being capable of doing things among women. On the same note, the positive correlations with Leadership Ambition ($r = 0.181$ -. 0.534) have been observed to show that capacity-building will enhance the ambitions of women to take up leadership positions. Self-Efficacy and Leadership Ambition ($r = .711$) is the strongest predictor in the correlational level, and it has a very strong relationship: more capable women are more ambitious about becoming a leader. On the whole, the theoretical model, which is based on the capacity-building factors, is supported by the matrix; they are interrelated and mutually contribute to the psychological empowerment and leadership intentions of women.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Predicting Leadership Ambition

Dependent Variable: Leadership Ambition						
Predictor	B	SE	t	p	95% CI (Lower, Upper)	
Constant	0.611	0.128	4.78	<.001	[0.358, 0.863]	
Leadership Training	0.066	0.076	0.86	0.389	[-0.085, 0.216]	
Mentoring	0.254	0.071	3.56	0.001	[0.113, 0.395]	
Networking	-0.165	0.075	-2.20	0.029	[-0.313, -0.017]	
Institutional Support	-0.217	0.064	-3.37	0.001	[-0.344, -0.089]	
Self-Efficacy	0.744	0.058	12.75	<.001	[0.629, 0.859]	
Model Summary:						
$R^2 = 0.716$ (71.6%), $F(5,144) =$						
<i>highly significant</i>						

Table 3 shows the predictor specific effects of the predictors on Leadership Ambition in the presence of other variables. The important positive predictors include:

Mentoring ($B = 0.254$, $p = .001$)

Mentoring helps a lot to improve leadership aspiration. Women who undergo mentoring are more ambitious to become leaders even after eliminating other issues.

Self-Efficacy ($B = 0.744$, $p < .001$)

This is the most predictive one. Great self-efficacy is a strong predictor of ambition to be a leader among women and the theory of Social Cognitive Theory that effective belief in one self-abilities leads to motivation and ambition is corroborated.

Very important Negative Predictors:

Networking ($B = -0.165$, $p = .029$)

Surprisingly, the impact of networking reveals a negative influence, although it is small though significant in the presence of other variables. This might be indicative of low quality networks, closed circles or informal networking obstacles encountered by women in universities that are open to all.

Institutional Support ($B = -0.217$, $p = .001$)

The negative influence of institutional support also presents a negative response which could show problems of ineffective support structures, minimum effort or perceived institutional barriers that diminish ambition despite formal structures.

Non-Significant Predictor:

Leadership Training ($B = 0.066$, $p = .389$)

Once other factors are taken into account, leadership training fails to provide any significant predictability of leadership ambition. It can be inferred that training cannot be a motivating factor in ambition unless it is accompanied with mentoring or confidence-building factors. The regression findings highlight the key importance of self-efficacy and mentoring in promoting the leadership ambition in women. Surprisingly adverse outcomes on the networking and institutional support suggest systemic or cultural problems in the universities of the public sector which can disrupt the feminine leadership trajectories.

Table 4: Mediation Analysis (Leadership Training → Self-Efficacy → Leadership Ambition)

Path	Effect (B)	p-value
a: Leadership Training → Self-Efficacy	0.328	<.001
b: Self-Efficacy → Leadership Ambition (controlling LT)	0.747	<.001
c': Direct effect (LT → Leadership Ambition, controlling SE)	-0.077	.056 (ns)
Indirect effect (Sobel test)	z = 4.665	<.001

Conclusion

This paper presents empirical data on the role of different capacity-building initiatives on self-efficacy and leadership ambition among women in public sector universities of Punjab, Pakistan. The results show that the elements like leadership training, mentoring, coaching, and institutional support are interconnected and that they all play a role in the psychological empowerment of women. Self-efficacy was the most significant predictor of leadership ambition compared with other predictors, which is in line with the Social Cognitive Theory that highlights the importance of the belief in personal ability as a motivating factor. The mentoring factor was significant as well, which means that encouraging developmental relations enables women to see their future in leadership positions. Interestingly, the regression model was negative with networking and institutional support, which indicated that structural or cultural barriers, including limited networks, weak support systems, or tokenism, could constrain women in their leadership quests in spite of formal capacity-building policy. In general, the paper makes it clear that not only psychological empowerment of women but a really supportive institutional environment is necessary to empower women in higher education.

Implications of the Study

This study has significant practical and theoretical implications. In practice, the research explains why universities should reinforce formal mentoring programs, improve leadership development programs, and create programs that clearly construct confidence and self-efficacy among women. Schools ought to be very critical in terms of their networking arrangements so as to make sure that they are indeed inclusive and supportive as opposed to being symbolic and restraining. Moreover, the universities should strengthen the institutional validation by developing clear promotion systems, lessening gender bias, and allowing women significant representation in decision-making units. Theoretically, the research supports Social Cognitive Theory by demonstrating that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between capacity-building and leadership ambition, and is consistent with Transformational Leadership Theory because it demonstrates the importance of supportive, development-oriented environments in developing future women leaders. The unforeseen negative results also lead to new theoretical debates concerning the influence of cultural and structural limitations in the setting of developing countries.

Limitations

Despite the valuable insights that are given in this research, it is important to note that it has a number of limitations. In the study, convenience was employed in sampling 100 women faculty members, which limits the extrapolation of the study results to the general population of the public sector universities. The cross-sectional design does not allow drawing conclusions about causal relations between the variables and the perception observed at a certain point in time.

The researcher used self-reported questionnaires to gather data; hence the possibility of response biases, including social desirability, is present. Moreover, the research was limited to the universities in Punjab, so it did not take into account the differences in institutions in other provinces.

Lastly, contextual issues, including university culture, gender expectations, leadership behaviors and informal power structures that are major contributors to the leadership experiences of women, were not directly measured.

Future Research Directions

This study can be extended in a number of ways that are significant in future research. Longitudinal studies are likely to give more information about the relationship between capacity-building and leadership development over the years and whether self-efficacy keeps rising through application of greater experience. Comparative research in various provinces, or in state and non-state universities, can provide a bigger picture of the ways in which organizational settings influence women's leadership aspirations. It might also be helpful to include qualitative techniques, including interviews or focus groups, to explain the causes of the negative effects of networking and institutional support and provide a more comprehensive picture of the cultural and structural barriers. Intervention or experimental research might be used to assess the success of individual mentoring programs or leadership seminars. Also, the integration of other variables, like work-life balance, psychological resilience, leadership identity, or workplace culture can perhaps provide a more detailed depiction of what factors shape the leadership path of women. A study that takes into account the views of male faculty might also be able to illuminate on the previously veiled organizational obstacles and cultural biases which influence the promotion of women.

Author's Contribution

“Study conception: AN and UN, supervision of the whole process KH, Initial draft of paper, data collection: UN, AN, data analysis: ZA, and final approval of the manuscript: all authors

Conflict of Interest

All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Data Access Statement

All relevant data is present in the paper.

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