

## **Men Working in Female-Dominated Professions: A stigma or facilitation?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Gender roles not only keep men and women in different spheres of family and social life but they also promote gender segregation in the education sector and professional life. There is a lot of research being conducted on women working in male dominated professions but there is scarcity of research regarding males working in female dominated professions. This study was conducted to explore the experiences of men working in female dominated professions. the first phase of this study collected quantitative data about the type female-dominated professions in Pakistan. Based on this data in-depth qualitative interviews were done with 5 professionals using snowball sampling: Nurse, Psychologist, Montessori teacher, Makeup artist/ Beautician, and Bus host. Thematic analysis was used to identify sub-themes presented in this study: (i) Reasons or motivation for joining nontraditional profession; (ii) Reaction of near and dear ones; (iii) Positive aspects of female dominated profession; (iv) Challenges of female dominated profession; (v) Professional journey; (vi) Being a minority in female majority; (vii) Struggle to maintain masculinity and (viii) Future aspirations. Study findings can be used to support male entry and retention in female dominated professions.

**Key words:** Men, Discrimination, female-dominated professions, Pakistan, stigma, facilitation

## INTRODUCTION

Society enforces masculinity and femininity on the individuals and transforms their behavior accordingly. Gender, which differentiates the roles for males (as breadwinners) and females (as housekeepers) also obstructs in the professions on the bases of the physical attributes. Our society segregates professions in accordance to the gender of the individual. Blue collar jobs are associated with men because they require more physical strength and competitive behavior (Eagly & Wood, 2012); whereas pink collar jobs which are associated with household jobs ,child nurturing and caring are associated with women. This professional segregation can be seen across the globe (Anker et al., 2003).

Individuals are bound to find their professions within the societal gendered boundaries. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects are considered male oriented subjects in many countries especially in under developing countries. So professions related to those subjects are also considered male oriented. Similarly some subjects and professions are considered female dominated like teaching, medicine and nursing Professions like financing, marketing, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) are mostly men's field where there is little representation of females (Ko & Marx, 2018); and nursing, school teaching and makeup artists were considered purely as women's field. Furthermore, traditional male jobs are considered to be more respectable and well paid with higher cultural rank and social status in society (Connell, 2000). Comparatively, people allocated less status and respect to professions associated with females. These stereotypical mindsets have passed on from one generation to another. With the passage of time, theses stereotypical

beliefs are fading. In contemporary times, both men and women are opting for professions which are not traditionally meant for them in the past. Both genders are getting into non-traditional professions not associated with their gender (Hakim, 2000). It is still easier for women to join non-traditional professions (Bradley, 2000); whereas for men it is a greater challenge as their masculinity is questioned (Connell, 2000). Comas-d'Argemir and Soronellas (2018) mentioned cultural and structural barriers which hinders men from joining non-traditional professions. Females might face issues like glass ceiling or low wages in non-conventional professions but male's masculinity becomes questionable if they join female-dominated professions and their heterosexuality is also questioned (Kimmel & Aronson, 2010).

This study explored the experiences of men working in the female dominated professions, especially focusing its influence on their personal and professional life and their masculinity. the objectives for this study were to explore: (i) the experiences and daily life of males working in female dominated professions', (ii) the reaction of participants' family, friends and society towards their decision, and (iii) participant motivation and factors behind joining female dominated professions. Furthermore, it was explored if being a minority in female dominated profession creates hindrance for a man or facilitates them. We also attempted to understand if participants have to make efforts to maintain their masculinity as sometimes people question the masculinity of men who are working in female dominated professions.

Previous research on the topic reveals favorable findings about men working in female dominated professions. Cross and Bagilhole (2002) conducted a qualitative study with males working in female dominated professions like social work, cleaning, primary school teaching and nursing and concluded that although the masculinity of men in these professions is being challenged, men have adopted strategies to retain their masculinity. Lupton (2002) found in a

research conducted in UK that masculinity of males, who work in female dominated professions, is questioned and that they are being labeled as sissy or homosexuals. Men are also ridiculed for working as subordinates of female supervisors.

In the same context Simpson (2004) found that males working in female-dominated professions are of three types: seekers, finders and settlers. Such men gain benefits and feel comfortable of being in female dominated professions. Men try to re-establish their masculinity through re-labeling, status enhancing and distancing from females which is being undermined because of feminine profession. Ross (2017) found that work of male nurses is quite challenging, they face discrimination and gender bias by co-workers and patients. The participants complained that usually they are considered misfits and female nurses are perceived as better care providers. They were also considered gay and stigmatized. Simpson (2007) while working with male nurses also explored that enrollment of males was less and those who work as nurses have to adopt strategies to survive in the profession as they are discriminated against. This behavior was not limited to nursing profession only but Kalokerinos et al. (2017) found similar stereotypical thinking and discrimination against male primary school teachers in USA. Previous research largely focused on male nurses and primary school teachers though some researches also address librarians and cabin crew as well.

### ***Rationale of the Study***

The current study was conducted to explore the experiences of men working in female dominated professions. Literature indicates a large number of studies about women who opt for male dominated professions and the discrimination they face, but there is scarcity of researches indicating men's experiences in female dominated professions, and most research in this regard

are foreign studies. This study is also unique in its nature because it explores men's perceptions from a patriarchal culture, where masculinity is a matter of pride.

Most of the preexisting literature states that female dominated professions cause a negative image to men's masculinity. The above reported literature is mainly foreign literature which encouraged the researchers of this study to explore the situation of Pakistani males working in female dominated professions. Pakistan is a developing country where gender roles are strictly followed and people have a patriarchal mindset. This study was expected to shed light about to how the professional, social and personal life of men working in female dominated professions is influenced, how their family and friends react towards their decision, and if being a minority in their specific professions gives them benefits or do they face discrimination.

### ***Research Questions***

The following research questions, to be asked of men currently occupied in female dominated professions, served as basis for this study:

1. How did friends and family react toward the decision of joining female dominated profession?
2. What are the positive aspects of a female dominated profession?
3. What are the challenges of working in a female dominated profession?
4. Does being a minority in a female dominated profession facilitate or create hindrance for men?
5. How does a man maintain his hegemonic masculinity while working in female dominated professions?
6. How do participants foresee their future in female dominated professions?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **First Phase of Study**

A pilot study was done in which the aim was to collect quantitative data from people working in female dominated professions in Pakistan. They were not provided with any pre-established list of professions because the objective was to choose the professions which are considered female dominated from a Pakistani perspective. Thus, a literature was not consulted beforehand. A total of 15 females and 15 males participants were part of this first phase of study. Participants belonged to Lahore, and were working in different fields. The participants of pilot study listed a total of 25 female oriented professions (Figure 1). The five most frequently reported professions included Nursing, Makeup artist/ Beautician, Psychologists, Bus host and Montessori teachers.

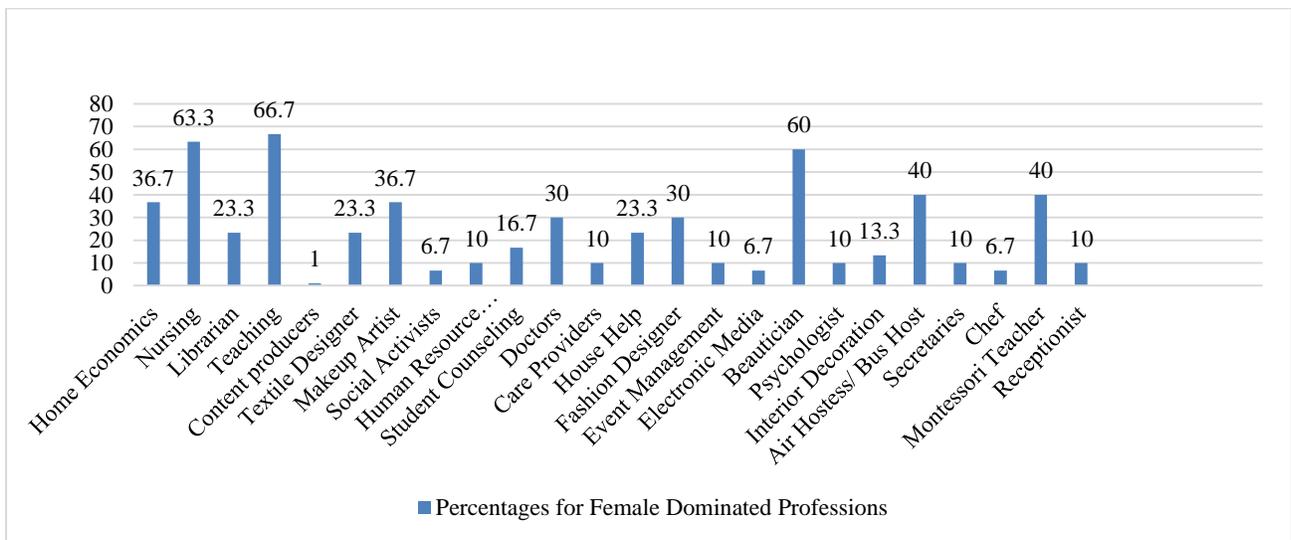


Figure 1: Graph indicating female dominated professions as described by pilot study participants

## Second Phase of Study

### Ethical Considerations

Approval was taken from the Board of Studies of Department of Gender and Development Studies, Lahore College for Women University (LCWU) to conduct this study. Verbal informed

consent was taken from participants and they were assured anonymity and confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any point. Permission was also gained for audio recording before the start of the study. Audio recording was used to facilitate theme development and data analysis. No recordings were used or shared and have been kept safety with the PI of this research.

### **Research Design**

This study adopted a qualitative research design with in-depth interviews.

### **Sample**

The selection criterion for the sample included (i) males currently working in female dominated professions, and (ii) who have spent a minimum of 1 year in the workforce. Purposive sampling was used and though initially it was decided to choose at least 2 participants from each Female-Dominated Professions making a total 10 participants, it was not possible because many of the people contacted were not willing to participate in the research. The sample included 6 male participants from five professions: Nursing (n=2), Psychologist (n=1), Montessori teacher (n=1), Makeup artist/Beautician (n=1), and Bus host (n=1). The sample was selected from urban areas of Lahore.

### **Tool for Study**

A semi structured interview protocol was designed with semi-structured questions related to our objectives and research questions (Appendix A). Literature review was also used while preparing the interview protocol.

### **Data Collection**

An interview protocol was designed keeping in view the objectives of research and literature review. The researcher contacted different organizations who were willing to provide

information about their employers to reach the target sample. The participants were contacted in person after permission from their employers and consent from the participants was taken before the interview. Only 6 participant interviews were included in the study and the main reasons for low response were (i) the lack of time, and (ii) discomfort or lack of consent for audio recording. The interviews were conducted in private office space provided by employer during the period of September and October 2019. Each interview lasted 40 to 50 minutes on average. Data Saturation could not be achieved because of difficult sample and time constraints.

### **Data Analysis**

Interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word and themes were extracted using manual coding. The coding was done by the first author, along with a friend who was also a trained researcher, and was double checked by the second author. Translation was not needed as the participants responded in English and Urdu. Audios and notes both were taken into consideration during extraction of themes. The data were analyzed by inductive or bottom up thematic analysis (Frith & Gleeson, 2004). An inductive approach means the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves and this form of thematic analysis bears similarity to grounded theory (Patton, 1990).

## **RESULTS**

### **Sociodemographic Results**

Table 1 presents the demographics of the sample. Most of these participants belonged from Majority of the sample was unmarried (90%), 2 of the participants did Matriculation, 1 did Intermediate and 1 Bachelors whereas just one of them did MS/MPhil. So far as work experience is concerned majority of participants 66.6% were within range of above 1 to 5 years of experience. 66.6% participants belonged to middle class.

**Table 1**

Demographics characteristics of the participants (N=6)

Demographic Variable	<i>f</i>	Percentage %
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	1	10%
Unmarried	5	90%
<b>Education</b>		
Matric	2	33.3%
Intermediate	1	16.6%
Bachelors	1	16.6%
Diploma	1	16.6%
MS/MPhil	1	16.6%
<b>Years of experience</b>		
1 year	1	16.6%
1 plus - 5 years	4	66.6%
5 years- above	1	16.6%
<b>Class/Income</b>		
Upper Class	2	33.3%
Middle Class	4	66.6%

## Qualitative Thematic Results

The major themes and sub themes are presented in **Table 2** and include eight major themes and their sub themes including: (i) Reasons or motivation for joining nontraditional profession; (ii) Reaction of near and dear ones; (iii) Positive aspects of female dominated profession; (iv) Challenges of female dominated profession; (v) Professional journey; (vi) Being a minority in female majority; (vii) Struggle to maintain masculinity and (viii) Future aspirations.

### *Motivation for joining nontraditional profession*

The first theme ‘reasons or motivation for joining female dominated profession’ revealed that joining a female dominated profession was not the first choice of any male participant. They adopted these professions either due to (i) failing to get good grades, (ii) because a significant other suggested it or (iii) financial issues forced them into the profession. Participants shared:

“I had no interest in studies, my mother suggested my father for this and they forcefully sent me in Nursing.” [P1; Nurse]

“It is a holy profession.” [P2; Nurse]

“I never wanted to be an engineer and wanted to do something in arts so became a Makeup artist/ Beautician.” [P3; Makeup artist/ Beautician]

“I became psychologist because I didn’t get good marks to get in the desired degree.” [P6; Psychologist]

### ***Reaction of dear and near ones***

The second major theme depicted the reaction the participants faced when they entered the female dominated profession. Participants disclosed that they experienced opposition from family. Some participants shared that their family did not know that they were working in female dominated professions or they were only concerned about the degree. Most of the participants reported that they already knew that the said profession is female dominated and they face difficulties in acceptance at beginning but some did not face any criticism:

The participants shared:

“Parents supported me but, my brother was not pleased with the decision as he wanted me to help him in growing the family business.” [P1; Nurse]

“Joining nursing as a profession was completely my parents’ decision. They had no issues.” [P2; Nurse]

“Convincing my parents was difficult as they wanted for me to work in a traditional respectable profession like engineering.” [P3; Makeup artist/ Beautician]

“My parents wanted me to support the family financially. But I didn’t know it was a female dominated profession.” [P4; Bus Host]

“My parents supported me when I started work in this profession.” [P5; Montessori Teacher]

“My parents were just concerned that I should have a degree regardless of field.” [P6; Psychologist]

### *Positive aspects of female dominated professions*

While describing the dynamics of their profession all participants, except the makeup artist, claimed that their profession was not discrimination against based on gender. Though the Makeup artist/ Beautician faced criticism, the rest of the professionals did not report any such thing:

“Gender difference does not exist in our organization. The working years matter regardless of gender. Only seniority matters.” [P1; Nurse]

“I don’t think gender discrimination exists. In today’s times, males and females are equal.” [P2; Nurse]

“There isn’t any gender discrimination in our field.” [P4; Bus Host]

“It is truly a female-dominated profession. Gender discrimination will take place if there is a large number of males in the profession but there is high number of female in this profession.” [P5; Psychologist]

Next participants described their profession as being noble, mystic and easy going:

“This profession gives us internal satisfaction. We are the life savers here and that connects us to God.” [P1; Nurse]

“I like to be a makeup artist. It made me famous and I earn more than my siblings who work in the traditional gendered professions.” [P3; Makeup Artist]

“It is very highly regarded to be a teacher in our religion. It helps to release stress when playing for kids.” [P5; Montessori Teacher]

“Helping creatures of God and humankind is a positive aspect for me.” [P6; Psychologist]

### ***Challenges of female dominated profession***

While discussing the challenges the participants faced in their said profession; they pointed out the following:

“The salary is not satisfactory and it is tough to fulfill all the expenditures, especially if the male nurse is the only income-earning member of the household.. The salary is also less than in private organizations as compared to the government hospitals.” [P1; Nurse]

“The salary is less as compared to the work-load and duties allocated.” [P2; Nurse]

“At beginning salary was minimal but things are better now. In our profession the most negative aspect is replication rather than being innovative people copy each other.” [P3; Makeup Artist]

“The extra hours are unpaid and sometimes the shift prolongs during holiday season. One more thing which I don't like in my profession is that we are forced to apply makeup and be smart and presentable.” [P4; Bus Host]

“The negative aspect is that less literate individuals are also working as a teacher. Secondly, money is adequate for me right now as I am not married and have no

responsibilities yet but, it would be difficult for married teacher to support a family. It is also difficult for me, being male, to handle small kids as I don't have experience in this.”

[P5; Montessori Teacher]

### ***Professional journey***

While discussing their professional journey both of the nurses were of the opinion that in the beginning they were not very fond of their profession because of being forced to join it, but with the passage of time they began to like their profession. Whereas, the Psychologist shared that his internship helped him to like his profession. One participant shared:

“Our profession is respectable and advancing. Though the initial study years and training are difficult, it becomes rewarding after work experience increases. Less educated people are also able to join this profession and we can take a break whenever we feel like.” [P2; Nurse]

### ***Being a minority in female majority***

Despite belief that men would be discriminated against in a female-dominated profession, the participants of this study shared that they were gaining some advantages because of their minority status. The male nurse and Montessori teacher were of the opinion that higher education is not required in their profession, so it is a benefit for them. Furthermore, Montessori teachers get separate office for work, rather than a common staff room, which provides him freedom and less interference. Although the makeup artist was of the opinion that he gets less acceptance in his field, at the same time he was happy for having lesser competition with men. One participant shared:

“I contacted many institutions in Pakistan to learn makeup but, all the institution denied taking me because I am a man and it is a female-dominated profession. However, once I entered the field I realized there is less competition with other men and this gives me an advantage” [P3; Makeup artist/ Beautician]

### ***Struggle to maintain masculinity***

Two of the research participants were of the opinion that they have to put effort to maintain their masculinity since they work in a female dominated profession. The makeup artist shared:

“There is less acceptance of a male makeup artist. Stigmatization exists and we are labeled as being *Gay* or *sissy*. This is a common misperception about male makeup artists. Sometimes people expect me to talk and have movements like transgender people. The negative comments and stigmatization hurt me in the beginning but then I try to maintain my male persona and convince my colleagues, clients and friends that I am not a gay.”

The bus host also complained of disrespect which he gets from the travelers, especially when he attempts to maintain his masculinity.

### ***Future Aspirations***

The last sub-theme revealed that three participants were eager to change their professions. Both the male nurse and the Montessori teacher were of the opinion that if they get a chance they will change their profession and the bus host was already looking for a different job. One participants

shared that they were using this profession to help them continue their studies and might then venture into another profession:

“Positive aspect for this profession is that working conditions are favorable and I can study while working.” [P4 Bus Host]

Table 2  
*Major Themes and sub themes extracted from transcriptions*

Major Themes	Sub Themes
1. Reasons or motivation for joining nontraditional profession	Not the first choice Forcefully sent to nursing To get a job Internship lead to profession
2. Reaction of near and dear ones	Family opposed decision Parents supported
3. Positive aspects of female dominated profession	Sacred profession Flexible timings Ever growing profession No gender discrimination Fame
4. Challenges of female dominated profession	Insufficient salary Hand to mouth eating Discrimination Discouragement from industry Sexism Lack of professionalism and originality Female objectification High workload Difficult to handle small kids
5. Professional journey	Liking for profession developed by time Once in began to enjoy that
6. Being a minority in female majority	Higher education is not required Lack of acceptance Separate place Lesser competition with men
7. Struggle to maintain Masculinity	Stigmatization Misperception Disrespect
8. Future Aspirations	Will change if got good opportunity Looking for better job

## DISCUSSION

While exploring the experiences of men in female dominated professions many themes and sub themes emerged from the participants’ discussion. There were differences and similarities found

in this study related to men in their non-traditional professions. It appeared from results that for almost all the participants being in a female dominated profession was not their choice but had been forced upon them. So we can claim them to be 'finders' who came into profession in the process of making general career decisions (Williams & Villemez, 1993). One of the participants admitted that he chose non-masculine field only because he wanted to be in any field related to arts rather than studying engineering. Another opted for a feminine profession because he got low grades. This finding is in line with Yasin et al. (2019) who concluded that failing to go into favorite field makes people choose less favorable jobs like teaching and female dominated professions.

We found that parents forced their children to be in specific fields, whereas in other examples parents and family disliked the choice of nontraditional profession. One probable reason for both the instances could be the influence of parents and how they want to control their children's career choice (Dick & Rallis, 1991). While describing the positive aspects of their professional fields the participants claimed their professions to be holy fields, and that this made them believe they were caring for humanity and would gain more blessings in return, giving them internal satisfaction. Others however were planning to leave their profession whenever they get a better chance. This discordant attitude might be an act of rationalizing their choice. This is also supported by a study by Erden and colleagues (2011) in which they stated that although men work in female dominated profession because they got a degree in it, if they ever got a chance to switch their jobs they would take that opportunity.

Nearly all of our participants, except one, denied the existence of discrimination and this is also in line with Simpson (2004) who claimed that working in non-traditional professions is in fact an advantage for men because they cash their minority position. This is also reflective from

the statement of one of the participant who claimed that he earned more fame because of being in a nontraditional profession for men. Another reason for this might be the power relations existing in our society where females are somehow passive in front of males (Sen & Chatterjee, 2004) and males almost always get advantage of hegemonic masculinity and are able to dominate the workplace even in female dominated professions (Connell, 2000). It can also be reflective of comfort zone effect which suggests that men feel relaxed and comfortable while working with women (Simpson, 2004).

While highlighting the challenges faced by the participants in female dominated professions; one of the biggest concerns was low wages and inadequate salary. This phenomenon is reflective of a global problem, which includes the glass ceilings faced by women at the workplace and the gender pay gap. Usually women working in the same profession as men are paid less because of the patriarchal belief that females are not bread winners and their income is not used for household contribution and thus they should get lesser pay (Hook, 2010). However, men working in female dominated professions are also suffering from issues of low pay, despite the fact that they may be sole contributors for the household income.

A couple of other challenges were highlighted by the male makeup artist. He claimed that he has to face a lot of discrimination while working in the field and that he was not being welcomed in the profession. This is in line with Mansoor and Yasin (2022) and Hjort and Komulaine (2017) who asserted that the beauty industry was considered a female field and men using beauty products or working in the beauty industry were considered misfits. There was also discussion about there being lack of originality and professionalism in the profession and people trying to copy others' ideas. This may be reflective of 'male variability hypothesis' which provides basis for men being more creative than women (He & Wong, 2021).

Another challenge narrated by bus host was high workload and female objectification. High workload might be reflective of ‘assumed authority effect’ which exposes minority men in feminine professions to challenging situations (Kanter, 1977), such as sexual objectification, which is a part of the hosting profession (Calderwood, 2019). Lastly, the Montessori teacher faced the challenge of dealing with small kids. Teaching is a nurturing job especially Montessori teaching and men have to change their masculine traits of loud voice and rough behaviors to be successful as teachers of small kids (Santiago, 1999).

While discussing the second last major theme ‘struggle to maintain masculinity’ the participant from the makeup industry disclosed that he has to strive to maintain his masculinity because people misperceive and stigmatize him as gay or sissy and make fun of him. This is in line with Kimmel and Aronson (2010), who conclude that males in such fields must establish their heterosexuality to others. The bus host also claimed that he doesn’t get due respect. Hosting has been the domain of women not only in homes but in airlines and buses and women have been known as ‘the gate keepers of hegemonic masculinity’ (Kimmel, 1994). Clients are known to have a disrespectful attitude towards bus hosts for not fulfilling ‘their ideal gender criteria’.

The last major theme ‘future aspirations’ reflects that most of the study participants working in nontraditional professions have become ‘settlers’ (Simpson, 2004). After a certain time period in the profession, and despite recognition that their profession provides an important role in society, men in female dominated professions are in search of profession change. One probable reason for this attitude might be because of low wages or the disrespect and stigmatization they are getting from other men. Research indicates that good wages is the sole interest of males when they look for a job whereas feminine dominated professions are always low paid professions (Elesser, 2019).

### *Limitations of the Study*

The study is limited in generalizability because of lesser number of participants. Future researches can include more womanly professions and its comparison with male dominated professions.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The current study presents the findings from men working in female dominated professions. We find that men may suffer from opposition and discrimination working in female dominated professions and that may be why fewer men are found in such professions. Another important finding from this study is that men working in female dominated professions also suffer from low pay. Given that men may be sole contributors to the family income this may be a problem that requires state attention and employer consideration. Finally, we conclude that men working in female dominated professions have to adopt strategies to maintain their masculinity. There is thus need for community-level and workplace awareness to reduce discrimination and stereotyping to improve working quality of life for men in female dominated professions.

### **Conflict of interest statement**

The authors declare no conflict of interest

### **Funding**

This study has not received funding

### **Ethics and Permission**

The study was approved from Board of Studies of Gender & Development Studies Department, LCWU. Permission was sought from employers of participants and informed consent was taken from participants.

### **Author Contributions**

AA gathered the data and conducted the analysis. SAY supervised the research and approved the final manuscript.

### **Data sharing and availability statement**

Data is available from the corresponding author based on request.

### **Acknowledgement**

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview protocol**

1. Can you please elaborate your professional journey?
2. How it is to be in some nontraditional profession?
3. Do you think a man needs to justify his being in a female dominated profession?
4. What are some positive aspects you found being in this profession?
5. Assuming that you have encountered challenges being in this profession, what those have been?
6. How would you evaluate your journey in this profession from joining to the present time?
7. How you anticipate yourself as a professional assuming that you have been in any other profession?
8. How being in this profession makes you perform your masculinity?
9. Being a minority in any profession facilitates a person or hinders his/her performance?
10. What circumstances would make you want to change your current profession?