



RESEARCH PAPER

Changing Masculinity in Contemporary Pakistani Society: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

In Pakistan, masculinity has long been conditioned by patriarchal principles according to which men become the source of authority, the main breadwinners, and the guarantors of family honour and women are supposed to be ranked beneath men in domestic and social environments. Nonetheless, in the recent social, educational, and media changes, it is possible to believe that masculine identities are being negotiated slowly. The given systematic literature review will focus on the conceptualization of changing masculinity in Pakistani literature, determine the prevalent research topics and methodological trends, and investigate the major factors that prompted these changes. The final synthesis included 16 peer-reviewed studies published in 2016-25 in the structured search and screening procedure in big academic databases. The results show that there is a strong focus on inclusive and cooperative masculine roles, especially among young and educated men, with more acceptable shared decision-making and caregiving practices.

KEYWORDS Changing Masculinity, Contemporary Pakistani Society, Systematic Literature Review

Introduction

Masculinity as a construct is determined by the socially constructed meanings, normative expectations, and related behaviors attributed to male identity in a particular cultural milieu. The patriarchal systems in Pakistan place male individuals in the positions of house heads, the main earners, and the main decision-makers. Such scripts of culture hold dominance, control, and stoic expression of emotion, and make weakness socially unacceptable. Thus, the strict and hierarchical vision of masculinity was developed, according to which men were supposed to keep family honor, control finances, and insist on dominance in the social and personal spheres. Women, on the other hand, were mostly left to the household spouses and their access to educational options, mobility, and involved decision-making processes was limited.

In recent years, however, visible shifts have emerged in urban and semi-urban areas of Pakistan. Many young men now express supportive attitudes toward women's education and employment, participate in household responsibilities, and endorse shared decision-making in marriage. At the same time, evidence suggests that this change is often partial rather than complete; for example, qualitative research with Pakistani participants notes that "men may have started contributing to household chores, but it is often seen as a help extended upon request rather than an equal share" (Ali et al., 2020, p. 9). The same study also highlights that even when women's economic roles expand, domestic expectations remain gendered, as *women have started working and contributing economically to the family*, but the burden of family responsibilities is still

considered women's responsibilities (Ali et al., 2020, p. 9). This social shift is also reflected in national data showing shared decision practices inside households, for example, the PDHS reports: "Forty-one percent of women indicated that they make decisions regarding their own health care jointly with their husband" (National Institute of Population Studies (NIPS)[Pakistan], 2019, p. 274).

Media portrayals, social campaigns, and public discussions increasingly depict fathers engaged in childcare and husbands encouraging professional ambitions. Social media platforms have further exposed men to global conversations on gender equality, mental health, and emotional awareness. At the same time, research on men's role in household and reproductive decisions continues to highlight how strongly male attitudes shape women's life choices; for instance, one Pakistan-based study using PDHS 2017-18 notes that "over 56% of the married female of fertile age intend to use FP services and only 39% use them" (Asif et al., 2021, p. 2). Although these changes are not uniform across regions or classes, they suggest a gradual movement from authoritarian masculinity toward more collaborative and emotionally responsive forms of manhood.

Although this has been the case, the academic discussion of masculinity in Pakistan is still disjointed. The majority of the existing studies deals with gender indirectly or put a strong emphasis on the experiences of women, thus providing a narrow systematic questioning of shifting masculine identities. Therefore, current gaps in the literature are urgently in need of an evidence-based synthesis that summarizes the current literature and outlines the salient gaps in knowledge.

The current study involves a methodical study of scholarly materials related to the change of masculinity in Pakistan. It challenges the expression of male identities, reveals dominant thematic constructions and methodology, clarifies social and cultural stimuli of change, and highlights loci that beckon empirical probing. The paper is organized into various sections, including literature review, methodology description, empirical evidence, analytical discussion, and conclusion.

Literature Review

Hegemonic Masculinity: Theoretical Framework

The theory of hegemonic masculinity by Connell answers how one single masterful form of manhood becomes culturally exalted and even a normal way of being, whilst other forms of masculinity are marginalized. Such hegemony is maintained in patriarchal frameworks by institutions (family, state, and workplace) as well as everyday practices that reward men who conform to the ideal and accuse men who fail to do so. According to Connell, hegemonic masculinity refers to *the configuration of gender practice that embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy* (Connell, 2020, p. 77). This concept is useful in the analysis of Pakistan in terms of attributing masculine authority to the constant oppression of women by their society and familial structure.

Traditional Masculinity in Pakistan

The patriarchal masculinity in Pakistan has long been based on the male as a breadwinner, guardian, and moral custodian, where families are highly controlled through an honour code in the daily social life of the community. Based on a Pakistani masculinity- ideologies scale, men are supposed to be providers (only financial

contributors); protectors, and to have influence/power on women, but maintain family honor and have authority in the sexuality and money domain (Imtiaz & Kamal, 2023, pp. 36–37). Emotional restraint is also considered a masculine discipline since it demands that men should not reveal their weak feelings, including crying in times of publicity (Imtiaz & Kamal, 2023, p. 20). This pressure is strengthened by the culture; the achievement of the role of a provider is the most significant and prevailing trait (Arshad and Shahed, 2021, p. 125).

Emergence of “Changing” Masculinity

Changing masculinity means that men are dropping off one rigid model of an ideal man and are moving toward various negotiable masculinities. It brings out the role of men in renegotiating power, emotion, and care in the daily associations. On a more global level, this is talked about as inclusive masculinity (lower gender policing), progressive masculinity (men in favor of equality), and hybrid masculinity (a combination of caring styles with a certain conventional status). As Anderson and McCormack demonstrate, a typical young straight man rejects homophobia; incorporates gay friends in friendship groups; and is more emotionally intimate with friends (Anderson & McCormack, 2016, p. 2). In Pakistan, men's allyship and household involvement changes can also be traced; digital feminism is capable of producing a so-called new father who is responsible and changing the landscape of domestic patriarchy, to ensure equality at home (Firdaus et al., 2023, p. 254).

Significantly, national evidence on male attitudes also reveals that receptivity to gender equality increases with education and socio-economic status, which indicates that there are certain groups of Pakistani men who will be more receptive to redefining masculine authority. As an illustration, the Pak-IMAGES survey indicates that less educated men believe men lose when women gain more rights (29% as opposed to men who did not attend school (47%) (Ashfaq et al., 2018, p. 65). This type of pattern can be used to enforce the notion that the alteration of masculinity in Pakistan is not an individual shift occurring in a fixed location, but a slow process which becomes more apparent among the educated and socially mobile men as the older control-and-honor expectations are more frequently debated, negotiated and even discarded in favor of more cooperative and emotionally sensitive modes of being a man.

Drivers of Change: Existing Explanations

According to the literature, education, media, and urban modernity are the major forces behind changing gender norms, which also redefine the role of men. Based on the 2017–18 Demographic and Health Survey of Pakistan, Lassi et al. (2021) reveal that the level of empowerment of women largely depends on the region of residence, wealth index, education, and media exposure of women (p. 9). They also indicate that higher education (aPR, 1.45; 95% CI, 1.25–1.67) and media exposure (aPR, 1.20; 95% CI, 1.06–1.36) are predictors of greater empowerment (Lassi et al., 2021, p. 1). The rising education and the growing involvement of women in the labour force in urban areas have led to men negotiating more in the household and raising the volumes of care work, and they are becoming more helpful spouses in general.

Gap in Systematic Reviews

Most of the reviews in Pakistan masculinity scholarship are narrative or topic-based, and there is no systematic review based on protocols that can map the field in

media, family, education, and work. Narrative reviews can be cherry-picked and non-reproducible; according to Snyder, conventional literature reviews tend to be poor in completeness and rigor and are done ad hoc (Snyder, 2019, p. 333). So, a systematic review is justified.

Material and Methods

Research Design

In this study, the systematic literature review method is applied based on the approach of Tranfield et al. (2003), which modifies evidence-based review processes for management and social science. They observe that reviews ought to be able to synthesise research in a *systematic, transparent, and reproducible manner*, reducing the bias of the research (Tranfield et al., 2003, p. 207).

Search Strategy

Google Scholar, JSTOR, Taylor and Francis, Emerald, Springer, and Scopus were searched. There was no time limit that was set in the search of the database. Nevertheless, all the identified studies were published between 2015-25 after inclusion and quality criteria application. Keywords in terms of masculinity, Pakistan, and social change were joined with the help of Boolean operators (AND, OR).

Table 1
Search Strings

Concept	Keywords and Boolean Combinations
Masculinity	"hegemonic masculinity" OR "traditional masculinity" OR "changing masculinity" OR "masculinity shift" OR "gender roles"
Region	"Pakistan" OR "Pakistani" OR "South Asia"
Change	"change" OR "changing" OR "transformation" OR "evolving" OR "shift"
Combined String Example	("hegemonic masculinity" OR "traditional masculinity" OR "changing masculinity") AND ("Pakistan" OR "South Asia") AND ("change" OR "transformation" OR "gender roles")

Study Selection Process

Predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to screen the studies. The inclusion criteria were that articles needed to be dedicated to Pakistani or South Asian masculinity, peer-reviewed journal articles, English language, and had to discuss transformation, role shifting, or gender attitude change. The exclusion criteria were used to remove those studies that focused on women only, without discussing masculinity and non-academic sources like blogs and reports. Articles that are purely opinion-based and have no empirical or analytical value were also excluded, and the duplicate records were isolated across the databases in the screening phase.

Quality Assessment

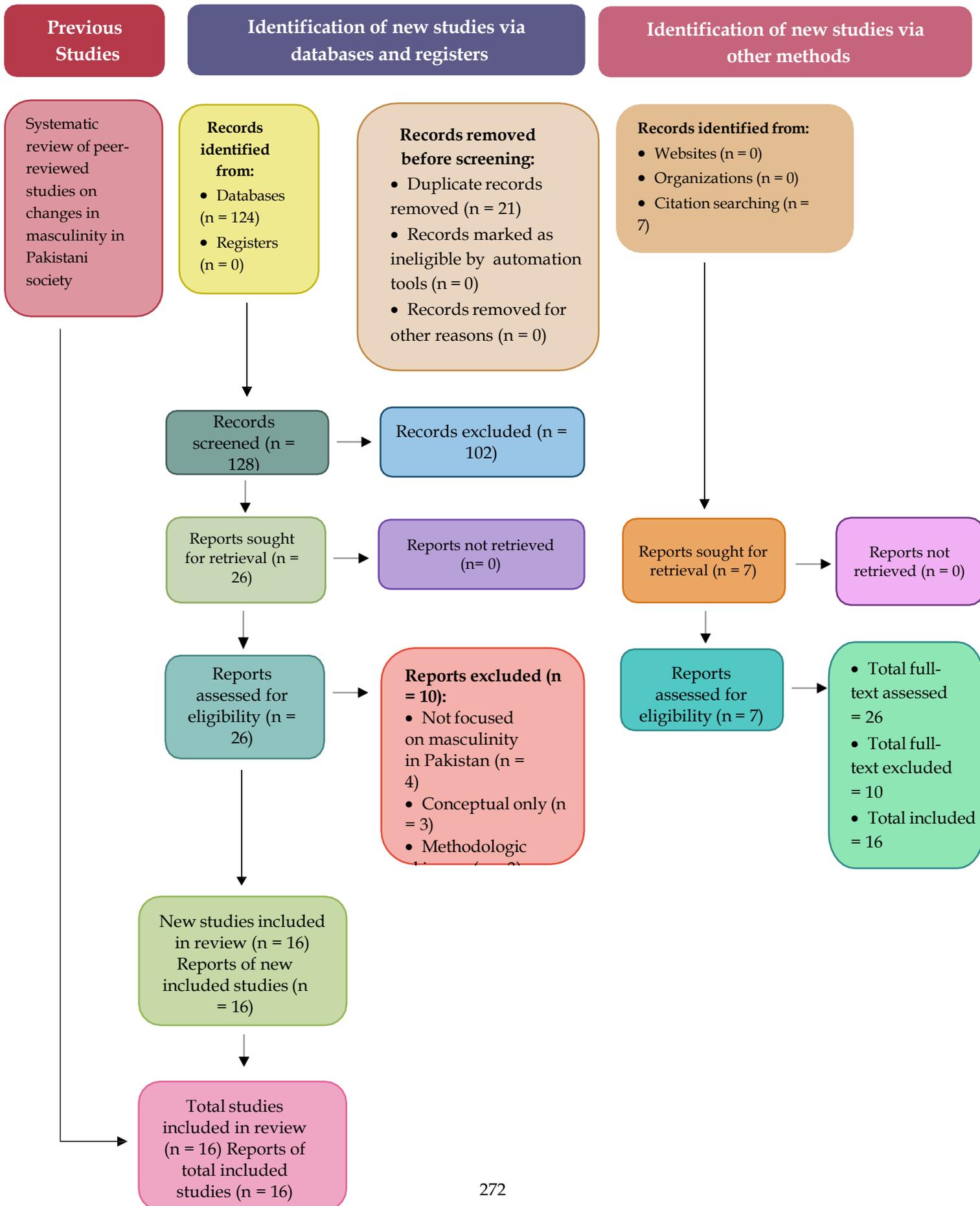
The quality evaluation was applied to make sure that the credible and methodologically sound studies were included in the review only. All full-text papers were verified as being peer-reviewed, having a clear research design, and having relevance to the topic of masculinity in Pakistan or South Asia, and depth of analysis. The journal indexing was also regarded as another quality measure, as Scopus has a *transparent and robust selection policy*, which is managed by an independent Content Selection and Advisory Board (Elsevier, 2023, p. 6). Nevertheless, status as an index was

not considered a strict inclusion criterion. Local Pakistani journals in peer-reviewed format could also be used if they showed methodological reporting and scientific rigor. All studies with no empirical evidence, no methodological transparency, or an analytical contribution were excluded.

Search Results

The PRISMA flow process was used to record the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Google Scholar, JSTOR, Taylor and Francis, Emerald, Springer, and Scopus were used to get 124 records based on the search strings defined. The title and abstract screening was done on 103 studies after eliminating 21 duplicates. After eliminating the studies that were not directly related to the topic of masculinity in Pakistan or were not relevant to the analysis, 34 articles were included in the list of the full-text assessment. Upon the use of the inclusion criteria and quality consideration, 16 studies were left to be included in the overall synthesis. The PRISMA Flow Diagram, which summarizes the different stages, is represented in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram



Data Extraction & Classification Scheme

The data extraction form is designed based on Microsoft Excel to provide uniformity and minimize bias in the reviewer. In all the included studies, the following aspects have been captured: author(s), year of publication, journal name, research aim, study setting, methodology, sample or data source, theoretical frameworks, major findings, and limitations presented. The data extracted was further classified into three layers. Contribution Type separated studies into conceptual/theoretical, empirical, or review-based; e.g., articles that suggested a masculinity framework were coded as conceptual, and interview or survey articles were coded as empirical. The central topic area, as represented by Research Focus, was the traditional norms of masculinity, shifting masculinities, change agents, or effects on gender relations; in some cases, media representations were coded as media representations. Research Type categorized methods as qualitative, quantitative, or mixed; interview studies were categorized as qualitative, surveys as quantitative, and mixed methods as combined designs.

Table 2
Classification Scheme

Category	Sub-category	Definition	Example of Study Type
Contribution Type	Conceptual/Theoretical	Develops concepts or theories about masculinity	Theory development paper
	Empirical	Uses primary or secondary data to test or explore masculinity	Interviews or surveys
	Review-based	Synthesises existing studies	Narrative or systematic review
Research Focus	Traditional masculinity	Describes patriarchal norms and older masculine ideals	Honour or breadwinner norms
	Changing masculinity	Examines progressive, inclusive, or hybrid masculine roles	Male allyship or care work
	Drivers of change	Identifies causes of shifting gender roles	Education, media, globalisation
	Impacts on gender relations	Shows outcomes for women, households, or society	Decision-making, mobility
Research Type	Qualitative	Non-numerical analysis of meanings and experiences	Interviews, discourse analysis
	Quantitative	Numerical analysis of variables and patterns	Surveys, statistical models
	Mixed methods	Combines qualitative and quantitative approaches	Survey and interviews

Data Synthesis

Synthesis of findings among the included studies was done using thematic analysis. The coded evidence has been categorized into themes on traditional masculinity norms, new forms of evolving masculinity, and significant agents of change. The research type and the year of publication were also compared on patterns to establish the prevailing trends, gaps, and future research requirements.

Data Synthesis / Findings

General Characteristics of Included Studies

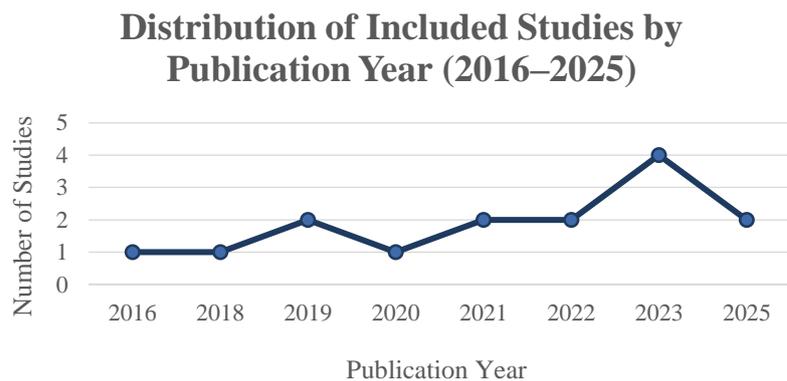
The general characteristics of the included studies will be presented in 4.1. The general trends in the publication suggest a slow rise in the studies of masculinity with respect to Pakistan beyond 2015. Among the 16 covered studies, 2 studies have been published within the years 2015-2016, but publication activity has increased since 2018.

The greatest amount of literature was found in the period between 2021 and 2023, which can be attributed to the increase in academic interest towards the gender transformation debates. With regard to the distribution of the database, the majority of the articles were found in major academic databases, including Scopus-indexed journals and Taylor and Francis Online, and a few of the articles were located using the searches of Springer and Google Scholar.

The journals were not centralized in one venue but represented a variety of publications published in gender, sociology, psychology, and health journals. Patterns of authorship reveal that there is a mixture of Pakistani-based and internationally based scholars. There were more qualitative studies, especially interviews, discourse analysis, and thematic analysis, in the 16 studies included, with a less significant but significant proportion of the evidence base comprising quantitative survey-based studies.

As suggested in Table III, the distributions of the publications are spread across a multitude of journals and are not restricted to a single publication. Every journal added a study to the evidence base since the study of masculinity is interdisciplinary and cuts across sociology, psychology, public health, and gender studies.

Figure 2. Distribution of included studies by publication year.



This figure visualizes the distribution of the 16 used studies annually, where the number of masculinity-related studies is gradually increasing after 2018 and reaches its highest point in 2023.

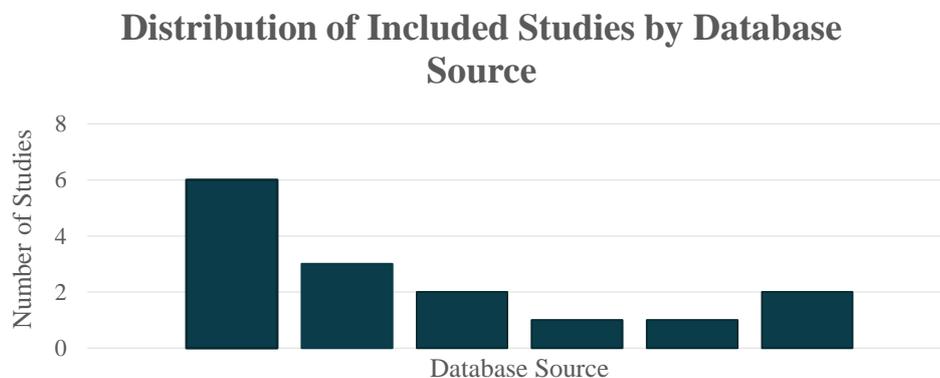


Figure 3. Distribution of included studies by database source.

The bar chart gives the distribution of the 16 studies used with the primary database sources, showing that the majority of the studies were found in the Scopus-indexed journals, followed by Taylor & Francis and Springer.

Table 3
Journals with the highest number of publications

Journal	Number of Publications
Pakistan Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences	1
Journal of Interpersonal Violence	1
Journal of Gender Studies	1
Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research	1
BMC Women's Health	1
Journal of Social Sciences Advancement	1
Asian Women	1
Sociological Research & Innovation	1
Pakistan Journal of Social Research	1
Masculinities & Social Change	1
International Journal of Psychological & Behavioural Research	1
International Journal of Environmental Research & Public Health	1
Social Science & Medicine	1

Distribution by Contribution Type

Figure 4 illustrates the number of different types of contributions in the 16 studies included. The biggest percentage is on altering masculinity, which speaks of increased interest in shifting roles, expression of emotions, and practices of partnerships by men. It is a minority yet considerable group that analyses traditional masculinity as the baseline to comprehend patriarchal norms, including honour and the breadwinner expectation. Few studies are able to compare traditional and contemporary patterns directly. Theoretical work remains sparse, which suggests that the discipline is more of an empirical and practical analysis rather than a fresh idea of a conceptual model.

Contribution Type Distribution

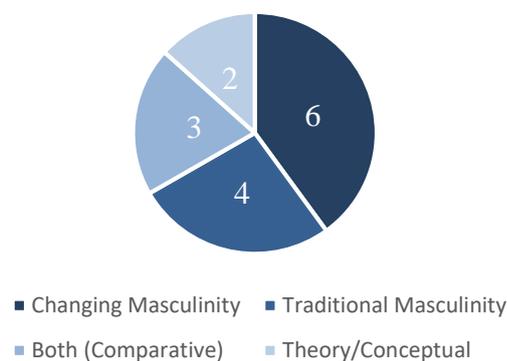


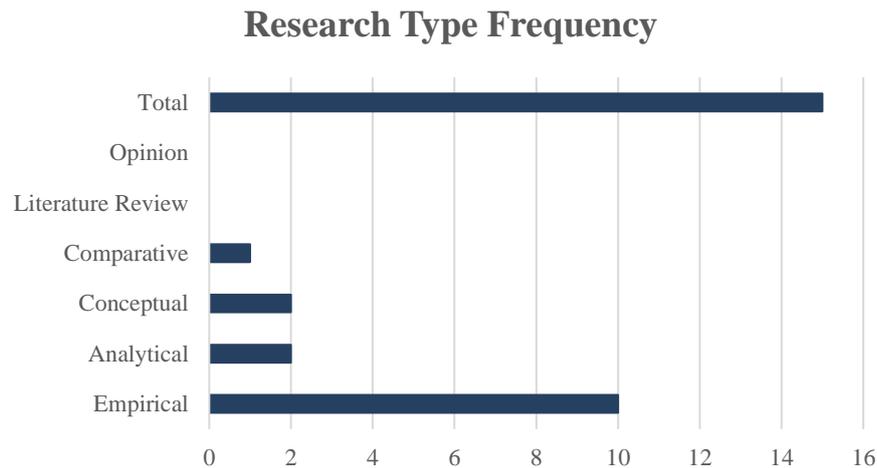
Figure 4. Contribution Type Distribution

Distribution by Research Type

Figure 5 provides a summary of the types of research in the 16 studies included. Most of them are based on empirical research, and the most common methods are the qualitative ones, especially the interviews, the thematic analysis, and the discourse

analysis. Less common, albeit containing valuable statistical information, are quantitative studies, which rely on a survey. Few conceptual or analytical papers are involved in the interpretation of theory. Longitudinal designs are not common, and it is impossible to monitor transformation over time. Generally, both distributions suggest that more mixed and multi-location studies are required to reinforce the evidence on masculinity transition in Pakistan.

Figure 5. Research Type Frequency



Distribution by Research Focus (Thematic Findings)

Theme 1: Media and Masculinity

The media evidence provided implies that Pakistani television tends to normalise hegemonic male power. Aslam et al. conducted a content analysis on two serials and stated that in TV drama in Pakistan, masculinity is the primary punch (Aslam et al., 2022, p. 224). Their response to authority (49%), aggressiveness (30%), and subordination of women (21%) was also coded, and the average hegemonic masculinity (2.98/4) was reported (Aslam et al., 2022, p. 226). There is little longitudinal and rural-media research.

Theme 2: Education as a Driver

In studies that were included covering education-related studies, the university coursework, particularly in Women and Gender Studies, was associated with egalitarian masculine attitudes. In qualitative research on co-education at public universities in Punjab, one of the male participants said, *I developed my mind after reading gender studies as a subject; women should take part in decision making* (Ahmad & Malik, 2023, p. 296). The evidence is concentrated in urban campuses (Lahore/Multan) and is hardly researched in the rural institutions and madrassa settings.

Theme 3: Generational Divide

The included studies suggest a generational divide: younger Pakistani men show more flexible The existing studies indicate a generational difference: younger Pakistani men have more loose attitudes towards gender roles compared to older men, particularly in urban areas. Authors of a qualitative study conducted in Pakistan have reported that *the younger generation was more favorable to the modernization and development of gender-specific roles than the older generation* (Awan et al., 2023, p. 74). Nevertheless, the best

intergenerational designs are still uncommon; there are very few comparisons between fathers and sons and small samples of rural youths.

Theme 4: Family and Household Roles

Research on family roles depicts slow and disparate changes towards full-fledged fatherhood and functional household support. The majority of mothers in rural Punjab have heard that some paternal assistance was provided, and about 40 percent of them said that the father spends time with the baby each day (Maselko et al., 2019, p. 2). This kind of engagement indicates gentler masculinity related to caregiving, but day-to-day chores and co-determination are hardly directly gauged. Household-level time-use data are relatively scarce, generally under quantitative data.

Theme 5: Resistance and Backlash

Included backlash research demonstrates that the challenges to patriarchy can have a defensive masculinity elicitation with the help of the ideas of religion and family. According to Batool and Malik (2022), organisers were threatened: "Last year the Karachi AM was threatening that they will be burned with acid (p. 25). These types of narratives resettle honour, control, and moral policing. Minimal research is done on psychological processes (shame, status threat) that support resistance.

Discussion

Summary of Key Findings

In the reviewed literature, masculinity in Pakistan is most repeatedly addressed through the prism of media and education, and family-role change and backlash seem to be less prevalent. Publication trends indicate that it has been on the increase since 2015, although authorship is still dominated by other work published or produced outside Pakistan. Analytically and qualitatively, the literature is biased towards analysis and quantitative designs as opposed to large-scale survey analysis, which narrows the scope of generalisability of the trends outside of the settings studied. In general, the field maps vary, but it was not frequently measured in time or space.

What is Missing? (Gaps)

There are also some gaps in the review. Research is also clustered around urban areas and high-end institutions, and therefore, the rural manhoods, the working populations, and the schooling of the religious groups are thinly contemplated. According to Aslam et al. (2025), *most scholarship focuses on urban activism, neglecting rural women who constitute 64% of the population, which indicates an urban-centered knowledge issue in gender studies (p. 32)*. Moreover, most articles have not employed longitudinal designs, comparative cohorts, or standardized measures of gender attitudes, which makes it difficult to trace change over time and the drivers being rigorously tested. The attitude that women have towards the change in men is indirect, and rarely is the backlash studied psychologically.

Implications

Theoretically, these findings suggest hegemonic masculinity remains a strong reference point, yet it is being negotiated through hybrid practices, care, shared decision-making, and moderated authority, especially in educated urban settings. Practically, the

synthesis can guide curriculum designers, media producers, and NGOs to promote non-violent, equitable masculinities without ignoring local cultural frames. Methodologically, the review demonstrates how a transparent SLR can map a scattered field and make gaps visible for future primary studies.

Future Research Directions

Further studies must focus on interviews and surveys among young men in the provinces, including rural districts and madrassas. The interaction between education and media exposure can be tested using comparative designs (fathers-sons, urban -rural, class- based). The longitudinal panel or repeated cross-section would be used to measure change over time, whereby triangulation with the accounts of women would be a more reliable measure of the self-reports of men.

Conclusion

This literature review is systematic, and it explores the issue of changing masculinity and how the issue is being debated in Pakistan-based scholarship, and why the role of men in modern society seems to be changing. Five themes were observed repeatedly in the reviewed literature, namely: media influence, education, generational divide, family/household role, and resistance/backlash. The literature review was mainly qualitative and analytical, and there was a lower number of large-scale empirical surveys and very few longitudinal or intergenerational designs. There are still major gaps: the rural setting is under-represented, masculinities in madrassas are seldom discussed, the views of women on how men are changing are still indirect, and the psychological aspects of resistance remain poor. Being the first systematic review to map the growing area of research in a structured and transparent manner, the study provides an evidence-based overview that summarizes the piecemeal results and identifies areas where knowledge is sparse. All in all, masculinity in Pakistan is not set in stone and is being renegotiated with education, media exposure, and family life, but scholarship must expand and diversify to capture this change accurately over time.

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