

BEENISH MALIK AND JAWAD SYED

Case

Gender, ethnicity, and intersectionality: Alina's career journey in Balochistan¹

Alina started her journey from Sibi, a small city of the Balochistan province of Pakistan in 1984. Born into a settler family (descendants of Punjabi settlers in Balochistan), she grew up amidst sweltering summers and a desert environment. From an early age, she realized that being female meant enduring continual struggle, and that social and patriarchal stereotypes were firmly in place.

Being the middle child among her two siblings, she was always in a struggle to prove herself as mature as her elder brother or as cheerful as her younger sister. Her mother had a strong impact on her personality. Her mother had sacrificed her teaching career and moved from Punjab to Balochistan to support her husband and children. Her mother's love of literature and discipline taught Alina skills that were helpful throughout her life and career. Books were her first companion. Strong parenting gave her confidence to exhibit a penchant for art, reading, and poetry. She led the dramatic club in the school, the Sibi Dramatic Club, where she participated in dramas, skits, poetry events, and quizzes. She became president of school's student union that gave her an opportunity and confidence to further define her identity and leadership skills.

As she was chasing her dreams in education, she got engaged, which was an abrupt decision of her parents. She was married at a tender age of 22 with a man who proved to be a great companion for the rest of her life. Alina's husband who was a bureaucrat provided her moral and physical support not only in educational pursuits but also in other spheres of life. His consistent belief in Alina's abilities and support to overcome obstacles played a key role in her career.

Alina completed her MBA in 2004 and opted to work at the Anon University in Quetta. She also appeared in the exam of the Central Superior Services (CSS) in 2008 but missed the 'merit list' by one mark only.

¹Professor Beenish Malik and Professor Jawad Syed wrote this case as a basis for class discussion rather than to serve as an endorsement, source of primary data, or illustration of effective or ineffective management. All names and some peripheral facts have been disguised to protect confidentiality. © South Asian Academy of Management. To order copies or request permission to reproduce materials, email: info@southasianaom.org OR call (+92) 3291009981. This publication may not be digitized, photocopied, or otherwise reproduced, posted, used or transmitted, without the permission of South Asian Academy of Management.

Alina's life was marked by both joy and heartbreak. Her first baby girl was the cutest creature in her life. After that, news of pregnancy rejoiced her three times, despite the unbearable pain of miscarriages. In every pregnancy, she built her up and passed early trimesters, but had to face the tragic loss of her child. Doctors figured this with emotional instability and termed this state of prenatal loss trauma due to her repeated losses. She lost three kids in 2009, 2010 and 2011 consecutively. She faced a family pressure of bearing a male child in the world where people thought that female child was inferior. Alina often had to hear words such as "try again for male child" or "will you bear a single daughter throughout your life", or "poor girl with only one daughter". Alina's resilience and faith in God were her key assets in these difficult times. The two surviving daughters filled her up with energy and strength. Her husband stood by her in these difficult times.

In addition to her role as a mother and wife, she also had a care giver role for her father in-law who was fighting with stage 4 cancer.

Alina started her Ph.D. studies at University of Balochistan in 2012. She chose to remain in the province due to family responsibilities, turning down foreign scholarship opportunities. Besides fulfilling all her duties, the smile of her two daughters and strong support by her husband gave her confidence to endure all the adversities.

In her professional life, Alina faced issues not only because of her gender but also because of her ethnic background. She faced prejudicious gender and ethnicity based societal obstacles and remained in the same employment grade for 18 years because she did not belong to a local Baloch or Pashtun tribe of Balochistan. Alina did not receive promotion despite having met the required criteria. Her journey remained obstructed because she was a settler (Punjabi speaking) female in a province (Balochistan) where everything was given on the basis of language and ethnicity. She had to struggle in a society where women's empowerment was just a slogan to merit foreign funding and seeking NGO attention.

She also faced issues of subtle harassment at the hands of a male administrator whose scanning gazes were a torturing experience for her, and the work environment became toxic.

During these difficult times, one thing that never failed to help Alina was the cheerful presence of her daughters and unwavering support by her husband. That's how she managed to weather the storms, proving that love and family can illuminate even the darkest of paths.

Questions for discussion

1. To what extent were Alina's experiences in life and career shaped by her gender and ethnicity?
2. What can other working women in Balochistan and elsewhere learn from this story?
3. What role can male colleagues and leaders play in creating more inclusive and equitable workplaces?