ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

GENDERED CONSTRAINTS FOR WOMEN MOUNTAINEERS OF GILGIT BALTISTAN

Safina Baig
PhD Scholar, Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad Pakistan.
Email: safinasafi94@gmail.com
Dr. Inam Ullah Leghari
Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad Pakistan.
Email: inam.leghari@qau.edu.pk

Abstract
Gilgit-Baltistan in Northern Pakistan is globally known for its high-altitude terrain and mountain peaks; however, mountaineering in the region has historically been perceived a male-dominated realm. Although women's recent participation in mountaineering challenges deep rooted gender stereotypes, significant socio-cultural barriers continue to persist. Current article explores how socially constructed notions of gender roles and expectations systematically limit women's participation in mountaineering. Employing a multi-sited ethnographic approach, the research uses participant observation, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews from a sample of 25 respondents, to document women lived experiences across diverse social contexts within the region.

The study findings reveal that women mountaineers face gender inequalities, particularly in the form of spatial confinement to domestic spheres. Constraints such as, restricted social and physical mobility, the unequal burden of reproductive labor and the cultural preferences of familial responsibilities over professional aspirations create substantial barriers to women participation in mountaineering. Further, the gendered division of labor reinforces the perception of high-altitude environments as inherently "masculine" spaces. The study concludes that women's exclusion from mountaineering is not merely a matter of individual choice, but rather a manifestation of broader structural inequalities that govern access to and control over geographical and physical spaces.

Key words: *Women Mountaineers, gendered constraints, gender roles and expectations, social construction of gender, Gilgit Baltistan*

1. Introduction

Gilgit Baltistan an area situated in the northern region of Pakistan, is a captivating and geographically diverse region that has long been a topic of scholarly interest and research (Sokefeld,2017). Gilgit Baltistan is positioned at the junction of three popular mountain ranges: the Himalaya, the Karakoram, and the Hindukush. This region is well-known for being home to the world's second- and third-largest peaks, K2 (8,611 m) and Nanga Parbat (8,500 m). Twelve of the world's top thirty highest summits are in Gilgit Baltistan (Zain, 2010, 181-190). According to Abdu's research, Gilgit Baltistan is home to more than 700 peaks that rise above 6,000 meters, 121 peaks of over 7,000 meters, and 29 peaks that exceed 7,000 meters (Abdu, 2021). It is a mountainous region characterized by towering peaks, glaciers, and deep valleys, which have a profound impact on the lives of its inhabitants (Schmidt, 2012). The natural mountain environment

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

not only motivates individuals to engage in mountaineering but also draws people to specific destinations that offer the necessary resources. Mountains offer an ideal setting for mountaineers to attain personal fulfillment and motivations for participating in this activity (Ewert,1985). This region has always been at the heart of global mountaineering; it is a famous destination for mountaineers around the world.

Mountaineering is recognized as an extreme sport (Robinson, 1992). Mountaineering activities involve a high level of risk (Jack, & Ronan, 1998). It requires a strong commitment, advanced skills, and equipment. Moreover, these activities take place in isolated or hard-to-reach areas with minimal services and facilities. Participants in mountaineering must be self-reliant, requiring minimal external support (Ewert & Jamieson, 2003). This paper focuses on isolated areas of Gilgit Baltistan, including Shimshal village in Hunza and Hushe valley in Skardu, where resources are very limited, men in these regions work as porters or guides, and individuals largely depend on self-sufficiency for their livelihood.

Historically, Mountaineering has been a male-dominated sport (Messner,1988). In Asian countries, customs, cultural practices, and norms widely accepted by the population are main barriers for women involvement in sports (Haddad et al., 2006). Most patriarchal/male-oriented societies give preference to males, in the field of sports, females are deprived of their rights (Hakim & Aziz, 1998). Social expectations and societal norms restrict women's participation in mountaineering. In comparison to men, women are expected to prioritize household duties and family responsibilities over personal mountaineering goals (Dilley & Scraton, 2010; Wilson & Little, 2005).

The engagement of women mountaineers from Gilgit Baltistan is a relatively recent activity, as evidenced by Farzana Jabeen's[1] ascent of Minglik Sar, in 2006. However, due to a lack of media attention and documentation of her achievements, she is still unknown in the mountaineering field (Alam, 2020). Women from Shimshal obtained international recognition in 2013, after Samina Baig's[2] summit of Mount Everest. However, many women's stories remain unnoticed and undocumented (Shahzad, 2020).

This study mainly focuses on existing gender norms, gender roles, and expectations, and how these factors influence women's participation in the field of mountaineering.

No prior research has examined women's experiences related to gender norms and expectations, and how it affects women participation in mountaineering; this study addresses that gap by highlighting women's experiences.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sports as a Male dominated Field

Sports are a microcosm of broader society and, as such, reflect its hierarchies and values. Mountaineering has long been considered a male-dominated field, historically accessible primarily to white, privileged, resourceful men. In contrast, people with disabilities, homosexuals, ethnic minorities, and women occupy subordinate positions. Through hegemony, this power dynamic is maintained, as is evident in the larger culture. Sport, as a social institution, was primarily created by and for men in its dominant shape (Messner, 1988).

[1] Farzana Jabeen first women mountaineer from Gilgit Baltistan summit MinglikSar a 6,050-meter-high mountain in Shimshal Valley, in 2006.

[2] Samina Baig is first women mountaineer from Pakistan who summit Mount Everest in 2013.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

2.2. Gender Norms and Women Participation in Mountaineering

In various cultures, through awareness of cultural norms, perceptions about women are frequently created. Beliefs and assumptions regarding mental and physical strength are among them; these assumptions restrict their abilities to achieve success and compete in the sport (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Similarly, intra-personal constraints are the most significant barriers to mountaineering participation. Such constraints are related to factors like family commitments (Dilley & Scraton, 2010), and gendered expectations (Kiewa, 2001). Family constraints included a lack of understanding from family and friends, due to household responsibilities, time limitation, and guilt over prioritizing participation over quality time with loved ones (Fendt & Wilson, 2012). Consistent with the literature, women from Gilgit Baltistan face major constraints related to gender norms, gender roles, and expectations, including the prioritization of family over a mountaineering career. Due to an unequal division of labor and excessive workload, they do not have time to engage in outdoor adventurous activities.

2.3. Culturally Constructed Masculinities and Femininities

We live in gendered societies, our identities are culturally constructed and categorized as either masculine or feminine (Humberstone, 2000; Swain et al., 2015).Femininity is associated with 'being emotional, passive, dependent, maternal, compassionate, and gentle', masculinity reflects 'strength, competitiveness, assertiveness, confidence, and independence' (Krane, 2001, p.117), and it embodies heterosexual characteristics (Messner, 1992).The cultures within which we live value and reinforce masculinity, yet they devalue and undermine femininity (Wearing, 1998). As gender is deeply ingrained in all aspects of society and central to explaining human behavior (Humberstone, 2000). Women find it challenging to express themselves fully in male-dominant social settings. Moreover, women mountaineers face stereotypes suggesting they are less capable than men, which can lead to self-doubt and competition. Women in mountaineering adopt behavior that is linked to culturally emphasized femininity (aligning with traditional gender roles). This often involves traditional feminine appearance and mannerisms, relationships with men, and self-objectification (Dilley, 2006, pp.4-5). Consistent with literature, women from Gilgit Baltistan are associated with traditional femininity. They are seen as weak, emotional, and unable to make decisions. They are expected to wear their scarf (dupatta) properly, maintain distance from men, do not express their ideas and feelings. They are expected to adopt behavior that is linked to culturally emphasized femininity.

2.4. Myths regarding women's Physique and competences

local perceptions, like women are emotionally and physically weak leads to a gender discourse. It is distorted rather than reflecting reality. These myths restrict women's involvement in sports (Coalter & Taylor, 2010, p. 292). Several myths exist related to participation in sports which include sports participation of women and girls would harm the reproductive system and create problems for child bearing. Participation in sports damages the looks of women and that their appearance would look masculine. Economic resources are wasted because the performance level of women is lower as compared to men. For women sports is not important because achievement and competition are irrelevant to the practical life experiences of women. These myths are attached with stigma for sports women. In reality women, athletes have better body image, better outlook, and better self-image than other non-athletes (Coakley & Pike, 2014, p.268). Women from Gilgit Baltistan are often restricted from participating in mountaineering due to deeply rooted misconceptions and myths, reinforced by their own mothers. Misconceptions are that women are

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

physically weak, mountaineering and other sports harm their reproductive health, and high latitude expeditions could negatively affect their physical appearance.

2.5. Social construction of Gender

According to Judith Lorber's explanation of the social construction of gender, in everyday life, gender is a fixed and integral part of who and what we are, our social position and place in society, and how others perceive and treat us. Our personalities, bodies, and ways of thinking, feelings, and acting are gendered. From birth, we are gendered by naming, clothing, communication, and interaction with family, peers, and teachers. Our identities as girls or boys, then as women or men, are felt and usually described as a natural outcome of the appearance of our genital organs, or biological sex. When our anatomy was determined by XY OR XX chromosomes that grew in utero in reaction to fetal hormones, we believe that our brain and behaviors are also determined by physiology. Just based on genital difference, how can men and women be so different in different times and spaces? Therefore, social constructionists claim that gender is not sex. However, gender is an underlying concept that categorizes people into two major groups: "women" and "men." They are treated differently and expected to be different (Lorber, 2018, pp.318-325). Similarly, social constructionists clarify that hierarchical power differences and social processes between men and women shape historical and cultural differences in gender. Likewise, these social processes construct our identities, behaviors, work, and family lives by doing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987, pp.125–151). The research findings are interpreted through the lens of the social construction of gender as the emergent themes substantively align with and are incorporated by its core constructs.

3. Setting the Scene

This study demonstrates a multi-sited ethnographic approach to document the diverse socio-cultural contexts in which women mountaineers' practices are deeply rooted. The study is conducted in different areas of Gilgit Baltistan, including Shimshal village, Hushe Valley Skardu Baltistan, Hunza Aliabad, and Gilgit city.

Figure 1: The Geographical Map of Gilgit Baltistan



Source:(Khan, A. N. (2019)

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

4. Methodology

The study adopts qualitative methods to explore the lived experiences of women mountaineers. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and FGDs. Two Focus Group discussions were conducted; each consist of eight participants. The sample of the study consisted of 25 mountaineers, out of which 20 were women mountaineers and 5 were men mountaineers.

Although the research centered on women mountaineers from Gilgit Baltistan, men were also interviewed to understand societal attitudes and expectations that shape women's experiences in mountaineering. A purposive sampling method was employed; the selection criteria were individuals who began mountaineering as a profession and climbed mountains above 6000m.

In line with ethical consideration, the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of the participants were ensured, using pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework developed by (Clarke &Braun, 2006).

5. Results and Discussions

Findings suggest that women face gender-based inequalities due to the social construction of gender. Likewise, the unequal division of labor influences participation, and gender roles and expectations restrict women's participation in mountaineering.

5.1. Born into inequality

In Gilgit Baltistan, gender-based inequalities are deeply rooted at the very moment of birth and continue to shape the life trajectories of women. As in many other traditional societies, in Gilgit Baltistan also, the birth of a girl is not merely a biological event but a socially constructed moment that carries hierarchical valuation, expectations, and symbolic meanings. Women mountaineers from research locale face explicit and subtle forms of discrimination from the initial announcement of birth, extending from emotional disappointment within families to long-term disparities in healthcare, mobility, nutrition, sports, and education.

Najma (pseudonym) stated in her interview,

> "In our society, women who are pregnant with a baby boy are differently treated, providing organic food, more butter, and kernel oil, eggs, and providing her with all available food at home. On the other hand, women who are pregnant with baby girls are not given enough healthy food; they have only access to daily routine food and are not provided any special care."

Majority of participants highlighted that, most of the family's birth of a girl is not celebrated as compared to boys. Even women when she gives birth to a boy are differently treated, giving extra care and gifts. On the other hand, when a girl's birth is mourned or shows sorrows the same as the death of someone, and use words like "koi baat nai khuda agali baar beta da ga" – [Don't worry next time God will give you son].

Similarly, boys are preferred in food distribution. Participants of research also discussed; mothers give extra care to sons over their daughters.

As Lubna (pseudonym) stated in her interview,

> "If at home we have one egg, then mother will give it to the boy, mothers think boys need to be physically strong, because they lift heavy loads and do outdoor heavy work".

Research findings suggest that initial moment of birth consequently becomes a significant critical site where gender hierarchy is produced. Moreover, women mountaineers from Gilgit Baltistan face systemic and consistent discrimination ingrained in patriarchal structures, cultural practices,

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

and norms, including son preference, the patrilineal inheritance system, and the gendered division of labor.

Similarly, the study's findings show that in research locale, male child preference is not merely a familial or individual bias. However, it reflects a wider economic, socio-cultural, and symbolic system that prioritizes men over women. From birth, sons are entrusted with greater privileges, expectations, and opportunities, while daughters are often given less social value. The family dynamic consequently becomes the primary site where gender is socially constructed, produced, negotiated, and reproduced.

Likewise, family institutions operate under the influence of patriarchy, along with customs and traditions manifested in providing more space and more freedom to men. For instance, if a baby boy is born, then it is considered that his family will have more communal supremacy, so his birth is well celebrated. In contrast, girls' birth is mostly not celebrated, because after marriage, daughters leave home to live with their husband. A family's wealth and strength depend on the number of strong, working men and the amount of land and other assets it owns. A man is considered lucky if he has many working sons. Family also places importance on women, but if there are sons, it is assumed they will get married and bring wives into the family. Daughters have to leave their families after marriage, so sons are considered valuable because they stay with their parents.

Participants shared that life-related key decisions are associated with education, professional selection, career as a sports person, or any other nonconventional field, and women are discriminated. Gender discrimination also works when it comes to getting married, selecting their life partner, and men control other familial issues.

Division of labor and women in Mountaineering

Findings of the study show that the family structure in research locale is predominantly patriarchal, with men occupying the role of primary authority and control within the household. Men predominantly make all key decisions within the household, including decisions related to the development and acquisition of land, and the purchase, sale, or exchange of cattle, grains, money, and other property are reserved for the head of the family. Women are in charge of household chores, where their role is to work silently, without making excuses or demands. She performs all tasks, e.g., cooking, washing, cleaning, child rearing, serving food, along with outside agricultural and livestock responsibilities. She is also responsible for effectively managing food supplies, including dried fruits, vegetables, and flour, for a year. If a woman fails to manage food for a year, she is considered an "incompetent woman".

Everyone in the family helps each other. From an early age, parents engage their children in specific jobs based on their abilities and strengths. Research participants reported that girls are responsible for taking care of younger siblings from a young age. They are responsible for helping their mothers at home with household chores; girls mostly imitate their mothers. Girls were taught cooking and baking skills from a young age.

As Maryam (pseudonym) stated,

"If she were not able to make bread in her own home, it is considered disgrace".

Traditionally, boys were responsible for grazing cattle and bringing milk; they were officially known as "herdsmen," but now boys have shifted this responsibility to girls. Girls bring cattle to graze and milk the cows and goats. They also collect grass, dead leaves, and thorny branches. Bring water from distant river areas. They do household chores and outdoor work. Moreover, from

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

an early age, girls are encouraged to learn sewing, traditional art and craft, and embroidery skills. It will save money and also generate income.

Research findings suggest that gender roles and expectations among women and girls in the locale are deeply rooted and shape their lives and ambitions in significant ways. Women and girls show strong acceptance of traditional gender roles; they are strongly engaged in household and village outdoor chores. They are not considering it a burden but a normative duty integral to their identity. Indoor tasks such as washing, cleaning, cooking, working in fields, cutting grass, bringing milk from animals, and serving food to father and brothers. These tasks are framed as normal; if a woman fails to perform her duties, she is often stigmatized and criticized by the community.

As Najma (pseudonym) asserted in her interview,

"In Shimshal, women are responsible for household work, regardless of the well-being of a sick sister or sister-in-law, who has to cook, clean, fetch water, even a glass of water, wash, iron, cook, and serve him food. If she is not well and refuses, then she is stigmatized as being a rebellious woman".

Also, Saima (pseudonym) mentioned in her interview,

"In our society, Shimshal, mothers put pressure on girls to focus on household chores rather than participating in sports. Girls are mostly labelled as "rebellious" or "dishonorable" if they go against family expectations.

As Gul Noreen (pseudonym) stated in her interview,

"As compared to girls, boys are given much freedom and choices in terms of household responsibilities. Boys usually have more free time, so they play outside, go on adventures, and for outdoor activities".

Respondents reported that in urban, developed, and developing countries, the classical domestic role of a cook or housekeeper are replaced by chefs and paid domestic workers. However, in Gilgit Baltistan, all domestic work is assigned to women. Girls in Gilgit Baltistan are perceived extraordinarily talented. However, social approval and imposed responsibilities prevent them from participating in sports. To earn a righteous position and name, society forces them to adopt an approval-seeking behavior to become virtuous girls, or, under the double burden, they do not pay attention to sports. Even girls think that gender roles are natural.

As Aliya (pseudonym) stated in her interview,

"It does not frustrate me because I feel it is my responsibility. I am prepared for my gender roles. We are shaped in such a way, and this is part of our culture".

In addition, study participants suggested that women in other countries receive mountaineering training from a very young age. In contrast, in Gilgit Baltistan societies, women are forced to learn ghardari (domestic responsibilities), a traditional belief that kal ko kise aur ghar mai jana hai [tomorrow you are going to another home]. This type of behavior limits women's abilities and develops a different mentality.

Abid stated in his interview,

"*Hamaray han gol roti pa focus kia jata hai*, jesay *Aurat ka tahzeb*- [In our culture, a lot of emphasis is placed on making perfectly round roti, women's domestic qualities, (abilities in cleaning and washing, making food)]. I think it's good and it's a basic life skill, but it should be for both men and women. If we provide basic mountaineering skills from a young age, women mountaineers' experiences will be different."

In conclusion, research findings suggest that, in remote settings, unjust labor assignment that is unpaid as well as unrecognized, domestic laborious tasks, including on and off-farm errands, badly

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

consume women and girls. They spend most of their time fulfilling their daily, unjustly non-awarded and unrecognizable chores, as by birth assigned.

5.2. Gender roles, expectations and women mountaineering

Intrapersonal constraints are the most significant barriers to women's participation in recreational mountaineering. Such constraints are related to factors such as family commitments (Dilley & Scraton, 2010) and gendered expectations (Kiewa, 2001).

Consistent with the literature, research participant's responses suggest that family commitments and gender roles often impose a "triple burden" on women. Women devote their full energy and time to unpaid domestic work, which reduces their freedom to participate in other activities, such as mountaineering.

Findings of the study show that, men's masculinity (*mardanage*), honor *(ghairat*), and dignity (*izzat*) never allow men to work side by side with women. They do not help with household chores, caring for kids, or other agricultural work. They do things, but participation in household chores is very little. They act as if they are doing a favor, not fulfilling a responsibility. They do not consider it part of their job.

Women are expected to prioritize family duties over personal goals. This gendered division of labor produced a context where the choice between families and a career threatened women. Married women face more constraints on participation in mountaineering than unmarried women. The majority of participants were unmarried; they did not want to get married, as it would entail a triple burden: managing the household, childcare, and working in the fields. Women mountaineers believe that it would vanish all their dreams. Study findings show that girls are aware of the fact that, under such a misogynist domestic environment, it is very difficult for them to balance their family and children's obligations along with their career.

As Naima (pseudonym) stated in her interview,

Marriage is a very big barrier in the field of mountaineering. "*Paon pa khuladi marna hai"*- [To hit your foot with an axe].

Aliya (pseudonym) stated her interview.

"In the context of Shimshal, marriage affects our professional careers. However, due to our religious community organizations, there is openness to sports; people appreciate sports. Men, most of the time, compliment positively in Shimshal. Men hunt talent in our community. However, it is true that if someone has kids, then they need to prioritize family first. Talent, passion, and performance are secondary things. Society often criticizes women who pursue mountaineering as a career and neglect caregiving responsibilities. It further creates psychological and social barriers*".*

Naima (pseudonym) mentioned in her interview,

"After prolonged, physically demanding exertion at high altitude, we women rush home and rush to the kitchen without changing our clothes or getting fresh, while men comfortably visit the washrooms to get fresh. I married at the age of 18, and my career was put on hold immediately to fulfill my reproductive obligation, as I was responsible for continuing my husband's proud progeny. On the other hand, men, the dominant figure at home, start their career after their 20s, and they do not face the same problems; they get care with respect and prestige and are not told that they are lazy or indecent to be a burden on others; they are not persons with special needs. They are physically healthy to do their own work. It is meant to be dependent on others rather than provided, and they accept these services with great pride: their clothes are washed and pressed, the shaving kit is ready, food is served, and polished shoes are provided. I quit my profession, looking

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

after his family and my child alone, providing all services. In return, I want some respect, but in order to maintain his masculinity in the family or society, he often disrespects me, which I feel is insulting. He apologizes privately in the room, but in front of everyone, he presents himself differently. "*Murd zaban say kuch aur undr say kuch aur hoty Hain.* [They speak differently from what they truly are]."

The study findings show that girls are taught to deny their own needs in the name of being 'decent.' They are socialized to remain quiet, polite, and caring, often taking on roles such as caregivers and companions, and developing domestic skills to be seen as morally respectable. Therefore, women chose domestic responsibilities over their mountaineering careers.

5.2.1. The Triple Burden of "Silent Labor"

During an interview with Shama Jabeen (pseudonym), the first woman mountaineer to have summited 6000m peaks from Pakistan, explained that after marriage, she could not continue her mountaineering career due to household responsibilities.

"I am alone at home; there is no other woman at home other than me. I look after children and do household work alone, including indoor chores, as well as outdoor work related to livestock and agriculture. My father-in-law is aged, and he is also my responsibility. I have energy, skills, and talent, but who will take my responsibilities at home? In our society, women are facing a triple burden, even more than a triple burden, for women going outside the home to fulfill her dreams is very difficult. We have permission to go outside and work, but many responsibilities prevent us from leaving the home and fulfill our dreams. In my home, my father-in-law and husband are very supportive, but the people of my village talk too much behind my back, because of social pressure, I sacrifice my dreams for my family; I don't have time to pursue more opportunities. People say you have talent; you can do it; you are energetic, and I believe the same. I never felt exhausted while climbing mountains; I summited 9 mountains over 6000m. I never found it difficult; instead, I enjoyed it. Mountaineering is my passion. On the other hand, for me, living a normal village life as a woman is a difficult job, doing the same thing every day, without appreciation and reward, doing hard work is a tough job, in our society, breathing as a woman is more difficult than anything".

It clearly highlights gender roles as a major constraint for women's participation in mountaineering.

5.3. Social Construction of Gender and mountaineering

The findings reveal that the social construction of gender, the gender division of labor, gender roles, and social expectations played an important role in shaping women's identities. In Gilgit Baltistan, girls and boys are treated differently, which leads to the development of distinct personalities in each. For example, girls are socialized from childhood to be helpful, quiet, caregivers, and nurturers. From a very young age, girls are conditioned to value or prioritize others' needs over their own; they are trained to serve others. They are always taught that girls are going to someone else's home and that they need to know everything, including indoor chores, cooking, cleaning, washing dishes, washing clothes, taking care of younger siblings, and many other tasks. They are also expected to know about outdoor chores, including cutting grass, milking the cow, collecting wood and grass from the mountainside, bringing water from the riverside, collecting vegetables and fruits, and many other household chores, in addition to their studies.

Boys are socialized to be bold, strong, protectors, and providers. They were encouraged to do hard, tough outdoor chores, including farming and managing livestock. Boys were encouraged to play outside, explore, and climb.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

Boys who stay at home were stigmatized by saying "*kia larkiyon ki tarha ghar pa ho bhr ja k khelo"* - [Why are you at home like girls go outside and play].

As Adnan (pseudonym) mentioned in his interview,

> "Boys in our area do not do indoor chores; they consider it a "female job." If a boy washes dishes at home, he is told to leave it and go do studies. Family members used to say, are you a girl? Washing dishes is a girl's job. God created you a man; act like one".

Similarly, boys are taught that real men are risk-takers and are not afraid of anything. Likewise, boys and men do not cry, and many other things men are forced and expected to do, whether they want to or not. Men are also bound to do many social obligations, regardless of their personal well-being or desires.

Abid Baig mentioned during Focus Group Discussion,

> "Boys were forced to carry heavy loads, whether they were weak, ill, or not ready. If boys resisted, they were considered weak like girls, and compared to other men with more strength and abilities".

Research findings suggest that, women mountaineer of research locale is facing constraints because of socio-cultural values and tradition; moreover, they are bound to follow rules and regulations assigned by society to both genders. Society always puts pressure on mothers of girls to teach them societal constructed acceptable behavior, so mothers try their best to follow all rules and regulations which are necessary to become an exemplary woman in our society. Mothers' constant reminders included telling their daughters how to walk, e.g., with elegance, heads bowed and eyes lowered, as well as while speaking with men, to look down rather than directly at them. Maintain distance when standing with men. Do not talk if men are talking. Value your brother's decision, even if he is smaller than you. Likewise, avoid staying out after dark, refrain from laughing loudly, and avoid public places, even during the daytime.

As Maria mentioned in her interview,

> In our society, mothers mostly try to make their daughters role models for the rest of society. Mothers in society are appreciated when they provide their daughters with a good upbringing, following all societal rules and regulations, which are necessary for shaping a well-rounded young woman. Mothers mostly tell their daughters to stay with girls and avoid gatherings with boys, because society does not consider it good. They always tell their daughter how to wear a scarf (dupatta), how to dress, and not to go out unless it is very much necessary"

Likewise, mothers usually object to and resist girls' participation in mountaineering because they believe girls are not as strong as boys. Mothers feel that girls' upbringing is different: boys eat more food than girls, walk for miles daily, carry heavy loads from a young age, and have greater stamina. From childhood, mothers encourage boys to do tough jobs, and girl's activities are confined to the household chores, because of the traditional thought that carrying heavy loads is not suitable for women's reproductive health. Mothers do not encourage women engagement in sports because girls need to face the menstrual cycle every month. They lose both blood and energy. Women are perceived as more tender than males. For the same reason, women rarely take part in tough challenges. As a normal girl in Gilgit Baltistan throughout her upbringing, they were discouraged and reinforced gender stereotypes to refrain from sports or any other physical activity. Girls usually do not think about mountaineering; it is impossible for them even to consider participating in an adventure activity for a day. Boys go on adventures and go to mountains even

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

without telling anyone at home. They do whatever they want to do in their lives, but girls have more restrictions. They ask for permission for months, and then some parents grant permission for one day, since girls need to come back home before sunset.

Gender is fashioned through women's socialization amid a misogynist culture that keeps reaffirmation of the core purpose of being women.

As Sirbaz Ali mentioned in his interview,

> "*Dasin bo be moorus ke xiskowatar dusas"*- [she is a girl, what does it need for a girl to climb a mountain]

Under these circumstances, if girls demand mountaineering as a profession, their mothers first restrict their daughters from taking part due to societal fear.

As Zahra (pseudonym) stated in her interview,

> "In our society, mothers are concerned about their own reputation. If they let their daughters go with boys for a long time, what will people think? They are considerably concerned about their daughters; they constantly question themselves: Is it good to give daughters so much freedom? If, unfortunately, something goes wrong there, how will they face society? It is better to keep daughters at home with respect and live with peace of mind, rather than worrying all the time".

In addition, findings also suggest that, due to patriarchal, traditional settings and as a result of discrimination in the social construction of gender, girls do not have the power to fight for their rights, and they are not even aware of their own rights. Women and girls were always told "chup raho" - [stay silent] and do whatever is told to you by your brother, father, and senior family member. Women do household chores, and were not allowed to speak for even minor matters. They were only allowed to go out for outdoor chores, which were part of their daily tasks, limiting their spatial experiences in outdoor settings.

As Najma (Pseudonym) stated in her interview

> "I am from Shimshal Upper Hunza, and I live in Zulfiqarabad. Living my life for 30 years in two different areas of Gilgit-Baltistan, I have experienced that the social structure of Gilgit-Baltistan is patriarchal with strict, misogynistic, discriminatory customary norms, practices, and values. I saw women's oppression and subordination in different forms, e.g., restriction on women's mobility, men's control over women's bodies and minds. Men are rulers, power holders, and decision makers. Women are facing issues of harassment and domestic violence, and discrimination based on gender. Women of Gilgit-Baltistan don't have rights of inheritance, even educated girls, who are aware of their rights don't demand their rights due to cultural expectations. Women who are not educated and financially depend on men are facing more challenges, as compared to women who are resourceful and earn money doing different jobs. To earn respect in society, women need to be financially empowered".

Furthermore, findings also show that, because of gender-based construction, girls face many difficulties even during expeditions, and they are often not allowed to make their own decisions. They are always dependent on team members, coaches, and family members.

As Abid Baig stated during the Focus Group Discussion,

"On expeditions, women are always dependent on others. They do not make decisions or even talk without the permission of their group leaders. They are not that open to expressing their skills, talent, and knowledge. It is because of socialization that, from an early age, they become dependent on male family members; they ask permission before doing anything; even on mountains, they are

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

afraid of being judged and harassed, and they are less open to sharing their ideas. As a male, I also hesitate to talk because I do not know what they think. I never hesitate to talk with foreign women climbers because they are open to sharing ideas and skills, and confident in themselves. They do not care what others think, they live in the moment, but females from Gilgit-Baltistan are physically present on the mountains, but they carry the mindset from where they belong".

Research findings show that, during mountaineering activities, women often rely on their brothers and family members. Women mountaineers also give men (family members or coaches) authority to make decisions, and control over freedom and mobility. Participants shared that, due to being repeatedly told from childhood that they cannot do it, and being told to do it by their brother in both small and big matters of life, they internalized it as natural. Women considered themselves weaker than men, even though women mountaineers are climbing peaks and undertaking extraordinary, complex, and tough activities daily. They do not consider themselves equal to men. They willingly give themselves a subordinate position in society.

As Nazma (pseudonym) mentioned in her interview,

> "man" is more respectful, more powerful physically and mentally. Women always need men's support, especially in high-altitude mountaineering.

Furthermore, findings reveal that due to this unequal gender treatment, male mountaineers on high-altitude expeditions feel additional pressure.

As Ali (pseudonym) mentioned in his interview,

> "Male mountaineers feel extra pressure during expeditions because they feel they are responsible for females; men do not ask for help until they have used up all their energy. It is our cultural thing. Asking for help from women, men consider it shameful. I first put all my energy and effort into it, and after that, women volunteered to help. During mountaineering, physically demanding tasks such as cutting ice, carrying heavy loads, and fixing ropes are generally performed by men. It is not in the climbing rules, but it is just a cultural thing. We give women respect and support as a responsibility".

Findings suggest that the construction of gender is invisible; everyone is doing gender[3] because they are obliged, bound, and constrained by the gendered social processes and structures. Through socialization, women are taught that men are physically stronger than women, which makes men think of themselves as more powerful, competent, and strong, and women's position as silent domestic laborers gives them a subordinate position in society. Gradually, unequal power dynamics value men and discriminate against women, creating a hierarchy. However, gender differences are invisible; they look so natural that no one rarely notices. The social process maintains these power differences between men and women. Unfortunately, gender differences are legitimized by social institutions, including family, religion, education, mass media, and other socio-cultural structures, which also play a significant role in maintaining gender differences.

Consistent with Judith Lorber's explanation of gender, women participants' experiences indicate that women facing challenges in the field of mountaineering started from "social construction of gender", or a preliminary socio-cultural setup in which women, as kids, are nurtured, through gender differences, gender roles, gender expectations, gender stereotypes, and gender discrimination.

[3] The phrase 'everyone is doing gender' refers to the idea that gender is an ongoing social accomplishment, produced and reproduced in everyday interactions (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

6. Conclusion

In Gilgit Baltistan, the social construction of gender within the family and other cultural standards set rules and regulations based on gender differences, creating constraints for women's participation in mountaineering. From birth to socialization, women are discriminated against in terms of upbringing, social limitations, moral standards, acceptable social behavior, and outdoor exploration. Because of this, women's experiences in the mountaineering world differ from men's, and women rarely participate in mountaineering activities.

Women from Gilgit Baltistan have very strong mountaineering skills, especially in mountainous regions, but, due to cultural expectations, they are socially constrained from pursuing mountaineering as a long-term career, leaving them to focus on the bulk of agricultural and domestic activities. Women who want to continue their careers in mountaineering are first bound to calculate their foremost and socially assigned roles, from which there is no concession or freedom of personal choice, while maintaining a balance to pursue a personal career in sports, with sustenance through communal approval and a prestigious clan position. Participants believed that women's social condition and her social position play a pivotal role; it propagates sacrifices, whether women have to choose family and children or a sports career amid a socially and culturally fabricated bondage environment. Additionally, women face scrutiny for balancing mountaineering with family responsibilities, reflecting broader societal expectations regarding gender roles.

Bibliography

Abdu, M. (2021). *Mountain, and History of mountains*. Green Heart Publisher, Faisalabad.

Ahmed, S. K., Mohammed, R. A., Nashwan, A. J., Ibrahim, R. H., Abdalla, A. Q., Ameen, B. M. M., & Khdhir, R. M. (2025). Using thematic analysis in qualitative research. *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health*, *6*. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2949916X25000222

Alam, S. (2020). *A Forgotten Legend: Farzana Jabeen is the First Pakistani Woman to Climb 6000 Meters Mountain Peak*. Lens. Retrieved 2. 3. 2026, from https://propakistani.pk/lens/a-forgotten-legend-farzana-jabeen-is-the-first-pakistani-woman-to-climb-6000-meters-mountain-peak/

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101.

Coalter, F., & Taylor, J. (2010). Sport-for-development impact study: A research initiative funded by Comic Relief and UK Sport and managed by International Development through Sport. *Stirling, UK: University of Stirling*.

Coakley, J., & Pike, E. (2014). *Sports in society: Issues and controversies*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill.

Dilley, R. E., & Scraton, J. S. (2010). Women, climbing and serious leisure. *Leisure Studies*, *29*(2), 125-141. https://doi.org/10.1080/02614360903401927

Dilley, R. (2006). Climbing Tales Gendered Body Narratives and Stories of Strength'. *University of Leeds, UK, e-paper*. Retrieved April 5, 2026, from https://gender-studies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/53/2013/02/epaper14-rachel-dilley.pdf

Ewert, A., & Jamieson, L. (2003). *Current status and future directions in the adventure tourism industry.* Managing tourist health and safety in the new millennium. London: Elsevier.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

Ewert, A. (1985). Why people climb: The relationship of participant motives and experience level to mountaineering. *Journal of Leisure Research*, *17*(3), 241-250.
Fendt, L. S., & Wilson, E. (2012,). 'I just push through the barriers because I live for surfing': How women negotiate their constraints to surf tourism. *Annals of Leisure Research*, *15*(1), 4-18. 10.1080/11745398.2012.670960
Haddad, Y. Y., Smith, J. I., & Moore, K. M. (2006). *Muslim women in America: The challenge of Islamic identity today*. Oxford University Press.
Hakim, A., & Aziz, A. (1998). Socio-cultural, religious, and political aspects of the status of women in Pakistan. *The Pakistan development Review*, *37*(4), 727-746.
Humberstone, B. (2000). The 'outdoor industry' as social and educational phenomena: gender and outdoor adventure/education. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning, 1*(1), 21-25.
Jack, S.J, & Ronan, K. R. (1998). Sensation seeking among high- and low-risk sports participants. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *25*(6), 1063–1083. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869(98)00081-6
Khan, A. N. (2019). *Map of Gilgit-Baltistan* [Figure]. In *Floral diversity of Yasin Valley, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan*. ResearchGate.
Kiewa, J. (2001). Control over self and space in rock climbing. *journal of Leisure Research*, *33*(4), 363-382.
Krane, V. (2001). We can be athletic and feminine, but do we want to? Challenging hegemonic femininity in women's sport. *Quest*, *53*(1), 115-133.
Lorber, J. (2018). *The social construction of gender. In Inequality in the 21st Century*. Routledge.
Messner, M. A. (1988). Sports and male domination: The female athlete as contested ideological terrain. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, *5*(2), 197-211.
Messner, R. (1992). *Annapurna: 50 years of expeditions in the death zone*. Seattle: The Mountaineers.
Robinson, W. D. (1992). A descriptive model of enduring risk recreation involvement. *Journal of Leisure Research*, *24*(1), 52-63.
Schmidt, M. (2012). Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War The Most Dangerous Place: Pakistan's Lawless Frontier. *Mountain Research and Development*, *32*(1), 101-102.
Shahzad, S. (2020, July 15). *The Heroic Mountain Climbers of Pakistan*. Youlin Magazine. Retrieved September 6, 2025, from https://www.youlinmagazine.com/story/the-heroic-mountain-climbers-of-pakistan/MTc4NQ==
Swain, M., Kinnear, P., & Steinman, L. (2015,). Sociocultural Theory in Second Language Education: An Introduction through Narratives. *Multilingual Matters*, *8*(3), 94-98. http://dx.doi.org/10.5565/rev/jtl3.635
Sökefeld, M. (2017). Not Part of Kashmir, but of the Kashmir Dispute': The Political Predicaments of Gilgit-Baltistan. *Cambridge University Press eBooks*. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316855607.009
Wilson, E., & Little, D. E. (2005). A 'relative escape'? The impact of constraints on women who travel solo. *Tourism Review International*, *9*(9), 155–175. 10.3727/154427205774791672.
West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender & society*, *1*(2), 125-151.
Zain. (2010). A Socio-Political Study of Gilgit Baltistan Province. Pakistan. *Journal of Social Sciences*, *30*(1), 181-190. https://www.bzu.edu.pk/PJSS/Vol30No12010/Final_PJSS-30-1-16.pdf