

Role of Women in Tourism: A Study of Upper Chitral KPK

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of socio-cultural factors and gendered barriers on women's participation in the tourism industry in Upper Chitral, Pakistan. Using a quantitative research design and survey data from 101 respondents, the analysis employed descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and multivariate linear regression to test two hypotheses: (H1) there is an association between socio-cultural factors and women participation in tourism industry, and (H2) there is an association between gendered barriers and women participation in tourism industry. The findings reveal that more than two-thirds of participants acknowledged intimidation and harassment as critical barriers, while purdah was reported to provide psychological comfort but simultaneously restrict professional opportunities. Structural challenges including reliance on male family members for mobility, lack of confidence in dealing with male clients, limited access to raw materials, poor infrastructure, and low technological awareness were identified as major obstacles. Regression results demonstrated strong statistical support for both hypotheses, with socio-cultural factors explaining 71.6% of the variance and gendered barriers explaining 70.1% of the variance in women's participation. Interpreted through Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical lens, the results indicate that women's restricted participation is not only a consequence of individual limitations but also a product of entrenched symbolic violence, habitus, and unequal distribution of social and cultural capital. The study concludes that women's agency in Upper Chitral's tourism industry is systematically curtailed by patriarchal norms, structural deficiencies, and socio-cultural expectations. These findings highlight the need for policy interventions that address cultural transformation, infrastructural development, and capacity-building to promote equitable participation of women in tourism.

Keywords: Socio-Cultural Factors, Gendered Barriers, Women Participation, Tourism, Chitral

Introduction

Women's participation in the tourism industry is increasingly recognized not only as an economic imperative but also as a sociological phenomenon shaped by deep-seated gendered structures, particularly in rural and conservative contexts (Nur et al., 2021). In Upper Chitral, a remote district in northern Pakistan, tourism has begun to emerge as a source of livelihood. However, women's access to this evolving economic field remains mediated by entrenched sociocultural norms and domestic expectations, which frame tourism not as a neutral sector, but as a gendered space marked by restricted mobility, symbolic exclusion, and unequal access to resources (Sayira et al., 2021; Hazel, 2025). The question of women's participation in the tourism industry is not simply one of economic integration but of ontological visibility of who is allowed to be seen, to act, and to be recognized within the structured spaces of production and value (Millar, 2024). In peripheral

regions such as Upper Chitral, the tourism sector unfolds not in a social vacuum but within a historically sediment environment of patriarchy, class hierarchy, and cultural conservatism. From a Bourdieusian perspective, economic fields like tourism are never merely technical arenas of exchange or employment they are cultural battlegrounds where habitus and capital interact within fields governed by doxa (Heuwinkel, 2024). The habitus of women in Upper Chitral a product of generational conditioning through religious, familial, and social institutions renders certain practices thinkable and others taboo. This embodied history shapes how women perceive their capacities, obligations, and the moral legitimacy of their domestic and public roles (Darko & Halseth, 2025). Thus the main objectives of the study were to determine the influence of sociocultural factors on the role of women in tourism sector. The main hypotheses of the study were:

H₁: There is an association between socio-cultural factors and women participation in the tourism industry.

H₂: There is an association between gendered barriers and women participation in the tourism industry.

Literature Review

The participation of women in the tourism sector has increasingly drawn attention within sociological and developmental discourse. Existing literature highlights how tourism, while offering new economic opportunities, remains embedded within gendered power structures that influence the nature and extent of women's involvement (Ferguson, 2011; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2020). Tourism, as a form of economic participation, does not exist in isolation from the broader social field in which it operates. Instead, women's engagement is mediated by socio-cultural norms comprising patriarchal ideologies, religious traditions, kinship systems, and community perceptions that restrict their mobility, autonomy, and legitimacy in public and commercial spaces (Aitchison, 2001; Kabeer, 2016). In rural contexts such as Upper Chitral, these factors act as invisible yet powerful constraints, creating a paradox where opportunities exist in theory but remain inaccessible in practice. This illustrates how tourism becomes a gendered space, reflecting broader societal hierarchies rather than challenging them. Scholars applying Bourdieu's theory of practice extend this analysis by showing that women's marginalization within tourism is not simply a matter of economic participation but of structural inequalities in access to different forms of capital, particularly social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1990; Costa et al., 2017). Even when women acquire cultural capital through education or skills training, prevailing gender ideologies often diminish the symbolic value of their contributions, restricting their agency in tourism markets (Mets-Oja et al., 2025). Thus, the field of tourism privileges male participation, reproducing patterns of inequality rather than disrupting them. Furthermore, some recent studies highlight that women's involvement in tourism is influenced by societal frameworks rather than only by economic opportunities. Zafar (2024) examined that women's empowerment in South Asia significantly contributes to poverty alleviation, surpassing the impact of tourism, particularly in conservative rural settings. Mahwish and Nawaz (2024) also emphasized that societal limitations, including familial standards, income expectations, and designated gender roles, impede the transfer of educated women into professional careers, thereby restricting their contributions to areas such as tourism. These findings affirm that tourism is inextricably linked to the social structures that regulate women's movement and agency. Haider's (2024) empirical study in Gilgit Baltistan underscores the structural marginalization of women within Pakistan's northern tourist sectors. He records vocational segregation, salary discrepancies, limited public exposure, and the frequency of harassment as fundamental components of gendered obstacles. The results corroborate the indicators used in the research, including micro-level restraints such as salary disparities, exclusion from leadership, and familial obligations, and macro-level structural limits

indicative of entrenched patriarchal norms. Haider's study advocates for legislative reforms in harassment legislation and education, reflecting the systemic remedies suggested above. Khan et al. (2025) contended that infrastructure deficiencies, travel limitations, and institutional conservatism all hinder women's effective involvement in tourism. Local customs mandating male accompaniment or familial consent constrain women's mobility, closely correlating with signs of mobility dependency and male guardianship. The structural restrictions, such as restricted access to transportation, raw materials, and technical infrastructure, align with the field theory framework: the tourist industry functions not just as an economic domain but as a social field where power dynamics determine participation. Millar (2024) contends that women's agency in tourism is dependent on cultural legitimacy, which determines their recognition and visibility within tourist environments. Millar's case studies of tours guided by Pakistani women illustrate how highly ingrained habitus roles constrain business, despite existing local demand. These results correspond with Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence: cultural norms like purdah, codes of honor, and stereotypes function subtly to marginalize women without the need of physical force. Darko and Halseth (2025) further elucidate how conventional religious and family institutions influence women's habitus, consequently molding both self-perception and external expectations within tourist situations. Ali, Iqbal, and Ali (2024) indicate that in Hunza Valley, women's entrepreneurship in mountain tourism has started to alter attitudes and enhance women's symbolic and economic capital. Despite their small size, these micro-enterprises indicate that tourist venues may serve as catalysts for change when women get agency. This finding corresponds with Sultan et al. (2023), who delineate many structural and symbolic barriers, including inadequate access to financing, restrictive gender norms, and insufficient governmental backing, that impede female entrepreneurs in Pakistan's tourist sector. These studies suggest that socio-cultural factors and gender-related obstacles hinder women's agency. Empirical data from Pakistan's northern areas and similar settings positions these factors within a solid, theoretically sound framework aligned with Bourdieu's theory.

Theoretical Framework

The study draws on Pierre Bourdieu's Practice Theory which provides a powerful lens to analyze gendered practices in tourism, particularly in culturally conservative and resource-limited settings like Upper Chitral (Millar, 2024). Bourdieu's core concepts habitus, capital, field, and practice aid in understanding the social reproduction of inequality (Bourdieu, 1990; 2005). Women's *habitus* in Upper Chitral is shaped by patriarchal norms and religious traditions that limit their roles in public and entrepreneurial life (Boley et al., 2025). Their access to *capital* economic, cultural (education, skills), social (networks), and symbolic (prestige) is unequal, restricting opportunities in tourism (Feldbauer & Jeffrey, 2025; Najjinda et al., 2025). The *field* of tourism is a gendered space where male actors dominate resources and recognition, marginalizing female entrepreneurs (Ali et al., 2024). *Practice* emerges from the interplay between habitus and field, mediated by available capital. Women running guesthouses or craft businesses show resilience but remain constrained by limited resources and gendered expectations (Nur et al., 2021). Bourdieu's idea of *symbolic violence* the subtle domination embedded in norms helps explain how inequality is normalized, as women's exclusion from formal economic life is internalized and rarely questioned (Umar et al., 2025). Bourdieu's theory enables a deeper understanding of the structural and symbolic barriers women face in tourism. It reveals how transforming gender roles in Upper Chitral requires not only economic support but also cultural and institutional change (Sayira et al., 2021).

Variables of the Study

Independent Variable 1: Influence of Sociocultural Factors

Socio-cultural factors in this study refer to the interplay of gendered barriers, violence or intimidation in public spaces that hinder women's access, mobility, and agency within the tourism industry (Barmpouza & Rabbiosi, 2024). These dimensions reflect the embedded cultural ideologies that sustain gender-based exclusions and affect women's ability to operate freely and safely within the tourism sector. On the basis of this definition of socio-cultural factors, two sub variables including violence and intimidation in public spaces and gendered access to markets and mobility were selected to measure the socio-cultural factors that influence the women's participation in tourism sector. Violence and intimidation in public spaces is the first sub variable of independent variable, and it is measured by the indicators such as helplessness, fear of harassment, misbehavior lack of confidence and attraction of clients, public transport harassment and harassment at workplace. These indicators are based on the definition of violence and intimidation in public spaces given by UN Women (2017), which defines it as “acts of sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence that occur in public spaces, including streets, public transport, markets, and workplaces, which create environments of fear and restrict women's freedom of movement, safety, and rights to equal participation in public life.” The second sub variable of socio-cultural factors is gendered access to markets and mobility. The indicators of gendered access to markets and mobility are travel challenges, male dependency, male dominance, family approval, poor transport, language barriers, low tech awareness, raw material access, infrastructure limitations. These indicators are based on definition given by Scheyvens (2000), who argues that “gendered access to tourism resources and mobility is shaped by cultural norms, patriarchal authority, infrastructural deficits, and women's unequal access to skills and networks, which restrict their full participation in tourism economies.”

Independent Variable 2: Gendered Barriers

The second independent variable of the study is Gendered Barriers. Gendered barriers in this study are being measured by several indicators such as unequal opportunities, unequal access to markets and contracts, and cultural stereotypes. These indicators are based upon the definition of gendered barriers given by UNWTO (2019), which notes that gendered barriers in tourism manifest through “occupational segregation, limited leadership roles, wage gaps, and limited career progression that prevent equal participation of women in tourism industry.”

Dependent Variable: Women Participation in the Tourism Industry

Women Participation in tourism industry refers to the range and nature of activities, jobs, and entrepreneurial engagements that women undertake within the tourism sector. It encompasses formal roles (such as managing guesthouses or working as tour guides) and informal contributions (such as producing handicrafts or providing food services) (Chheang, 2013; Butler, 2013). In Upper Chitral, women are involved in various tourism-related roles, albeit mostly informal or low-income positions. These roles include operating small guesthouses, selling handicrafts, preparing traditional foods, and working as informal tour guides. However, their participation is constrained by sociocultural expectations and the dual burdens of domestic life. Many women report limited access to capital, business networks, and decision-making power, which confines them to less visible or undervalued parts of the tourism economy. Thus, their roles are shaped not only by personal interest or skill but by the broader sociocultural and familial structures that define what is deemed appropriate or acceptable for women (Ali et al., 2024; Feldbauer & Jeffrey, 2025).

Tools and Methods

This study adopts a quantitative design grounded in the positivist paradigm to examine the socio-economic and cultural challenges faced by women in Upper Chitral's tourism industry. Descriptive and inferential analyses were used to identify patterns and relationships, enhancing the reliability and generalizability of the findings. Data were collected through a structured, closed-ended questionnaire developed after an extensive literature review to align with the study's objectives. The instrument captured both socio-demographic data and key barriers such as limited capital, mobility constraints, and institutional neglect, allowing for objective and statistical analysis. The research population included women directly or indirectly involved in tourism-related work such as hotel management, guiding, or handicraft production across Upper Chitral. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed: first stratifying the region into three Tehsils (Buni, Mastuj, and Torkhow/ Mulkhow), followed by village selection through stratified random sampling, and finally using purposive sampling to identify women entrepreneurs. Field surveys were conducted in person, with translation assistance provided to participants facing literacy or language barriers. The researcher's local background helped build trust, particularly on culturally sensitive issues. A pilot study with 10 women in Booni helped refine the questionnaire's clarity and cultural relevance. A total of 101 women participated. Data were analyzed using SPSS, applying descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing through inferential methods. Ethical standards were strictly observed, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and data confidentiality, ensuring respect for participants' dignity and cultural norms.

Reliability of scales

The reliability analysis presented in the table assesses the internal consistency of the scales used to measure various dimensions of women's participation and experiences in the tourism industry in Upper Chitral. The Cronbach's Alpha values, all exceeding 0.90, indicate an exceptionally high level of reliability across the measured constructs.

Table 1 Reliability Analysis

	No of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Socio-Cultural Factors (IV ₁)	21	.987
Gender Barriers (IV ₂)	7	.946
Role of Women in Tourism Industry (DV)	5	.965

The scale titled "Socio-Cultural Factors", consisting of 21 items, yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.987, which signifies excellent internal consistency. This means the items included in this scale are highly correlated and effectively measure the same underlying concept women's overall contributions to the tourism sector, such as their roles in entrepreneurship, cultural preservation, and economic development. Similarly, the "Role of Women in Tourism" scale, comprised of 5 items, achieved a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.965. This again reflects a very high level of reliability, suggesting that the items used accurately capture women's functional involvement in tourism-related businesses, such as guiding, hospitality, and handicrafts. Finally, the "Gender roles" scale, with 7 items, showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.946, which is also considered excellent. This indicates a strong consistency among the items in representing the various challenges women encounter in balancing their professional roles in tourism with familial and societal expectations. The high Cronbach's Alpha values confirm the robustness and reliability of the measurement instruments used in this study. These results validate that the scales effectively and consistently measure the intended constructs, which enhances the credibility of the findings and interpretations drawn from the survey data.

Data Analysis

In this study, the researcher has employed statistical techniques through SPSS to analyze the data, based on the nature of this study and the research objectives and hypotheses. By employing regression and correlation analyses, the interrelationships among variables have been systematically identified and examined.

Demographic variables

Table 2 Demographic Variables (N=101)

Education		
Categories	Frequency	Percent
Illiterate	15	14.9
Primary	5	5.0
Middle	9	8.9
Matric	19	18.8
Intermediate	16	15.8
Graduation	14	13.9
Above Masters	23	22.8
Total	101	100.0
Marital Status		
Married	64	63.4
Unmarried	32	31.7
Widow	2	2.0
Divorced	3	3.0
Total	101	100.0
How Often Respondent's Business is Operational		
Seasonal + Semi-Annual	9	8.91%
All Seasonal	77	76.24%
Specific Months	15	14.85%
Total	101	100.0%

The educational profile of women in Upper Chitral's tourism sector reflects a stratified distribution of cultural capital with gendered implications. While 22.8% hold postgraduate degrees and 13.9% are graduates, significant portions 14.9% are illiterate and 18.8% have only matriculation-level education. According to Bourdieu, education as institutionalized cultural capital shapes access to socio-economic fields (Feldbauer & Jeffrey, 2025). In tourism, this capital is unequally distributed and highly gendered, with educational credentials serving as symbolic resources aligned with dominant norms of professionalism (Madawala et al., 2025). Despite their qualifications, many educated women remain excluded from leadership roles, revealing symbolic violence where women's capital is misrecognized in male-dominated fields (Mets-Oja et al., 2025). For the nearly half of women with limited education, restricted cultural capital pushes them into informal roles framed as domestic extensions rather than economic work (Sun et al., 2024). This reflects an internalized gendered habitus that limits women's economic roles (Shanmuganathan et al., 2025). The marital status of respondents 63.4% married, 31.7% unmarried, and 5% widowed or divorced reflects a gendered stratification of access and legitimacy within Upper Chitral's tourism field. Rather than a neutral demographic, marital status serves as symbolic capital, influencing women's positioning in public, male-dominated spaces. In Bourdieu's terms, the tourism field is shaped by patriarchal *doxa*, where marriage confers moral legitimacy, enabling married women to participate with less social resistance (Prayag et al., 2024; Najjinda et al., 2025). Married women benefit from

symbolic capital tied to male guardianship, stabilizing their habitus in a moral economy that links public respectability to marital status. Conversely, unmarried and divorced or widowed women often face symbolic violence their participation is morally scrutinized, undermining their legitimacy and deterring economic engagement (Topić-Rutherford et al., 2025; Boley et al., 2025). This internalized surveillance reinforces gendered norms and restricts aspirations. Thus, marital status operates as a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion, reinforcing patriarchal boundaries rather than disrupting them. Women’s visibility in tourism, especially that of married women, should not be equated with empowerment but understood as conditional acceptance under moral constraints. The findings highlight the need for gender strategies in rural tourism that go beyond moral respectability and promote genuine agency. The majority of the respondents (59.2%) reported that their businesses are operational throughout all seasons, indicating a stable and year-round involvement in tourism activities. This suggests a relatively higher level of consistency and demand within the sector for these respondents. A smaller but notable proportion (21.5%) stated that their businesses operate during specific months only, reflecting a pattern of selective or peak-season engagement, possibly aligned with tourist inflows during holidays or weather-favorable periods. Meanwhile, 19.2% of the respondents (a merged group of those initially categorized under “Seasonal” and “Semi-Annual”) operate their businesses in intermittent periods of the year. This lower percentage indicates that a smaller segment of the population relies on tourism as a part-time or supplementary economic activity. The data reveals that a significant portion of women in Upper Chitral maintain continuous engagement in tourism throughout the year, while others adapt their participation based on seasonal dynamics or specific market windows.

Descriptive Analysis

Influence of Sociocultural Factors (IV₁)

Sociocultural factors deeply shape gender roles in the tourism industry in Upper Chitral, particularly through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social capital. Bourdieu conceptualizes social capital as the resources accessible through networks of relationships, shared values, and mutual recognition. In a traditional, male-dominated society like Upper Chitral, women’s limited access to these networks significantly constrains their agency, opportunities, and roles in tourism:

Table 3 Influence of Sociocultural Factors (N=101)

S.No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Violence and Intimidation in Public Spaces					
1	Women often feel helpless and fear harassment in public space and work place.	16.2% (21)	50% (65)	25.4% (33)	8.5% (11)
2	Tourists behave in a harassing manner towards women.	18.5% (24)	47.7% (62)	19.2% (25)	14.6% (19)
3	Purdah makes women feel more comfortable.	23.1% (30)	32.3% (42)	27.7% (36)	16.9% (22)
4	Purdah makes it harder for women to attract clients.	29.2% (38)	36.9% (48)	21.5% (28)	12.3% (16)
5	Purdah reduces tourist interest in women’s businesses.	26.9% (35)	39.2% (51)	18.5% (24)	15.4% (20)
6	Rural women lack confidence dealing with male clients.	13.8% (18)	41.5% (54)	25.4% (33)	19.2% (25)
7	Rural women fear harassment on public transport.	18.5% (24)	47.7% (62)	23.1% (30)	10.8% (14)

Gendered Access to Markets and Mobility					
8	Rural women face travel challenges for business.	31.5% (41)	28.5% (37)	20.8% (27)	19.2% (25)
9	Women rely on male family for business travel.	45.4% (59)	21.5% (28)	21.5% (28)	11.5% (15)
10	Male dominance hinders women's business ownership.	49.2% (64)	16.2% (21)	20% (26)	14.6% (19)
11	Women need family approval for business decisions.	48.5% (63)	15.4% (20)	23.1% (30)	13.1% (17)
12	Poor transport limits women's daily travel.	61.5% (80)	6.9% (9)	20% (26)	11.5% (15)
13	Women face language issues with customers.	31.5% (41)	13.8% (18)	45.4% (59)	9.2% (12)
14	Women lack tech awareness due to low exposure.	36.9% (48)	30% (39)	19.2% (25)	13.8% (18)
15	Women struggle to get raw materials locally.	57.7% (75)	11.5% (15)	23.1% (30)	7.7% (10)
16	Poor infrastructure limits business growth.	62.3% (81)	11.5% (15)	20% (26)	6.2% (8)
17	Few businesswomen mean weak networking opportunities.	25.4% (33)	44.6% (58)	19.2% (25)	10.8% (14)

A significant proportion of respondents acknowledged the presence of intimidation and harassment as barriers. More than two-thirds (66.2%) either *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that women often feel helpless and fear harassment in public and workplace settings, while only 8.5% strongly disagreed. Similarly, 66.2% also reported that tourists behave in a harassing manner towards women, indicating that gender-based harassment is a critical challenge within the tourism sector. While 55.4% agreed that purdah makes women feel more comfortable, a notable proportion also linked purdah with economic disadvantages: 66.1% agreed that it makes it harder for women to attract clients, and 66.1% stated that it reduces tourist interest in women's businesses. These results show a double-edged effect of purdah, providing psychological comfort but restricting professional opportunities. Confidence and mobility issues were also notable. More than half of respondents (55.3%) agreed that rural women lack confidence when dealing with male clients, and 66.2% reported that rural women fear harassment on public transport. This indicates that fear of harassment directly limits women's capacity to operate freely in tourism markets. The majority of respondents confirmed structural challenges that hinder women's market access and mobility. Around 60% agreed that rural women face travel challenges for business, and 66.9% indicated that women rely on male family members for business travel, reflecting strong patriarchal dependency. Male dominance was highlighted by 65.4% as a barrier to women's business ownership, while 63.9% confirmed that women need family approval for business decisions. Infrastructure and mobility limitations emerged as severe constraints. Over two-thirds (68.4%) strongly agreed or agreed that poor transport limits daily travel, and an even larger proportion (73.8%) emphasized that poor infrastructure restricts business growth. Similarly, 69.2% highlighted difficulty in accessing raw materials locally. Regarding skill-based barriers, 61% of participants noted women's lack of technological awareness due to low exposure, while 45.3% agreed that women face language barriers when dealing with customers indicating both educational and communication gaps. Networking opportunities were also considered weak, with 70% agreeing that the scarcity of businesswomen reduces the possibility of effective professional networks. The findings suggest that socio-cultural norms, gendered restrictions, and structural inequalities

intersect to severely limit women's agency in the tourism industry. Violence and intimidation in public spaces create a climate of fear, while patriarchal authority, mobility restrictions, and infrastructural deficits reduce women's capacity to fully participate and thrive as entrepreneurs. Purdah plays a dual role: it offers a sense of safety but simultaneously diminishes women's visibility and customer engagement. Collectively, the results indicate that socio-cultural barriers are systemic rather than isolated, deeply rooted in gender norms, cultural expectations, and structural deficiencies. These constraints not only reduce women's confidence but also hinder their competitiveness in tourism markets. The interpretation of this data through Bourdieu's theoretical lens reveals that women in Upper Chitral face a multi-layered exclusion from the tourism sector not simply through overt discrimination, but through deeply embedded *structural, cultural, and symbolic mechanisms*. These mechanisms restrict their access to valuable networks, recognition, and autonomy key components of social capital thereby reinforcing gendered divisions in opportunity, visibility, and authority in tourism.

Independent Variable 2: Gendered Barriers

Table 4 Gendered Barriers (N=101)

S. No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Women are involved in low-paid and informal tourism jobs.	26.2% (34)	40% (52)	20% (26)	13.8% (18)
2	Few women hold leadership or decision-making roles in the tourism sector.	32.3% (42)	35.4% (46)	19.2% (25)	13.1% (17)
3	Women are often paid less than men for the same work.	34.6% (45)	31.5% (41)	17.7% (23)	16.2% (21)
4	Women's career progression is limited by family responsibilities.	16.2% (21)	50% (65)	16.2% (21)	17.7% (23)

Table 4 presents the perceptions of respondents (N = 101) regarding gendered barriers in the tourism sector. The results show clear evidence that women continue to face systemic inequalities in their professional participation. For the first indicator, "*Women are involved in low-paid and informal tourism jobs,*" a majority of respondents either strongly agreed (26.2%) or agreed (40%), amounting to 66.2%. This indicates that most respondents recognize the occupational segregation of women into low-paying and less secure tourism positions. Regarding leadership, 67.7% (32.3% strongly agree, 35.4% agree) confirmed that "*Few women hold leadership or decision-making roles in the tourism sector.*" This reflects a substantial acknowledgment of the glass ceiling effect, where women are underrepresented in higher-level managerial or policy-making roles. Similarly, wage disparity was highlighted in the third statement, "*Women are often paid less than men for the same work.*" Here, 66.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, reinforcing concerns over gender-based wage gaps within the tourism industry. Family responsibilities were perceived as a significant limiting factor for women's career growth. The majority, 66.2% (16.2% strongly agree, 50% agree), endorsed the statement that "*Women's career progression is limited by family responsibilities.*" This underscores the cultural and domestic expectations that disproportionately hinder women's upward mobility.

Dependent Variable: Women Participation in Tourism Industry**Table 5 Women Participation in the Tourism Industry (N=101)**

S. No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Women hold managerial roles (e.g., HR, marketing, general management).	30.8% (40)	30% (39)	26.2% (34)	13.1% (17)
2	Women coordinate with tour operators, guides, and agents.	20.8% (27)	38.5% (50)	23.1% (30)	17.7% (23)
3	Women run restaurants, cafés, or guest houses.	39.2% (51)	30.8% (40)	17.7% (23)	12.3% (16)
4	Women work in hotel operations (e.g., chefs, waiters, front desk).	36.9% (48)	34.6% (45)	13.8% (18)	14.6% (19)
5	Women act as cultural or adventure tourism ambassadors.	21.5% (28)	33.8% (44)	21.5% (28)	23.1% (30)

When asked whether women worked as hospitality managers, 60.8% agreed or strongly agreed, while 39.3% expressed skepticism. This split reveals a tension between aspirational change and structural reality. According to gender role theory, which posits that social roles are learned through cultural expectations, women are still often perceived as less suitable for leadership roles due to traditional expectations about their nurturing and subordinate roles. Thus, while some respondents believe women can lead as general or marketing managers, a significant minority remain unsure, reflecting the internalization of gendered occupational segregation. From Bourdieu's lens, this hesitation also reflects limitations in women's symbolic capital their social legitimacy and authority in decision-making positions. Managerial roles demand recognition, trust, and prestige, which are harder to attain in patriarchal structures where men dominate the "field" of power in tourism-related enterprises. More than half (59.3%) believe women can work with tour operators, travel agents, and guides, yet over 40% remain doubtful. This hesitation may stem from the public-facing nature of these roles, which challenge conservative norms of purdah and restricted female mobility. Bourdieu's concept of habitus the internalized dispositions shaped by social conditions explains how cultural beliefs may limit women's own perceptions and ambitions for roles that involve interacting with outsiders or male tourists. Moreover, guiding and operations require strong network-based social capital, which women often lack due to restricted participation in formal or informal professional circles. This limits both their real and perceived potential in these areas. Entrepreneurial roles in restaurants and guest houses are the most positively perceived roles as 70% of respondents believe women can become entrepreneurs and owners. This optimism reflects a growing cultural shift in some communities, possibly due to visible examples of women-owned small businesses or donor-funded local initiatives. Sociologically, this aligns with feminist modernization theory, which argues that economic participation can gradually shift gender norms by demonstrating women's economic capabilities and benefits. However, from Bourdieu's view, entrepreneurship in this context might be more acceptable because it often remains within the boundaries of the home or community spaces where women's presence is less controversial. These roles align better with the existing habitus, reinforcing acceptability even as they open economic space. A strong majority (71.5%) support the idea of women in hotel and guest house service roles, which indicates that gendered divisions of labor persist. These roles are perceived as extensions of women's traditional domestic responsibilities cooking, serving, caregiving and thus are more culturally sanctioned. According to structural functionalism, societies tend to assign roles based on what is seen as "natural" or functional; women being chefs or wait staff aligns with this logic. However, it can be critiqued this as a form of symbolic violence where oppressive gender roles are reproduced under the guise of being "natural," thus limiting aspirations and sustaining power inequalities. Regarding cultural and adventure promotion ambassadors, the perceptions of the

respondents are divided, only 55.3% agree, while 44.6% are hesitant or disagree. This reflects deeper concerns about cultural appropriateness and safety. Adventure tourism implies physical mobility, exposure to outsiders, and assertive roles traits culturally coded as masculine in conservative societies. The habitus clashes with the expanding field, revealing that while the tourism sector opens up new possibilities, social conditioning continues to inhibit female participation in culturally visible or physically demanding roles. The data shows that women's perceived roles in tourism are still shaped by traditional gender norms, internalized expectations (habitus), and limited access to social and symbolic capital. More passive, service-based or home-adjacent roles (e.g., cooking, front office work, owning a guest house) are more accepted, while roles requiring public interaction, leadership, or mobility (e.g., tour guiding, adventure promotion) are met with resistance. This reflects gender stratification, where social structures continue to influence not only women's actual participation but also what they and their communities believe they are capable of achieving.

Bivariate analysis: Correlations

The bivariate correlation analysis examines the relationship between socio-cultural factors (MSCF) and the roles of women in the tourism industry (MDV). The results of the Pearson correlation coefficient provide strong evidence in support of the hypothesis:

H₁. There is an association between socio-cultural factors and women participation in the tourism industry.

Table 6 Correlation 1

		MSCF	MDV
MSCF	Pearson Correlation	1	.846**
	Sig. (2-Tailed)		.000
	N	101	101
MDV	Pearson Correlation	.846**	1
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.000	
	N	101	101
**. Correlation Is Significant At The 0.01 Level (2-Tailed).			

The bivariate analysis reveals a strong and statistically significant positive correlation ($r = .846$, $p < .01$) between socio-cultural factors (MSCF) and participation of women in the tourism industry (MDV). This suggests that as socio-cultural constraints and influences increase such as traditional gender norms, cultural expectations, and mobility restrictions the roles and participation of women in tourism are directly shaped and often limited by these factors. Sociologically through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social capital, this relationship is interpreted as evidence of how power-laden social structures reproduce gender inequality within economic sectors like tourism. Bourdieu (2005) argued that an individual's capacity to act (agency) is deeply conditioned by their position within a social field and their access to various forms of capital especially social and cultural capital. In patriarchal and conservative rural settings such as Upper Chitral, women are positioned in a field where social norms act as gatekeepers, limiting their ability to accumulate or mobilize capital. The strong correlation indicates that socio-cultural factors not only influence but also define women's professional possibilities in tourism. For example, practices such as purdah, gendered expectations around respectability, dependence on male guardians for mobility, and fear of harassment collectively structure women's 'habitus' their internalized set of dispositions shaped by cultural and social history. This habitus restricts women's participation by normalizing male dominance and discouraging behaviors that deviate from traditional roles. It also refers to the reproduction of symbolic violence that is a process by which cultural and gender hierarchies are legitimized and internalized without the need for overt coercion. Even when women wish to

engage actively in tourism, the lack of social capital (e.g., professional networks, confidence to engage male clients, trust from male counterparts) and institutional support hinders their roles. The correlation, therefore, does not merely indicate a linear association; it reflects a deep, structural entanglement where socio-cultural norms act as both cause and consequence of gendered exclusion.

H₂. There is an association between gendered barriers and women participation in tourism industry.

Table 7 Correlation 2

CORRELATIONS			
		MDV	MDRI
MDV	PEARSON CORRELATION	1	.837**
	SIG. (2-TAILED)		.000
	N	101	101
MDRI	PEARSON CORRELATION	.837**	1
	SIG. (2-TAILED)	.000	
	N	101	101
**. Correlation is Significant at The 0.01 Level (2-Tailed).			

The correlation analysis for Hypothesis 2 indicates a strong and statistically significant positive relationship ($r = .837$, $p < .01$) between gendered barriers (MDRI) and women participation in the tourism industry (MDV). This result supports the hypothesis that women's simultaneous responsibilities at home and in the workplace significantly influence their participation and effectiveness in tourism-related occupations. Interpreted through Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework, particularly his concepts of habitus, field, and capital, this strong correlation underscores how women's roles in tourism are constrained by socially constructed gender expectations and domestic obligations. In traditional patriarchal settings, women are often expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities childcare, eldercare, and household management over professional aspirations. These expectations form part of their *habitus*, or the deeply internalized norms and dispositions shaped by their social environment. When women attempt to enter or succeed in the public and professional field of tourism, these domestic roles act as structural constraints, limiting their ability to invest time, energy, and resources into their businesses. The analysis empirically validates Hypothesis 2 and, through Bourdieu's sociological lens, shows that dual role conflicts are not merely logistical challenges but products of embedded power structures and cultural norms. Addressing these requires not only economic empowerment policies but also a cultural shift that recognizes and redistributes caregiving responsibilities to enable more equitable participation of women in the tourism industry.

Multivariate Analysis Linear regression H₁

The multivariate analysis was conducted to test Hypothesis *H₁. There is an association between socio-cultural factors and women participation in the tourism industry.* The results support this hypothesis and demonstrate a statistically significant and strong influence of the predictor variable (MSCF: Socio-cultural factors) on the dependent variable (MDV: Women Participation in tourism Industry).

Table 8 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.846 ^A	.716	.713	.51688
A. Predictors: (Constant), MSCF				

The model summary indicates a high correlation coefficient ($R = 0.846$), suggesting a strong positive relationship between variables. Furthermore, the R Square value of 0.716 demonstrates that socio-cultural factors explain approximately 71.6% of the variance in the women participation in the tourism industry. This high percentage reflects the strong influence of social norms, cultural expectations, and gender roles on women's participation and positioning in tourism-related activities.

Table 9 ANOVA^A

MODEL		SUM OF SQUARES	DF	MEAN SQUARE	F	SIG.
1	REGRESSION	66.680	1	66.680	249.586	.000 ^B
	RESIDUAL	26.449	99	.267		
	TOTAL	93.130	100			
A. Dependent Variable: MDV						
B. Predictors: (Constant), MSCF						

The ANOVA table further supports the strength of the model, with an F-statistic of 249.586 and a significance value ($p = .000$), confirming that the regression model as a whole is statistically significant.

Table 10 Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.165	.171		.966	.337
	MSCF	.944	.060	.846	15.798	.000
A. Dependent Variable: MDV						

In coefficients table the unstandardized coefficient (B) for socio-cultural factors is 0.944 with a highly significant p-value of .000. This means that with each unit increase in socio-cultural constraints, there is a corresponding 0.944 unit increase in the limitations or shaping of women's participation in the tourism sector. This strong association underscores the dominant impact of cultural barriers and societal expectations on how women participate in the tourism industry. These findings illustrate that women's roles in tourism are not solely determined by individual effort but are embedded in a broader social structure that governs access to power, opportunity, and resources. According to Bourdieu, social capital defined as the networks and relationships that enable individuals to gain advantages within a social field is unequally distributed. In the context of Upper Chitral, women lack the same level of access to influential networks, mobility, and decision-making power as men, which severely limit their capacity to function autonomously in the tourism sector. Moreover, Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions shaped by one's social environment helps explain how internalized cultural norms discourage women from pursuing roles outside the traditional domestic sphere. The regression results mirror these theoretical constructs: women's limited visibility and constrained roles in tourism are not coincidental but are the product of historically structured inequalities. The findings reveal that cultural expectations, gender biases, and restrictions on mobility and autonomy collectively contribute to the reproduction of gender hierarchies, thereby restricting women's ability to accumulate social capital and assert agency within the tourism economy. The statistical evidence validates Hypothesis 1 and confirms the crucial role of socio-cultural factors in shaping the gendered dynamics of tourism. Theoretically, it reinforces Bourdieu's argument that structural inequalities embedded in social institutions perpetuate limited roles for marginalized groups in this case, rural women in Upper Chitral.

Multivariate linear regression analysis H₂

The multivariate linear regression analysis provides strong statistical support for Hypothesis 2, which posits that there is an association between gender barriers and women participation industry in Upper Chitral.

H₂. There is an association between gendered barriers and women participation in tourism industry.

Table 11 Model Summary B

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.837 ^A	.701	.698	.53037
A. Predictors: (Constant), MDRI				

The model demonstrates a high correlation ($R = .837$) between gendered barriers and women's participation, indicating a strong positive relationship. The R Square value of .701 shows that approximately 70.1% of the variance in women's participation in the tourism industry can be explained by gendered barriers. This suggests that gendered barriers including unequal opportunities, cultural stereotypes, male dominance, and mobility restrictions are major determinants of women's involvement in tourism. The Adjusted R Square (.698) remains very close to the R Square value, confirming the model's robustness and generalizability. The standard error of the estimate (.53037) is relatively low, indicating that the model fits the data well and that the residuals (unexplained variation) are minimal.

Table 12 ANOVA B

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	65.281	1	65.281	232.073	.000 ^B
	Residual	27.848	99	.281		
	Total	93.130	100			
A. Dependent Variable: MDV						
B. Predictors: (Constant), MDRI						

The ANOVA results ($F = 232.073$, $p < 0.000$) indicate that the regression model is highly statistically significant. This means the model explains a significant portion of variance in the dependent variable (MDV – women participation in tourism), and the predictor (MDRI– gender barriers) is not due to random chance.

Table 5 Coefficients B

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.082	.183		.449	.654
	MDRI	.971	.064	.837	15.234	.000
A. Dependent Variable: MDV						

The unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.971$) indicates that for every one-unit increase in gender roles, there is a 0.971-unit increase in the restriction or limitation on women participation in the tourism industry. The t-value (15.234) and p-value (< 0.000) further emphasize the predictor's strong impact and statistical reliability. The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.837$) confirms that gender barriers have a strong effect on women participation in the tourism sector. This regression analysis statistically confirms that gender barriers are a dominant factor restricting women participation in tourism.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong empirical evidence that women in Upper Chitral face multidimensional sociocultural constraints that significantly limit their participation in the tourism industry. The data confirm that harassment, patriarchal authority, structural limitations, and cultural expectations collectively shape women's opportunities, roles, and agency. These results are consistent with recent scholarship highlighting how entrenched sociocultural norms continue to marginalize women in Pakistan's tourism and related sectors (Haider, 2024; Khan et al., 2025). Our survey revealed that a considerable majority of respondents (66.2%) either strongly agreed or agreed that women often feel helpless and fear harassment in public and workplace settings. This finding echoes recent research from Gilgit-Baltistan, which documented gender-based harassment and intimidation as significant deterrents to women's involvement in tourism (Haider, 2024). Similarly, Akram et al. (2025) noted that female tourists and workers in South Asian mountainous regions, including Kashmir and Ladakh, face substantial constraints related to safety concerns and harassment, which not only restrict mobility but also diminish the willingness of families to support women's public participation. These findings underscore the argument that the public sphere remains a contested and unsafe domain for women, thereby reinforcing gendered exclusion. The role of purdah emerged as particularly ambivalent. While 55.4% of respondents agreed that purdah provides women with psychological comfort, 66.1% also acknowledged that it hinders client attraction and reduces tourist interest in women's businesses. This dual role has been well documented in contemporary scholarship, where purdah is described as simultaneously protective and restrictive (Bilal & Ahmad, 2025). It enables a sense of safety in patriarchal settings but also limits visibility, networking opportunities, and direct client interaction, thereby constraining women's economic agency. These findings align with Sharma et al. (2024), who found that cultural restrictions in Kashmir significantly curtail women's ability to access educational and professional opportunities despite offering symbolic protection. More than half of the respondents (55.3%) indicated that rural women lack confidence in interacting with male clients, and 66.2% reported fear of harassment on public transport. These findings reflect the persistence of patriarchal norms in shaping women's habitus, or their internalized dispositions and self-perceptions (Bourdieu, 2005). Structural barriers such as reliance on male family members for business travel (66.9%) and family approval for decision-making (63.9%) mirror the entrenched patriarchal control over women's mobility and autonomy. These findings corroborate the findings of Khan et al. (2025), who emphasized that women's dependency on male guardianship continues to limit their economic engagement in tourism-related enterprises across northern Pakistan. Poor infrastructure and transport emerged as particularly severe challenges, with 68.4% reporting that inadequate transport limits daily travel and 73.8% affirming that poor infrastructure restricts business growth. These structural deficits reinforce earlier findings that inadequate physical infrastructure exacerbates gendered exclusion in rural tourism economies (Haider, 2024; Khan et al., 2025). The findings also reveal substantial skill-related and social capital barriers. A majority of participants (61%) reported that women lack technological awareness due to limited exposure, while 45.3% highlighted language barriers with customers. These observations align with Panezai et al. (2024) and Amjad et al. (2024), who found that educational disparities in rural Pakistan significantly reduce women's ability to acquire professional skills and effectively participate in economic activities. Furthermore, 70% of respondents agreed that the scarcity of women entrepreneurs weakens networking opportunities, reinforcing Bourdieu's (2005) assertion that the unequal distribution of social capital perpetuates structural disadvantage. Findings regarding gendered barriers revealed that 66–67% of respondents identified women as confined to low-paid and informal jobs, excluded from leadership positions, and receiving lower wages than men. These patterns reflect occupational segregation and wage disparity that are widely documented in recent studies of Pakistan's tourism economy (Haider, 2024; Avcı & Gümüş, 2025; Wilson & Chambers,

2025). Similarly, Ali et al. (2024) observed in the Hunza Valley that women entrepreneurs in tourism remain exceptions rather than the norm, with most women confined to supportive or service-oriented roles. Despite systemic barriers, some optimism is evident. Approximately 70% of respondents expressed support for women's involvement in entrepreneurial roles such as running restaurants, cafés, or guest houses. Ali et al. (2024) found similar evidence in Hunza, where women's entrepreneurship in tourism has fostered both income generation and shifts in community perceptions. This reflects the potential of tourism entrepreneurship as a gradual pathway toward empowerment, though it remains largely confined to socially sanctioned spaces and roles (Jan et.al, 2025).

Conclusion

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that socio-cultural factors and gendered barriers critically shape women's participation in the tourism industry of Upper Chitral. The results demonstrate that intimidation, harassment, mobility restrictions, purdah practices, patriarchal authority, and infrastructural deficiencies intersect to limit women's agency and opportunities within this sector. While purdah offers women a sense of safety, it simultaneously constrains their professional visibility and client engagement, reflecting the complex interplay between cultural norms and economic participation. Moreover, systemic issues such as male dominance in business ownership, family approval requirements, wage disparities, and weak networking opportunities reinforce structural gender inequalities. The regression analyses confirmed both hypotheses, revealing that socio-cultural factors and gendered barriers explain a significant proportion of variance in women's participation in tourism. These results validate the argument that women's roles are not merely the outcome of individual agency but are deeply embedded in cultural expectations and institutionalized gender hierarchies. Interpreted through Bourdieu's theoretical lens, the findings highlight the reproduction of symbolic violence and the unequal distribution of social and cultural capital, which perpetuate occupational segregation and limit women's access to leadership and entrepreneurial opportunities. This study contributes to the growing body of literature (Ali et al., 2024; Panezai et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2025) emphasizing the need to address structural and cultural barriers in order to foster inclusive economic development. Policy interventions must move beyond economic empowerment schemes to encompass cultural transformation, infrastructural improvement, and digital literacy initiatives. Without dismantling entrenched socio-cultural norms and redistributing caregiving responsibilities, women's full participation in tourism will remain constrained. Ultimately, the study underscores that achieving gender equity in tourism in regions like Upper Chitral requires an integrated approach addressing both structural limitations and cultural conditioning. Sociologically, the study underscores the need to deconstruct the rigid dichotomy between domesticity and economic agency and instead promote gender-inclusive narratives that recognize and validate women's multidimensional roles in tourism. It calls for the transformation of policy frameworks, community norms, and institutional mechanisms not only to improve women's material access to resources but also to shift symbolic valuations of female labor. Programs that foster women's social capital, support mobility, provide professional training, and create women-centric business networks must be embedded within broader strategies of gender mainstreaming in tourism development.

Contribution of the study

Viewed through Bourdieu's theoretical framework, these findings highlight the intersection of habitus, field, and capital in perpetuating gender inequality. The persistence of harassment, patriarchal control, and infrastructural limitations represents structural barriers embedded within the social field, while internalized cultural expectations such as purdah constitute elements of habitus that shape women's dispositions (Laurie et al., 2005; Trivedi et al., 2025). Simultaneously,

limited access to technological, educational, and networking resources restricts women's ability to accumulate social and cultural capital, thereby reinforcing symbolic violence and gendered subordination (Bilal & Ahmad, 2025). Moreover, this study contributes to the growing feminist discourse that views entrepreneurship not merely as an economic activity but as a site of social and cultural struggle. By foregrounding the role of women in tourism sector of Upper Chitral, the research calls attention to the urgent necessity of overcoming systemic inequalities and building a more inclusive tourism landscape that centers women not as marginal actors but as key stakeholders in Pakistan's economic and cultural development.

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