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## #IlooklikeaSurgeon! The Monthly Stitch | Edition 2

Dear faculty, staff, and well-wishers of Surgery,

Our first edition of the electronic newsletter seemed to be well received and we had a number of comments on it – we welcome all comments as that provides us with the path to improve! We should take the time to thank the team that worked on it and organized by Fakhra Atif – the faculty and staff members are listed here: Dr Saqib Bakhshi, Dr Sana Zeeshan, Dr Robia Ghafoor, Khairunnissa Nadeem, Mariam Khan, and Dr Farhan Raza.

The second one just one month later is again completely full of things happening in our wonderfully diverse department. There is so much in fact that perhaps a weekly edition would not be enough to cover it all adequately. It reflects on how much we have to be grateful and thankful for in these trying times. The recent earthquake in Turkey and Syria that has claimed the lives of over 35 thousand people is a stark reminder of the fragility of our existence. Our prayer and best wishes are with them and, if needed, our expertise as well.

There was a robust response to the ‘guess the surgeon’ picture game – and the newsletter committee has decided to offer up the opportunity of tea / coffee with me for the winner. I am pretty certain that represents a ‘punishment’ rather than a prize of any kind (as in “you are guilty and sentenced to three teas with Saleem!” as a form of a severe penalty), so I am open to any alternative like some chocolate or something else instead!

The ‘cover’ of this edition features our outstanding women faculty replicating the iconic New Yorker cover from 2017. This was iconic because it highlighted that female surgeons are not only here to stay, but should be expected to deliver equal - if not frequently superior - care and outcomes to their male counterparts. It started a number of movements copying the image and the ‘#Ilooklikeasurgeon’ tag. It was actually designed to represent a patient’s perspective as they are going to sleep and /or waking up and what they see when they look up. In fact the electronic version cover was animated, as you can see here: <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/cover-story-2017-04-03> As we see our super talented women medical students and residents move into hopefully an increasing number of faculty positions, we should be proud of that and happy that the department will be delivering ever better care in the future, Inshallah.

Thanks so much and take care!!

**Saleem Islam**  
Chair, Department of Surgery



## *Surgery's Pioneer-Dr Farhat Moazam*



### **Reflections of a Woman Surgeon**

“Traveler, there is no path,  
The path is made by walking”

*Antonio Machado, Spanish poet (1875-1939)*

It was October 1985 when I returned to Pakistan, the year in which the Aga Khan University inaugurated its hospital. I had spent almost two decades in the USA training in general and pediatric surgery and then as full-time faculty at the University of Florida in Gainesville. As the politically correct title chairperson had yet to cross the Atlantic Ocean, I was designated the Founding “Chairman” of the Department of Surgery in AKU. I recall a befuddled, polite security guard refusing to let me drive in through one of the university gates. “Only the chairman sahib can enter through this gate,” he said. “And the chairman is a man.”

AKU was ahead of its time in appointing me, a woman, to head the Department of Surgery. It was not until 1987 that USA would have its first female chief of surgery, Dr Olga Jonasson, a transplant surgeon, at the Ohio State University. During my residency and fellowship years, all my teachers were male surgeons, none of the programs I trained in had female residents besides me, and I remained the sole female surgeon on the faculty of the University of Florida until my departure. Having cut my professional teeth in all-male environments (sans the secretaries), being handed the reins of an all-male surgical department in AKU was not, as my Floridian colleagues would say, my first rodeo. Nevertheless, the horse and the arena were quite different.

As I look back, my challenges were based on the novelty of a woman calling the shots in a patriarchal society with traditional gender roles, and trepidation among the surgeons about steps which, in my view, were essential for a strong, academic department. These included initiating mortality and morbidity meetings and surgical rounds for faculty and residents, and my insistence on structured residency programs replacing the British professor-apprenticeship paradigm in place. However, among my proudest moments was the appointment of another woman surgeon and the female chief resident in our first batch of general surgery residents.

Has the world changed for women wishing to pursue a surgical career since then? To some extent, perhaps, but, based on my observations and innumerable conversations with young female surgeons, not appreciably so. General surgery and its sub-specialities remain dominated by male surgeons in numbers



and top positions. As far as I know, among AKU's current 75 or more full-time surgeons, only 7 are females (senior instructors and above, no full professor), a situation similar to that in other universities/hospitals in the city. Women wishing to train/practice in surgery are still viewed as "less serious" than their male counterparts, perceived as less competent because they are "emotional." And the oldest canard, construed as a compliment, that a female surgeon is good because "she works like a man" needs to be put to rest.

My argument is not to equalize the number of female and male surgeons or to demonize men. It is to highlight a collective responsibility to ensure equal and fair opportunities for young people, irrespective of their sex, who wish to pursue this field.

**To paraphrase Machado, female and male surgeons have to begin walking together to make this a path.**

### *Guess the Surgeon?*



**L-R:** The surgeon on "Guess the Surgeon" last month was none other than Dr. Saulat Fatimi, the renowned professor of cardiac surgery at AKUH. Enjoy the pictures from his childhood again as he shares his lovely childhood memories; 1-year-old Prof. Saulat playing with an empty jar outside his house; 20-year-old Prof. Saulat during 2nd year of his medical school at AKUH; Prof. Saulat at the age of 3 years with his family at the time of his eldest brother's graduation from medical college.

The winners of the contest are *Khairunnissa Nadeem* 🏆 and *Marium Khan* 🏆



Happy  
Guessing!!



Now that you have finished guessing the first surgeon, let's activate our neurons and identify the surgeon in the pictures above. Send in your guesses through the following link, [Click >>](#) and don't forget to mention your department.

The winners from this month will get an invite to have coffee with Dr Saleem Islam (Chair, Surgery), and a chance to have candid conversation with him, so don't miss out on this opportunity to have some lighthearted conversation over a cup of coffee.

Good Luck!!!

## Surgery Highlights



The 18th Annual Academic Surgical Congress (ASC) was held in Houston on February 7-9, 2023. ASC is the largest conference of academic surgeons in USA. With 27 research presentations, AKU had the 7th highest number of

abstracts at the conference from all over the world. Our faculty including Dean Adil Haider, Chair Prof. Saleem Islam, Dr. Hina Inam and Dr. Saqib Bakhshi attended the prestigious conference with a number of research fellows and students. Drs. Lubna Vohra and Sana Zeeshan's research fellow, Dr. Danish Ali, won the ASC travel award. On the sidelines of ASC, an AKU alumni dinner was graciously hosted by Drs. Azam Kundi and Monira (Class of '92).

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A simulation-based bowel anastomosis workshop was organized on January 28, at ASLS, for General Surgery residents. Twenty residents participated in the one-day event, which Dr Madeeha Ali and Dr Rimsha Afaq directed. Prof. Inam Pal was the senior faculty for this activity.

Animal tissue (goat bowel) was used at the wet lab to practice bowel anastomosis.

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Pediatric Surgery faculty Prof. Muhammad Arshad attended the 16th meeting of the Arab Association of Paediatric Surgeons. He delivered invited talks on Renal tumors with intravascular & intracardiac thrombus, and the management of Wilms tumor.

The event was held in Tunisia on January 27-28.





The Section of Dentistry conducted its inaugural annual Microsurgical Endodontic Course. This course was organized using unique microsurgical models and surgical instruments by Dr Fahad Umer, course director. Faculty and residents from different institutions attended it.

Some notable attendees were Prof Ambreen Afzal, councilor CPSP , and Prof Arshad Hasan, Principal of Dow Dental College.

Dean Adil Haider, Chair surgery, and section head, graced the course with their presence.



Department of Surgery conducted a unique graphic designing course for its admin staff. Communicators from other departments were also invited for a collaborative learning approach. The course was conducted by IVS teacher Sir. Sikander Ali who intensively taught the participants to manoeuvre Photoshop, Indesign and Illustrator in a 12-class program—a great initiative by the department to groom its staff. The participants also learned sketching to improve their creative prowess along with calligraphy. Prof. Ather Enam was an eager participant in the course.



Dr Ian Shyaka, Dr Francoise Makagaju and Dr Yves Caster Nezerwa are the first graduates of Rwanda's plastic surgery training program. They contacted Dr Zia ul Islam, Consultant Plastic Surgeon at AKUH, for clinical attachment for board exam preparation. During this attachment at AKUH, they gained experience handling a wide range of conditions in plastic surgery. They attended special teaching sessions and mock exams at our hospital. This helped them to pass the COSECSA Board Exam on the first attempt. Dr Makagaju was declared the Best Candidate in the exam.

After passing the exam, their message to Dr Zia was, *'We can't thank you enough.'*

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Presurgical Naso-Alveolar Molding (PNAM) is a non-surgical approach to the management of cleft lip and palate in infants. It involves using a custom-made oral appliance and nasal stent to mold the shape and position of the alveolar bone, nasal cartilage, and lip tissue before surgical repair. The device is typically placed soon after birth and worn for a few months leading up to the surgery. The goal of PNAM is to improve the surgical repair's aesthetic outcome by minimising the aperture's size and tension, improving the position and symmetry of the nasal structures, and reducing the need for bone grafting.

Cleft lip and palate have a high incidence in Pakistan. This is well managed through the team approach to treating this condition. This case explicitly highlights the role of infant orthopedics, by Presurgical Naso Alveolar Molding. The first case of PNAM was recently completed by Dr Murtaza Kazmi & team; later, surgical correction was carried out by Dr Zia ul Islam, resulting in an excellent outcome for the patient

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ENT Chief Resident Dr Ambreen Unar received a travel scholarship from the British Academic Conference of Otolaryngology (BACO) to attend their annual meeting in Birmingham, UK, on February 15-17. Dr Unar presented her poster at the conference. The picture shows Dr Unar with other scholarship recipients from India, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Ukraine, Nigeria and Kenya.



The Section of Neurosurgery organised a workshop on Computer Vision for Medical Imaging, realising the need for incorporating novel methods in surgical research. The highly interactive 3-day workshop included didactic and hands-on sessions on computer vision methods applicable to radiological images delivered by faculty from AKU, NUCES-FAST, and GIK Institute. The workshop engaged professionals from various medical, computer science, and biomedical engineering backgrounds promoting interdisciplinary learning and networking.



The AKUH Department of Surgery team arranged a stoma get-together to gather ostomy patients on one platform.

So they can share their views and get their concerns responses by an arranged expert panel discussion multidisciplinary team based of doctors, Stoma nurses, and dietitians. This program involved around 150 ostomy patients and their attendants, physician, and nursing staff. In this program, multiple patients shared their life experiences and coping mechanisms from post-surgery till they moved into functional life, which was a significant part of the program. Another important part was the motivated poem and panel discussion. At the end of the session, gifts were distributed among the invited patient and participants.

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Dr. Altaf Laghari, Assistant Professor in Section of Neurosurgery, passed FRCS in January 2023, in Italy.





Abdul Majid, Senior Assistant, received his MBA from SZABIST with a chancellor role on securing a 3.5 GPA

## The Power Women



"Aga Khan University is my home," - Ashraf Fidai

Spending her adolescent years in India and emulating the manners from *Hyderabad*, *Dhakkan* Ashraf Fidai is an epitome of grace and poise. Dressed in powdered blue *Shalwar Kurta* and freshly painted nails, her



eyes never dried from the freshness of pain she endured in the form of her husband's death (Karim Fidai) in 2010.

"It was an arranged marriage, and we had financial struggles, but life was beautiful with him," says Fidai in between her sobs.

Fidai joined AKU in 1991 and left in 1997 after she could not manage her two daughters and night shifts.

"I started working as a secretary to fend for our financial needs because we couldn't afford a house help, and I needed to work as well as care for my daughters."

Fidai re-joined AKU in 2007 after her daughters were old enough to be left under the care of her parents.

"My uncle in India adopted me as he had no children, but later, I came back to my parents in Pakistan and got married here; the same year, my uncle was blessed with a son after years of childlessness," recalls Fidai in her soft vocals.

Ashraf Fidai struggled with her husband to reach some financial stability to raise her daughters well when in 2010, her husband got diagnosed with a rare disease of Guillain-Barré syndrome.

"He stayed in AKU for two weeks and then passed away on September 4th, 2010 (Ramadan 27th)," says Fidai with a tear-filled shock, "That was a nightmare to my existent struggles, and I couldn't recover mentally for three years after my husband's demise."

Fidai feels proud of how her department supported her. Murad Bana generated an email to extend financial support to her, so she didn't have to worry about bills and finances while her husband was at the hospital. It was a crisis moment in her life, and the Urology's faculty offered their unwavering support to her.

"I don't remember how often I fell unconscious in AKU, and my father was allowed to sit with me because I was not in a normal state, whereas my mother would take care of my daughters at home," says Fidai.

However, time ticked away, but Fidai didn't leave her dreams behind to raise her daughters in an empowering way.

"I didn't give birth to multiple children to wait for a son, I had those tall-mounted dreams for my daughters, and when an average mother would sing poems, I would sing:

*Twinkle Twinkle Little Star; My daughters will shine and be a star,*" says Fidai with a twinkling pride in her eyes.

Her dreams did come true when her daughter Almas Fidai (Popular TV Actress) took her to Tariq Road and didn't spill the surprise unless Fidai saw her daughter proud and smiling back at her from across a giant billboard.

"You are my star, Almas," said Fidai with her heart full of pride.

Her Younger daughter Kehkashan is an IVS Graduate and an architect with a distinction in her degree.

"HR supported me at the time in allowing two jobs, and I would come with a colleague in the morning (to save fare) and go with another for my second job and reach home at 11:00 to sleep and return to the office again in the morning," says Fidai.

The journey we can revisit in a few minutes had years buried under them and the struggles of being a single parent when her daughter (then 11-years-old) Kehkashan got psychologically affected by the Karimabad Jamaatkhana blast and assumed that her mother died in one.

"My daughter stopped walking, and I had to admit her to AKU psychiatry when the doctors strictly asked me not to meet her for two days. Can you imagine my pain when I was in the hospital and could not see my daughter?" says Fidai with her eyes nothing but tears.

Her daughter recovered, and a kind doctor had let her look at her from afar. Fidai could hug Kehkashan after two days of staying away from her.

"Kehkashan was admitted to NCA Lahore after that, and I saw a bomb explosion near her campus. I couldn't talk to her for four hours, and those were the most difficult four hours of my life," says Fidai.

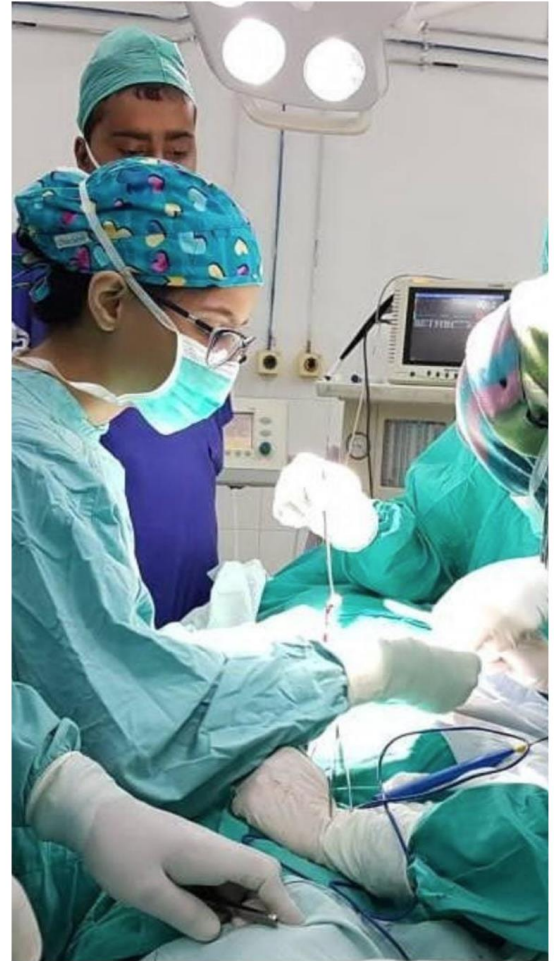
Fidai called Kehkashan back from NCA before her unfinished degree and enrolled in IVS because she couldn't bear to be away from her.

"I got many marriage proposals, but first I didn't marry for my daughters, and now I won't marry for my mother," says Fidai, "But my heart is eaten away every day that if I lose my mother, where will I go?" says Fidai.

Fidai, both daughters, are married and settled, and she lives alone with her mother. She comes to AKU and finds her happiness and solace with her colleagues, but the idea of her 80+ old Mom anytime leaving her gnaws at her heart.

"My example is like a bull tied to a pole and made to walk in circles; after all my struggles and pain, I am also walking in circles and in the end, I am standing where I started, *Akeli Tanha* (all alone)...."

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*“We (men and women) are differently abled”- Hafiza Fatima Aziz*

**Q. Who/What Inspired you to become a Surgeon?**

A. My mother and sister hold strong position in my life, but the right inspiration comes from my awe of brains. I was always fascinated by the brain's anatomy and wanted to exercise my expertise in working on them.

**Q. Surgical training can be frustrating, and residents often have bitter memories from their junior years of training. What is your take on this?**

A. Yes, my junior year was challenging because I came from JPMC, and it was a different setup. I didn't know things, and dealing with people was difficult, but I stayed persistent and always kept sight of my goals. My vision was clear, and Alhumdulillah, I achieved what I always wanted.

**Q. There are around 360 neurosurgeons in Pakistan, less than 10% of whom are women. How did you remain confident and excel as a female resident in men dominating society?**

A. Both genders have their strengths, and expressing emotions is a strength in women. I never felt anything different. It would be best to have a definite purpose, courage and support to avoid problems and prejudices.

**Q. Work-life balance is an essential aspect of a healthy career. Did you ever feel that you could not maintain that balance because you were a female?**

A. I don't believe in work-life balance, but I am a strong proponent of work-life integration, so when I am at work, I am entirely at work with my most possible efforts. However, my job commanded me to cut down on any lazy time, which I happily do because I get pleasure from what I do, so I won't call it a compromise.

**Q. Are gender roles becoming less stringent in Pakistan?**

A. Yes, because I don't cook, but I am so passionate about my work which shows that we have started accepting gender roles to be less stringent.

*From the Alumni's Catalogue*



***Surgical stitch that Binds: Road Trip to Kartarpur Corridor***

The planning started over the *Anda Paratha Nashta* at *Alamgir* with Nadeem Khurshaidi (LNH, alumnus 1998), Muneer Amanullah (SIUT, alumnus 1996) and Mohammad Asim Khan (Children's Hospital, Lahore, alumnus 1999) and the author (Aamir Jafarey, CBEC-SIUT, alumnus 1995). Khurshaidi casually mentioned the ideal weather for a road trip for the boys in his beloved Dala (AKA Isuzu DMax), going to Lahore and onwards to *Gurdwara Darbar Sahib*, at Kartarpur. Mohammad Arshad (LNH and AKU, alumnus 1994) volunteered in absentia.

We departed Karachi at 4:30 am, with Khurshaidi at the wheel of the Dala. Khurshaidi had planned the trip like he plans his surgeries, down to the last detail.

We covered the entire 1211 km in 15 hours, with generous breaks for tea and pee, continuously updating our progress with photographs on the Alumni WhatsApp group, which Tabish Chawla (AKU, alumnus 1994), flying to Lahore the same afternoon, picked up. He joined us at *Butt karahi* for dinner and accompanied us to Kartarpur the next day, making it a group of 6 alumni.

Kartarpur is about 3 hours from Lahore, extendable indefinitely if one keeps stopping for *gup shup* over *chai pakoras* as we did!

The Gurdwara Darbar Sahib complex is a century old, surrounded by a sprawling marbled courtyard, truly an awe-inspiring piece of architecture. This is where the founder of Sikhism Sri Guru Nanak lived and died in 1539. The site houses the holy water pond, residences for pilgrims and elegant buildings for the *langar* prepared in a vast, clean kitchen,. We were served delicious *chawal*, *daal* with *achar*.

Providing the Sikh yattris visa-free access to their holiest of sites is heartwarming.

This may open more avenues between hearts across the barbed wire fence.

This memorable trip to Lahore ended with a fabulous lunch hosted by Asim and his family for us, with Dr Farhat Moazam, who was in town for a conference, as his guest of honor.





Dr Mustafa Kamal received the famous Levi Wetkin award by Thoracic Surgery Foundation. It's a two-week fellowship with world-renowned Dr. Munir Boodwai at Ottawa Heart Centre, Canada. He visited Kennedy Space Center, Florida, USA, after his research presentation at the Academic Surgical Congress (ASC) on 2-3rd Feb 2023, where he also received the 2022 ASC Research Travel Award.

### Groundbreaking Thoughts

To tell a woman everything she cannot do is to tell her what she can-

**Dr Dinaz Gandhi Consultant OMFS**

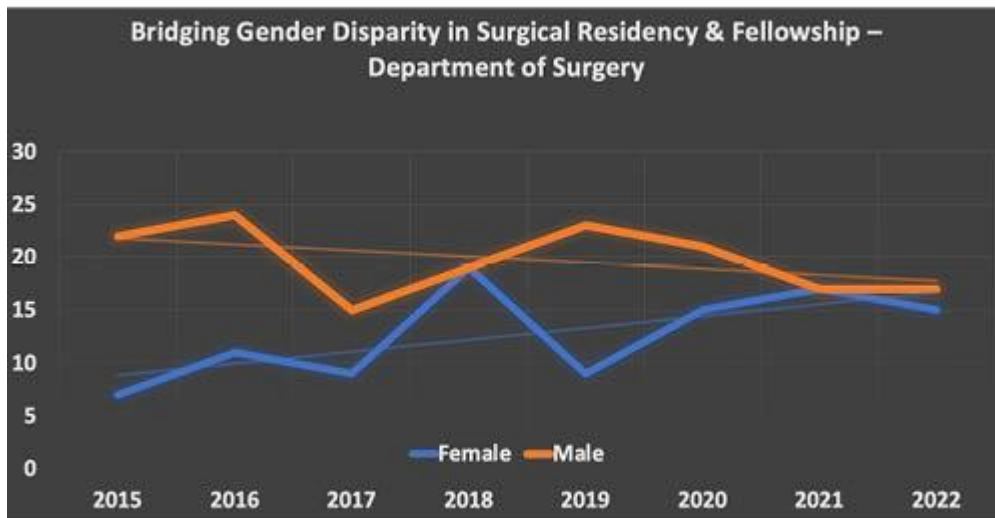
A man or woman does not matter, I believe it's all about recognizing their rights and potential- **Dr Lubna Vohra**

Department of Surgery keeps me happy and safe when Dr Saleem gifted me *mithai* on Diwali, this is the spirit we want in the country with women and minorities!- **Sapna Raj**

**Dr Mujahid Jamil:** "Courage, Perseverance and Integrity: NOT Gender!"

"Competency comes first in surgery and is independent of gender,"  
**Dr. Hasnain Zafar**

**Dr Farah Saeed-** Women empowerment play an integral role in shaping the next generation and nation



The Department of Surgery strives to reduce gender disparity in surgical training in Pakistan. This also aligns with the vision of gender diversity promoted by Dean Adil Haider, who abolished questions on gender-specific roles from residency and fellowship interviews around 4 years back. The results are evident in this graph.

### ***Bioethics, Gender diversity, and Surgery***

Dr Tashfeen Ahmad, Assistant Professor, Department of Surgery, introduced the Postgraduate Student Bill of rights in the Orthopaedic Residency Manual. It includes clauses pertaining to equity during his tenure as the Director of Orthopaedics [Read More>>](#)

In Dr Tashfeen's supervision Dr Rufina Ali, a graduate of the Orthopaedic Surgery Residency Programme, 2022, co-authored the article [Read More >>](#)

Dr Nida Zahid, Assistant Professor, is a representative from the Department of Surgery in WGW (working group of women). She has been a part of numerous workshops propagating gender diversity, including Promoting gender diversity in the workplace. Following studies are done under surgery's paradigm: Factors Affecting Women Surgeons' Careers in Low-Middle-Income Countries: An International Survey, World Journal of Surgery [Read More>>](#)

Gender discrimination against female surgeons: A cross-sectional study in a lower-middle income country, Annals of Medicine and Surgery [Read More>>](#) Cultural Barriers for Women in Surgery: How Thick is the Glass Ceiling? An Analysis from a Low Middle-Income Country, World journal of surgery [Read More>>](#) Workplace mistreatment and mental health in female surgeons in Pakistan. BJS open [Read More>>](#)

**Thanks for Reading!**

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We will be pleased to receive your comments, feedback, and contributions for the next edition before the 15th of each month.

Happy Next *Stitch!*

Please write to us at [fakhra.atif@aku.edu](mailto:fakhra.atif@aku.edu)