

Khan, Mir Asghar Ali

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### Chapter 5.14 Research Management and Administration in Pakistan's Context

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#### Kontakt/Contact

ZBW – Leibniz-Informationszentrum Wirtschaft/Leibniz Information Centre for Economics  
Düsternbrooker Weg 120  
24105 Kiel (Germany)  
E-Mail: [rights\[at\]zbw.eu](mailto:rights[at]zbw.eu)  
<https://www.zbw.eu/>

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## Chapter 5.14

# Research Management and Administration in Pakistan's Context

*Mir Asghar Ali Khan*

 0000-0001-6464-3003, Director, Research National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases, Karachi, Pakistan;  Conceptualization, Data curation, Methodology, Visualization, Writing – original draft

### Abstract

Pakistan, being a developing country, still has a long way to go to see progress in the field of research managers and administrators (RMAs). This chapter briefly explains the profession's ecosystem in the country, its evolution, available data, and the future of the field. The type and quantum of extramural research happening in Pakistan are quite significant in terms of the number of grants as well as the total annual funding. Despite this progress, the growth of research management and administration as a profession is slow-paced because of the lack of recognition of RMAs as a profession, complemented by the dearth of schools that teach this formally in the country. The future, however, sounds promising as more and more people are gradually undertaking this dynamic field and working formally to acquire the knowledge and skills to become better research management and administration professionals.

*Keywords:* Pakistan; research management and administration; RAAAP; CRA; extramural research; profession

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## Research Ecosystem

Pakistan, as one of the developing countries of Asia ([World Bank Data, 2022](#)), has been predominantly dependent on extramural funding for a variety of implementation and research initiatives ([The World Bank, 2022](#)). Be it health improvement, education enhancement, law and order betterment, infrastructure building, or capacity development, the country's indigenous funds are unfortunately limited for such imperative requirements. Pakistan's institutions, both private and public, primarily rely on international grants to be able to initiate and sustain social, health, and similar other societal and community initiatives for the country ([The Global Fund, 2022](#)).

Over the past decade or so, a greater influx of international developmental grants has been observed. Unfortunately due to the unavailability of data, this cannot be statistically substantiated however it's a well-known fact here. Many international and national NGOs (non-governmental organisations/non-profits) have started up (Islamabad Capital Territory Administration, 2022) and have been supporting or taking new initiatives towards the betterment of the people here. With more grants coming in, the need to have trained people who can manage the funds professionally has also risen. Like in other developing countries, there is a serious dearth of skilled and trained research administrators in Pakistan. The absence of schools or programs that teach research administration as a formal profession adds to the challenge here, hence the grants in Pakistan are mostly being managed either by accountants, business administration graduates, or in some precarious scenarios, by the investigators themselves. With the absence of specific knowledge, hands-on training, and requisite experiences, there is a risk everyone is taking in terms of possible mistakes and errors by not having trained research administrators manage such large grant portfolios, both in private and public sectors.

Since there is no verifiable source of aggregate data, based on the observations by the author, the greater share of the external funding pie is still held by the government institutions, followed by NGOs, and then by academic institutions, as the funders prefer their recipients to be actively engaging with the government institutions or to be the government institution. They believe that the impact of the research and findings can be augmented and strategised with the overall goals of the funder this way. Unlike academic institutions where the goal is to create knowledge through research, most of the research work at the government levels is *implementation research* or *capacity development* (action on the field with subjects or training/mentorships). Non-profits conduct both types of research: implementation research as well as knowledge generation work. It is important to mention here that many academic institutions have active collaborations with foreign institutions based all over the world. Stanford University, Harvard University, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, University of California in San Francisco, University of British Columbia, University of Toronto, University of Sydney, University of Virginia, and Emory University are amongst the many. While the absence of data does not allow a definite conclusion, one of the key reasons behind this active collaboration with international partners, is the lower cost of operationalising the research (per subject recruitment and follow-up, logistics, cheaper human resources, insurance, etc.).

In Pakistan, there are 240 recognised universities and degree-awarding institutions in the country ([Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, 2022](#)), though not all of those are actively engaged in intramural or extramural research. There is no data available but based on the author's observations at various training sessions in the field of research administration and grants management in Pakistan, only about 15% of

the universities are engaged in extramural research despite the fact that the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan lays a lot of emphasis on universities undertaking research. However, this does not preclude university professors having publications in accredited journals for non-funded research as well as collaborative research with national and international partners.

Pakistan receives grants from across the globe, including funders like The World Bank, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, UNICEF, World Food Programme, World Health Organization, Grand Challenges, Canadian International Development Organization, Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office, UK (formerly called DFID), Global Fund, Packard Foundation, USAID, AusAID, MRC, Wellcome Trust, National Institutes of Health, USA, National Science Foundation, USA, and similar other US federal agencies. Research institutions in Pakistan tend to welcome grants from foundations more than federal agencies because of the comparative ease of managing those. However, the real reason appears to be that the institutions lack the ability to apply for and manage grants from federal agencies such as the NIH of the US. Very few recipients (or intended recipients) are aware of the procedural and regulatory requirements for such grant applications, lest the financial compliance, post-award, and audit guidelines.

Locally, institutions receive funding from key institutions like Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, National Institute of Health, Pakistan Science Foundation, and other government-supported initiatives and programmes.

Pakistan also has research councils, including: Abdul Qadir Khan Research Laboratories, Pakistan Agriculture Research Council, Pakistan Health Research Council (formerly known as Pakistan Medical and Research Council), Nuclear Institute of Agricultural Biology, Pakistan Arts Council, and Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Council ([Pakistan Center for Philanthropy, 2022](#)). These councils have high-end scientists and relevant expertise, and work diligently towards developing and conducting state-of-the-art research.

People working closer to the role of a research managers and administrator (RMA) professional, are mostly found in universities, NGOs, and iNGOs, and their educational attainments are market competitive. Even for the starter position of an *Assistant, Research and Grants Administration*, institutions ask for at least a bachelor's degree (accounting/business management). For higher positions like managers and senior managers, the criteria are even higher and individuals with master's degree in business administration, and/or cost and management accountancy, make it to that level, after having worked for a period of 4–8 years in this field. Unlike the Western world, where high school graduates are able to secure entry-level office job, the academic criterion for jobs, in the author's option, is higher in Pakistan as compared to the developed world.

## **Evolution of the Profession**

RMA, or what is locally termed as Research Administration, as a profession is still in its infancy stage in Pakistan due to the lack of awareness of this specialised field. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there are very few institutions and individuals who are cognizant of the fact that there is a specific expertise required to manage and administer research grants effectively. There are no formal schools and training centres that offer and conduct capacity development workshops or sessions in this field. There is no academic curriculum in any of the institutes of higher education in the country that teaches Research Administration as a subject, nor are there any formal

certifications being offered, by any government or local body for the credentialing of the research administrators. Very few have proper RMA profession titles, mostly people are instead designated as *Finance Manager, Compliance Officer, Accounts Officer, Research Manager, or Research Coordinator*. Hardly any had obtained any formal training in this field. Hardly anybody knew that there is a full-time two-year degree programme offered by accredited universities outside the country, for instance, Master in Research Administration/MSc in Research Administration; [University of Central Florida \(2023\)](#)/[Johns Hopkins University \(2023\)](#)/[City University of New York \(2023\)](#), and various on-site mentoring fellowship available for people to obtain training (e.g. Society of Research Administrators International's Awards). In Pakistan, there is still a long way to go for this profession to be formalised, although the need is very much existent, because of the increasing extramural research funding.

### **Current Community**

In the author's opinion, RMA as a profession is budding in Pakistan, but there are no formal associations or fraternities that exist in the country despite the fact that there are associations in other professional fields. No centrally governed certification body prevails. People do engage in taking up training courses that are offered by a few, formally educated and trained experts in the country, but those courses are offered on a random basis and provide course-specific certificates only. An example would be the Research and Grants Management Training Sessions offered by the author himself in the years 2014, 2019, 2020, and 2021; the first one with the collaboration of the Society of Research Administrators International. With the increasing awareness of certifications like CRA/CRPA/CRFA (Certified Research Administrator/Certified Pre-Award Research Administrator/Certified Financial Research Administrator), offered by RACC in the United States, research administration professionals have started to prepare for and undertake such courses (e.g. enrolling in the annual meeting of SRAI, NCURA, CARA, etc.). However, the frequency is still too low, primarily because such certificates are not required by the employers.

The RMA community in Pakistan is very informal and primarily based on social media platforms only. People connect with others who have their matching job profiles or interest to stay abreast of any developments in this field, share articles or conference announcements. Going forward, it is hoped that a formal fraternity will be established, which may also in time implement certification systems.

### **State of Research Administration and Future Challenges**

As it stands, there is no centrally manned dataset available for Pakistan that gives us some factual insights about the RMA profession as well as professionals at this point. Research administrators in Pakistan have been making efforts for people working on RMA roles in Pakistan to become part of the RAAAP-3 dataset ([Kerridge, Dutta, et al., 2022](#)), however, only three were received. There were no responses from Pakistan in the previous RAAAP-1 and RAAAP-2 surveys. Among the three entries in RAAAP-3, some of the responses received in lieu of the RAAAP-3 dataset call can be summarised as follows:

- *Gender of the respondents was all males.*
- *Two have been working for 5–9 years and one for more than 15 years in this profession.*
- *One respondent belonged to a hospital, two from university research.*

- All have been from private not-for-profit institutions.
- All have been permanent staff with their education aligning with what they are doing.
- Two have Masters level education; one has Bachelors level education.
- The age distribution has been one from 25 to 34, one from 35 to 44, and another from 45 to 54 group.
- Every respondent opined that they would recommend RMA as a professional career to others.

## Trends and Future Challenges

Conversations with RMA professionals working in international and national NGOs as well as social development organisations in Pakistan, suggested that the gender trend might be leaning towards males. It was also indicated that organisations prefer to hire RMAs on a project-to-project basis instead of recruiting them over the long-term which would actually develop institutional capacities. This does not hold true, however, for educational institutions and organisations operating over years with a strategic vision. The staff are either provided training internally (by senior/trained staff) or in some specific cases, grant (funder) specific training is provided either by the teams of the funders or by professional trainers who are qualified to impart such training.

In terms of registered international NGOs, there are 103 registered international NGOs in Pakistan and 983 registered national NGOs (data as of 6 June 2022) (Ministry of Interior, Government of Pakistan, 2022). An interesting trend has been observed in Pakistan, in national and international NGOs, which is 'hire-for-work'. As there is a serious dearth of skilled RMAs in Pakistan, institutions hire people on a grant-to-grant basis (due to non-availability) and once the grant contract is ended the employment of RMA staff also finishes, primarily because there is no sustainable funding available at the institutions to retain such staff. This adds to the challenge for people working in, or looking forward to making RMA as a profession.

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