



JOB-RELATED CONSTRAINTS FACED BY WORKING WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS: A CASE STUDY OF AKBAR PURA DISTRICT NOWSHERA, KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA, PAKISTAN

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Abstract:

The study was conducted in Akbar Pura village, located in the Nowshera district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, with the objective of examining the job-related constraints faced by working women. The study aimed to identify the types and nature of jobs undertaken by these women and investigate the challenges they encountered both in the workplace and at home due to family responsibilities. A sample of households with working women was selected using simple random sampling, representing twenty-five percent of the total households. The findings of the study indicated that most of the respondents were literate, belonged to the young age group, and were unmarried; the majority of the working women were involved in teaching professions. The practice of pardah (veiling) was common among the respondents, and it was perceived as both a cultural and Islamic practice. The study identified several constraints and difficulties faced by working women, these included problems related to transportation, instances of men staring at women, time constraints, managing household responsibilities, lack of respect for female workers, and the expectation to return home early. The majority of the women shared these problems with their family members. Based on the findings, the study recommended the provision of a conducive and secure environment for working women so that they can perform their jobs effectively and support their families. It also emphasized the importance of prioritizing women's education to enable them to shoulder the economic burdens of their families. In summary, the study conducted in Akbar Pura village highlighted the job-related constraints faced by working women. The findings emphasized the need for a supportive environment and increased education for women to empower them economically and address the challenges they face in both the workplace and their homes.

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Keywords: job constraints, working women, rural areas, District Nowshera, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

1. Introduction

Gender roles are not similar in different developing countries of the world, men and women perform different roles in every society. Gender empowerment plays an important role in exploiting these potentials so that they could contribute to the socio-economic development of the country. The strength-requiring activities, presumably a male trait, are not strictly apportioned to males, in fact, activities such as burdens bearing men and women are pillars of society; without their equal participation in all spheres of life, and no society can progress. As far as the capabilities of women are concerned, they are no less than men. They are performing their role as doctors, teachers, lawyers, and many other fields of life but still, society is not giving them their legitimate status and working women are facing a lot of problems in Pakistan (Sobia, 2011)

In Pakistan, women's development in society is hindered, as many factors, maintenance of rural women in particular, and sometimes other parts of the oppressive dominant society. Most rural women have to bear the double burden of domestic and external work. They are the first to rise, the last one to sleep. They lit the fire to prepare breakfast, wash dishes and clean the house before setting out for outside work, although the condition of women in urban areas is much better than those women who are residing in rural areas. But the old traditions and religious restrictions impede the independence and freedom of movement of women (Chand, 1999).

The majority of Pakistani women are silent and neglected farmers in rural areas. This is a poor and illiterate majority of the past, leading to physical hardship with many hours of housework, for which no compensation or recognition. After all, others collapsed in bed; these women are still cleaning up, cleaning, and preparing the next day. These women have longer days than the rest of their families (Bokhari, 2005).

No doubt, Pakistani women are very confident today. They are now working in all sectors of society, including media, education, art, film, planning, and decision-making. They are eager to participate in any effort. Pakistani women's race is on the Fast Track and now nothing can stop them (Altaf, 2004).

Women refused to be appointed to key positions; they are limited opportunities in public employment, which is expected to education. Women who find work are severely restricted in their speech, dress, and behavior, similarly, the role of cultural attitudes that limit women's opportunities, the series of conditions on the ability of women's work, including complete coverage of their own, away from the man, instead of criticizing the government (Sweetman, 2000).

Many studies show that the pursuit of the family's food supply and income causes a heavy burden on women. Almost everywhere, women are responsible for processing, storing, and preparing family meals. Rural women also bring water and firewood for the family. First, women's employment and wages as domestic workers in agricultural work

and other income-generating activities and create a major part, and sometimes even the basic daily food for all the family. They are usually responsible for small animals, often of small ruminants, and sometimes for large animals, not outside. (FAO, 1990).

Women from an average farm family remain extremely busy during the two farming seasons in sowing and harvesting. In Barani (rain fed) agriculture, where crop production is not sufficient to meet the subsistence needs of the households, men have traditionally sought employment in the non-farm sector. As a result, women have to take over a substantial burden of the work in agricultural production. Moreover, dramatic growth rates in cotton production have generated tremendous demand for female labor. Such production-labor interactions have led to the increasing feminization of agriculture. Though Islamic laws do not deny equality between the sexes, women receive differential treatment due to misinterpretations of religious teaching. Due to various social beliefs and cultural bias, women's access to property, education, employment, etc. remains considerably lower compared to men's (Sharma, 1999).

Made a significant contribution to rural women, livestock production, this contribution is more visible than their work in plant breeding. Women who participated in the care and feeding of livestock and poultry, a wide range of tasks, such as force-feeding, feeding, collecting fodder, grazing, cleaning animals and their living quarters, so that fertilizer cakes, collecting manure, organic fertilizer, and dairy processing and marketing animal products (butter making, selling eggs, etc. (Bucks, 1988).

Women constitute almost half of the total population of Pakistan; they can play a vital role in the socio-economic development of a country. They are proofing their talent in so many sectors like medicine, teaching, nursing, air-hostess, etc; however, due to men's dominant society, there are many constraints to working women in the socio-economic development of the country. On the one hand, women are less literate than men and on the other hand, they face more problems than men. They are restricted from high positions; which makes them unable to utilize their skills, knowledge, potential, and experience, and have many problems on the way to the workplace like male words placing, staring of men, etc. Although women can play a vital role in supplementing family income if provide with them secure environments, transportation, and safe workplaces, such a study has not been undertaken in this area, so far. Therefore, this study will be of greater importance for policymakers, researchers, and for academic purposes.

The present study examined the (i) types of jobs undertaken by working women in the study area; (ii) investigated job-related constraints and problems at the workplace as well as at home in the study area and (iii) suggested policy recommendations as to how these constraints can be minimized.

2. Research Methodology

The focus of this study encompasses the area of Village Akbar Pura, located in the Nowshera District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The selection of this village was purposeful

and deliberate, driven by several key factors; firstly, it stands out for its relatively advanced level of development in comparison to neighboring villages, secondly, the village boasts a notable population of working women, adding to its suitability for the study. Akbar Pura comprises 2200 households (GOP,1998) and to select a reasonable sample size a preliminary informal survey of the area was conducted in which it was found that 280 households had working women, out of a total of 280 households, 70 working women were randomly selected which was 25% of the whole. The data for this study were collected using a pre-testing interview schedule from the sample respondents. The filter data were analyzed using the percentage and frequency application.

2.1 Universe of the Study

Akbar Pura, District Nowshera constituted the universe of the study, as it is a relatively more developed area of District Nowshera and almost all facilities are available to the inhabitants of the Village. With the changed status and needs of the people. Moreover, a number of females from Akbar Pura also started working to contribute to family income and improve socio-economic conditions. At the same time, women faced different problems in their work or job.

2.2 Sampling and Sample Size

Akbar Pura comprises 2200 households and to select a reasonable sample size a preliminary informal survey of the area was conducted in which it was found that 280 households had working women. A sample of 25% was taken from the whole i.e., 70 working women were studied who were working in different organizations. These respondents were randomly selected for the study by lottery method.

2.3 Data Collection

The primary data were collected directly from the sample respondents through face-to-face interviews with the help of a pre-tested interview schedule.

2.4 Data Analysis

The collected data for the study were analyzed with the help of computer software known as MS Office simple data analysis, using frequency distributions and percentages was performed.

2.5 Limitations of the Study

Almost all research studies have various limitations due to many known and unknown reasons while conducting research. The same is the case with this study which had the following limitations.

- 1) This study did not cover the whole district because with time & financial constraints, the organization and conduct of a study covering the whole area was too ambitious for a single researcher. Therefore, the study was confined to

sampled households of selected villages from the district thus; it may not represent the entire region.

- 2) The data collected from the respondents may be an approximation or estimation; hence it may not be hundred percent accurate.
- 3) Respondents showed reluctance in answering various questions regarding their composition of the family and their income sources, etc. so, to tackle this problem, they were taken into confidence by explaining the purpose and nature of the research.

3. Problems Faced by Working Women on the Way to Their Workplace

Table I provides insights into the challenges confronted by working women during their commute to the office. Among the total respondents, 41% of women encounter issues related to transportation, while 29% report experiencing uncomfortable male staring. An additional 30% face various other challenges, such as unwelcome male comments and a lack of respect from males. The data notably underscores two primary challenges faced by working women during their commute. The foremost concern centers on transportation issues, affecting a significant majority. Moreover, the secondary issue involves uncomfortable interactions with males, particularly in the form of unwarranted comments and a lack of respectful behavior. These observations collectively emphasize the need to address these challenges to ensure safer and more conducive commuting conditions for women.

4. Constraints Faced by the Working Women

Table II provides insights into the challenges faced by respondents, with a substantial 91% reporting encountering problems. Specifically, the following breakdown of issues arises: 14% contend with frequent instances of males making comments about them, 26% interact with male colleagues, 18% express experiencing a lack of respect from males, and it's noteworthy that similar findings are highlighted in another research source. The research titled "Social barriers and conservative values in the province, job problems created by male colleagues and a lack of sense of security are some of the pressing problems hindering female workers" was conducted by Dawn (Shah Q. S., 2002). Within this context, 14% of respondents indicate being pressured by family members to return home early. Additionally, 20% express discomfort due to unwelcome male staring. A smaller subset, comprising 6%, identifies other issues such as security concerns, negative attitudes from office colleagues, and family-related challenges encompassing childcare, healthcare, education, and similar domains. Evidently, the data underscores that a comprehensive array of challenges confronts working women. The prevalence of comments and interactions with male colleagues, coupled with a lack of respect, stands out as significant issue. These observations are reinforced by the alignment with findings

from previous research, which highlights societal barriers, conservative values, and security concerns as substantial obstacles hindering the engagement of female workers.

In summary, Table II paints a picture of the multifaceted difficulties that working women grapple with, encompassing interactions with male counterparts, societal norms, and familial expectations. These findings emphasize the importance of addressing these challenges to foster an inclusive and supportive work environment for women.

5. Problems Faced by Working Women after Job or During Home

Table III outlines the challenges experienced by women, with a staggering 91% encountering various difficulties. Among these, specific categories emerge: 22% contend with house management issues, 16% grapple with cooking problems, 11% confront childcare challenges, another 11% navigate problems tied to their husbands, 12% face familial issues, and 16% confront a shortage of rest time. A marginal 1% report miscellaneous issues encompassing personal care and the like. Evidently, a shared experience among all working women is the post-job predicaments they face upon returning home. A prevailing sentiment is that the bulk of their day is consumed by work, leaving them with inadequate time for domestic responsibilities. For instance, married women are notably encumbered by challenges stemming from limited childcare time and insufficient attention to their husbands. The distinct societal context of the Pakhtun community further shapes these dynamics, where women predominantly shoulder home management responsibilities. The cumulative findings unequivocally underscore the presence of myriad issues faced by respondents. Chief among these is the pervasive predicament of home management, catalyzed by the demanding nature of their jobs, which consequently curtails their capacity for domestic engagements. In essence, the data corroborates that working women, upon returning home, encounter a gamut of challenges that collectively underscore the delicate balance between professional commitments and domestic responsibilities. This challenge is particularly pronounced in areas where traditional gender roles contribute to the heft of these struggles.

6. Problems in Managing Social Activities

Table IV provides insights into the management and participation in social activities among the respondents. Notably, 27% of the participants oversee social activities, primarily through family members' involvement, while the remaining 73% do not engage in such management. Among the subset of those managing, a specific breakdown reveals that 36.84% do so with ease, while a larger proportion of 63.16% rely on assistance from their family members. A substantial 72.54% of the respondents express a lack of time to partake in social activities. Conversely, 13.73% attribute their non-participation to a lack of interest in such engagements, and an equivalent percentage of 13.73% cite various reasons. These include constraints imposed by their husbands, or the predominant attendance of the household head in social events, among others. The findings notably

highlight that the majority's inability to engage in social activities is primarily due to time constraints. Balancing job commitments and home management renders it impractical for them to attend social gatherings, which are crucial for fostering normalcy and happiness through interactions with family members. Importantly, those respondents who are involved in social activities largely do so because of their family members' support and sacrifice. This underscores the role of familial assistance in enabling them to participate in extra-curricular social pursuits. The challenge of time scarcity appears to be more pronounced among respondents with lower income levels, further emphasizing the influence of economic circumstances.

In summary, the data underscores the significant impact of time limitations, work-home balancing acts, and the indispensable role of family support in shaping the respondents' engagement in social activities, which are vital for well-rounded and contented lives.

7. Working Women Participation in Decision-Making Activities in Household

Table V presents the distribution of decision-making rights within households across various aspects. The data reveals that a significant majority, amounting to 88.57%, actively participate in decision-making, while a smaller proportion of 11% does not possess such rights. In the context of selecting child clothing, 96% of women are engaged in this process, signifying their involvement, while a minority of 4% lack the authority to participate in such decisions. Turning to matters of child education, a comparable percentage of 88.57% engage in discussions with their household head regarding this topic, while 11% do not partake in these conversations. When considering mate selection, a notable 41.42% have the privilege to choose and discuss their child's marriage or mate selection with the household head, in contrast to 58.57% who do not engage in these discussions. Furthermore, concerning career planning, a substantial 76% engage in conversations with the head of the household about their career aspirations and plans, whereas 24% are devoid of this prerogative.

Evidently, the data underscores the prevailing trend of a majority of women being actively involved in the decision-making process across a spectrum of household matters as outlined in the table.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study's findings underscore the myriad challenges that women encounter across diverse settings. Predominant among these challenges are transportation difficulties, an insecure environment, unwarranted male attention, and negative attitudes from male colleagues. Notwithstanding these obstacles, working women exhibit a resilient belief in their capacity to surmount these issues. They perceive themselves as active contributors to household income and pivotal players in driving socio-economic progress. A prevailing theme from the research is the predominantly positive sentiment expressed by

a majority of women regarding their jobs. Notably, a significant proportion of unmarried and young women participate in the workforce, attributed to their strong work ethic and determination. In contrast, married women contend with greater obstacles due to familial responsibilities. Their primary motivation for employment is often centered on economic support for their families. Moreover, the research reveals a notable correlation between higher levels of literacy and greater job engagement, with a substantial number of women being graduates. Financial constraints are more acutely felt among low-income earners in comparison to their high-income counterparts. This discrepancy can be attributed to the latter group's advanced qualifications, which position them in senior roles accompanied by elevated salaries and comprehensive amenities, including transportation and residential facilities. Interestingly, while high-income working women appear to experience fewer constraints, they are not immune to challenges. Despite pursuing employment to foster a social and active lifestyle, many of these women still grapple with issues such as inadequate security measures, unsupportive attitudes from colleagues, and familial responsibilities like childcare, healthcare, and education.

In summary, this study underscores the multifaceted challenges that women confront across different contexts, and despite their commendable efforts to enhance their lives and contribute to society, various barriers persist, necessitating further attention and support.

- 1) It is imperative for organizations employing women to ensure a secure working environment for them.
- 2) The government should prioritize offering dedicated transportation options for working women.
- 3) Women should be given the right to decision-making in almost all family matters.
- 4) Women should be given equal employment opportunities in all sectors.

Table I: Distribution of the Sample Respondents According to Difficulties Faced

Difficulties	No.	Percentage
Transport	29	41
Male staring and facing males	20	29
Others*	21	30
All	70	100

* male pass comments, males give no respect etc..

Source: Field Survey, 2013.

Table II: Constraints Faced by the Sample Respondents

Constraints	No.	Percentage
Yes	64	91.42
No	6	8.57
Total	70	100
If Yes, what Type		
Male pass comments	9	14
Facing males in the office	17	26
Males give no respect	12	18.75
Male staring	13	20.34

Compelled to come home early	9	14
Other *	4	6.25
All	64	100

* Lack of security, bad attitude of office colleagues and their family problems time for childcare, good health, schooling, etc.

Source: Field Survey, 2013.

Table III: Problems Faced by Working Women after They Return Home from Work

Problems	No.	Percentage
Yes	64	91.43
No	6	8.57
Total	70	100
If Yes, Describe Problems		
House management	14	22
Cooking	10	16
Children care	7	11
Laundry	7	11
Husband	7	11
Family members	8	12
No time for rest and pleasure	10	16
Others*	1	1
All	64	100

* personal care.

Source: Field Survey, 2013.

Table IV: Problems in Managing Social Activities

Managing problems	No.	Percentage
Yes	19	27
No	51	73
Total	70	100
If Yes, Problems		
Family/other	19	100
How do you manage?		
Easily	7	36.84
Through family members	12	63.16
Total	19	100
If no, why		
Shortage of time	37	72.54
No interest	7	13.73
Other *	7	13.73
All	51	100

* husband did not allow, the household head to attend social activities, etc.

Source: Filed Survey, 2013.

Table V: Participation of Females in Decision-making in Family Matters

Family matters	No.	Percentage
Childre n Education		
Yes	62	88.57
No	8	11.43
Total	70	100
Children Dress		
Yes	67	96
No	3	4
Total	70	100
Marriage Selection		
Yes	29	41.43
No	41	58.57
Total	70	100
Career Planning		
Yes	53	75.71
No	17	24.29
Total	70	100

Source: Field Survey, 2013.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. The authors whose names are listed below certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or other equity interest; expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements, or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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