



ISSUES OF FEMALE LABOURERS IN PAKISTAN

Dr. Muneera Moulabuksh
Assistant Professor
Department of Social Work
Federal Urdu University of Arts, Sciences & Technology
Karachi –Pakistan
muneerahouth9@gmail.com

Dr. Rukhshanda Zarar
Lecturer
Department of Social Work
Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University
Quetta –Pakistan
rukshanda.jamil@yahoo.com

Dr. Nasreen Aslam Shah
Professor
Department of Social Work
University of Karachi
Karachi –Pakistan
drnasreenaslamshah@gmail.com

Abstract

Employment opportunities for women in Pakistan are severely limited due to widespread prejudice. Some people believe that having more women in the workforce has a beneficial effect on both the economics of the country and the health of women. World Bank and Pakistan Bureau of Statistics data on the labour force show that women's labour force participation in Pakistan is low relative to both international norms and industrialised countries. This holds true not only for the female labour force as a whole but also for the whole labour force in the country. In addition, the vast majority of women are concentrated in less formal industries, mostly agriculture. This discrimination against women has its roots in legal, political, cultural and economic factors that have a negative impact on the status of women and restrict the opportunities for employment and employment options available to women. The reasons for this discrimination are ingrained in these factors. It has been argued that an approach to comprehensive transformation should be begun in each



country individually, sponsored by the media, and embraced by the population.

Keywords: Employment, population, women, Pakistan, Labour.

Introduction

According to the latest Census of Population and Housing in Pakistan, the total population of the country is now above 207 million (2017). About 51.2% are male, 48.8% are female, and 0.05% are transgender, totaling 10,418 people. About 63.6% of the population lives in rural regions, while 36.4% of the population resides in urban areas. About 64% of the population is under the age of 30, while 29% of the population falls between the ages of 15 and 29. Due to the increase in the number of young people entering the workforce, the economy will need to grow at a rapid pace, adding almost 2.1 million new jobs per year. The World Bank estimates that interest rate cuts and substantial infrastructure investments propelled Pakistan's economy to a growth of 5.8% in 2018. However, with the adoption of stricter fiscal and corrective measures to rein in the consumption-led growth of prior years, this is expected to decrease to 3.4% in 2019. Rising inflation and a weakening rupee have both contributed to the economic slowdown. Agricultural, industrial, and service activities constitute the bulk of the economy. Although the gender difference is noticeable, women may be seen working in all of the major industries. 2017-2018 Labour Force Survey data showed that women's refined activity rate in the labour force was 20.1%, down from 22.0% in 2014-2015. Employment rates for women were higher in the countryside (25.6%) than in the cities (23%) (at 11.1 per cent). Sixty-seven per cent of women worked in agriculture, forestry, hunting, and fishing, 16% worked in manufacturing, and 14.6% worked in the community, social, and personal services. As can be seen from the data, the percentage of women working in agriculture has dropped since the last poll was conducted in 2014-2015 (from 72.2% to 68.6%), while the percentage of women working in manufacturing has risen (from 45% to 53%). (from 14.1 per cent).

According to the results of the Labor Force Survey conducted between 2017 and 2018, 51.9% of the female labour force was comprised of unpaid family workers, followed by 28.5% of paid employees and 19.5% of self-employed individuals. The majority of people with jobs in the economy were employed in the service sector, which is characterised by low-skilled labour that pays low wages. Approximately 50.3% of women had such jobs, followed by 26.4% in agriculture and 23.3% in manufacturing. As is often the case, women perform the vast majority of manufacturing labour in the informal sector. For instance, manufacturing accounts for 17.7 per cent of males but 61.5 per cent of women in the informal economy. After that came the business of providing personal and social services,



where 31% of women were employed, compared to 14% of males. The unemployment rates for men and women in 2017 and 2018 are significantly different at 5.1% and 8.3%, respectively. The involvement of women in the labour force is considered vital not only to the growth of the country but also to the well-being of the women who participate in it. This view is at the heart of the arguments surrounding women and works in Pakistan. The low rate of female labour force participation in Pakistan is viewed as a collection of problems that may be solved by adjusting government policy. Microcredit financial provision, legislation against sexual harassment in the workplace, and improvements in women's education and health care are just a few examples of the legislative measures that have been taken to encourage and support female entrepreneurs. Focus is placed on enhancing women's economic autonomy through expanding access to and boosting women's use of existing economic possibilities.

However, there is a scant discussion on the calibre of the available opportunities for them to pursue. Constitutional and legislative rights (right to own property, etc.), women's political representation, changes to marriage, divorce, and child custody legislation, the struggle against military dictatorship, and the threat posed by increasing Islamization have all been central to feminist arguments. The feminist movement in Pakistan was "NGO-ized" in the 1990s, coinciding with the advent of neoliberal globalisation and its negative impacts on women in the workplace. The internalisation of the development model led to donor-driven answers to the issues that women confronted in the economy. There has not been a strong and cohesive feminist response to the difficulties of globalisation of economies and the influence of digitalization and automation on women's labour, notwithstanding scattered attempts in terms of research such as Saba Gul Khattak's good work on subcontracting women workers.

Issues of Female Labourers in Pakistan

While the percentage of women in Pakistan's workforce has increased by more than half over the previous two decades, it is still much lower than in other nations with similar earnings. In Pakistan, just approximately 25% of college-educated women work outside the house, demonstrating that the participation rate of women in the labour force is low across all educational levels. The potential loss of productivity due to women's underrepresentation in the workforce is substantial. Increases in GDP have coincided with increases in female labour force participation in Pakistan, as increased economic opportunity has led more women to enter the labour market. Working for a wage may help improve gender equality by giving women more say in family decisions. After controlling for home fixed variables, Fatima's (2014) analysis of national data reveals that employed women are more likely to have a say in family expenditure decisions and to have a say in



whether or not contraception is used. Although it's common knowledge that women in positions of power inside the home are more likely to want to pay for employment, the direction of causality isn't necessarily what one anticipates. However, when comparing women within the same home, the impact is still there, suggesting that employment has a liberating effect. A countrywide sample of homes was questioned in 1991, and Ray (2000) found that children earned a percentage of household income that was only marginally lower than women's. He claims that increasing women's involvement in the labour force in Pakistan will diminish the prevalence of child labour. This is because women are restricted from working outside the house for cultural or religious reasons.

Because of movement constraints due to cultural and social conventions and security concerns, few women in Pakistan work for pay. Nearly 40% of non-working women cite male family members' refusal to let them work outside the house as the primary cause. Fifteen per cent of those surveyed cite a lack of interest in working outside the house as the reason. One-third of women who say they are eager to work say they are solely interested in working from home. This is shown by the fact that 30% of the employed do so from the comfort of their own homes. Most women who do leave the house for work don't have to commute as far as males do. Few women report actively looking for employment, and even fewer say they are "available" to work. While this is true, statistics reveal that 40% of unemployed women say they did not have enough to accomplish the day before. These trends are shared by both urban and rural women who are unemployed.

Gender Discrimination

Women in Pakistan are more likely than men to experience discrimination in the workplace. Low levels of education, marriage, having children, and culture all have a role in the prejudice women face in the workplace. In Pakistani culture, many women are forbidden from working side-by-side with men since doing so would dishonour their families. It's a male-dominated society where men typically discourage their female relatives from seeking employment. It will take time for the "Protection against harassment of women at the workplace" bill to be fully implemented and for a culture shift to occur that will make the workplace a safe place for all employees. There has been a minimal shift in the structure of Pakistan's labour market during the previous two decades. There has been a recent shift toward equal representation of women in professional fields that were traditionally held by males. Women's contributions to the workforce are increasingly being recognised as crucial to economic growth and social advancement. While this is true, it is also true that most women continue to face discrimination in the workplace because of this concept. When it comes to advancement and salary at the same level of employment, there is no difference between men and women under the law in the United States' official



sectors. However, a new study of women in the formal workforce reveals that promotion discrimination persists even if equal rights laws are on the books. There are disproportionately fewer men than women in positions of power and influence in the world of work. According to a survey conducted by a group of federal government district managers in 2005, discrimination against women is rife and few women have attained positions of power.

When it comes to development and planning, women are underrepresented and denied equal access to decision-making roles. Because of this bias, women's demands are often overlooked while formulating new laws and regulations. Women's empowerment can only progress toward its goals if they are included in the legislation and policymaking institutions' open, transparent, and accountable decision-making process. Both the medical field and the academic sector employ a disproportionately significant number of women. All-female institutions and colleges assign solely women to administrative positions, while co-ed schools appoint men as presidents, provosts, and vice presidents. Many of these schools include female faculty members, but no women have ever served as principals. There is a lack of information on the percentage of women working in various fields, as evidenced by the number of women in high positions in institutions. Women typically work in low-level administrative or production positions in the informal economy. Women are underrepresented in management positions. In the informal economy, there is also pay inequality between men and women.

Income Gap

The low earnings of the employment accessible to women may be one reason why so few of them choose to join the workforce. This persistent wage gap between men and women has been around for a long time. One possible reason for this trend might be discrimination in pay, however, this would be hard to tell apart from genuine disparities in abilities and experience. Another factor is that women are often discouraged from entering certain fields because of the low demand for jobs deemed appropriate for women. It is consistent with strong gender norms on the sort of labour taken up, as well as with specific expenses seen by businesses for having women in the workplace, such as the cost of insuring their security, that Cheema et al. (2012) discover that a high number of enterprises hire no women at all. Indicators suggest that the financial benefits of furthering women's education are extremely convex. Returns to education, measured by better salaries, are relatively modest for elementary and secondary schooling but much greater for high school and beyond. When a woman completes her secondary and tertiary education, only then do her earnings begin to rise significantly. Despite greater pay and opportunities for advancement in white-collar fields, the percentage of women in the labour force is still shockingly low.



Despite the fact that many more women than males hold postgraduate degrees, just a quarter of these women are actively participating in the job field.

Customs and Traditions

In Pakistan, gender norms unquestionably play a factor in the restriction of women's engagement in the labour sector. These norms either require women to remain wholly at home or limit their participation in the labour force to particular jobs that are deemed socially acceptable. Men are traditionally considered the primary breadwinners, and the majority of people believe that in times of high unemployment, companies should give preference to men for available positions. However, this sentiment applies almost equally to women as it does to men. It is true for people of all (self-identified) socioeconomic backgrounds. It's natural to think that more schooling would lead to a different perspective, yet those with more formal education are just somewhat less likely to hold this opinion. Women's work is often intentionally stigmatised in Pakistan, beyond the simple preference for men's access to job prospects. Efforts to expand men's access to employment opportunities are not the only target of this stigma. Outside-the-home working women face widespread stigma (World Bank 2006). When a woman's reputation suffers, her family as a whole feels the effects, and male decision-makers like her husband or in-laws may try to restrict her freedom to choose whether or not she will work outside the home. A recent study found that the vast majority of women do not feel they have any control over whether or not they seek out economic possibilities. According to the available evidence, the level of influence that a woman maintains over the choice of whether or not to look for work has a significant bearing on whether or not she is a part of the labour force.

Social mobility

Women's mobility in Pakistan is restricted by many of the same characteristics that make particular workplaces in the country safe or "suitable" for women to work in. Women's limited mobility outside the house as a result of cultural norms and worries about security has been shown to have a significant impact on female labour force participation, as was said, and as the current body of research and survey data suggest. Even if the working conditions themselves are regarded as safe and appropriate, the commute to and from work might result in a level of exposure that exceeds what is considered acceptable (Ali 2012, World Bank 2006). For instance, eighty-five per cent of working women in Karachi who take public transportation at least monthly reported being harassed in the preceding year, according to a survey. This sample was small and not typical of the population (ADB 2014). The vast majority of the harassing behaviour was carried out by male passengers; on the other hand, almost one-quarter of women also reported experiencing sexual



harassment at the hands of the drivers or conductors of the transit vehicles. In addition, women are not allowed to ride bicycles or motorbikes by themselves due to societal taboos, which force them to rely on male relatives in order to utilise these forms of transportation. This makes it more difficult for urban women to work outside the house, and it also makes it more difficult for rural women to seek employment outside of their village or even their sub-village settlement. The same issues that make it difficult for older women to continue their education or pursue vocational training that may lead to greater job possibilities also make it difficult for younger women.

While other durables in the home are inversely correlated with women's labour force participation, Ejaz (2007) finds the opposite to be true for automobile ownership. This might simply represent the U-shaped association between wealth and female labour market participation, or it could be a reflection of a mobility impact, with women whose families own automobiles being able to more easily get to and from work without facing harassment or shame as a result. Despite not focusing solely on women's labour force participation, some recent studies on social and economic concerns in Pakistan shed light on this subject. Even among those women who report being actively job-seeking, research demonstrates that their geographic options are far more limited than those of males. One-third of these women report being able to take on solely in-home jobs, significantly limiting their career options. Most of the surviving women can only be found inside their own community. The availability of women outside the house has grown in recent years, and the availability of college-educated women has grown much more.

Women's labour force participation is significantly higher in regions with more gender equality in educational and occupational opportunities. The x-axis categories are based on the average of women in the respondent's district who went out of the house the day before for any reason (other than the respondent's personal observation). A woman's chances of finding gainful employment increase in areas frequented by other women. Women in cities are more likely to be educated, interested in careers outside the house, and mobile. Unfortunately, such is not the situation in Pakistan. Women in cities are somewhat less likely to report being actively seeking employment. In addition, their availability suggests a reduced propensity to seek employment outside the house. The new obstacles that urbanisation can provide for women's movement, such as public exposure, increased anonymity, and crowding with strangers, may contribute to their reluctance to accept certain sorts of jobs.

Socio-Economic Issues



Many barriers, including sociocultural ones, prevent women in Pakistan from finding gainful employment. Social and cultural barriers make it harder for women to get work because they are rooted in entrenched patriarchal norms that validate discrimination based on gender. These limitations also offer difficulties for working women, whether they are employed in the formal or informal economy. Due to the fact that such restrictions have a substantial weightage against the employment of women in the official sector, a majority of working women may be found in the informal sector. This is the case since the informal sector pays lower wages. It is possible to think of the society of Pakistan as being one that is founded on the traditional patriarchal environment. This environment has historically repressed women and has cast a spell of uncertainty over them by restricting their role in the process of advancement and empowerment. In the majority of nations, girls and women are only permitted to attend schools where they may study skills that would prepare them for the duties of housewives and other domestic workers, which are the responsibilities that are socially expected of them. In societies where the man is expected to provide for his family, women who work are sometimes looked down upon, even when they do so in industries where their salaries are comparable to or better than those of their male counterparts. But due to geographical, social, and class disparities, this idea cannot be implemented uniformly across Pakistan. There is less female mobility in KPK and Baluchistan than in Punjab and Sindh, for example, even if these provinces have areas with higher per capita incomes. Both rural and urban residents of Punjab are more accepting of women who choose to enter the workforce. Increasing urbanisation and industrialization have helped shift cultural norms in favour of women in the workplace.

Most women in Pakistan do not have access to high-quality educational opportunities, which contributes to their low percentage of involvement in the labour force. A number of studies have demonstrated that increasing the number of girls who enrol in primary school reduces the gender gap in educational and occupational chances. (Chaudhry: 2007, Chaudhry et al: 2009). Numerous studies have shown that education improves labour market outcomes, and the returns on investment for elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education tend to be larger than those for the former. Greater economic returns from education can be expected in settings with both weak growth policies and strong demand for educated workers. Education for All (EFA), worldwide monitoring reports (2005), Gupta et al. (2002), and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) all note that investing in a child's education pays dividends in the form of higher wages and stronger national economic growth over the long term (2003).

However, Pakistan scores very low on measures of literacy and educational attainment, and female students have historically lagged well behind their male counterparts (World Bank: 2002, UNDP: 2003). Due to the unequal distribution of power within the country's



governing institutions, women in Pakistan continue to experience disadvantages and discrimination in the educational and vocational training programmes that have been launched. The State thinks that if development funds are given to the male breadwinner, they will be distributed fairly among all family members, including women. However, there is evidence to suggest that women have profited disproportionately from State-sponsored initiatives to improve girls' access to higher education. Funding shortfalls, bureaucratic top-down approaches, and a lack of political will all play a role in derailing several initiatives aimed at improving women's access to higher education, healthcare, and the workforce. The effects on Pakistani women, who are disproportionately poor, illiterate, and dependent on males in the home and society, are devastating.

Analysis

People have always been expected to relocate to where the jobs exist. The advent of digital technology and automated processes has caused a shift in this paradigm. People no longer have to go looking for jobs. Some Pakistani women may benefit from this change. However, training and schooling are essential for this sort of profession. Poor education and training opportunities are a problem across the board in Pakistan, but they are more pronounced for women. Around 5.1 million elementary-aged kids aren't in school, another 6.5 million aren't in middle school, 5 million aren't in high school, and 6.3 million aren't in higher education. When compared to boys, more girls are not in school. Among students in elementary through high school, 49% of girls are not enrolled, compared to 40% of boys. More women than males are enrolling in college, so things are looking up at the advanced level. However, this degree does not usually lead to work but rather acts as another worm on the hook in the marriage market. Investing in education and training is important, but so is re-skilling for a workforce that will become increasingly dependent on technological advances in the coming decades. The level of technical training in Pakistan is poor. A National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTT) has been established at the federal level, and a Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA) has been established in each province. NAVTT offers policy advice to the government and conducts a small number of training programmes. Its activities presently engage 400,000 trainees, of which just a fraction are women.

As far as I can tell, there is no specific initiative aimed at addressing the needs of women. The provincial TEVTAs may admit a small number of students to diploma programmes in technical subjects. In 2018, just over 100,000 students enrolled at TEVTA Punjab. Some academics suggest that lifelong learning systems are the key to adapting to the ever-evolving workplace. Improvements in education and training can only be made if the government reforms the structures that oversee them and the money used to pay for them.



There must be shifts in the goals, curricula, and methods of instruction in order to create a system of lifelong learning. The government already has reduced education funding and is looking to transfer the burden to private providers as part of its structural adjustment programmes. Will businesses invest in future-proof learning solutions for the industry? To sum up, further research into the future of work in Pakistan is required, with a focus on lifelong learning and how it might become incorporated into future policy and planning that results in feasible initiatives.

Policy Recommendations

The research offers a variety of recommendations for legislative changes that might have an impact on women's labour force participation, either immediately or indirectly, through facilitating their freedom of movement. Many interventions in these fields lack sufficient research and should be subjected to rigorous testing. A series of studies are needed to assess the advantages and costs of policies, programme designs, and expenditure allocations for increasing women in Pakistan's labour force. The interventions may seek to alter the prevalent societal norms in Pakistan, or they may seek to alleviate significant restrictions by going around them. The second type of policy action has the ability to boost female labour force participation in the short term, and by extension, has the social exposure necessary to effect long-term norm shifts. Changes in policy might encourage more women to join the workforce in the following fields:

1. Exposure to visible role models of women in the workplace or in leadership positions, as shown by research from other nations (Fogli and Veldkamp, 2011), can help to shift cultural norms. It is possible to consider two policy interventions that have the potential to directly target norms: (i) initiatives to increase the number of Pakistani women in positions of leadership in local civil society, such as the ongoing Rural Support Programmes Network funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and other institutional donors. Ghazala Mansuri and her coworkers are doing in-depth research on the impact of media interventions on women's empowerment and (ii) the impact of such efforts on the portrayal of women's work in the media.
2. Workplace sexual harassment is a serious problem in Pakistan. Despite the belief that women in Karachi enjoy more supportive societal norms than their male counterparts, 96% of female respondents to a survey of 10 commercial and 10 public organisations reported experiencing sexual harassment at work (Sadrudin 2013).
3. Several prospective important policy levers might improve female labour market participation even without a significant shift in attitudes defining what types of work are



suitable for women. Increased demand for women's labour can be encouraged by demand-side strategies that focus on certain industries and occupations.

4. The improvement of public transportation and urban infrastructure is another policy instrument that might be used to make it easier for women to move about in Pakistan. They could make it easier for women to pursue careers in the workplace. Due to widespread stigma toward female cyclists and motorcyclists, most women in the nation rely only on public transportation to go to and from work.
5. Within the framework of the societal standards, it has been shown that white-collar job is more acceptable for women in Pakistan. Secondary and postsecondary education is particularly crucial for enhancing women's labour force participation since they enhance their access to these positions. Because of this, it is not unexpected that most studies on education have concentrated on elementary and secondary school, whereas higher education opportunities for women have received very less attention in terms of both study and policy.
6. Criminal justice, security and public safety interventions are undeniably crucial in figuring out the proportion of women in the work market. The norms that influence women's mobility and workforce involvement are intertwined with the concerns of physical safety they address. When women feel safe travelling to and from work, they are more likely to seriously explore working outside the home.

Conclusion

Agarwal (2002) claims that empowering women and giving them more bargaining power in the workplace and in other spheres of life may be accomplished by encouraging more women to enter the labour force. Most women in the workforce today are low-income individuals who have no choice but to join the workforce due to dire economic conditions. The lack of opportunities for women to work independently or cultural constraints that discourage women from working in low-status, low-paying jobs outside the house further restricts women's access to the labour market. Both of these factors contribute to the problem. Agarwal (2001, 2002) and Sen (2001) argue that if women are able to improve their economic condition through jobs and other revenue-generating activities, they would be treated better at home. Credit, employment, and other income-generating strategies, in addition to social development, are viewed as essential for women's empowerment by many development organisations helping to bring about such change (Azid et al., 2001; Sen, 2001). (Agarwal: 2001). (World Bank;2005). Despite this, women continue to be invisible in the workplace and the economy. If women can improve their financial standing, they will be better able to participate in decision-making at all levels of society, including the household, the workplace, and public policy. If women were given the same



economic opportunities as men, they would not only contribute to the profitability of the household, but they would become key contributors, or even equal to males, to the economy of the nation. As women gain economic independence, their loved ones and the general public may begin to view them differently. Therefore, this structural shift would lead to economic equality, which drives males to engage women in decision-making processes and establishes a hierarchy on which both women and men have a seat on the same ladder. As an added bonus, gender parity would compel males to include women in policymaking. This is the real definition of women's empowerment in Pakistan.



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