

## **Public Attitude Towards Women's Employment: Perceptions of Working Women in Urban Pakistan**

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**Abstract:** Women constitute an important component of the labor force in Pakistan. The current research was carried out with the premise to examine the perceptions of working women about the public attitude towards their work in urban Pakistan. Through quantitative research design a sample of 80 respondents were selected who were affiliated with schools, hospitals, telephone exchange and local non-governmental organizations in Rawalpindi city in Pakistan. The data was collected by using researcher administrated close and open ended questionnaire. The findings illustrate that with the increase in the number of working women in the workforce public attitude towards women's work is changing in Pakistan. Women reported respect and cooperation from family and colleagues. Yet, despite this change challenges for women were also evident in the form of gender based discrimination and harassment at workplace. These concerns require attention at policy level to facilitate women's participation in the workforce.

**Key words:** Public Attitude • Working Women • Gender Discrimination • Pakistan

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Historically women's entrance in the workforce has been limited due to familial confinements, cultural values, societal norms, world economy and stringency for women's mobility [1]. Lack of educational training, fewer market-sustainable skills, and social taboos are other reasons which keep women away from the workforce [2]. The participation of women in the labor market is rapidly increasing in countries around the world. In Pakistan too women can be seen in various disciplines including teaching, medicine, nursing, social services as well as in commercial fields like marketing, advertising, banking, planning development, and administration [3].

However, the participation of women in male dominated professions is low and women prefer to work professions like teaching and health which are socially acceptable [4]. One reason for this may be the fact that in Pakistan the decision about the selection of a job is not personal and is made by the male members in the family. This is especially true for the young women who have less autonomy and decision-making power. The families may also enforce prevention from work outside the home

[5]. Various factors effect women's participation in the workforce in Pakistan including social, religious and cultural values [6].

Studies on the public attitude towards working women are very few especially in the context of Pakistan. The basic premise of this research was to explore the perceptions of working women about the attitude of public about their work in the labor force. The paper posits that negative attitude towards women's work in patriarchal society's effects women's personal lives as well as their performance at work.

### **Theoretical Framework**

**Conflict Theory:** The present research is inspired by Conflict theorists [7, 8] who hashed out the gender inequalities in which men's domination and women's subjugation prevailed in societies. The conflict theorists call our attention about this fact that our daily practices and cultural patterns form and maintain the basic gender inequalities within the family structure.

Ralf Dahrendorf [8] considered that conflict is built in authority related relationships. He observed that authority related conflict prevailed from macro to micro level of the

society. Individuals working in authoritative positions impose compliance which successively creates resistance and resentment [9]. He further depicted that society is in the state of uncertainty and dissonance. He concentrated on the persona of authority which is viewed as in the societal structure in the form of subordination and super ordination. Groups' affiliation and association are based on specific interests. Dahrendorf [8] identified that authority plays dual role - an integrative role and conflicting character that is important for effective social structure.

Lewis and Coser [7] identified that conflict prevailed among close intimate relationships. People were affiliated via a network of responsibilities, power and rewards. If someone altered one feature it can easily disturb the family arrangement. This demands the need to handle these intimate relationships with special care. Every society has a strain element, conflicting behavior and mismanagement within the family relationships that create conflict. Mild deviation from the norms and values leads to clash within the family [10].

Traditionally, women are considered the binding force of the social and cultural life of the family as viewed by conflict theorists. Men are bread winner and women are home makers. Historically, women have been assigned the role of satisfying the needs of men including their fathers, husbands, and brothers [7]. However, in recent past women's changing roles have posed a challenge for men. Seen through this lens the conflict theory explains the reasons for the attitude of the public about women's employment in the workforce. Hence, it is used as a theoretical lens to understand the aim of the research.

**Literature Review:** Global statistics show that approximately 70% women around the world are employed. In the US as per 1998 statistics 61 million women having working status were affiliated with various blue and pink color jobs such as secretaries (99%), nurses (67%) and sales girls (60%) [11]. Yet despite this, gender discrimination prevails in the society in various forms such job segregation, unequal wages, lack of professional training and advancement opportunities. At times women's exclusion from the workforce is due to the masculine nature of jobs. Additionally, women's traditional responsibility of child care also excludes them from the workforce [12, 13]. Nevertheless, despite constraints women's participation in labor force has increased in urban areas largely due to access to higher education [14].

Importantly women's increased participation in the labor market has also changed the attitude of people towards them especially in patriarchal societies where women's work was considered inappropriate previously. In the context of Nigeria the study of Adeyemi-Bello and Tomkiewicz [15] revealed that with an increase in the ratio of women in the workforce respectful public attitude towards their work was observed. Likewise, in the Arabian Gulf countries the research of Abdalla [16] found that though men were not willing to share the responsibilities with women but the attitude towards women in different profession was favorable for women than men. However, the attitude towards working women in Middle East countries is less positive than other region which also effects the women's labor force participation [17].

Koshal *et al.* [18] have indicated that women perceived resistance from both men and women in Malaysia. It has also been identified that women's supervisors for sale department have much favorable attitude towards sales girls as compared to male supervisors in China. Scandinavian countries have a high level of female employment but traditional attitude to manage household responsibilities still prevails in the Scandinavian countries [19, 20].

The familial setup and attitude play significant role in the entrance of women in the workforce. It is a common perception that women outside the house are not safe [21]. Besides family it is the workplace environment that discourages women's participation in the workforce. Male colleagues do not applaud the efforts of females. Even with equal qualifications and achievements to that of their male counterparts, women are perceived less favorable in terms of their ability and accomplishments. This stereotyping tends to be reflected in evaluations and promotions and places women at a disadvantage for advancement. Negative comments are often passed among males [22].

Pakistan is a socio-culturally confined country where women's ratio of paid employment is still low. The ratio of working women was 1/3<sup>rd</sup> in Pakistan until recently according to the general survey conducted in 1993-1994 and it has recently been raised to 4/5 [23]. Patriarchal system and division of labor among men and women is strict in which women are responsible for household chores and male are expected to work in the public domain. These socio-cultural taboos hinder the way of women employment in Pakistan. The cultural norms and values relegate women into secondary position in the family [24]. Patriarchal society of Pakistan gives

predefined roles and responsibilities for women [25]. Women have a religious and cultural obligation to sustain the family honor which restricts their participation in female oriented jobs [26]. Where women do enter male professions they encounter problem due to household responsibilities [3, 27]. Consequently, a pessimistic attitude towards women’s employment can be observed in the country [28, 29].

**METHODS**

To achieve the aim of this research a quantitative survey was conducted. Data was collected from 80 working women affiliated with schools, hospitals, telephone exchange and local organizations. These organizations included Government secondary FG girl’s high school, Sir Syed Road Sadar, Fuji foundation, Jhelum Road, Cantonment Hospital, Sadar, PTCL Exchange, Rawal Road, Chaklala and NTC Exchange, Mall Road, Oil Refinery Head Office, Morgah Ministry of defense, Sadar, General Head Quarter, and Mall Road, Sadar. The working women were selected by using convenient sampling technique. The data was collected by using a survey and was analyzed by using SPSS. Chi-square has been used to determine association.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Socio-economic background plays a decisive role in the interpretation of field data. The table above reveals the respondents’ socio-economic information including age, occupation, education, family system, marital status and no of children. The table shows that the majority of the women were between the age group of 26 – 35. 69% of the women were married and 64% lived in joint families.

Table 2 narrates the distribution of the respondents according to their perception of attitude towards their work in the private and public domains. The table demonstrates that majority 77.5% of the respondent reported to have experienced respectful attitudes from public, 82.5% of the respondents had experienced respectful attitudes from neighbors and 78.8% of the respondents had experienced respectful attitudes from relatives. 82.5% of the respondents had experienced respectable attitude from friends and 87.5% of the respondents had experienced respectful attitude from colleague. These findings are concurrent with the results of Akhtar [30] who identified that most of the working women in his study were having venerating attitude from public, like general public, family member, friends, colleagues and neighbor etc toward them as working women. Further, these finding clearly indicate a change in attitude of people towards women’s work especially in non-traditional occupations in the country.

Table 3 shows that majority (51.2%) of the respondents stated that people always encouraged them in their jobs and services. While 53.8% responded that they sometimes faced criticism by people towards their jobs and services. The majority of these worked in the profession of nursing, secretary and telephone exchange and these professions in Pakistani culture are not considered appropriate for women. This too indicates a change in people’s attitude towards women in non-traditional professions in Pakistan.

Table 3 illustrates that according to 45% women public attitude sometimes influenced their work, according to 42.2% public attitude sometimes affected family relationships. 60% responded that public attitude sometimes affected their health. These finding are also in accordance with the results of Rizwan and Sabir [31]

Table 1: Socio-economic Background of the Respondents

Age of the respondents	Occupations	Education	Marital Status	Family System	No Of Children
20-25 (33.8 %)	Nursing (25%)	Matric (20%)	Single (30%)	Nuclear (35%)	2-4 (25%)
26-30 (25%)	Teaching (25%)	F.A (18%)	Married (69%)	Joint family (64%)	4-6 (40%)
31-35 (25%)	Telephone (25%)	B.A (29%)	Widow (1%)	Extended family (1%)	6-8 (18%)
Above 35 (16.2%)	Secretary (25%)	Master (34%)			Above 8 (18%)

Source: survey

Table 2. Perceptions of Women about Public Attitude towards their Work

	Neighbours	Public	Family/Relatives	Friend	Colleagues
Respectable	82.5 %	77.5%	78.8%	82.5%	87.5%
Aggressive	4, 5%	2.5%	6.2%	6.2%	3.8%
Abusive	12.5%	20%	15%	11.2%	8.8%

Source: survey

Table 3: Perceptions of Women about Reaction to their Work

Categories	Encouragement	Criticism
Always	51.2%	13.8%
Sometime	38.8%	53.8%
Never	10%	32.5%

Source: survey

Table 3: Women’s Perceptions about the Influence of Public Attitude

Categories	Women’s work	Family relationships	Women’s Health
Always	22.5%	38.8%	15%
Sometimes	45%	42.5%	60%
Never	32.5%	18.8%	25%

Source: survey

Table 4: Women’s Perceptions about Gender Based Discrimination at the Workplace

Categories	Frequency	Percent
Always	20	25.0
Sometimes	47	58.8
Never	13	16.2

Source: survey

Table 5: Women are perceived less in ability to accomplish the task at the workplace

Categories	Frequency	Percent
Agree	28	35.0
Disagree	42	52.5
Neutral	10	12.5

Source: survey

Table 6: Women’s Perception on Harassment at Workplace

Categories	Frequency	Percent
Always	9	11
Sometimes	51	64
Never	20	25

Source: survey

who concluded in their article “Public attitude towards working women” that negative attitude of people to some extent influence the family relationships of working women. Likewise, it has been found that the overt gender discrimination at workplace influence the women’s health because they have less opportunities of professional development and promotion [32].

The Table 4 illustrates the gender base discrimination at work place. Majority (58.8%) of the respondents reported to have sometimes encountered gender based discrimination at the workplace [29].

The table 5 indicates that the majority of the women (52.5%) disagreed that women are perceived as less in ability to accomplish the task at the workplace. This again indicates that women seemed to have positive experiences at workplace. Nevertheless, despite this concerns were

raised about issues like harassment at work as is clear from table 6.

The table narrates that majority (64%) of the respondents reported to sometimes have faced harassment at work. Research has revealed that it is the sexual harassment that prevents women’s entry in the job market. It creates anxiety and agitation among women [33].

## CONCLUSIONS

This research was conducted to explore the perception of women about societal attitude towards their paid employment. The findings highlight that women who participated in this study seem to have positive response about their work from colleagues, friends, family and general public. The fact that the majority of the working

women reported that their work was respected indicates that the attitude of people towards women's work is changing in Pakistan and they are accepted in traditional as well as non- traditional professions. However, the findings do reveal that gender based discrimination was reported at workplace especially in the male dominated professions. It was also found that the attitude of people is likely to influence the family relationship and health of working women as well. To encourage the participation of women in non-traditional occupations measures need to be taken at policy level to make the workplace safer for women.

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