

Original Article

Husband's Views on the Impact of Working Status of their Wives on Family Life

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ABSTRACT

Background: Working Women have to look after the family and earn to meet financial needs. Husband is the most important person who can provide much needed support and encouragement.

Objective: To explore husband's views on impact of working status of women on their own life and that of their husbands and family.

Methodology: A Questionnaire based survey of working women's husbands was carried out at out-patient services of three tertiary level hospitals in Karachi, Pakistan from October 2011 to February 2012. Questionnaire was developed based on study objectives and included demographic profile of respondents. Written Informed Consent form was filled by participants and confidentiality assurance was provided.

Results: 395 husbands were interviewed. The mean age was 41.56 ± 28.18 years with majority having more than grade XII education (70.4%). According to husbands: 171 (43.3%) women were working due to need alone and 193 (48.9%) were finding it difficult to carry out home responsibilities; extra understanding and support from the family was received by 344 (87.1%) and 320 (81.0%) women respectively; 235 (59.0%) women did not have enough time for themselves; domestic help was available to 271 (68.6%) women and 92 (23.3%) felt harassed at work; 152 (38.5%) women felt guilty because they were unable to give time to their family; 245 (62.0%) felt that confidence among children of working women was higher; 230 (58.2%) felt children of working women perform better in practical life; 268 (67.8%) said status of working women is better; 217(54.9%) felt their wife's health had been affected negatively due to work and 260 (66.1%) felt that financial benefits outweigh other disadvantages. 314 (79.5%) agree all women in future will have to work and 285 men (72.2%) supported that women should work.

Conclusions: A need exists to improve the working conditions and home situation including husband's support for working women in our society.

Key-words: Working women, Women's Health, Women, Women's Rights

INTRODUCTION

Unprecedented inflation in the country and increasing cost of living has forced an increasing number of women to adopt a working status to help support their families. Despite that according to the 1999 report by the Human Rights Commission of

Pakistan, only two percent of Pakistani women participate in the formal employment sector. Although in other countries the female working force is many times higher. In Sri Lanka for example, over 50 percent of the population and the labor force of 6.6 million are women¹.

It is unfortunate that working women are considered second class workers with less reward for same work in comparison to working men². Traditionally, women are expected to look after their family and home needs whereas men are required to earn to support the family finances. Since this status is changing very rapidly, there are serious concerns that a working woman has difficulty in meeting home needs³⁻⁵. The stress of work causes anxiety and depression among working women resulting in difficulties in looking after their home and family⁶.

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It is also reported that health promotion activities are higher among working women in comparison to housewives, showing extra care taken by those who work⁷. Despite the stress and lack of time to care for their families, working women are reported to do more for their families than housewives⁸.

Situation in Pakistan is no different with similar concerns for working women. In 1999, females officially made up 2% of the labor force in the country. It is reported that women in rural Pakistan work 12-15 hours, doing work at both home and outside in the fields. The situation for urban women is worse. The impact of such hard work with little appreciation plays a heavy toll on the physical and psychological health of these women. The feeling of guilt among these women from their perceived inability to be as good in meeting the family and home needs in comparison to housewives is important to address. An earlier study surveyed working women to seek their views on the impact of their working status on their life and on lives of their immediate family members⁹.

A need was felt for a similar study, seeking views and opinion of husbands on the possible impact of working status of their wives on their own life and that of their husbands and family. Based on this background we decided to explore husband's views on impact of working status of women on their own life and that of their husbands and family.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire based cross sectional survey was conducted at three tertiary care hospitals of Karachi including Civil Hospital Karachi, Liaquat National Hospital and Sindh Institute of Urology and Transplantation (SIUT) Pakistan, from October 2011 to February 2012.

A Questionnaire was developed by the Principal Investigator, after extensive literature search including input from colleagues and patients. The questionnaire included data on the demographic profile of the patients including age, education and occupation. The questions were directed at finding out the **husband's point of view** about the impact of working status of women

on their lives and the lives of their families. It was administered in both "English" and "Urdu" languages, depending on patient's comfort level. Urdu is the national language of Pakistan.

The Co-investigators interviewed the male patients and filled out the questionnaire. A pilot study was conducted before the start of the administration of the final questionnaire. An agreement was reached between the Co-investigators on how to administer the questionnaire in order to ensure uniformity. The questionnaire was administered in the waiting area outside the Physicians' offices, prior to the consultation. Patient interviewed were those who agreed to participate in the study. The interviews were conducted throughout the study period and no specific timings were followed. Since a descriptive study was planned and the data was not to be subjected to statistical tests, sample size based on statistical calculations was not considered. Ethical requirement including the administration of written Informed Consent and the provision of confidentiality were ensured.

We interviewed patients based on their availability and convenience. A systematic random selection of study subjects was not under taken. SPSS computer software was used for data management.

RESULTS

395 husbands of working women were interviewed. The mean age was 41.56 ± 28.18 years. The majority had more than grade XII education (70.4%). 171 (43.3%) women were working due to need and 193 (48.9%) were finding it difficult to carry out home responsibilities because of it in Husband's opinion. Extra understanding and support from the family was received by 344 (87.1%) and 320 (81.0%) women respectively in Husband's view.

According to husbands, 175 (44.3%) women found it difficult to look after their family members because of their job. 235 (59.0%) women did not have enough time for themselves in Husband's view. Domestic help was available to 271 (68.6%) women and 92 (23.3%) felt harassed at work according to Husband. 152 (38.5%) women felt guilty because they were unable to give time to their family

because of work in Husband's view. 245 (62.0%) respondents felt that confidence among children of working women was higher than nonworking women. Children of working women perform better than those of non-working women in practical life according to 230 (58.2%) respondents. 280 (70.9%) respondents reported working women feel better working than not working.

The status of working women is better than non-working women according to 268 (67.8%) respondents. 217(54.9%) men felt their wife's health had been affected negatively due to work. Financial benefits outweigh other disadvantages according to 260 (66.1%) respondents. 241 (61%) respondents reported that working women would give up work if they had a choice. 314 (79.5%) respondents agree all women in future will have to work. Marriage prospects of working women and their children are better than non-working women and their children

TABLE-01
Demographic Variables of Respondents

Parameter	No. (%)
Sex	
Males	395 (100)
Mean age in years (standard deviation)	41.56 (28.18)
Marital Status	
Married	395 (100)
Educational status	
Illiterate	54 (13.7)
Can read and write	24 (6.1)
Grade V education	13 (3.3)
Grade VIII education	5 (1.3)
Grade X education	16 (4.1)
Grade XII educational diploma	45 (11.4) 167(42.3)
Graduate	66 (16.7)
Post graduate	5 (1.3)
Occupational Status	
Self Employed	51 (12.9)
Unemployed	06 (1.5)
Private Service	249 (63)
Government Service	29 (7.4)
Retired	25 (6.3)
Student	35 (8.9)

according to 234 (59.2%) & 228(57.7%) respondents respectively. Confidence in working women is higher than non-working women according to 362 (91.6%) respondents. 74 (18.7%) respondents feel that working women's financial independence has negative impact on their husband's self esteem. 151 (38.2%) working women did not get support from in-laws in Husband's view. 256 (64.8%) would want their daughters to work if they had any. 256 (64.8%) believed that environment was less conducive for working women than working men. 285 men (72.2%) supported that women should work.

DISCUSSION

Our study population had a majority with good educational background and representation from all walks of life including laborers at one extreme to professionals at the other. Since we interviewed a population visiting a teaching hospital for treatment, the results cannot be generalized to the rest of the population. Because an educated population visiting a specialized modern hospital for treatment was interviewed, we expect a far more difficult situation for women working out in the community. Nonetheless, we have valuable information on the subject that can form the basis for further larger studies in the community leading to interventional programs to improve the home and work situation for the working women in the society.

A substantial number, 43.3%, women were working due to need and 48.9% were finding it difficult to carry out home responsibilities because of job. This finding testifies to our concern that economic situation is forcing more women to work to support their families. This situation is raising the feeling among 48.9% men that they are unable to attend to home and work needs at the same time. We need to find ways to provide better working conditions and remunerations to allow working women to take care of their home responsibilities. There is extra understanding and support from the family side in majority of cases but more needs to be done. Domestic help is available to more than half of the working women but we must realize these are well placed women and the situation is likely to be different in the community with little or no domestic help. A good number of working women are harassed at work, a situation that requires social awareness and eradication.

TABLE 2A
Husband's views on working Women issues (n=395)

No.	Question / response	No.	(%)
1.	Reason to work		
	Own choice	138	34.9
	Need	171	43.3
	Both	86	21.8
2.	Are fulfilling home responsibilities harder because of the job?		
	Yes	193	48.9
	No	201	50.9
	Don't know		
3.	Does your wife receive understanding from the family?		
	Yes	344	87.1
	No	46	11.6
	Don't know	5	1.3
4.	Does she receive extra support from the family?		
	Yes	320	87.1
	No	75	19.0
	Don't know		
5.	Does your wife find it difficult to look after family members?		
	Yes	175	4.3
	No	217	54.9
	Don't know	3	0.8
6.	Do you feel she doesn't have time for herself?		
	Yes	233	59
	No	153	38.7
	Don't know	9	2.3
7.	Is domestic help available for her help?		
	Yes	271	68.6
	No	124	31.4
	Don't know	124	31.4
8.	Does she feel harassed at work?		
	Yes	92	28.3
	No	300	75.9
	Don't know	3	0.8
9.	Does she feel guilty for not giving time to the family?		
	Yes	152	38.5
	No	222	56.2
	Don't know	21	5.3
10.	Do you think the confidence amongst children of working women is higher?		
	Yes	245	62
	No	99	25.1
	Don't know	51	12.9
11.	Children of working women perform better in practical life?		
	Yes	230	58.2
	No	108	27.3
	Don't know	57	14.4
12.	Does she feel better off working than non-working?		
	Yes	280	70.9
	No	104	26.3
	Don't know	11	2.8

TABLE 2B
Husband's views on working Women issues (n=395)

No.	Question / response	No.	(%)
1.	The status of working women is better than non-working women?		
	Yes	268	67.8
	No	116	29.4
	Don't know	11	2.8
2.	Do you feel her health is negatively affected because of work?		
	Yes	217	54.9
	No	173	43.8
	Don't know	5	1.3
3.	Financial benefits outweigh other disadvantages for working women?		
	Yes	261	66.1
	No	111	28.1
	Don't know	23	5.8
4.	Would she give up working if she had a choice?		
	Yes	241	61.0
	No	135	34.2
	Don't know	19	4.8
5.	Do you agree that in the future women will have to work?		
	Yes	314	79.5
	No	51	15.4
	Don't know	20	5.1
6.	Marriage prospects are better for working women?		
	Yes	234	59.2
	No	113	28.9
	Don't know	48	12.2
7.	Marriage prospects are better for working women's children?		
	Yes	228	57.7
	No	93	23.5
	Don't know	74	18.7
8.	Is the confidence in working women is more than their non working counterpart?		
	Yes	362	91.6
	No	25	6.3
	Don't know	8	2
9.	Your wife's ability to be financially independent has a negative impact on your self esteem:		
	Yes	74	18.7
	No	295	74.7
	Don't know	26	6.6
10.	Do the in-laws not support her?		
	Yes	151	38.2
	No	222	56.2
	Don't know	22	5.6
11.	Would you want your daughter to work?		
	Yes	256	64.8
	No	112	28.4
	Don't know	27	5.6
12.	Do you think that environment is less conducive for working women than men?		
	Yes	256	64.8
	No	112	28.4
	Don't know	27	6.8
13.	Do you support that women should work?		
	Yes	285	72.2
	No	102	25.8
	Don't know	8	2

Several men also felt that their wives do not find enough time for themselves. 38.5% of the men felt their wives were unable to give time to their families because of working status. These are some of the areas that require improvement to better the situation for working women in our society. It was encouraging to find out that husbands of working women felt their children have more confidence and do better in practical life than children of non-working women. There is a need to conduct a study to see whether this difference exists in real life.

It is again heartening to learn that a majority of men believe the status of working women is better in the society than that of non-working women. This testifies to the fact that the working conditions for working women are improving. On the other hand, the finding that 61% respondents would quit if they had a choice proves there is need for improvement. This could perhaps be explained by the fact that 43.3% of women were working because of need, hence if economic levels permit they would quit willingly.

Respondents answered more favorably about whether financial benefits outweigh other disadvantages of working. It is true that financial compensation is not enough to make up for loss of quality time spent with the family. It is also important to note that men felt their wives' health had been affected negatively. It is not surprising that a majority of the respondents feel all future women will have to work to support their families. This finding testifies to the fact that the deteriorating economic situation is forcing more women to work in order to support their families.

We have found that working women feel marriage prospects & their children increases because of working status. Working woman not only has enhanced prospects because of better financial status but also because of their enhanced opportunities for social interactions. Confidence in working women is higher than non-working women according to a majority of the respondents. Those who venture out to work already have confidence required for such activity. The challenges faced by working women during work also increase their self confidence and develops their personality. Minority of the respondents felt that their wives' financial independence had negative impact on their self esteem.

Similar study exploring views of working women on the impact of working status on their life and on that of their immediate family members has found very similar views 9. It shows that there are issues on which there is consensus and broader understanding between husbands and wives that require further exploration and resolution.

CONCLUSIONS

According to husbands, working women find it difficult to carry out their home responsibilities and tending to their personal and families' needs. A need exists for further studies on how to improve the working conditions and home situation for working women in our society.

COMPETING INTERESTS:

Authors have no competing interest in conducting this research or in the publication of this manuscript.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge with thanks for the participants' time and information provided for the study.

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