



RESEARCH PAPER

Empowering Women: Navigating the Workplace Challenges with Strength and Resilience

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the current study was to find out the personal, family and social challenges faced by married working women in district Lahore, Pakistan. The present study employed a phenomenological research design to understand the problems faced by working married women. The paradigm of the research was interpretivism. The interpretivist perspective holds that there is more than one reality; rather, they believe that there are multiple realities. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select the sample for the present study. An interview protocol was prepared by the researchers after reviewing the literature review in order to conduct interviews. The six women from diverse fields of profession were selected by using purposive sampling technique. The thematic analysis approach was used to analyzed the data. The findings of the study showed that challenges faced by working married women in Pakistani society include work-life balance disputes, isolation, security concerns, safety issues, neglecting children, long working hours, and mental health problems. On the basis of results, it was recommended that media may increase public awareness and consciousness regarding women's rights in order to eradicate problems that affect working women.

KEYWORDS Family Challenges, Personal Challenges, Social Challenges, Working Women

Introduction

It is impossible to overlook the cultural, social, political, economic, and educational contributions that women provide as a foundation of every nation, and this is especially true given that Allah has given women all abilities. The majority of Islamic women are choosing to work for a living and gaining independence as a result of the rapid speed of modernity. To help support their families financially, more and more women were pushed into the workforce by inflation and industrialization. It is hardly an overstatement to claim that Islam provides a framework for safety, prosperity, and the empowerment of women. There are no mistakes in this method at all. On principles of justice, equality, and fairness is their connection with Allah based. This is especially true in the modern day, when more and more women are entering the workforce and having opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge. The teachings of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) should guide our efforts towards the advancement of Islamic principles. Islam allows women to participate in a wide range of commerce and transactions, including buying, selling, leasing, and more. Women are permitted to leave the house in order to meet their necessities, especially to earn money to support their husbands, parents, and family, as shown by the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and his companions. Modern society and the workplace are very different from what they were 30 years ago.

The impact on the corporate world in the twenty-first century has changed due to technological advancements, shifting work and family roles for women in Pakistan, and other factor (Ahmed et al. 2025 & Shah et. al., 2015). Every day, Pakistani families face increasing financial demands. With the rising cost of living, the rising cost of schooling, and the rising cost of housing in Pakistan, every family is scrambling to find ways to increase household income.

In terms of money, women tend to be more cautious. Money is something they handle with more care. As the old adage goes, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." This is especially true for women. Women tend to save more than males. Even back when women were expected to stay at home and take care of the household's finances, they would save up for both unexpected expenses and future plans. Women back then didn't know about all the different places you could put your money. However, in the modern era, working women are increasingly conscious of the importance of financial investments, and they hold immense power to effect constructive social change. Khan and Bibi (2011).

There are many different types of empowerment that can be applied to women, including social empowerment, economic empowerment, political empowerment, and legal empowerment, among others. Numerous empirical research have demonstrated a wide range of factors that influence the empowerment of women. Women's empowerment, as stated by Mahmood (2004), is contingent upon the region, namely whether it is rural or urban. Similarly, according to Arif (2014), women's decision-making at the household level is determined by their degree of education as well as their employment status. Similarly, social backwardness and religious conservatism are also factors that limit the independence of women (Banerjee & Roy, 2015). Moreover, according to Mekonnen and Asrese (2014), the two most significant obstacles that influence the decision-making process of women are social status and gender disparity. According to Akram (2018), married women's autonomy might be impacted by their husbands and their mothers-in-law in certain situations. In contrast, women who reside in Barani areas have a greater degree of participation in the decision-making process within their households as compared to women who reside in other parts of Punjab (Sathar & Kazi, 2000). It is important to note that women's engagement in household activities in developing nations is influenced by a number of different factors. Among the primary contributors are cultural and social conventions that restrict the participation of women in the decision-making process on a day-to-day basis. This, in turn, has an impact not only on the family unit as a whole but also on society as a whole. The bulk of decisions in rural and tribal regions are made by men, and the responsibilities and participation of women are restricted to the home. This trend is also prevalent in tribal areas. According to a report published by the United Nations Children's Fund in 2006, Pakistan is the country in South Asia that has the largest gender gap and the most persistent discrimination against women. This discrimination continues to exist in all aspects of life, and women are forced to conduct their lives in accordance with the cultural and traditional standards of their society.

In addition, the employment situation of women is a significant factor that contributes to their empowering status. One who is financially secure is a lady who is employed. According to Chaudhry and Nosheen (2009), Haleem et al. (2021), Paul et al. (2016), Sanawar et al. (2016), and Mariam Abbas Soharwardi, Khan, and Khalid (2015), she is able to complete her goals or wishes and make decisions on her behalf. This is in contrast to the situation of the unemployed woman. When women are subjected to any sort of violence, it has a negative impact on their sense of self-worth and empowerment. The elimination of violence and harassment directed towards women is necessary if we

are to empower women. This is a significant barrier that stands in the way of the empowerment of women. Women are less empowered than women who do not experience any form of violence, regardless of the location or intensity of the violence they experience. Chaudhry, Nosheen, and Lodhi (2012), S. U. Khan and Awan (2011), and Shetty and Hans (2015) are just a few of the research that have demonstrated that it has a negative association with women's empowerment. At this point in time, the media is playing an important part in every aspect of life. Furthermore, the media is serving as a driving force for the empowerment of women. When women are exposed to the media, they have a greater awareness of the rules and rights that pertain to their social security. (Chaudhry & Nosheen, 2009; S. U. Khan & Awan, 2011; Nayak & Mahanta, 2012; Paul et al., 2016; Varghese, 2011) Research has shown that women who have access to the media are more empowered than those who have limited or no access to the media.

Literature review

In order to empower women, it is necessary to create an atmosphere in which they are able to make decisions about their lives without any restrictions, that they are afforded equal rights in society, and that they are not subjected to any form of discrimination when it comes to employment and other forms of education. A secure working environment that provides enough protection should be provided to them. It is estimated that around half of the total population of the planet is comprised of women. Globally, there is a significant amount of women who are without employment. For a variety of reasons, including unequal chances for women in the workplace, the global economy suffers a great deal. According to Khan and Bibi (2011), the most important advantage of women's empowerment is that it would lead to an overall betterment in the society. According to the findings of a study conducted in Punjab, the positive expectations that more empowered women have for their children result in increased infant survival during the first few months of life, as well as an increased likelihood that their children will attend school. Furthermore, the study found that women's empowerment is also a significant factor for the health outcomes, with absolute empowerment being considered an essential component of their overall wellbeing as stated by Chaudhry, Nosheen, and Lodhi (2012) A study was conducted by Indira S. (2018) to investigate the socio-economic factors that influence the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in the Pondicherry region. The purpose of the study was to analyse the socio-economic aspects that women entrepreneurs face and to determine the reasons that women engage in entrepreneurial activities. They are influenced by demographic or socioeconomic factors such as the community, the composition of the family, educational qualifications, the location of the business, and the building premises itself, all of which are in coordination with women's empowerment. In 2008, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reported that women make up seventy percent of the world's impoverished. In this way, there is a significant need to recognise the work that women do and to give them with equal chances and resources so that they can be able to contribute their role to the prosperity of the country. This is necessary in order to keep women from living in poverty and from spending their lives in poverty. Not only does the economic empowerment of women contribute to the growth of the country's economy, but it also helps to promote other aspects that contribute to sustainable development. This is an important consideration to take into account. It is also essential to ensure that women are given the opportunity to fully participate in the decision-making process of the nation. According to research conducted by Shah et al. (2015), women who are economically disadvantaged do not have the time to participate in political activities of the nation. On the other hand, women who are economically empowered and have access to resources have the time to participate in political activities of the nation and do so, and they do so actively.

Consequently, it is important to point out that the economic empowerment of women offers a great deal of additional benefits.

There are many different types of empowerment that can be applied to women, including social empowerment, economic empowerment, political empowerment, and legal empowerment, among others. Numerous empirical research have demonstrated a wide range of factors that influence the empowerment of women. The empowerment of women has become increasingly important in today's world due to the fact that it has a strong correlation with a variety of successful development outcomes. The fifth Sustainable Development Goal, which is to be accomplished by the year 2030, is implied by this. Numerous pieces of writing have been produced on the subject of the notion of women's empowerment, with the purpose of elucidating its various dimensions and the elements that influence women's empowerment. Education is a significant socioeconomic factor that plays a role in the development of the skills, society, and empowerment of individuals. Education for women has been utilised as an independent variable by a number of academics in order to examine the influence that it has on women's empowerment opportunities. Every single study has confirmed that it has a beneficial association with the empowerment of women. There is a correlation between a woman's increasing level of education and her increased awareness of her rights, which in turn leads to an increase in her level of empowerment (Baig, Nusrat, & Bano, 2020; Haleem, Nabi, & Hussain, 2021; Mariam A Soharwardi & Ahmad, 2020).

Recent years have seen a significant increase in the number of studies that have focused on the topic of women's empowerment (Ibrahim and Asad, 2020; Chowdhury and Somani, 2020; Kabeer, 2020; Kapoor, 2019; Karwati, Ansori, and Mulyono, 2018). According to the findings of a study that was conducted not too long ago by Rehman, Moazzam, and Ansari (2020), the critical elements that have an impact on the empowerment of women are education, age, the type of family, and marital status. It is demonstrated in the research conducted by Anwar, Shoaib, and Javed (2013) that there is a positive and significant connection between women's independence and the ability to make decisions within the home. There were 138 married women from four different districts in Sialkot who participated in the data collection efforts. In a similar manner, Acharya et al. (2010) carried out the same research, and their findings demonstrated that there is a statistically significant connection between women's independence and decision making in terms of age, working women, and motherhood. When it comes to medical treatment, educated and working women have the ability to make their own decisions; they also have the freedom to leave the house to perform domestic responsibilities. According to research conducted by Aeri and Jain (2010), children have the strongest bond with their mothers due to the fact that they are dependent on their mothers to maintain a healthy atmosphere within the house. On the other hand, women may be confronted with a number of obstacles that make it difficult for them to establish the most favourable environment for their child. According to Almani, Abro, and Mugheri (2012), the challenges that they encounter include a lack of freedom to pursue their jobs, financial limits, and an excessive role burden, all of which leave them with little energy when it comes to providing the best possible care for their children. According to Almani, Abro, and Mugheri (2012), any difficulty that the mother is experiencing, whether it be in terms of her health, her finances, or her social life, might have a negative impact on the development of the child. According to the findings of several studies (Almani, Abro, & Mugheri, 2012), children whose moms are employed may develop a greater tendency to avoid social interaction, become more aggressive, or experience emotional instability.

A great number of researchers make use of a lot of children who are still alive in their studies. There are research that have shown a negative correlation between women's empowerment and the number of children that a woman has (Abbas et al., 2021). On the other hand, there are studies that suggest that women who have a greater number of children are more empowered than women who have a smaller number of children (Niaz & Iqbal, 2019). As another extremely essential aspect that has a big impact on the empowerment of women, the education level of the husband is also highly crucial. For the purpose of determining the degree to which women are empowered, a number of researches have used the education level of the husband as an independent variable. The results of their research have demonstrated a positive correlation with the empowerment of women (Baig et al., 2020).

Roy et al. (2023) conducted research on the influence of women's earnings and their function in determining the level of domesticity. The majority of women are either housewives or they perform domestic duties, but they do not receive any form of monetary compensation or concrete incentive for their work. As a result of the widespread spread of the coronavirus, working mothers in Pakistan are also confronted with a number of difficulties.

It is difficult for working women to maintain a healthy work-life balance, and the stress of losing their jobs, transitioning to work from home, and managing their children while working from home are all factors that have added to the load that they place on themselves. (Horwood 2021). The results also indicated that the degree of social support is a predictor of depression and loneliness. Additional consequences mentioned by Yasmeen (2015) include insomnia, decreased appetite, and difficulty concentrating on work.

Material and Methods

This study employed qualitative research approach to understand the triumphs and trials of Women in the Workplace. The current study employs a phenomenological research design. The goal of phenomenology research is to explore problems and challenges faced by the working women who's belong from diverse fields of profession. The paradigm of the research was interpretivism. The interpretivist perspective holds that there is more than one reality; rather, they believe that there are multiple realities. The researchers invited the participants and conducted interviews according to the availability and feasibility of the participants. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select the sample for the present study. The six women from diverse fields of profession were selected by using purposive sampling technique. An interview protocol was prepared by the researchers after reviewing the literature review in order to conduct interviews. The interviews were recorded and interpreted. The thematic analysis approach was used to analyzed the data.

Table 1
The demographic characteristics of the participants

Sr no	Profession	Age	Marital status
1	Doctor	32	Married
2	Lawyer	34	Married
3	IT expert	33	Married
4	Business woman	37	Married
5	Business woman	39	Married
6	University Lecturer	34	Married

Results and Discussion

All of the research participants were of the view that the role of the women has significantly changed over the past 15 to 20 years as the women participation in the work force is increasing which led to an increase in a number of different factors. When the participants were asked about why it is important to empower women, one of the participant who is a doctor said that "In order for families, communities, and nations to thrive, it is crucial to empower women. The entire potential of women may be realized when they are able to live in an environment that is safe, fulfilling, and productive". The other participant who is working as a lecturer in a University answered that "Achieving economic independence is critical for moving women out of poverty and ending the cycle of generational inequality. To fully realize women's potential as company owners and entrepreneurs, we must ensure that they have equitable access to capital, education, and other possibilities". The other two participants who were business women stated that "Everyone benefits when men and women work together to make decisions at home, which benefits the household and society as a whole, For this reason, empowering women for improved home living is crucial". Another participant who was an IT expert expressed that "Empowering women is giving them control over their own lives. When we talk about empowering women, we are talking about ending discrimination and giving them equal opportunity in every area. Another participant who was a lawyer stated that "Women can achieve their maximum potential when they are free from harm, have meaningful lives, and contribute to society. bringing their abilities to the job and can bring up healthier, happier kids." when all of the participants were asked that what kind of personal, professional and family life challenges working women have to encounter. The following problems came into the limelight:

Personal life challenges



Figure 1: Personal life challenges

The stress level of working women is rising, disproportionately, as a result of technology advancements and the competitive nature of the job. The health of women was ruined by the excessive workload of various administrative or management occupations, on top of their responsibilities as mothers and caretakers for in-laws. Working women already have a lot on their plates between their jobs and taking care of home issues and household matters.

Poor physical health

Neglected for as long as anyone can remember is women's health. When women have a lot on their plates between caring for children, running a business, and other administrative or clerical tasks, it can take a toll on their health. All of the research

participants said that due to extreme work load at work place they are unable to sleep and rest well which resultantly lead to severe head aches at times ,One of the research participant who was the banker expressed her concern over gaining too much of weight due to longer sitting hours at work . One participant, a doctor, expressed worry that the high stress levels in her workplace are causing her to suffer from frequent episodes of dyspepsia.

Poor mental health

Feelings of sadness, misery, and general mental sickness are symptoms of depression. Among Pakistani women, major depressive disorder is rather common. All of the research participants were of the view that Workplace stress is leading to mental health problems and Depression is most common among working women. In addition to putting in long hours at the work place, they strive to be the best wives and mothers they can be, resultantly majority of the working women are experiencing stress, anxiety, conflicts, and tensions as a result of their multitasking.

Time management issues

Every second counts. As a result of their paid and unpaid work, working women in Pakistan are often said to be time poor. All of the research expressed their concerns over time management issues .They all said that they find it extremely difficult to balance their work and home lives as they scarcely find time to spend some quality times with their children and families and on the weekends they want to spend their time while resting or cooking for the entire week which makes it difficult for them to give time to their families un like other house wives . As a result of the widespread spread of the coronavirus, working mothers in Pakistan are also confronted with a number of difficulties.

It is difficult for working women to maintain a healthy work-life balance, and the stress of losing their jobs, transitioning to work from home, and managing their children while working from home are all factors that have added to the load that they place on themselves. (Horwood 2021)

Social life problems

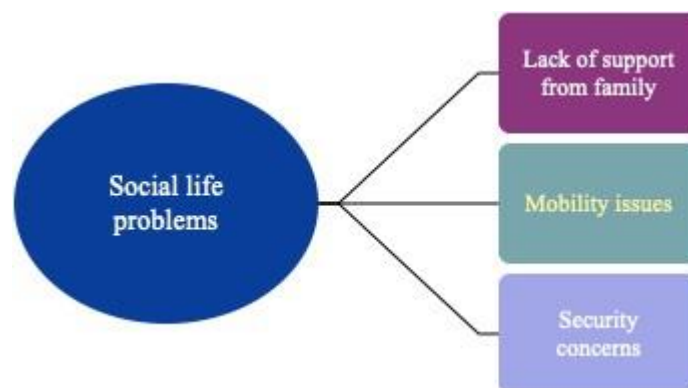


Figure 2: Social life problems

In the context of social support, the support of the parents, husband, in-laws, relatives, friends, and social circle is regarded to be social support. There is no way for women to achieve professional success without it.

Lack of support from family

All of the research participants were of the view that they are encountering a lack of social support from their husbands as they feel that they are over looking their families and children which is leaving a negative impact on their health and home environment . All research participants believed that Without the love and encouragement of their loved ones, modern women struggle to make it. In order to meet the demands of the workplace, women need the support of their parents, husbands and in laws. As stated by the results of a study that the degree of social support is a predictor of depression and loneliness. Additional consequences mentioned by Yasmeen (2015) include insomnia, decreased appetite, and difficulty concentrating on work.

Mobility issues

Women in professional roles who come from middle class families cannot afford to possess a car. In order to get to work every day, they rely on public transit. Four of the research participants were of the view that even though they have car at their homes but they have to use public transport at times because their husbands needs car to leave for their work places as a result they have to stress over reaching their work place in time .One of the research participant who was an IT expert shared that she is unable to own a car, which means that she must rely on public transit. Furthermore, she has been experiencing a sore throat as a result of the filthy and bad weather conditions which is resultantly effecting her work performance.

Security concerns

Threats to their safety and security are faced by working women. All of the research participants were of the view that they are subjected to the stares and comments of strangers, which can be quite offensive. In addition to this discriminatory views held by members of society, prevented working women from making full use of their skills and capabilities in the workplace. A school of thought still prevails that women have poor decision making power as compared to men.

Family life challenges



Figure 3: Family life challenges

There are a variety of challenges that working women are confronted with, which have a negative impact on their position and their participation in the economy.

Poor parenting duties

Within the context of the family unit, a child is an indispensable member. Women are expected to fulfill the role of mother at home, and they also become members of the workforce in the workplace. All of the research participants were of the view that as a result of being completely engaged in household duties and other matters linked to the house and work place, they are unable to spend a significant amount of time at home with their children. Additionally, they have feelings of exhaustion and sleepiness when returning from their places of employment. All of them also stated that they struggle to meet their children's developmental needs due to several obstacles, including a lack of time, household duties, social expectations, and unsavoury job situations. As stated by Almani, Abro, and Mugheri (2012), any difficulty that the mother is experiencing, whether it be in terms of her health, her finances, or her social life, might have a negative impact on the development of the child.

Increase in divorce rate

Experts suggest that women who prioritise their careers are more prone to initiating divorce proceedings compared to mothers who primarily focus on staying at home. All of the research participants expressed their concerns over the increase in the divorce ratios among the working women these days. They were of the view that working women financial stability motivates them to exit unhealthy bond of marriage. The primary factors contributing to Pakistan's elevated divorce rate encompass the presence of narrow-minded attitudes, a deficiency of mutual concessions, and the growing economic autonomy of women.

Personal limitations

Working women are consistently busy with their professional responsibilities and domestic duties, leaving limited opportunities for socializing with friends, relatives, or even neighbours. All of the research participants perpetuated the idea that they hardly find time to socialize and enjoy public gatherings which makes them irritated at times. According to the findings of several studies (Almani, Abro, & Mugheri, 2012), children whose moms are employed may develop a greater tendency to avoid social interaction, become more aggressive, or experience emotional instability. In addition to this they also said that because of their rigorous work schedules and substantial responsibilities, they are unable of partaking in the happiness and sadness experienced by their loved ones. They are perceived negatively and characterised as unpleasant or thoughtless individuals.

Conclusion

Women are permitted to engage in employment under the guidelines set by Islam. Islam permits women to work as long as they adhere to the religion's guidelines of modesty and virginity. They are allowed to work. If they desire, they are more than welcome to engage in job and make contributions to the home finances. Working women encounter numerous problems in balancing their responsibilities both at home and in the workplace. Some challenges experienced by workers in Pakistani society include work-life balance disputes, isolation, security concerns, safety issues, neglecting children, long working hours, and mental health problems. Proper enforcement of legislation, along with strong familial backing, can mitigate these issues.

Recommendations

Following are the recommendations in the light of the results from the above stated study

- Digital media should increase public awareness and consciousness regarding women's rights in order to eradicate problems that affect working women.
- Sociologists and educators should be invited to educate the public on the benefits of women's empowerment in reducing economic burden on men and facilitating the upbringing of their children in accordance with the demands of our rapidly evolving world.
- Laws regarding women protection should be revised
- New and better laws should be formulated and imposed in order to bring good changes for working women.

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