

## IMPACT OF WORKING STATUS ON THEIR LIVES: A SURVEY OF WORKING WOMEN AT A TEACHING HOSPITAL IN KARACHI, PAKISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To study the impact of working status on the lives of working women.

**Methodology:** A questionnaire based cross sectional survey was conducted at the Family Practice Center, Aga Khan University Hospital, Karachi, Pakistan, from July to December 2006. The Questionnaire included data on the demographic profile of the patient and questions in line with study objectives. Ethical requirement including the administration of written informed consent and the provision of confidentiality were ensured. SPSS computer software was used for data analysis.

**Results:** Two hundred working women were interviewed. The mean age was 29.05 years. A majority was married (53.5%) with more than grade XII education (67%). Sixty three (31.5%) women were working due to need and eighty three (41.5%) were finding it difficult to carry out home responsibilities because of it. Extra understanding and support was received from family by 155 (77.5%) and 115 (57.5%) women respectively. One hundred twenty three (61.5%) women felt they did not have enough time for themselves. The status of working women is better than non-working women according to 123 (61.5%) respondents. Financial benefits outweigh other disadvantages according to 105 (52.5%) respondents. Marriage prospects of working women and their children are better than non-working women and their children according to eighty one (40.5%) and eighty (40%) respondents respectively. Confidence in working women is higher than non-working women according to 142 (71%) respondents. Eighty one (40.5%) respondents feel that working women's financial independence has negative impact on their husband's self esteem.

**Conclusions:** Working women find it difficult to carry out their home responsibilities. There is need for further studies on how to improve the working conditions and home situation for working women in our society.

**KEY WORDS:** Working women, Women status, Women health, Women's role.

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## INTRODUCTION

Industrialization and rising costs of living is forcing more women to assume working status to earn a living and support their families. As a result in Sri Lanka for example, over 50 percent of the population and the labor force of 6.6 million are women.<sup>1</sup> It is unfortunate that working women are consid-

ered second class workers with less reward for same work in comparison to working men.<sup>2,3</sup>

Traditionally, women are expected to look after their family and home needs whereas men are required to earn to support the finances. Since this status is changing very rapidly, there are serious concerns that a working woman has difficulty in meeting home needs.<sup>4,5</sup> The stress of work causes anxiety and depression among working women resulting in difficulties in looking after their home and family.<sup>6</sup> It is also reported that health promotion activities are higher among working women in comparison to housewives, showing extra care taken by those who work.<sup>7</sup> Despite the stress and lack of time to care for their families, working women are reported to do more for their families than housewives.<sup>8</sup>

Situation in Pakistan is no different with similar concerns for working women. During the 1990s, females officially made up 13% 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 not much different.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

Based on this background, a need was identified to explore impact of working status on the lives of working women.

## METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire based cross sectional survey was conducted at the Family Practice Center, Aga Khan University Hospital, Karachi, Pakistan, from July to December, 2006. One hundred fifty family practice patients are seen daily by twelve family physicians at the center. 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 patient including age, marital status, and education. Questions were directed at finding out the impact of working status on the lives of these women. It was administered in both "English" and "Urdu" languages, depending on patient's comfort ability. Urdu is the national language of Pakistan.

The co-investigators interviewed the 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 physician's office, 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

Two hundred working women were interviewed. The mean age was 29.05 years. A majority was married (53.5%) with more than grade XII education (67%) and in teaching profession (40.5%) [Table-I]. Sixty three (31.5%) women were working due to need and eighty three (41.5%) were finding it difficult to carry out home responsibilities because of it. Extra understanding and support was received from family by 155 (77.5%) and 115 (57.5%) women respectively. One hundred twenty three (61.5%) women felt they did not have enough time for themselves. Domestic help was avail-

Table-I: Demographic Profile of the respondents (n=200)

Parameter	No. (%)
<i>Sex:</i>	
Males	00(00)
Females	200 (100)
Mean Age in years (Standard deviation)	29.05 (6.7)
<i>Marital Status:</i>	
Married	107 (53.5)
Single	91 (45.5)
Others	02 (1.0)
<i>Educational Status:</i>	
Illiterate	17 (8.5)
Can read & write	05 (2.5)
Grade V education	10 (5.0)
Grade VIII education	14 (7.0)
Grade X education	20 (10)
Grade XII education/ diploma	30 (15)
Graduate	77 ( 38.5)
Post-graduate	27 (13.5)
<i>Occupation:</i>	
Accountant/saleswomen	18 (09)
Doctor	06(03)
Secretary/Librarian	04(02)
Teacher	81(40.5)
Maid/Domestic servant	23 (11.5)
Engineer/lawyer	11 (5.5)
Beautician /Dietitian	14 (07)
Social worker	18 (09)
Tailor	08 (04)
Police women	01 (0.5)
Laborer	08 (04)
Nurse	03 (1.5)
Others	5 (2.5)

able to eighty nine (44.5%) women and forty three (21.5%) felt harassed at work. Ninety two (46%) women felt guilty because they were unable to give time to their family because of work [Table-II-A]. Confidence among children of working women was higher than non-working women according to 106 (53%) respondents. Children of working women perform better than those of non-working women in practical life according to 104 (52%)

women. One hundred twenty nine (64.5%) women felt better working than not working [Table-II-A].

The status of working women is better than non-working women according to 123 (61.5%) respondents. Financial benefits outweigh other disadvantages according to 105 (52.5%) respondents. Sixty (30%) respondents would give up work if they had a choice. One hundred twenty six (63%) 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 according to 81 (40.5%) & 80(40%) respondents respectively. Confidence in working women is higher than non-working women according to 142 (71%) respondents. Eighty one (40.5%) respondents feel that working women's financial independence has negative impact on their husband's self esteem. [Table-II-B].

## DISCUSSION

A reasonable number of respondents were interviewed to draw some valid conclusions about the impact of working on the lives of working women in our society. The 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 sixty three (31.5%) women were working due to need and eighty three (41.5%) were finding it difficult to carry out home responsibilities because of job. This finding testifies to our concern that economic

Table-II A: Respondent's views on Working Women issues (n=200)

Question/Response	No.	(%)
1. Reason to work:		
Own choice	84	42
Need	63	31.5
Both	53	26.5
2. Difficult to carryout home responsibilities because of Job?		
Yes	83	41.5
No	98	49
Don't know	19	9.5
3. Do you receive understanding from your family because you work?		
Yes	155	77.5
No	45	22.5
4. Do you receive extra support from your family because you work?		
Yes	115	57.5
No	85	42.5
5. Do you find it difficult to look after your family members because you work?		
Yes	80	40
No	120	60
6. Do you feel who don't have time for yourself because you work?		
Yes	123	61.5
No	77	38.5
7. Is domestic help available to you?		
Yes	89	44.5
No	111	55.5
8. Do you feel harassed at work?		
Yes	43	21.5
No	157	78.5
9. Do you feel guilty that you don't give time to your family because of job?		
Yes	92	46
No	108	54
10. Confidence among children of working women is higher than non- working women?		
Yes	106	53
No	36	18
Don't know	58	29
11. Children of working women perform better than those of non- working women in practical life?		
Yes	104	52
No	29	14.5
Don't know	67	33.5
12. Do you feel better off working than not working?		
Yes	129	64.5
No	37	18.5
Don't know	34	17

Table-II B: Respondent's views on Working Women issues (n=200)

Question/Response	No.	(%)
1. The status of working women is better than non-working women in our society?		
Yes	123	61.5
No	51	25.5
Don't know	26	13
2. Financial benefits outweigh other disadvantages for the working women?		
Yes	105	52.5
No	57	28.5
Don't know	38	19
3. Would you give up working if you had a choice?		
Yes	60	30
No	109	54.5
Don't know	31	15.5
4. Do you agree that in future all women will have to work?		
Yes	126	63
No	31	15.5
Don't know	43	21.5
5. Marriage prospects are better for working woman than non-working woman?		
Yes	81	40.5
No	60	30
Don't know	59	29.5
6. Marriage prospects for working women's children are better than non- working women?		
Yes	80	40
No	45	22.5
Don't know	75	37.5
7. Confidence in working women is higher than non-working women?		
Yes	142	71
No	27	13.5
Don't know	31	15.5
8. Working woman's ability to be financially independent has negative impact on husband's self esteem?		
Yes	81	40.5
No	66	33
Don't know	53	26.5
9. In-laws of a working woman do not support her to work?		
Yes	67	33.5
No	73	36.5
Don't know	60	30
10. Would you want your daughter to work if you had one?		
Yes	105	52.5
No	43	21.5
Don't know	52	26
11. Do you believe environment is less conducive for working women than working men?		
Yes	108	54
No	92	46

situation is forcing more women to work to support their families, yet 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 need to be done. Domestic help is available to almost half the respondents 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 reversal. A substantial number of working women do not find enough time for themselves. Almost half of them feel guilty because they are 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 is again heartening to note that working women feel 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 working women feel better working and 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 30% respondents would quit if they had a choice proves there is need for improvement. Respondents were divided whether financial benefits outweigh other disadvantages of working or not. It is true that financial compensation is not enough to make up for loss of quality time spent with the family.

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 for them and their children increases because of their working status. A working woman not only has enhanced prospects because of their 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. A majority of the respondents feel that working women's financial independence has negative impact on their husband's self esteem. Further studies are required to study husband's self esteem and ways and means to enhance it.

## CONCLUSIONS

Working women find it difficult to carry out their home responsibilities. A need exists for further studies on how to improve the working conditions and home situation for working women in our society.

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*Authors' contributions:* The research project was conceived, developed and its conduct supervised by the Principal Investigator. The co-investigators collected the data and entered into the computer software programs for analysis. The Principal Investigator took the lead in manuscript writing with input from Co-investigators. The 4<sup>th</sup> co-author provided statistical support.

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