

SOCIO-CULTURAL BARRIERS EXPERIENCED BY WORKING WOMEN IN BAMYAN

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ABSTRACT

Socio-cultural barriers that working women face in society are the basic reason for their deprivation and retards their progress. In countries like Afghanistan women's deprivation is the result of traditional, social and cultural structure. Other prominent factors are insecurity and long history of gender discrimination. Socio-cultural barriers in the form of gender discrimination restrict the capacity and advantages of working women and contribute to the weak performances of working women. This study examines the experience of these barriers by working women of Bamyan province. The main objective of this study is to analyze these barriers considering three major variables including society, family and workplace. The research questions and objectives were answered by distribution of questionnaires across the five categories of employed women in Bamyan. The results showed that half of the working women still feel disrespected by society and the work of women is not totally acceptable for communities. The study examined that 78.3 percent of the families of the working women are in support of them. Although, a considerable preference in employment opportunities of women taken place by government and administration but still women do not feel this preference in reality.

KEY WORDS: *Administrative barriers, Family barriers, Socio-cultural barriers, Workplace & Working women.*

1. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Gender injustice in the name of religion, philosophies to the male oppression, and socio-cultural values, norms and practices prevails in almost every society. This is the main reason behind deprivation of women and women subordination [1]. According to Benton et.al (2012), women are an important and critical part of every society and contribute to a nation's identity, its economic growth, its social prosperity, and its future. As underscored by the World Economic Forum, "Reducing gender inequality enhances economic productivity and economic growth." Empowering women to participate fully in the economy promises a great deal for all Afghan people—women, men, and children [2].

Women in Afghanistan is severely impacted by socio-cultural norms and values; even the women who are already working suffer from deprivation and inequalities. The women labor in Afghanistan face various challenges in vulnerable conditions. According to Ganesh et.al, (2013) nearly 95 percent of labor women is in vulnerable employment and 78 percent in unpaid family work [3].

International Conference on Research Developments in Arts, Social Science, & Humanities

The Indian Council of Social Science Research, Panjab University Campus, Chandigarh (India) (ASH-2018)  www.conferenceworld.in

18th March 2018

www.conferenceworld.in

ISBN : 978-93-87793-08-8

Although, and according to the study of Asia Foundation on 2011, marked progress have taken place for afghan women after the years of conflict but still very significant gender gaps remain and the scope of continued progress remains unclear. According to this study, the female labor force participation rate is just 19% compared to 80% for men and the practice of purdah in some aspects of Afghan society restricts women's mobility and interactions in the public sphere. This study also adds that, the severity of the security situation in Afghanistan serves to exacerbate societal and familial resistance to women working outside the home in many parts of the country.

Similarly, the businesses and employment in Afghanistan face sever constraints for all but for women this is compounded due to historical and social reasons. According to the study of Asia Foundation these historical and social reasons resulted in less experience of women in management; limited business skills and knowledge and insufficient access to business networks and markets. Meanwhile, according to Ganesh et.al (2013), socio-cultural parameters for labor women exclude them from public spaces. Some of the major constraints that women face are lack of job opportunities, lack of experience, low pay, low educational attainment, and an unsupportive family environment.

As Benton et.al (2012) state in Afghanistan, the unusually harsh realities for women circumscribe women's situations and consequently shorten their lives and affect their day-to-day quality of life. These circumstances cannot be viewed in isolation from the past decades of occupation and conflict or "from harmful traditional practices that have shaped the current position of women in the family and society." Widespread poverty, overall insecurity, and harmful traditional practices affect women disproportionately and seriously limit their access to services, opportunities, and resources that are needed for the full development of their human potential and the exercise of their rights.

There is also shortage of capacity for employed women that limits their progresses and sound functioning. The lower capacity of women overall in Afghanistan is linked with a long history of socio-political structure of afghan society. The Taliban era resulted decreasing the capacity of women in Afghanistan. As Benton et.al (2012) claims the restrictions on girls and women attending schools resulted in a population of women who have lower literacy, numeracy, vocational, and professional skills than men.

Getting the professional skill itself is a problem for women due to socio-cultural restrictions and obstacles. According to Benton et.al (2012), women have significant problems in getting internship, moving freely and obtaining their capacity. There is a large workforce gap in Afghanistan for all employers. Female employees have an additional restriction: they need a "socially appropriate" place to work. As noted in the Introduction, support for women working outside the home is decreasing because of both tradition and security concerns [2].

Benton et.al (2012), with reference to the study of Asia Foundation 2011 stated that here is a significant difference between men's and women's attitudes regarding female employees and the study showed that 79 percent of female respondents say women should be allowed to work outside the home compared with 50 percent of men who think so.

Considering the major socio-cultural obstacles faced by working women this study was conducted to explore these barriers in Bamyán context. This study was carried out between end of 2017 and March 2018. Although,

Bamyan is understood as the safest provinces of Afghanistan where women can easily work at governmental and non-governmental organizations and run the private businesses too but still there are a number of barriers affecting the promotion of women in workplace. Gender discrimination, traditional considerations and social values are among the most challenging barriers still faced by women in Bamyan.

II.OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To identify the existing socio-cultural barriers faced by working women in Bamyan province of Afghanistan
- To examine employment opportunities (advantages & disadvantages) of women comparing with men
- To explore the specific barriers faced by women at the workplace, in the family environment and society.

III.METHODOLOGY

The paper has been structured mainly with a quantitative approaches. Considering the applied models a questionnaire was developed by researchers in order to collect the primary data. This was to examine the experience of barriers by working women across society, family and workplace. The questionnaire was measured with 16 items which are covering the extent and degree of barriers. Then 69 questionnaires was distributed across five categories of working women in Bamyan. The research sample for this paper consists the following people: women employees of education, directorate of women affairs, security departments and NGOs. Validity and consistency of the data were checked. This provided more explanations of the emerging results from the field data collected. The internal reliability of the scales has been the acceptable level and the Cronbach Alpha was founded 0.78.

IV.FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The data which were gathered through questionnaire were analyzed by SPSS. Categorization of the data have taken place considering three major variables including society, family and workplace. The frequencies and percentages of data were transformed to the tables and interpretation of the tables taken place further.

V.DEMOGRAPHY OF THE RESPONDENTS

As explained on the methodology the samples of the study were selected considering the experiences of employed women; so all of the respondents were selected to be female. Considering the minimum age required for an employed (after completion of the study) women the aging of the respondents were ranked in three main categories including 20-30, 31-40 and 41-over. The majority of 57 respondents were between ages of 20-30.

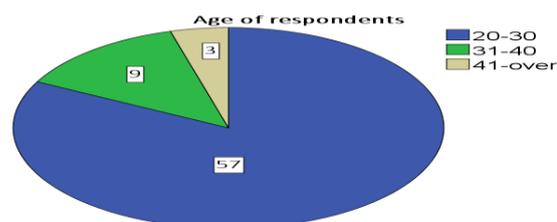


Figure 1: demography of the respondents

Source: field survey, 2017

The employees of five major categories of organizations were selected to be the respondents of the study. Considering the presence of the working women in the organizations the number of the potential respondent ranked. Majority of the working women in Bamyam work in education directorate as teachers and in NGOs. The women affair is a small directorate which is functioning in Bamyam.

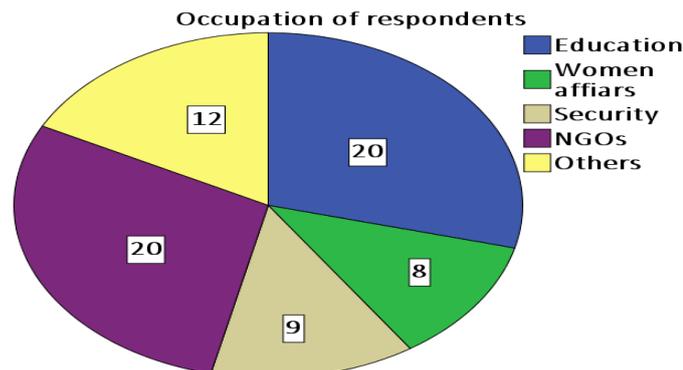


Figure 2: occupation of the respondents

Source: field survey, 2017

The educational range of the respondent were consisted of only two categories. This was an open question asked from respondent. Undergraduate women are still working in the organizations of Bamyam. It seems to be due to absence of graduate women in the employment market. Meanwhile, majority of respondents were among the graduate women.

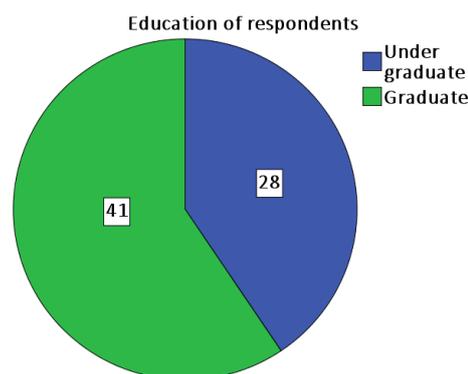


Figure 3: education of the respondents

Source: field survey, 2017

VI. THE EXPERIENCE OF BARRIERS BY WORKING WOMEN IN SOCIETY

The study showed that nearly 50% of the working women in Bamyam still feel of being disrespected by people. Being a working women and having work outside the home is not overall an accepted phenomenon in Bamyam society. Considering the type of the job it might varies because in cases such as being a police officer or working with army is still a men determinant occupation in Bamyam. Traditionally women have not been present in the occupations such as police or military and that is clearly showed on the table 1 where majority of respondents’ selected traditional norms as the reason of accused in the society. Majority of violation against working women have taken place outside the home and outside the workplace. 59.4 percent of the respondents have experienced physical or oral violation outside. The social class, social status and social relationship of the women marked determinant in employment opportunities in this study. About and over 80 percent of the respondents believed that regardless of the gender these factors are strongly important for women in the work.

Table 1: experience of barriers by working women in the society

Factors	Scale	F	%
People behave respectfully with me as a working women	Agree	34	49.3
	Disagree	35	50.7
As a working women I am appreciated by society	Agree	35	50.7
	Neutral	29	42.0
Society disrespect and accuse working women because of:	Disagree	5	7.2
	Traditional norms	33	47.8
	Gender discrimination	15	21.7
As a working women I experienced violation on the street/ outdoor	Religious believes	8	11.6
	Agree	41	59.4
	Disagree	28	40.6
The social class of women is determinant for their employment opportunities	Social problems	13	18.8
	Agree	56	81.2
The social status of women affects their employment opportunities	Disagree	13	18.8
	Agree	58	84.1
The social relationship of women is determinant for their employment opportunities	Disagree	11	15.9
	Agree	55	79.7
	Disagree	14	20.3
	Agree		

Source: field survey, 2017

VII.THE EXPERIENCE OF BARRIES BY WORKING WOMEN IN FAMILY

The study examined that majority of the family members of the working women are in support of them. 78.3 percent of the respondents have never experienced work prevention from the family members. Meanwhile, the involvement of women in family and home activities showed to be the major reason of preventing and challenging their careers in this study. As the table 2 shows; 44.9 percent of the respondents marked that their home responsibilities impacted their career and employment functioning. Regarding in this issue according to hamdard the traditions and costumes in some part of the country still remaining to forbid women from their rights. In most parts of Afghanistan, outside the home women employment has always been subject to severe restrictions, and the limited access to childcare continues to pose a significant obstacle to women’s employment outside the home [4].

Table 2: experience of barriers by working women in the Family

Factors	Scale	F	%
Have you ever faced work prevention by your family members?	Yes	15	21.7
	No	54	78.3
Have your home responsibilities ever challenged your employment functioning?	Yes	31	44.9
	No	38	55.1

Source: field survey, 2017

VIII.EXPERIENCE OF WORKPLACE BARRIES BY WORKING WOMEN

The study examined two types of barriers experienced by working women in the workplace. These two categories of the barriers including workplace barriers and administrative barriers analyzed separately. The study highlighted that 87 percent of the working women are respected by their male colleagues and only 13 percent of women have experienced disrespectful behavior. Similarly, 97.1 percent of the respondent felt either secure or very secure in the workplace.

Table 3: experience of workplace barriers by working women

Factors	Scale	F	%
My male colleagues behave respectfully with me in the workplace	Agree	60	87.0
	Disagree	9	13.0
As a women I am equally with men paid attention by employer	Agree	49	71.0
	Disagree	20	29.0
How much do you feel secure in the workplace?	Less secure	2	2.9
	Secure	31	44.9

Source: field survey, 2017

The study also showed that in comparison to the men 30.4 percent of the women feel that employment opportunities are challenging to them. Similarly 47.8 percent see equal opportunities and 21.7 experienced easier opportunities of employment. Preferences in employment opportunities have been considered by government and administration but in the reality only 46.4 percent of the respondent received this privilege in the workplace. Similarly, only 15.9 percent of the respondent think that the government has maintained more preference to the employment opportunities of women. As the table 4 shows 43.5 percent of the respondents think that they are not equally compensated due to their work and employment functions. According to International Foundation for Electoral Systems: The government’s inability to implement and enforce laws in areas where they are in control is the primary reason women fail to receive justice [5].

Table 4: experience of administrative barriers by working women

Factors	Scale	F	%
Comparing to the men I feel that employment opportunity is:	Challenging	21	30.4
	Easy	15	21.7
	Equal to men	33	47.8
Have you received any privilege in employment competition as a women?	Yes	32	46.4
	No	37	53.6
How do you rank the preference of central government in women employment?	less	24	34.8
	Middle	34	49.3
	More	11	15.9
Comparing to the men; do you receive equal compensation?	Yes	39	56.5
	No	30	43.5

Source: field survey, 2017

CONCLUSION

Considering three major categories of barriers experienced by women; the variable of society is effective on their employment opportunities in Bamyan. The family support has not brought significant changes on the reality of women employment in Bamyan. Although administration and government procedures have brought privilege to the working women but still there are traditional and historical norms and values of the society which negatively impact the employment of women in Bamyan. Compared to previous years, there are many changes in the status of women in Bamyan. In previous years, many restrictions by their father, elder brother, their father in law and some of their relatives.

IX.ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We acknowledge, with thanks, the following people for making this paper a reality: women employees of education, directorate of women affairs, security departments and organization and non- government institutions (NGOs). We thanks to the entire respondent of the survey.

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