Full Length Research Paper

Challenges and risks faced by the working women in government organizations: An insight from asian countries

Huagui Zhu[1], Hafiz Ghufran Ali Khan[2]* and Muhammad Ilyas[3]

[1]Faculty of Managemnt Sciences, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan..
[2]School of Management and Engineering, Nanjing University, People's Republic of China.
[3]Department of Business Management, Karakoram International University, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan.

This research is conducted to explore the challenges and risks faced by the working women in government organizations of northern areas (Gilgit-Baltistan Pakistan). For this purpose, a sample of 50 working women was taken from government organization, from Gilgit city. The age group of selected sample ranged between 20 and 49 years. The qualification of the respondents was usually under-graduate and graduate, the working experience of the sample ranges between 1 and 25 years. The research is descriptive in nature and it describes the challenges and risks faced by working women in government organizations of Gilgit city. The collected data reveals that 38% women agree with gender policy and 62% do not agree. Variant views are found about issues like female employees face harassment at work place. This statement is supported by 26% female employees, while 74% working women are against the statement, pick and drop facility for female staff is supported by 86%, and on the other hand 14% working women does not want to avail this facility. The finding indicates that inequality with women or lack of opportunities for women in job market is a serious issue. This research shows that female employees face many difficulties in government organization, such as discriminatory gender policy, lack of trainings, pick and drop facility, and even in some organization female employees do not have separate toilets. Almost all organization did not have day care centre for children of working women, timings are inflexible for female employees and lack of appreciation for their work, internet facilities at work place, lack of official accommodation and cafeteria facility are the major concerns of working women of Northern areas of Pakistan.

Key words: Working women, government organizations, challenges and risks, northern areas, Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

In Northern areas (Gilgit Baltistan) of Pakistan, the concept of human rights does not exist in its finest form. These isolated areas of Pakistan are denied of a number of basic necessities. Even men do not enjoy exposure to opportunities of quality, scientific and technical education, economic resources, human capital and people are denied of political and their constitutional rights.

Female employees face problems like work place harassment, gender inequality, pick and drop facility, inflexible timings, lack of maternity leaves and social limits, etc., these problems need to be addressed by government organization for better working environment and efficiency and productivity of employees.

The rationale of selection of the topic of discrimination against women employees is based upon the felt need and realization of the intensity and severity of the issue. Besides, one could see that this discrimination exists in almost all parts of the country and perhaps its worst form exists in remotest and isolated parts of Pakistan, and of course the women of northern areas face the most severe form of discrimination (Andre, 1992; 1995). Prevalent male dominance and women suppression has

---

*Corresponding author. hghufran@yahoo.com.

affected women's life in different ways. Physical and psychological growth, mental and emotional health and psychological well being of these women seems to be influenced by discriminatory attitudes, which tend to project this authoritarian manner in all spheres of women's life Ahwireng-Obeng (1993).

Research problem

This research primarily focuses on challenges and risks faced by female employees working in different government organizations and the problems they faced on the basis of gender discrimination. Women constitute 48% of the northern areas population. Their contributions to the regions well being however, remained undervalued and largely unseen, and their needs and aspirations often remained unrecognized.

Research objectives

1) To find out the challenges and risks faced by working women in different government organizations based in Gilgit city.
2) To gather data about the overall conditions of working women in government organization, and to know how many types of challenges and risks are faced by women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Problems faced by working women in Pakistan

In certain sectors, women are taken as cheap labor and are paid fewer wages than their male counterparts. Females' workplace, too, is not often adequately designed where they could feel at ease during work and break timings. Such unfriendly and oppressive behavior of employers is not a peculiarity of our society; rather it is a world-wide problem, and an offspring of the capitalistic approach, in which the real goal of any entrepreneur is profit maximization, and not human welfare (Hyder, 2009).

As far so, the capabilities of women are concerned, they are no less than men. Even from our independence's earlier days, women have worked to overcome outdated social attitudes and to improve conduction's for their sisters in the country, yet the Pakistan population census of 1981 states that only 3% of these builders of the national are what the government defines as "working women". Thus, is a gross distortion of women's actual economic contribution to the national productivity (Hussain, 2001).

Poor transport system is also adding to the problems of working women. Public transport is costly, scarcely available and unpleasant. Government is still unable to provide adequate transport facilities to the commuters,

even in the major cities of the country. Working women find themselves in another dilemma: they always feel that home is their original domain, which they have to sustain in all circumstances. Women generally prefer to stay at home, and normally, do not opt for the job out of choice, but out of necessity. They always have a feeling of guilt for sparing less time for family and maternal responsibilities. This dual responsibility proves the double burden on her, and resultantly, she has to fight simultaneously on two fronts (Hyder, 2009). Discussing the problems of working women, she explained that they have to face different types of difficulties and harassments. Harassment, in different manifestations from staring and stalking to sexual advances, is fear for many of them. Women do not generally feel intellectually challenged in their pursuits; rather they face psychological pressures, which restrict their active participation in work. Such annoying behavior is not limited to any specific society or any section of the society; even the employers, highly educated bosses and government officials, are also the cause of the psychological pressures faced by these women (Hyder, 2009).

In a recent workshop on "women's employment concerns and working conditions organized by the employers" Federation of Pakistan (EFP), Sindh Governor, Muhammad Soomro admitted the fact that "integration of women in the development process as equal partners, has become one of the crucial areas of governments policies not only for us here in Pakistan, but at the global level as well. Rahul (2009), notes that "women's employment today is increasingly viewed as a necessary and integral component of the overall national economy. Importance attached to women's issues and particularly those related to their employment and human resources development are accepted as crucial to development of any country and economy (Hussain, 2001).

According to Baines and Wheelock (1998), the fear of police is more common in women than men, and they avoid going to the police station for registering a complaint for any offending incident. It is unfortunate that citizens feel more defenseless in the presence of a police official Boden (1999). A woman is always apprehensive of likelihood of harassment from the policemen. Police needs to be sensitized on gender issues, and made human friendly in their responses to the public complaints. A woman would go to a police station only if she is provided with a secure and trust-worthy environment (Hyder, 2009; Awan, 2000).

Women are however not always weak and subjugated; they enjoy active support and respect as well from their male relatives and colleagues. In professional sectors, many women have made their marks with their confidence, and have proven their abilities. There are cases where organizations also facilitate them with equal rights and remunerations (Hyder, 2009).

The Faisalabad Textile Industry which has a history of

about a century is largely and overwhelmingly recognized in the manufacturing of low value added products such as cotton yarn of low counts, grey cloth, low quality finished and printed cloth, etc. This explains Pakistan relatively low export earning through textile despite largeness of these export volume wise. It is now well know that Faisalabad Textile export to Quato countries are usually the cheapest priced as compared to export of similar items from other textile exporting countries (Khan, 2001).

Harassment at the work place exists in several forms and manifestation. Incident of harassment at office operate against women and if unchecked, these simple remarks and gestures can take the form of violence causing deep psychological, emotional and mental strain. Such behavior pollutes the working environment and affects performance and productivity, resulting in economic loss to individual, family, society and indeed the women Birley (1989). Working women want change and are looking for help. For the AFL-CIO, the survey findings will inform and inspire our efforts on a fall range of issues concerning all working women including raising pay, improving opportunities for advancement, defending economic security, extending health insurance, child care, and elderly care. Pensions and other benefits, and helping working women and non-working women organize a stronger voice and better deal in the society would help solve their psychological pressures (DAWN, 2002).

"Report on the national survey from the working women's department, AFL-CIO. Early in 1997, the nation's largest organization of working women-the AFL-CIO, with 5.5 million women members set out to learn about the issues that shape women's lives on and off the job" (Abramson, 1989).

Problems faced by working women in China

"Gender discrimination is widespread, Didi Kirsten Tatlow wrote in the New York Times. "Only a few women dare to sue employers for unfair hiring practices, dismissal on grounds of pregnancy or maternity leave, or sexual harassment, experts say. Alsos and Ljunggren (1998), employers commonly specify gender, age and physical appearance in job offers. There are gaps in the law. A major problem, according to Feng Yuan is that it does not define gender discrimination. The law also sticks to the longstanding requirement that women retire five years earlier than men at the same jobs, thereby reducing earnings and pensions" (Tatlow, 2010).

Highly qualified candidates such as Angel Feng struggle to find jobs. Didi Kirsten Tatlow wrote in the New York Times, "Fluent in Chinese, English, French and Japanese, the 26-year-old graduate of a business school in France interviewed between January and April with half a dozen companies in Beijing, hoping for her first job in the private sector, where salaries are highest. Tatlow

quoted Ms. Feng who said: "The boss would ask several questions about my qualifications, then he would say, 'I see you just got married. When will you have a baby?' It was always the last question. My response would be not for five years at least, but they did not believe me' (Tatlow, 2010)

Even though the Red Guards' violence was directed against the "class enemies", it was still often "sexualized" and "gendered". Many young women were exposed to sexual assault, on the countryside by local cadres, in the cities by Red Guards and other gangs. During the cultural revolution, women were attacked because they wore fashionable clothes or looked "feminine". The female Red Guards dressed like men. Whoever behaved like a women could be seen as a "backward element". There were cases where women were attacked under the pretense of "sexual immorality". One woman says: "at that time, people were attacked for bad class origin. To women, at that time, people would say, you had 'lifestyle problems' [a euphemism for sexual immorality]. Such lifestyle problems would be a huge blow to you. When they had no reasons to attack you, they would say that you had lifestyle problems. I remembered during the cultural revolution, those women who were said to have lifestyle problems wore a string of worn shoes around their shoulders, parading through the streets, being tainted as 'broken shoes', "a euphemism for a loose woman" (Liu 38)2.

Problems faced by working women in India

Working women in India are faced with lot more challenges than their counterparts in the other parts of the world. In India, men do not share on most of the household chores, it is women who have to cook, clean the house, do the dishes, wash clothes, get their children ready for school, etc. Men just took care of few chores that are to be dealt outside the house. So the major burden of running the family is on the shoulders of women. It was alright for women to handle all the chores as long as they were homemakers. Now with their increasing need for getting some income for the family, they have to work all the more harder. They have to take up a 9 to 5 job plus handling all the household chores that they handled as a homemaker. Men's role has not changed much (Neetu, 2009).

They have to handle harassment's at their work place, sometimes just over look things to ensure that their job is not jeopardized in anyway. Many Indian families are still living as joint families along with the parents and in-laws. This adds to their stress, further because they have to please all the family members of their husbands. These women have to listen to the complaints made against them and turn deaf ears towards them if need be. Overall, majority of women in India look towards or live in the hope that things will change. Some of us have given

up that hope and learnt to accept that nothing can be done about it. India has a long way to go before our women will be able to live their lives to the fullest (Neetu, 2009).

It is an open truth that working women have to face problems just by virtue of their being women Brockhaus (1980). Working women here are referred to those who are in paid employment. Social attitude to the role of women lags much behind the law. This attitude which considers women fit for certain jobs and not for other jobs is determined by those who recruit the employees. Thus, women find employment easily as nurses, doctors, and teachers in the care and nurturing sectors, and secretaries or assembling jobs in the routine submissive sectors. But even if well qualified women engineers or managers or geologists are available, preference will be given to a male of equal qualification. A gender bias creates an obstacle at the recruitment stage itself. When it comes to remuneration, the law proclaims equality but it is seldom put into practice. The inbuilt conviction that women are capable of less work than men or less efficient than men governs this injustice of unequal salaries and wages for the same job. The age old belief of male superiority over women creates several hurdles for women at their place of work. Women on the way up the corporate ladder discover that they must be much better than their male colleagues to reach the top. Once at the top male colleagues and subordinates often expect much greater expertise and efficiency from a woman boss than from a male boss. Conditioned by social and psychological tradition women colleagues do not lend support to their own sex. Working in such conditions inevitably put much greater strain on women than what men experience. These problems tend to make women less eager to progress in their careers. Indeed, many of them choose less demanding jobs for which they may even be over-qualified. A woman's work is not merely confined to paid employment (Rahul, 2012).

Technological advancement results in retrenchment of women employees. No one thinks of upgrading their skills. Maternity leave is seldom given. It is much easier to terminate the woman's employment and hire someone else. Trade unions do little to ameliorate the lot of women workers. Women's issues do not occur on the priority list of most of the trade unions. Women going to work are often subject to sexual harassment. Public transport system is overcrowded and men take advantage of the circumstances to physically harass women (Lurie 1998).

Colleagues offer unwanted attention which can still be shaken off, but a woman is placed in a difficult situation if the higher officer demands sexual favors. If refused, the boss can easily take it out on the woman in other ways to make life miserable for her. There have been several cases of sexual harassment recently involving even the senior women officials. On the other hand, if a woman is praised for her work or promoted on merit, her colleagues do not hesitate to attribute it to sexual favors Birley (1989). The psychological pressure of all this can easily lead to a woman quitting her job. Most of the problems that beset working women are in reality rooted in the social perspective of the position of women. Traditionally, men are seen as the bread winner and women as the house-keepers and child bearers. This typecast role model continues to put obstacles before the working women. A fundamental change is required in the attitudes of the employers, policy makers, family members and other relatives and the public at large (Rahul, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

This research primarily focused on female employees of government organization. Females are working in different departments of government organizations in Gilgit city, which includes Planning and Development Department, Family Health Association, Population, Northern Area Transport Corporation, District Head Quarter Gilgit, etc.

Sample size

For this study, a purposive sample of 50 individuals has been collected, which will be representing different areas of Gilgit city. Academic qualification level of the selected group ranges above matriculation. The age range of the selected sample is above 18. Age range marital status and minimum educational qualification would be held constant in order to control their effects.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire is based on the concept of closed and open ended question. Each question represents the objective of this research. Each questionnaire contained twenty three questions which reflect the problems faced by female employees in government organization of Gilgit city.

Data collection

Questionnaires were given to female employees in different sector of government organization and were collected back on next day. The sample has been approached at their work places as well as at their homes. They were instructed to readout statement carefully and check the appropriate answers by marking tick on it and give answers to open ended questions.

The data for this research was collected from primary source. A questionnaire was designed to address the objectives of this study specifically to assess the work place related issues. The data were analyzed manually since the study is a descriptive one. However, statistical tool was not applied, but frequency distribution and cross tabulation of different variables were made.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The sample size consists of a total of 50 respondents. The age group of 3 respondents ranges from 21 to 25, 13 respondents had a 26 to 29 years, 14 respondents range from 30 to 34 years, 13 respondents ranges from 35 to 39 years, 6 respondents range from 40 to 44 years, 1 respondent range from 45 to 49 (Table 1 and Figure 1). The total sample size is of 50 respondents among whom

Table 1. Demographic analysis of age-wise responses.

Age group	Frequency	%
21 - 25	3	6
26 - 29	13	26
30 - 34	14	28
35 - 39	13	26
40 - 44	6	12
45 - 49	1	2
Total	50	100

Table 2. Demographic analysis of marital status.

Marital status	Frequency	%
Married	35	70
Unmarried	15	30
Total	50	100

Table 3. Demographic analysis of the qualification of female employment.

Educational qualification	Frequency	%
Others	1	2
Masters	10	20
Bachelor	12	24
HSSC	19	38
SSC	4	8
Middle	1	2
primary	3	6
Total	50	100

35 (70%) respondents are married and 15 (30%) respondents are unmarried (Table 2 and Figure 2).

The research is conducted to explore working women's conditions in government organization. This finding reveals that 38% women agree with discriminatory gender policy and 62% do not agree. Variant views were found about issues like female employees facing harassment at work place. This statement is supported by 26% female employees, while 74% working women are against the statement, pick and drop facility for female staff is opposed by 86%, and on the other hand 14% working women supported this statement (Table 3 and Figure 3).

Finding indicates that inequality with female employees or lack of opportunities in jobs is considered a serious issue. This research tells that female employees face many difficulties in government organizations, such as non fairness of gender policy, lack of trainings, and lack of pick and drop facilities. Even in some organizations, there is lack of separate toilets for women, lack of a day care centre for their children, inflexible timings (night duty), insufficient salary and salary not paid on time, lack of appreciation for their work achievements, lack of computerized systems, lesser access to internet facilities at their office, and lack of official accommodation and cafeteria facility. There are such kinds of facilities which government should provide to female staff in government organizations especially in government hospitals in Gilgit city where working woman have not any facility according to their duties.

Women employees also faced some common hindrances in government organizations, e.g. harassment issues, work load, no job security, sectarian problems, stagnant work, and bad environmental issues.

Conclusion

In the last few decades, visible changes in the Northern areas (Gilgit-Baltistan) of Pakistan took place, in this
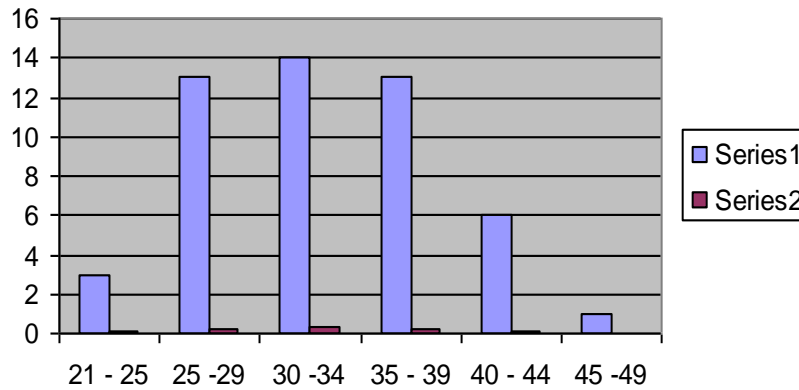
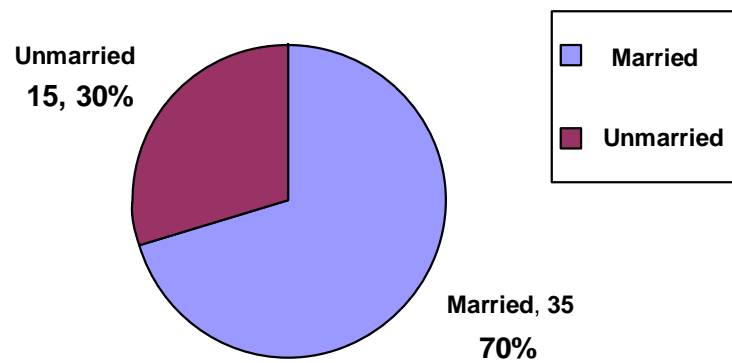**Figure 1.** Graphical representation of age-wise responses.

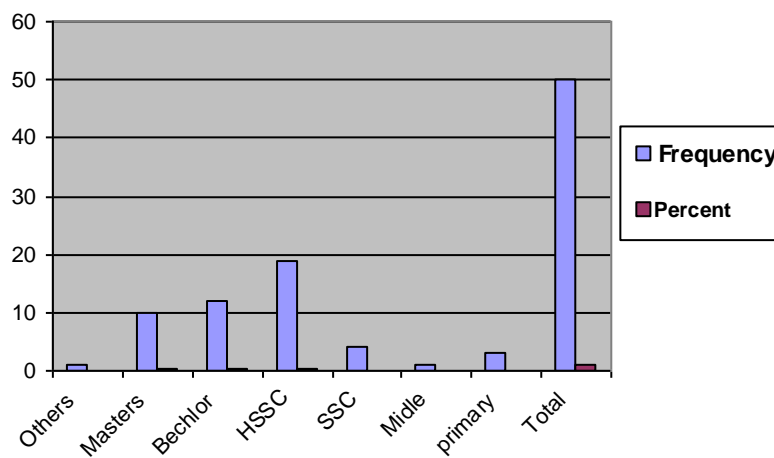**Figure 2.** Graphical representation of marital status.

Figure 3. Graphical representation of the qualification of female employment.

regard, the contribution of northern areas administration is quite significant.

The participation of women in mainstream at government organizations is increasing day by day. The information from statistical analysis indicates that the developments in the fields of female employment ensure by government organizations. When men and women are able to respect and accept their differences, then love has a chance to bloom and in this way female employees get facilities and are able to manage the challenges and

risks faced by them to perform even better into the process of overall improvement and productivity.

REFERENCES

Abramson HS (1989). AFL-CIO Creates Transport Trades Unit. Journal of Commerce. November 17.

Ahwireng-Obeng F (1993). Gender, entrepreneurship and socioeconomic reparation in South Africa. Rev. Black Polit. Econ. 22(2):151-165.

Alsos GA, Ljunggren E (1998). Does the business start-up process differ by gender? A longitudinal study of nascent entrepreneurs. Frontiers Entrep. Res. pp.137-151.

Andre R (1992). A national profile of women's participation in networks of small business leaders. J. Small Bus. Manag. 30(1):66-73.

Andre R (1995). Diversity in executive networks: A national study of women's representation in private sector economic development. J. Managerial Issues, 7(3):306-322.

Awan S (2002). The development trends of occupational health services in Pakistan-Current status and future perspective. World Health Organization, Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office, Cairo, Egypt.

Baines S, Wheelock J (1998). Working for each other: Gender, the household, and microbusiness survival and growth. Int. Small Bus. J. 17(1):16-35.

Belcourt M (1990). A family portrait of Canada's most successful female entrepreneurs. J. Bus. Ethics 9(4/5):435-438.

Bird BJ, Brush CG (2003). A gendered perspective on organizational creation: Entrep. Theory Pract. 26(3):41-65.

Bird BJ, Brush CG (2003). A gendered perspective on organizational creation: Entrepreneurship Theory Pract. 26(3):41-65.

Birley S (1989). Female entrepreneurs: Are they really any different? J. Small Bus. Manag. 27(1):32-37.

Birley S, Moss C, Saunders P (1987). Do women entrepreneurs require different training? Am. J. Small Bus. 12(1):27-35.

Boden Jr. RJ (1999). Flexible working hours, family responsibilities, and female selfemployment: Gender differences in self-employment selection. Am. J. Econ. Sociol. 58(1):71-84.

Brockhaus RH (1980). Risk-Taking propensity of entrepreneurs. Acad. Manag. J. 23(3):509-520.

Hyder (2009). Women & Economy, 4th Roundtable (SGGI)

Hussain (2001). (The News 2001 cited in Hussain 2001).

Khan (2001). (The News 2001 cited in Khan 2001).

Liu (38)2 2011, American Institute of Stress.

Lurie J (1998). The Downsizing Game. Unpublished Research Thesis, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey.

Neetu 1 (2009). Social Justice & Empowerment.

Rahul 2009, Women & Economy, 4th Roundtable (SGGI)

Rahul 2012, "Problems of working women in India" Human Resource & Development.

Tatlow 2010. (New York Times 2010 cited in Tatlow 2010).