

SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF HOME-BASED WORKING WOMEN IN HYDERABAD SINDH

Zareen Atta*

Nasreen Aslam Shah†

Abstract

The present qualitative research study was carried out by analysing the conditions of the lives of home-based working women in Tando Allahyar, District Hyderabad of Sindh Province, whereby three research participants were selected for in-depth interviews. The study's main objective is to know the living conditions of home-based working women by exploring the problems they face in the workplace.

Four themes were generated from the collected data employing in-depth interviews. The response rate of theme 01, which discusses the social security system, is 100% by all three research participants. Theme 02 was responded to by all three research participants, which discussed the daily routine activities of home-based working women who simultaneously earn and perform domestic activities. Theme 03, reported by all three research participants with a frequency rate of 100%, discusses the effects of home-based work on women's lives. Theme 04 was reported with 66.7%, which was responded to by two research participants. The findings of the present research study show that home-based working women are vulnerable in terms of social security protection; however, they have evolved with a significant share in national economic growth. Home-based working women simultaneously serve domestic duties of households and livelihood, which are full-time engagements that these women perform all day from dawn to dusk for minimal money.

Keywords: *Home-based workers, self-confidence, vulnerability, government apathy*

INTRODUCTION

In the present age of globalisation, modern economic trends under the development approach of capitalism have changed the production process through subcontracting, and wages have become formalised (Bigger, 2002). The global competition has entirely changed the strategies of economic

*Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, University of Sindh, Jamshoro

†Professor (Meritorious), Department of Social Work, University of Karachi, Karachi

systems into cost-effectiveness, which creates new employee engagement formulas for unregistered and unincorporated enterprises and casual workforce on daily wages (Bertulfo, 2011).

In many parts of the world, informal economic trends have engaged more than two-thirds of the workforce in developing countries, where South Asia has 65%, including Southeast Asia. However, Latin America, the Middle East, and North African countries have 60% of the growing trends of the informal economy, while the rate in the developed countries is 25% to 40% (Chen, 2008). The number of home-based working women has increased from 2013 to 2018 from 3.59 to 4.37 million; these women share their contribution to the total employment ratio as 7 per cent. This has become possible with the growing trend of home-based working women during 2013-14, which remained at 3.59 million, and during the year 2017-18, it increased from 22 % to 28 % in total women employment (Akhtar & Vanek, 2013).

Home-based work (HBW) can be traced back to the age of human civilisation. In the modern era, men supervise and struggle to fulfil the family's basic needs, create new ways of income generation, and become service providers for others. However, at the beginning of the civilisation era, there was no such concept of income generation or employment-creating opportunities. Thus, a man was responsibly producing the essential things needed for them. With the passage of centuries, men progressed and could generate sources of income generation, such as agriculture-related items, including animals, which were sold out to other people (Humphrey, 1985).

It is reported in the National Labor Force Surveys of Bangladesh (2002) that in Pakistan, Nepal, and India, a significant ratio of the informal economy witnesses the most considerable contribution of the total workforce in employment, which, as India comprised 72%, Pakistan has 73%, Bangladesh witnesses of its 62% and Nepal has also equal to Pakistan which is 72%. It expresses that the informal economy has become a major integrated part of the economic systems in developing countries (Chen, 2005).

The findings of previous studies reveal significant relations among the three major components: globalisation, informatisation, and feminisation in developing countries (Chen, 2005). South Asian countries witness the informal economy, where a significant contribution is made by women workers who are poor and unemployed. Women with poor economic backgrounds are a significant portion of the informal economy (Duane, 2007).

Home-based working women are streamlined in this age due to the globalisation and extensive decentralisation of the production process, an

emerging element of the informal economy. The changing strategies based on cost-effectiveness from the manufacturer and global competitiveness have contributed to the increasing number of home-based workers.

Developing countries are mainly confronted with the structure of society where women are confronted with socio-cultural barriers and other economic challenges where they cannot receive formal employment; hence, they prefer to work at their homes, which is accessible and convenient for them.

Even though various research studies have revealed the factors responsible for and involved in home-based work for males and females, females are more contributing factors than males because females are more vulnerable and deprived of education and economic independence (Perry, 2007). Home-based working women are more comfortable, accessible, and cost-effective for capitalists in production. Home-based working women perform dual responsibilities of economic and domestic activities parallel (Duane, 2007). South Asian regions are the same in terms of home-based working women due to the social composition of societies where women are at social risks, such as illiteracy, unskilled and socially excluded, and other social barriers (Chen, 2005).

Employers are satisfied with the home-based worker because there is no rule of employee retention; hence, the home-based working women are powerless to wage bargaining with their employers (Bigger, 2002).

Unionisation is no longer applicable in the employment of the home-based work process because they work in isolation. They are also at risk for the middleman and contractors' involvement in marketing and selling goods, with all entrepreneur costs to be paid. Such entrepreneurial costs are a heavy burden on them, which is the responsibility of employers (Hiralal, 2017). Home-based working women are vulnerable to the vulnerable community in the field of the informal economy and are always at risk of survival (Ravallion, 1997). Home-based working women receive the lowest wages. Other dimensions directly affect the life of home-based working women. Such as the indivisibility of work and the contractual nature of work in isolation under an irregular work process, which does not give them a share in the value chain system, and there are no safety measures within a working environment (Khan & Kazmi, 2003).

The Rationale of the Study

According to the UNO report on home-based working women, in Pakistan, home-based working women are 3.8% of the GDP of Pakistan; thereby, home-based working women contribute 400 billion. The findings of previous studies show a considerable need for home-based women where the form of society is male-dominant. In a patriarchal society, women are more vulnerable than in liberal societies. In the conservative form of society, women are used as either sex objects or doorstep servants to serve male interests. As regards the present study, it was fit for the current scenario to research the lives of home-based working women, knowing in depth about their lives in their views. Knowing in-depth about their lives could only be possible through conducting a qualitative research study that gives insightful data regarding the research questions in the current study.

Literature Review

An outbreak of COVID-19 has widened the debate over the availability of jobs at home due to the "social distancing" policies to be implemented worldwide (Dingel, 2020). There is significant variation in job content across the world (Winkler, 2020).

Not all occupations contain the same activities; however, each comprises work categories. Hence, occupational activities cannot be served from home. This is because the home public cannot be dealt with directly, such as performing for or working directly with the public is very important handling and moving objects is very important, or repairing and maintaining electronic equipment is very important. However, those occupations' requirements can be changed exceptionally (Dingel, 2020).

Law professionals and communication fields professionals must communicate with the public using information technology to work on the tasks but not entirely; however, artisanal workers can continue their work activities through e-commerce, and individual artisans and artisans can continue their work by repairing moveable objects and devices.

Not all but optimal occupations can be carried out; however, sub-optimal activities can be feasible during the pandemic. Developing countries witness the increasing trends of home-based work. The great concern is the working conditions for the home-based workers, which are inhuman. They are isolated, socially excluded, and do not get benefits due to the informal employment system. They are socially unprotected due to the nature of their employment (Samantroy, 2015). Various studies have placed the grievances and working conditions of home-based workers. Even though home-based workers contribute significantly to producing goods and services, statistically, it is insignificant. Women are the main contributors to urban

employment in some Asian countries (Chen, 2014).

The more significant number of informal sector workers is increasingly getting ground in the urban areas within household settings with no employer-and-employee relationship system. This shows the severe concerns and deprivation of formalised social security through labour legislation. Reported by the ILO from its World Social Protection Report, that only 29% of the global population is getting benefits of the formal social security system, which covers child social security to the family and old-aged pensions systems; the rest of the 5.2 billion people around the world which becomes 71 % of the total population are yet deprived of the formal social security system or partially protected of social security benefits.

If protected through the social security system, home-based workers within the informal economy can boost their working efficiency and prevent them from poverty. (ILO, 2017). Home-based work was prevalent in primitive societies long ago; however, it suffered due to the progress of human societies. Changes in production and supply chain systems, the Industrial Revolution, wars, and technological advancement are key factors (Zahiri, 2017).

Research Methodology

The current research study has been conducted employing the qualitative research approach. The qualitative research study is undertaken in natural settings to take insightful data on the subject matter. The data was collected using purposive sampling, mainly employed in qualitative research, to explore a deeper understanding of the phenomena of interest. Purposive sampling is employed where the research respondents are experienced in the areas a researcher does want to explore from the view of the research respondent. Three home-based workers were selected for the current research study for district Tando Allahyar.

All data were mainly collected in local languages such as Sindhi and Urdu due to the research respondents' mother tongue. Hence, the researcher typed it into the MS Word computer software application. All three interviews were typed and stored in the specific folder with the case numbers for analysis. The data was analysed using the QDA Miner Lite version 2.6.0 computer software. The data was analysed employing the thematic analysis research method. Four major themes were generated from the coded data in response to the research questions. In qualitative research studies, these themes answer the research questions generated by identifying the specific codes from the data; however, all similar codes are merged into a specific category.

Research Findings

Table 1 Demographic Data of Research Participants

Sr. No.	Names of IDIs Participants (Anonymous)	Ethnicity	Present Age	Education	Marital Status	District
1	Sajida	Punjabi Muslim	25	Only religious education	Married	Tando Allahyar
2	Bhagul	Marwari Hindu	32	4 class primaries	Married	Tando Allahyar
3	Nasseban	Sindhi Muslim	40	Uneducated	Married	Tando Allahyar

Category: 01: Social Conditions of Home-Based Working Women

Theme 1: Home-based working women have no social security within an informal economic system.

Social security is a financial strategy for an individual or household which ensures their accessibility to health care systems and financial access when they reach their old age or in any emergency: unemployment, injuries during working time, maternity. Home-based working women are living with no social security. Home-based working women are vulnerable in terms of social security because these women do not have access to health, financial and old-age benefits at all.

Their children suffer more due to the lack of proper health and education provisions. The current theme advocates the genuine demand for home-based working women (HBWW), who are isolated contributors to Pakistan's economic sector. One of the research participants of the present study shared her views on her working conditions and grievances, which are given below extracts from her interview: The informal sector runs its function without having proper HR policy frameworks; however, home-based employees suffer more due to the absence of proper HRM policies.

These women are low-paid, have long working hours, and lack job security. Small business owners always think of their financial stability through profit margin, leaving behind their frontline soldiers with the lowest wages. Modern-age technological advancement has also replaced the previously engaged home-based working women because of the machinery. This has created an alarming situation for women associated with this industry.

The whole family agreed upon the decision to start working at home to get rid of the lack of financial issues. Growing inflation and unemployment are the primary reasons that compel people to do this work because a small income cannot support it. I started working at home and receiving sub-contractual work assignments. I used to produce work orders in due course of time, but the price I receive from the intermediaries serving agents of the factories and direct sale agents is insufficient (Case -1).

Theme 2: Home-based working women suffer due to performing dual duties in their homes.

Home-based working women are vulnerable to the vulnerable who are constantly engaged in doing work and find no time for rest. They work from dawn to dusk to earn a livelihood or perform domestic activities. They have dual responsibilities at home but are not compassionate in the informal economic sector.

Extract from one of the interviewees from her interview in support of the theme two is given below:

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“I reserve some amount from my income. I used to spend that amount on my children's education. However, no other sources of government support could help my family and me survive. We, the self-employed, are at the stake from every angle. I used to work round the clock for my domestic and livelihood. I feel tired after doing whole day activities.” (Case-2).

Category Two: Economic Conditions of Home-Based Working Women

Theme 3: Home-based work empowers women and makes them financially independent.

The women associated with the informal economy are invisible in the social security system but are significant contributors to Pakistan's national economy. These women work through the sub-contractual process. However, those women who directly sell their products in the markets face enormous issues such as transportation, market accessibility, and receiving the proper price of the products. Despite these hurdles, these women consider

themselves fortunate to earn and serve their families. They do not even depend on their male family members.

Home-based working women find their livelihood working in this sector when these women do not find other sources of income. This informal sector is a supplement for those women who do not find any compatible source of income in the running age; however, if there is no choice, this is the best choice for them, which could at least support them in feeding their families.

A participant stated, *"Self-earning makes one confident that he/she can make decisions at will. She or he will never follow others' dictation. Rather, he/she does whatever is good for them."* She further said, *"I work under the supervision of male management, and I have not yet observed such an experience."* She believes that *"being alone to serve the whole family, including earning, creates problems for me. However, I manage it through tolerance and patience because I believe that no one will help me resolve my issues and problems. I am the only person who could eliminate the issues"* (Case 2).

Theme 4: There is no employment retention policy for home-based working women.

These describe the insecure job trends among home-based working women who are even significant in numbers serving the economic sector. For specific reasons, women who render services within an informal economic sector are more vulnerable. For example, they work at home in isolation with improper safety measures, and the informal economic sector does not recognise employee retention and other benefits the employers provide to formal sector employees. Most small business owners run their businesses without having designed the employee retention policy framework, and the employees, due to unemployment, serve their interests on a minimal amount of money.

Responding to questions, a participant said, *"Self-employed women are confronted with socio-economic problems and others because of the lack of employment retention policies. Self-employed women are informal workers without proper employers, but intermediaries serve them through a sub-contractual system. Hence, it directly affects us due to the improper system developed within the informal economic sector"* (Case-1).

Discussion

The informal economy has evolved from the civilised human societies; however, economic resources were rare then and mainly depended on Agro-Economy and pet animals. Due to the advancement in information technology, human societies have been transformed from traditional to modern economic systems. E-commerce is the modern-day business module widely adopted by the larger population of the world. The current study was an analytical study of the home-based working women who work within the informal economy of Pakistan and share a significant portion of employment. In the present study, only three home-based working women were interviewed through open-ended questions. All three research participants responded according to their experiences. The reports published by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) reveal that out of five, only one person has access to social security worldwide.

In Pakistan, home-based working women are living their lives miserable with no social security at all. They are a vulnerable class in this society. The present study findings reveal their sentiments and views, deplorably creating a horrible picture of their vulnerability. Policymakers should rethink and reformulate this forgotten and socially excluded class in an economic sector with proper social security policy systems which could keep them secure from these economic and social problems. Their social status can only be raised when these invisible working women are assured of social security and proper policy implementations.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The present research study was carried out on the working conditions of home-based women of Hyderabad Sindh. In the Sindh province of Pakistan, a large portion of women are submissive to their male family members to serve them. This happens mainly in rural areas where resistance against a male's decisions is a sinister act. Uneducated women cannot get lucrative salaries but remain labourers working as home-based women, earning a small portion of their income, which is insufficient for them to run the expense of their families.

The present study reveals four significant themes while analysing the data collected from the targeted research participants. The first theme shows that the home-based working women have no social security system that could give them a helping hand in hard times. Such insecurity creates unrest and other psychological problems. This is termed as the home-based working women are completely insecure on economic grounds. Theme two of the study shows the dual character in terms of performing the duties of earning

for the families and serving at home, such as cooking, home cleaning, and taking care of children. It directly affects the health of those home-based working women, for which there is no consoling pattern. The third theme of the finding reveals that home-based working women feel that this economic activity makes them financially independent, which is a positive sign; however, it would have been more fruitful if the owner had given social security through employee retention or retirement benefits. Theme four of this study discusses the retention of their economic activity, which is yet a daydream for them. It is undeniable that human nature always seeks security wherever it is applicable; however, mainly in the economic system, every human wants a sustainable source of income that could be workable in difficult times.

The present study's findings reveal that home-based working women are vulnerable to informal artisanal work that does not provide their social security regarding employee retention, emergency financial assistance, medical assistance, life insurance, pension, etc. On the other hand, formal economic sector employees are socially protected and take all benefits. All four themes reflect that home-based working women must have proper skill-based training, adequate machinery for working, proper market access, market-based price of produced goods, and social security systems. Such proper implementation could reduce their suffering if the women of the informal economic sector were provided with such facilities.

This study recommends that home-based working women receive proper skill development training. They should be provided with work tools and machines. Their work must be retained under the government labour laws for the social security system. They should be treated like employees of all social sectors.

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