

A Gender Wise Analysis of Work Experiences of Private Sector Employees During
Pandemic

Samina Riaz

Lecturer, Department of Gender & Development Studies, LCWU at-samina.riaz@lcwu.edu.pk

Faseha Khalid

BS scholar at-Fasehakhalid64277@gmail.com

Naveed Iqbal*

Assistant professor, Department of Mass communication, LCWU at-naveed.iqbal@lcwu.edu.pk

Fareeha Anjum

Lecturer, Department of Gender & Development Studies, LCWU at-Fareeha.anjum@lcwu.edu.pk

Abstract

The pandemic COVID-19 had negative impact on worldwide economy. This study was aimed to discover experiences of private sector employees during pandemic. Qualitative research design was used for the purpose. To collect the information semi structured interviews were carried out. Purposive sampling was used to select six participants. Selected participants were from education sectors, banking, NGO and multinational company. Thematic analysis was done to analyze transcribed interviews. The findings of this study indicated that COVID -19 has affected private organizations as they faced low production rate resultantly profit ratio was also reduced. To overcome the financial burden organizations either fired their employees or delayed payment of salaries for couple of months. The findings of study showed those who were not on permanent positions and employed recently got fired from their jobs to manage organizational economic burden. The study showed that both males as well as females faced social mobility restrictions during pandemic and males felt more stress due to this social restriction. It also exhibits that organizations changed their work mode and exhibited compliance with Governmental policies to handle the situation during pandemic. This study would be helpful in understanding issues faced by employees of private organizations so in future if world faces some similar situation, organizations learn to generate secure jobs for employees and plan strategies to curtail economic burden on their employees.

Keywords: Gender Inequalities, Workplace experiences, Pandemic, Private sector, Employees

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic gave birth to many barriers in every sphere of life. It has affected millions of people across the world. It has a very negative impact on the socio-economic status of our society. The effect of COVID-19 has exposed the gender inequalities in Pakistan. According to the recent record (UN, 2020) the gender elements of COVID-19, stated that pandemic have a strong adverse effect on the livelihoods of vulnerable agencies and pre-existing gender inequalities in developing countries like Pakistan. Gender based differences in mode of work resulting men

unable to maintain social distancing. Moreover, it also results in increasing house work load on women which affect their proficiency in professional work.

Historical Background of COVID-19

According to the recent report (WHO, 2020) through the end of 2019 year, an outburst had taken place which used to be phenomenon of unknown disease was once appear, afterwards instances demonstrate that it used to be induced by means of novel disease Covid-19 which escalate all over the earth rapidly. The first case of pandemic was reported in Pakistan on 26th of February, 2020. Moreover, from 15th of March, 2020 the number of instances raised so promptly because of the pilgrimage advent from Iran through Taftan boarder. Furthermore, lock down was declared in Pakistan was coerced less than a day that immigrants should have to go back to their homes due to this crowdy situation social distancing become impossible (World Bank, 2020). The corona pandemic has spread into more than 200 countries and produced public panic (Huang & Zhao 2020). This outburst has caused many health-related problems including stress, depressive symptoms, anxiety globally (Torales et al. 2020).

COVID-19 Impact on Worldwide Economy System

The coronavirus ailment – (Covid-19) outbreak has acutely affected country wide and worldwide monetary. It has been seen that number of people globally experience the tremendous effect of COVID-19 outburst on their corporations. The most important sufferer of COVID-19 outburst is those who belong to MSME's (micro, small and medium sized enterprises) (Bartik et al., 2020; Prasad et al., 2015). According to the UNCTAD 2020 report in Pakistan giant quantity of elements such as the slowdown of production, lockdown have shut down most of the commercial enterprise and it has increased the unemployment ratio all over the globe. The COVID-19 impact on Pakistan economy can be seen as during pandemic Pakistan has vanished one-third of its earnings and trades were fall by 50 percent due to this outburst (Junaid, 2020). Another study said that in Pakistan there are all over five million people who lives just at or beneath the subsistence borderline, although there are mass of the untrained people who have lack of skills or low skilled for instance transport workers, labors, construction workers, waste recyclers as well as domestic workers who rely on daily wages to meet their basic necessities of life. Almost four million people in Pakistan are daily wage workers. These wagers have been affected by the Lockdown very badly (Hussain, 2020).

COVID-19 Impact on Gender

Women's have limited access to technology this create a severe digital divided by gender in Pakistan. According to (Global digital report, 2018) women are 37% less likely to own a mobile phone or have access to internet facilities Furthermore 33% of the population in Pakistan have internet facility in which 21% are men and 12% are women. Women with disabilities are at risk of lacking access to information and communication to technology services as if they don't have access to these services. From the past worldwide outbursts including (SARS) severe acute

respiratory syndrome in 2003, from 2014-2016 Ebola and from 2015-2016 Zika highlighted the importance of incorporating a gender analysis into all readiness and responsive measures as pandemics and humanitarian crisis have affected men and women differently. These crisis exhibits unequal gender power relations among men and women through which women suffer due to the lack of access to capitals (Bibler, 2020). This exploratory study traces effects of COVID-19 pandemic on women and men at their workplace. Pandemic has affected world economy badly. Organizations adopted several strategies to deal with the pandemic situation like online or work from home, and downsizing of employees. Similarly, in Pakistan employees of private sector also experienced multiple issues, it is needed to discover the challenges which private sector employees faced during Pandemic. This will help to devise strategies to minimize the economic burden on employees.

Literature Review

According to previous studies there are many external environment crises has badly affected the economy worldwide like 1953 great floods in Holland, 2011 floods in Thailand, 2011 Japan earthquake as well as tsunami. Further before Covid-19 many epidemic outbreaks have affected the world such as SARS, Mars, swine flu (2009 HINI), Ebola outburst in 2014, ZIKA outburst etc. (Auzzir et al., 2018; Eggers, 2020). These disasters have a very negative effect on the social economy and are a major root-cause of huge financial losses. According to the research (Ahmed, 2020) the division, who faced the most financial threat, are those who belong to construction service, manufacturing service, lodging service as well as food services, wholesale traders and commercial enterprise workforce. All these sectors are laborers, in which many of them are low-paid and low-skilled workers. The quarter sector was badly strike because of the COVID brought about lockdowns in the globe. The 2018 survey of Labor Force showed that 1.18 million people in Pakistan badly affected because of the complete lockdown worldwide and cancellation or postponement of export orders resulted adverse impact on labor intensive category who are employed on daily wages or daily wage earners as well as self-employed workers faced financial crisis. Research has exhibited that youth-led organizations are fighting to live to tell the tale in the light of financial thunderstruck caused by the pandemic. There is diminished consumer demand and provide chain disruptions. A global survey indicated that one-third of the youth-led firms had to lay off its group of workers whilst a quarter had to decrease wages. According to another research COVID-19 leads to behavior modifications like isolation at home, wearing masks as well as different regions of world displayed gender differences in COVID-19-related views and behaviors. For instance, according to women pandemic was a serious health threat.

Research Questions

Following questions paved the way to design the present study

1. What are the experiences of private sector employees in the duration of pandemic at their workplace?
2. How pandemic affected both genders at their work place?

Method

This research is concerned with understanding of pandemic COVID-19 impact on men and women at their workplace with in Pakistani Context. This research involves objectives to explore the difficulties that employees faced in the duration of pandemic as well as to find out the impact of gender inequalities on employees. This research also explores the organizational strategies in the duration of pandemic. This study falls in interpretive school of thought. This study used the interpretive school of thought as it is grounded on the human uniqueness and social realities of humans. Inductive reasoning was used in this study for generating ideographic shape of explanation.

Research Design

In this study while conducting the investigation of phenomenon the qualitative research design was used as this research method helps to explore phenomena in detail. Furthermore, according to the researchers this qualitative exploratory study was required to be coherent to examine the experiential meanings and organization of data in a more comprehensible and presentable way.

Participants

The participants for this research were six employees in which three were male and three were female employees from different private sectors of Pakistan in Lahore. The selection of participants in this study was done by the purposive sampling technique.

Demographic Profile

| Occupation | Gender | Marital status | Family System | Age | Experience |
|-----------------------------------|--------|----------------|---------------|-----|------------|
| Bank Manager | Male | Single | Nuclear | 29 | 4 |
| University Lecturer | Male | Married | Nuclear | 45 | 15 |
| Employee in Multinational Company | Male | Married | Nuclear | 48 | 22 |
| School Teacher | Female | Single | Joint | 25 | 1 |
| NGO Worker | Female | Single | Nuclear | 23 | 1 |
| Academic Teacher | Female | Single | Nuclear | 20 | 1 |

Data Source

Data in this study was collected by using semi-structure interview protocol to gain in-depth understanding of the data. The researcher conducted interviews and ask open-ended questions from the participants.

Procedure

Semi structured interview guide was designed for obtaining data from the participants. Purposive sampling was employed for participants selection. After consent taking selected participants were contacted with the help of gatekeeper through telephone. Before starting the interview, the purpose of the study was elaborated to the participants and after their consent, data was collected through call interviews and recording was done. All the participants assured that this information will only be used for research purpose. Recordings of the interviews were used for interview transcriptions. Transcripts were read again and again and after that the data was analyzed and findings were concluded.

Data Analysis

The researcher utilized the thematic analysis technique to analyze the data. The purpose of thematic analysis identification of themes or interesting and unique patterns in the data. Another purpose of thematic analysis was to use these themes to solve research or say something about a problem. In this study to fully analyze the detailed information themes were generated that would give an insight to reach understanding of the study.

Findings

The present study explores the difficulties that employees faced in the duration of pandemic as well as to find out the impact of Gender inequalities on employees during pandemic in Pakistani society. The findings of this study indicated seven key themes that emerged through thematic analysis which are linked with themes and sub-themes related to the experiences of employees of private organizations during COVID-19 with in Pakistani context 1) Economic Challenges Faced By Organization, 2) Social Environment During Pandemic, 3) Economic Challenges Faced By Participants, 4) Professional Challenges Faced By Participants, 5) Psychological Health Of Participants 6) Physical Health of Participants, and 7) Organizational Strategies During Pandemic (table 1).

Table:1

Extracted Themes and Subthemes of Employees of Private Organizations During COVID-19

| <i>Main Themes</i> | <i>Sub-Themes</i> |
|--|---|
| <i>Economic Challenges Faced By Organization</i> | Downsizing Unable to pay salaries Low production Field-work problems |
| <i>Social Environment During Pandemic</i> | Compliance with COVID-19 SOPs |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p><i>Economic Challenges Faced By Participants</i></p> | <p>Limited social engagement Employees were fired Small Businesses had less compliance with SOPs Economic Issues Job Insecurity among Females Professional Deficiencies Job Security among males</p> |
| <p><i>Professional Challenges Faced By Participants</i></p> | <p>Poor Planning and Management by Organization Technological Issues Electricity Issues Confusion Regarding Future Strategy of Work</p> |
| <p><i>Psychological Health Of Participants</i></p> | <p>Stressful Situation for Females Emotionally Down Uncertainty of Future Less Stressful Situation for Males</p> |
| <p><i>Physical Health Of Participants</i></p> | <p>More complaints in Females Headache Less complaints in Males Did not visit doctors</p> |
| <p><i>Organizational Strategies During Pandemic</i></p> | <p>Compliance with Government SOPs for COVID 19 Work from Home Reduced Working hours 50 % employees a day</p> |

Economic Challenges of Organization During Pandemic

The first emerged theme from the interviews was economic challenges experienced by organizations during pandemic that clearly showed that due to economic issues organizations were unable to provide salaries, downsizing is the only situation to deal with it, low production rate and field work problems throughout the pandemic. Some participants revealed that:

“Permanent employees were not affected that much in COVID-19 due to their secured jobs....” (P-1, Bank Manager). As revealed by the participant “in a factory production of 250 cars turns in to making of 100 cars only.....” (P-3, Employee in Multinational Company). The pandemic has also created many field work problems. Another participant also revealed that “due to pandemic in community based work it was difficult for us to gather women and children due to this online responses were not that much good as physical responses.....”(P-5, NGO Worker).

Social Environment and Pandemic

The second theme emerged from the responses of participants was social environment throughout pandemic that indicated due to pandemic employees were fired, limited social engagement, most of the organization's compliance with Covid-19 SOP's but small businesses had less compliance with Covid-19 SOP's. Some participants indicated that:

“We served our customers by following proper Sop's.....”(P-1, Bank Manager) as number of clients were not reduced during pandemic. On the other hand another participant revealed that “we engaged with less number of people.....”(P-5, NGO Worker) due to lack of social engagement during Covid-19. In this research another participant also revealed that “Multinational companies followed SOP's strictly but local companies didn't follow that much SOP'S.....”(P-3, Employee in Multinational Company).

Economic Challenges Faced by Participants

The findings of this study shed light on another theme related to the economic challenges experienced by participants. It indicates that males have secured jobs while females have unsecured jobs as they were not permanent employees, participants faced professional deficiencies and economic issues throughout the pandemic. The participants revealed that:

“I am a student in morning too made it more difficult to manage things.....”(P-6, Academic Teacher) so time management was another major obstacle during pandemic. Moreover the participant revealed that “permanent employees were not affected that much in COVID-19 due to their secured jobs.....”(P-1, Bank Manager) as he got his full salary with holidays. Same as another participant revealed that “as a permanent employee I didn't faced that much as they paid us full salaries with holidays and we didn't need to do any part time job or extra work”..... (P-3, Employee in Multinational Company). While on the other hand another participant revealed that “As I was a permanent teacher but they didn't pay us full salaries.....”(P-2, University Lecturer). As revealed by another participant “my probation period going on so I don't know how to manage things on time and they paid us 2 months late salaries.....”(P-5, NGO Worker). It leads to time management problems too. As indicated by another participant“ I was a newly appointed teacher so I got worried about my job and as a school teacher they didn't pay us full salaries.....”(P-4, School Teacher).

Professional Challenges of Participants

The fourth theme concluded from the findings was the professional challenges of participants. Findings indicate that participants faced electricity issues, technological issues and due to poor planning and management of organization leads to confusion regarding their work strategy. Some participants indicated that:

“Due to unstable internet, it made difficult for teachers to teach and students to learn.....”(P-2, University Lecturer) so technology was another major issue faced by students and teachers. The study also showed that poor planning and management by organization leads to many obstacles during pandemic as indicated by another participant “As a newly appointed teacher I don't understand at which time I should take class or not so we have to work without

any proper schedule.....(P-4, School Teacher)". Another also revealed that "Proper working schedule was provided but not followed due to internet problems.....(P-6, Academic Teacher)".

Psychological Health of The Participants

Fifth theme that commenced from the findings of this research was psychological health of the participants. It clearly shows that males faced less stressful situation due to their secured jobs while females faced stressful situation as they feel emotionally down and have confused state of mind throughout the pandemic. Some participants revealed that:

"When I got informed about that this time we'll get half salaries I got angry.....(P-2, University Lecturer)". The research showed that the situation was stressful among females as another participant revealed said that "As teaching is my passion and when you sit down at home negative vibes comes in your mind so sometimes I felt headache and dizziness....."(P-4, School Teacher).

Physical Health of The Participants

The sixth theme commenced from the findings of this research revolves around the physical health of the participants. It clearly shows that males have fewer physical complaints while females feel headache but they didn't need to visit any doctor. As some participants revealed that:

"I didn't face any stressful situation and I also didn't experience any medical condition....."(P-1, Bank Manager). Another participant also revealed that "faced a stressful situation as sometimes feel headache but not that much as I didn't need to visit any hospital....." (P-2, University Lecturer). The research showed that the situation was stressful among females as another participant revealed that "As teaching is my passion and when you sit down at home negative vibes comes in your mind so sometimes I felt headache and dizziness....."(P-4, School Teacher).

Organizational Strategies

The last theme emerged from the findings of this research was the organizational strategies during pandemic. This indicates that organization altered their work mode, flex working hours, reduction in their workforce and compliance with Government SOP's to cope up with the situation in pandemic. Some participants indicated that:

"Staff came on alternative days, organization experience that they can achieve targets with half employees so they continued this scheme.....(P-1, Bank Manager)". Another participant revealed that "Proper working schedule was provided but not implemented due to technological issues....."(P-6, Academic Teacher). Moreover another participant also revealed that "we started our projects online....."(P-5, NGO Worker).

Discussion

Covid 19 affected all spheres of life badly ranging from personal life of individuals to global economy. It has a very adverse effect on the socio-economic status of majority of the population. This adversity of COVID-19 has uncovered gender disparities in Pakistan. As described by a recent study (United Nations, 2020) the gender factor of COVID-19 shows that the epidemic has a strong negative influence on the livings of vulnerable organizations and the preexisting gender

inequalities in developing countries like Pakistan. Covid-19 has affected the Pakistan's monetary very badly because of this pandemic situation the production rates are low and it leads to less profit margins. The organizations during pandemic adopted downsizing as the major strategy to deal with the condition. This drastic change in pandemic has led to many physical and psychological complaints among people. Like in a study it was found out that the coronavirus pandemic has spread into more than 200 countries and was a serious cause of public panic (Huang & Zhao 2020). As indicated by another research many countries for the prevention of this chain of transmission have implemented complete "Lockdown". This outburst has caused many health-related problems including stress, depressive symptoms, anxiety globally (Torales et al. 2020). This current study glanced at the COVID-19 effect on male and female employees at their place of work. This research was purposed to explore the factors that leads to gender inequalities and the difficulties that private sector employees faced in the duration of pandemic. According to this research various themes have been emerged. These themes are discussed below for the better understanding of this study. In this research after data analysis, it was seen that organizations faced various economic challenges during pandemic such as organizations reduced 50% of their staff members because owners were not able to pay full salaries to their employees so they terminated them. Research showed that organizations faced economic issues and due to this downsizing was the only key strategy during pandemic through which any organization can dealt with the situation. It leads to low production rates. The pandemic has also created many field work problems. Hence Covid-19 has decreased the job opportunities among people as it has increased the unemployment rate and workload.

However, the social environment during pandemic was organizations showed compliance with Govt. SOP'S such as mask compulsion, no mask no entry, sanitizer usage, maintained social distancing. Hence, it was clearly showed that due to pandemic employees were fired, limited social engagement and most of the organization's compliance with Covid-19 SOP's but small businesses had less compliance with Covid-19 SOP's. Research also showed that participants experienced various economic challenges like they had some economic issues and professional deficiencies. On the other hand, research showed that males have secured jobs as they were permanent employees but females faced job insecurity as they were not permanent employees. Hence, male employees have less job insecurity as compared to female employees, participants faced professional deficiencies and economic issues throughout the Covid-19.

The findings showed that participants also had some professional challenges during pandemic such as technological problems, electricity issues and some management issues by organization, so technology was another major issue faced by students and teachers. The study also showed that poor planning and management by organization leads to many obstacles during pandemic. Hence, the participants faced electricity issues, technological issues and due to poor planning and management by organization leads to confusion regarding their work strategy. According to this study due to the uncertainty of the situation the participants faced some psychological and physical complaints too during pandemic. Hence this research showed that

males faced lack of stressful situation due to their secured jobs while females faced stressful situation as they feel emotionally down and have confused state of mind during pandemic. Research also showed that males have lack of physical complaints while females felt headache but they didn't need to visit any hospital for this. Findings of the study showed that organizations adopted certain strategies to minimize the impacts of Pandemic.

These strategies included compliance with the governmental polices regarding pandemic. They followed the safety protocols strictly in order to stop the spread of disease. Along with these, organizations also reduced their staff in order to reduce their productivity cost and maintain profit ratio. They fired extra staff, allowed work from home and change working hours as well. These strategies helped them to keep their working during pandemic. According to the research conducted on "the Covid-19 pandemic effect on workplace" said that work from home (WFH) is challenging as it's not easy and it requires full attention towards work tasks in order to perform well. Time management is another challenge to settle on. Technological advancement should be increased as everyone should be vigilant in technological use. Technological accessibility is also particular demand for both male and female employees to fulfill their jobs at staying home. The proper workable schedule should be made while working from home (Kaushik, 2020).

Conclusion

After analysis of the data, the research found that there are many factors which affected male and female employees at their place of work during Covid-19. These factors include organizations faced various economic challenges during pandemic. In this research it was seen that due to economic issues owners were not able to pay full salaries to their employees so they terminated them as downsizing was the only key strategy for any organization during pandemic to deal with the situation. It leads to low production rate and field work problems throughout the pandemic. The study showed that the social environment during pandemic was employees get fired, limited social engagement and most of the organization's followed proper SOP'S but small businesses had less compliance with Covid-19 SOP's. As indicated by this research participant also faced various economic challenges such as males had secured jobs as they were permanent employees while females faced job insecurity as they were not permanent employees. The participants also faced some professional deficiencies and economic issues throughout in COVID-19.

Research found that participants also faced various professional challenges during pandemic such as they faced technological issues, electricity problems and confusion regarding their work strategy due to poor planning and management by organizations. The research also showed the psychological health of males and females as males faced lack of stressful situation due to their secured jobs while females faced stressful situation as they felt emotionally down and have confused state of mind during pandemic. The research also showed the physical health of males and females as males have fewer physical complaints while females felt headache and dizziness but they didn't need to visit any hospital for this. The research also found the organizational strategies during pandemic such as the organizations showed compliance with

Government policies to cope up with the pandemic as they changed their work mode, reduced their workforce and changed their working hours during pandemic.

Limitations

The limitations inherent to this study include:

- Firstly, present study was limited to Lahore only. Due to pandemic situation, it was not possible to include participants from other areas.
- Secondly, the results of this study are not generalizable as it was qualitative and more subjective in nature.
- Thirdly, due to social isolation, interviews were conducted on telephone.
- The study was limited to just private sector employees.

Recommendations

- Future research is suggested to explore the Govt. sector working strategies during Covid-19.
- Another future research is also suggested to compare the impact of social, Psychosocial and economic crisis among employees of public and private sector.

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