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RESEARCH PAPER

Impact of Pandemic on Female Labor Force Participation: A Study of Female Working in Garment Sector of Lahore, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The study's goal was to find out how COVID-19 affects female who work in the garment industry in Lahore, which is in the Pakistani province of Punjab. The research looked at how badly the female labor force had to deal with the economic crisis during COVID-19. It also looked at the effects of state-run social protection mechanisms that the female labor force could use or not use. The universe for the study was female working in the garment industry of Lahore. A simple random sampling method was used to select the sample (n=250) from different factories in Lahore, Pakistan. A structured questionnaire was developed using deductive logic to collect data from respondents. Data was collected during the month of August, 2022 retrospectively. According to the findings, there is a significant impact of COVID-19 on female labor participation and economic crisis (unemployment) on women laborers working in garment industry. It was also found that majority of the women are not aware of the state operated social protected system. Those who were aware, showed dissatisfaction with the financial aid provided by state. However, they were satisfied with the provision of medical services during pandemic. It is suggested that state should develop sustainable policies regarding source of earning during pandemic and other natural disasters.

Introduction

Labor is defined as "spending of physical or mental work especially when difficult or compulsory". Whereas, the labor force is defined as "a group comprising economic category whose mode of working is manual and they do so in order to earn to support themselves" (Merriam-Webster). Working time is "a time period that is spend by person at paid labor" (ILO, 2022). Standard working hours refer to "the limit of the working hours per day, per week, per month or per year" (Lee, McCann and Messenger, 2007)**.-**

There are three kinds of labor i.e., Common labor, Semi-skilled and Skilled labor. Common labor refers to worker who have no particular skill or one who likely is illiterate, while Semi-Skilled labor constitutes of those jobs which require ability as well as primary or sometimes secondary school education, whereas, Skilled labor possesses those workers who have professional degrees and acquire specific training (Mukhopadhyay, 2021).

Effect of COVID-19 on female working in the work force

The corona virus quickly caused a time of financial shock for every working-class woman around the globe. The number of employments lost in this industry between the months of December and January was 597,000, which was the greatest drop in all labor jobs during that time. Historically, service jobs have offered lower pay and are less likely to offer benefits like health insurance, child care, paid time off, and retirement plans. This indicates that female who have worked in this field are less likely to have retirement funds or assets

to get them through a protracted time of unemployment. For many people, in-person work has not yet resumed and may never do so. Even when the prospect for employment for female was favorable, many were required to take minimal, undervalued occupations or part-time work in order to care for their children. Pay disparities were a reality for working female even before the coronavirus wreaked havoc on the world economy. The majority of minimum wage jobs in the world are held by female. Among them, many of the jobs has been particularly hard hit by the pandemic and has experienced business closures and massive layoffs as a result of COVID-19 limitations and required shutdowns. Many females use their careers to balance off the demands of their families (Zimmermann, 2021).

Working trends in Industrial sector during COVID-19

The service sector was confronted with numerous difficulties due to occupational constraints and social exclusion. Female of color make up a disproportionately large number of the workforce in the service industries most severely affected by the coronavirus, such as hospitality, retail, and child care. According to international organizations, between 158 and 242 million full-time employments will be lost globally, and 71 million people will live in low-income countries below the extreme poverty level. (World Bank 2020). The effect of COVID-19 on the labor market were accompanied by survival strategies to lessen the negative effects of pay misfortune on family prosperity. In the online COVID-19 review, 68 percent of females and 61 percent of male respondents mentioned a fall in family pay as a result of employment misfortune. Female who participated in COVID-19 were more likely than men by 11 rate foci to report a reduction in family income. (Tas et al., 2021).

Literature Review

COVID-19 is a pandemic that has a great impact at global level. Lockdowns were imposed in the countries in order to maintain social distancing which led to the closure of the schools, institutions and workplaces etc. (Tarkar, 2020). Along with the social sphere of the people of the world, COVID-19 is a pandemic that also have put devastated impact on trade, businesses and other economic activities. Social distancing and the lockdowns have made many people to suffer in the world (Das, 2020).

The global economic system is significantly disturbed by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a decrease in production as well as consumption. The slowdown in the economic activities is witnessed by developing as well as developed nations (Kapur, 2020). Sectors that greatly contribute to the economy and the creation of jobs, such as tourism, hospitality, aviation, textile, agricultural, construction, gems/jewelry, and start-ups, have seen losses in the billions of dollars during the pandemic (Seetharaman, 2020). One crore employee in the textile industry, which depends heavily on human capital, have been let go as a result of a shortage of funding, resources, a fall in demand, persistent logistical problems caused by lockdowns, and other factors (Business Standard, 2020).

The economic system of Pakistan is also greatly impacted due to the onset of the pandemic. It has put harsh impact on the informal and manufacturing sectors and services. Demand-supply shocks can have severe effects on an economy, and Pakistan is one of those countries where this can happen. The most recent research has determined that Pakistan is on the verge of an economic collapse, and as a result, millions of employees have lost their jobs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Asghar, Batool, Farooq and Rehman, 2020).

The COVID-19 crisis-induced recession has characteristics that could disproportionately impact female employment. The gender disparity in the transition rate from employment to nonparticipation (E and N) was twice as great as the gender gap in the transition rate from employment to unemployment (E and U). The employment to unemployment transition gap, but only a third of the employment to nonparticipation

transition gap, has been caused by the unequal representation of female in the workforce (Kim, 2021). The two billion workers who labor in the informal economy have been devastated by COVID-19. Because of the unequal employment ratio, female workers are more likely to be in danger (Haldevang, 2020).

According to International Labor Organization (ILO) female labor force living in Asia-Pacific region contributes 80% of the labor in garment sector which is greatly impacted by the pandemic (ILO, 2020). The garments producers in Asia suffered from the demand and supply shock and it has negative impact on the economy that will ultimately lead to the loss of wages and jobs for female labor force. The demand shock was strongly marked during the initial months of the pandemic, which prompted longer-term job insecurity for some notwithstanding a progressive expansion sought after once more. Many articles of clothing providers subcontract creation to female homeworkers, regularly informally. Moreover, a considerable lot of these female in the informal area do not fit the bill for government support (MacDonald, 2021).

Daily wagers in the official sectors are also disrupted as a result of the global shutdown (i.e., apparel, construction, textile and other manufacturing industries). (Alam & Kurtenabch, 2020). Although, both the genders were affected by this but female daily wagers are more severely impacted than male. The Pakistani government is actively working to meet the daily wage earners' requirements for money after the COVID-19 pandemic cost them their employment. The government has set aside PKR 200 billion for these regular jobs in established companies, but no specific quota is set out for female (Malik & Naeem, 2020).

Review of the existing literature shows that there is a scarcity of literature in the given area. Following hypotheses are developed on the basis of literature for this study.

H_1. COVID 19 has an association on labor force participation

H_2. COVID 19 has a strong impact on economic crisis for female workers

Material and Methods

Researcher used the Quantitative research type to investigate the problem under evaluation. Assumptions of descriptive research design was followed to interpret the results of the study. COVID-19 was used as an independent variable while female labor force, economic crisis and social protection mechanism were the dependent variable of the study. The respondents of the study were female labor force who are working in various different garment factories situated in Lahore, Pakistan. Keeping in mind the financial and time constraints, a sample of 250 female labor working in the garment sector and the response rate was 100%.

Questionnaire is used as a tool in order to collect data from the target population i.e., female labor force working in the garment sector in Lahore, Pakistan. The questionnaire is divided into five parts i.e., demographic Information, Working efficiency, Unemployment during pandemic, Poverty during COVID-19 and social protection of labor during pandemic. Researcher follow the assumptions of simple random and convenient sampling and collect data. As the respondents' demographic characteristics were specified and their subgroups were identified, they were contacted by the help of the managers of the factories. For data interpretation and analysis, statistical tests were applied for the data analysis in order to draw the tables which present the findings and results of the study. Data was examined distinctly to examine each hypothesis as the study evaluated the impact of COVID-19 on female labor force. Frequency distribution and percentage of different responses about various research questions by the participants was calculated and data was analyzed to draw the final conclusions.

Results and Discussion

A structured questionnaire was administered for pilot testing on female workers, employed in garment industry of Lahore. There were some confusion in the linguistic construction of a few questions for the respondents which was resolved before the process of data collection. Firstly, data analysis presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents, then the percentage distribution of the respondents regarding awareness and satisfaction with the social protection system is described and last the hypotheses testing through regression analysis is reported. The following table 1 represents the demographic characteristics of the respondents

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of the respondents

S.#	Variable	Frequency(f)	Percentage(%age)
	Age		
	Less than or equal to 30	87	39
1.	31-40	90	36
	41-50	50	20
	More than 50	23	9
	Income monthly(PKR)		
	Less than or equal to 10,000	25	10
2.	10,001-20,000	65	26
	20,001-30,000	110	44
	More than 30,000	50	20
	Number of Children		
	0	40	16
3.	1	13	5
	2	77	31
	3 or more	120	48
	Education of Respondent		
	Illiterate	145	58
4.	Primary	53	21
	Secondary	45	18
	Higher	07	3
	Marital Status		
	Single	35	14
5.	Married	120	48
	Divorced	40	16
	Widow	55	22
	Residence Type		
6.	Urban	53	21
	Rural	120	48
	Sub-urban	77	31
	Job Type		
7.	Permanent	110	44
	Contract	89	36
	Others	51	20
	Working Department		
	Packing	88	35
8.	Stitching	64	26
	Hand-crafting	44	18
	Others	54	22
9.	Employment Status		

Yes	166	66
No	84	34

The data shows that most respondents are from the younger cohort up to 40, whereas 20% belong to the age group 41-50, and only 9.2% of respondents were older than 50. The average income of the majority (44 %) of the population is PKR 20,001-30,000. A small portion of the population (10%) earned less than or equal to 10,000 per month, while 26% of respondents earned 10,001–20,000. Most respondents were married women, and 48% had three or more children. Only 16% of respondents have no children. Data reveals that generally illiterate or primary literate women (79%) work as laborers in the garment industry. There were only 2.8% of respondents who had completed higher education. The garment industry was mostly a work choice for married women; only 14% of the respondents were single. The data shows that women in both rural and urban areas are almost as likely to choose to work in the garment industry. Almost 20 % of respondents lived in urban areas, 30.8% lived in sub-urban areas near the factories where they were employed, and 48% of respondents lived in rural areas. The data shows that 44% of respondents were employed permanently, 35.6% were on a contract basis, and 20.4% were employed on ad-hoc or daily wages. The data shows that 35.2% of respondents were working in the packing department, 25.6% were in the stitching department, 17.6% were working in hand-crafting, and 33.33% were working in others. The data shows that 66.4% of employees were the only working people at their homes, while 33.6% reported that they were not the only working. A significant portion of the sample was the only one employed.

Social Protection System

Data revealed that there are some gaps in the information about presence and access to social protection system. Although majority of the women (%) were aware of the presence of state operated and NGO based social protection system yet almost 36% women had no awareness about it. Regarding the provision of financial aid during pandemic, 31% women expressed dissatisfaction with the available services. However the female laborers showed satisfaction with the provision of medical facilities during pandemic.

Table 2
Awareness and satisfaction about social protection system

	Statements	Responses		
1.	Availability of Social Protection system	Yes (64%)	No (20%)	Don't Know (16%)
2.	Satisfaction with Financial Aid during Pandemic	Yes (44%)	No (31%)	Sometimes (25%)
3	Satisfaction with medical facilities during pandemic	Satisfied (78%)	Dissatisfied %(12%)	Somewhat satisfied (10%)

Hypotheses Testing

The study seeks to find out the impact of COVID-19 on female labor force participation and economic crisis faced by the females working in garment industry. The outcome variables female labor force participation and Economic crisis were predicted by independent variable COVID 19. The independent variable has significantly predicted outcome variables. The hypotheses suggest that COVID-19 has a significant impact on labor force participation and economic crisis.

Table 3
Association between dependent and independent variables

Hypotheses	Regression Weights	Beta Coefficient	R^2	F	P-value	Hypothesis Supported

| H_1 | PDMC→LFP | 0.57 | .276 | 29.36 | 0.000 | Yes |
| H_2 | PDMC→EC | 0.61 | .364 | 31.34 | 0.000 | Yes |

Note.*<0.05 PDMC=Pandemic, LFP=labor force participation, EC=economic crisis

The above table shows that women's level of education i.e., more than ten years of schooling versus no schooling (AOR 5.16, 95%CI 3.18-9.98), high socioeconomic status than low status (AOR 5.69, 95%CI 4.27-7.58), economically developed regions than less developed ones (AOR 2.89, 95%CI 2.25-3.71), having two or less children than five or more children (AOR 2.08, 95%CI 1.83-2.38) and having a history of abortion than no abortion (AOR 1.51, 95%CI 1.25-1.82) were significantly associated with ANC utilization.

COVID-19 epidemic has sparkled a global labor shortage and economic collapse that has a tremendous impact on the poor, working class and youth (Blustein, Duffy, Ferreira, Cinemon & Allen, 2020). Compared to this study, the unemployment rate was high among the garment sector especially among the female labor force working there. COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on commerce, industry and other economic activities. Many people around the world have suffered as a result of social isolation and lockdowns (Das, 2020). As accordingly, pandemic crisis has also put disastrous effect on the financial situation of the female who are working as labor force in the textile factories in Lahore. According to this study, COVID-19 is a major cause of the female unemployment.

The COVID-19 outbreak in India has drastically disrupted the world economy. Both the developed as well as developing countries are experiencing the decline in the economic activities (Kapur, 2020). As compared to it, the economic crisis was also faced by the working class in Pakistan. The rapid impact on the business's operating cash and on upcoming marketing campaigns to secure new orders were the two main problems experienced by the textile entrepreneurs in India during COVID-19. Most of them, however, were discovered to be technologically capable, allowing them to quickly absorb digital knowledge and seize possibilities by producing N-95 mask and personal protective equipment (PEP) (Kaur, 2021). While the labor force (especially female) working in the industrial sector in Punjab, Pakistan has to face the issues of job risk while many of them lost their jobs due to high crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic. While conducting analysis it was seen that there was a significant association of COVID-19 and economic crisis.

A total of 3,856 social protection and labor policies were being planned or put into action by 223 economies as of January 2022. This is an overall increase of 523 measures or 15.6% from the May 2021 (Gentilini, Almenfi and Aziz, 2022). The social protection mechanism was highly affected due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the rate of medical facilities to the labor by the factory owners was low. There was a relatively low number of respondents who got vaccinated by the factories under labor quota.

Conclusion

Due to the COVID-19, female labor force has to suffer both socially as well as financially. The findings indicate that the COVID-19 was a major reason to cause poverty as well as economic crisis among the working poor class who constitute the labor force in the Pakistan. In the developing countries like Pakistan, the unemployment and crisis rate were high among the females. Like other nations, Pakistan have also faced many problems that were caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the rate of social protection mechanism was significantly low among the labor working in the garment sector in Lahore, Pakistan.

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