

SOCIAL ATTITUDES TO WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN BANGLADESH

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Human behaviour is the manifestation of attitude and values. The purpose of the present study is to investigate the relationship of women's work status with attitude towards female employment, female role perception and perceived social support as attitudinal variables. Women's work status may be categorized according to their involvement in income earning activities. Women who are involved in "income earning activity" or recognized as "earning member" of the family are called working women. On the other hand, women who are not involved in "income earning activity" are known as nonworking women.

According to the traditional feminine sex role of home-making, "a woman's place is at home." But in modern society, with increasing industrialization and literacy rate of women, women have turned to gainful employment outside the household for wages and this traditional view towards women's sex role has been changed.⁽¹⁾ In recent decades, both in fully industrialized and developing countries, the proportion of women in paid employment has increased substantially.⁽²⁾ The world economy is now globalised. Bangladeshi women are not far away from the linkage of global economy. As a developing country, percentage of women among total employed people was 10.2 in 1985 and it increased further in the last decade.⁽³⁾ The total civilian labour force of the country has been estimated at 49.5 million (Labour Force Survey, 2005-06) of which 37.3 million are male and 12.1 million are female while it was 46.3 million for both sex, 36.0 million for male and 10.3

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million for female in 2002-03.⁽⁴⁾ This statistics shows that the increasing rate of employed women is higher than its counterpart.

Determining factors of women's participation in employment can be divided into four categories, namely: (i) psychological factors, (ii) socio-economic and demographic factors, (iii) religious and cultural factors, and (iv) legal and political factors.⁽⁵⁾ Some studies have focused on psychological factors (variables) influencing women's participation in employment. Empirical literature suggests, attitudinal variables influence women's decision making for participating in paid employment, such as a husband's and wife's attitude towards female employment,⁽⁶⁾ sex role attitude⁽⁷⁾ and perceived social support.⁽⁸⁾

Attitude Towards Female Employment (ATFE): Attitude towards female employment is a positive or negative evaluation of female's participation in employment. Women with favourable ATFE are liberal in female role perception, active in decision making, and have more independence training, whilst women with unfavourable attitudes are housewives and have more children.⁽⁹⁾ More employed married women than non-employed married women significantly expressed positive attitude toward female employment.⁽¹⁰⁾ Ilyas found, working women have higher mean ATFE score than nonworking women. That means, attitude towards female employment may be a crucial factor that influences women's decision to participate in employment.⁽¹¹⁾

Female Role Perception: Female role perception is the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour patterns that define what is traditionally masculine or feminine within a culture.⁽¹²⁾ It is also defined as "sex role attitude" and "sex role perception". The manner of men and women's behaviour in a society depends considerably on how they perceive their sex roles. "Sex-role" refers to the expectation of the society as regards what role a female or a male should play. Traditionally in our society, attitudes related to "feminine role" involve positive feelings of being lovable, getting married, being an obedient housewife, rearing children, being a lovable mother and submissively doing all household work, etc. Working mothers have a more liberal sex role attitude than nonworking mothers.⁽¹³⁾ Masculine women (those who attribute more traditionally considered masculine than feminine characteristics to themselves) generally tend to choose traditionally considered masculine careers more often, while feminine women (those who attribute more traditionally considered feminine than masculine characteristics to themselves) tend to choose feminine careers more often.⁽¹⁴⁾ The research evidence also showed the positive association between egalitarian sex-role attitudes and greater participation in the labour force.⁽¹⁵⁾ Thornton, Alwin and Camburn found that the direction of influencing relationship between female labour force participation and sex-role attitude is interchangeable. Women who perceived female role as being primarily centred in the home are less likely to become involved in paid employment, while non-home work tends to change traditional orientations.⁽¹⁶⁾

Women with enjoyable and extensive professional work experience reported "extensive or severe crisis" and "emotional difficulties" in adjusting to their first child due to their poor identification with "the feminine role" (e.g.

motherhood).⁽¹⁷⁾ Some mothers, for rearing the child properly, choose to drop out of the workforce temporarily or permanently.⁽¹⁸⁾ Whereas, few new mothers choose to work part-time in their professional occupations.⁽¹⁹⁾ One of the causes of dropping out from the workforce may be the strongest identification with the traditional feminine role. In contrast, Jimenez found employed women have more positive motherhood experience and better adjustment ability.⁽²⁰⁾

Perceived Social Support: Perceived social support means all those form of supports provided by other individuals and groups that help an individual to cope with life.⁽²¹⁾ Social support is an important factor in assisting individuals and families to make transitions, cope with life stresses, and promote health.⁽²²⁾ It includes supportive workplace relationships, spousal support, and satisfactory child care arrangements. Social supports at work, within the family and through child care have been identified as major facilitators of maternal employment.⁽²³⁾ Social support facilitates successful postpartum return to employment.⁽²⁴⁾ According to the transactional model of stress,⁽²⁵⁾ perceived social support may be viewed as a coping resource that has the mitigating or appraisal effects on the role conflict (i.e. conflict between “mother” and “worker” roles)⁽²⁶⁾ and the stressful situation.⁽²⁷⁾ Research on employed women suggests that common symptoms (e. g., fatigue) are responsive to stress associated with multiple responsibilities at home and work.⁽²⁸⁾ Weber and Cook reported that the working women suffer from more stress than male colleagues.⁽²⁹⁾

Interference between work and family responsibilities has been associated with lower health ratings and increased symptoms in postpartum women.⁽³⁰⁾ In such a situation, social support provides real help to meet demands and facilitates coping with the effects of stress.⁽³¹⁾ The perceived social support was related to mastery beliefs and self-esteem, which were in turn associated with more positive mental health, less depression and anxiety.⁽³²⁾ More meaningful indicators could be that the woman remains employed; that she is able to function in her multiple roles of wife, mother, and worker; and that she adequately balances her work and family responsibilities. These outcomes could be influenced by the availability of social support in her workplace from supervisors and co-workers, the support she receives from her spouse in sharing family responsibilities and in indicating a positive attitude towards her employment and the availability of acceptable child care.

In Bangladesh, as a Muslim developing country, the role of motherhood and family responsibility are considered important for women's personal careers.⁽³³⁾ This message is conveyed by the different institutions of socialization. Many Bangladeshi girls, even being educated, are still trained by their family members to be submissive, patient and to make sacrifices, in order to accept marriage as the main goal in life. Under inherited gender norms, married working women feel guilty thinking their labour force participation as a reason for neglecting children and home responsibilities. There is no doubt, women involved in multiple roles fail to fulfil proper multiple roles and responsibilities expected in society. Successively different role playing often brings a conflict between what they expect and experience. It has been found

that role overload can result in stress and conflict.⁽³⁴⁾ Role conflict links with many consequences, such as: substandard performance, low rate in job involvement, job dissatisfaction.⁽³⁵⁾ Majority of working women assume that spouses sharing their housework would result in less conflict. But in reality they experienced maximum maladjustment.⁽³⁶⁾ Most of Bangladeshi males view domestic works exclusively as the domain of women. They are not aware of the growing changes in society and its consequences on women's life. With the industrialization and high rate of population growth, most people face difficulty meeting the basic needs with the income of a single earning member. This reality may demand women to get involved in earning activities. Moreover, in this male dominated society, women belonging to a lower social strata and vulnerable economic conditions may become an easy target to various forms of violence such as mental and physical torture for demanding dowry. As the economic self-dependency or economic strength is considered as the basis of social, political and psychological power in society,⁽³⁷⁾ women with a low economic status would be benefited both socially and psychologically from economic strength. Therefore, it is necessary to identify the factors facilitating women's participation in employment and their empowerment.

The above literature review suggests that attitudinal variables, as psychological factors, may play an important part in determining women's decision to participate in paid employment. Some of these factors inhibit women from working outside their homes, while others function to expand women's ability to work. Impact of these factors also may vary across cultures. The current study attempted to identify attitudinal factors (e. g. attitude towards female employment, female role perception and perceived social support) facilitating women's participation in paid employment in Bangladesh. The knowledge of the research may help to reduce obstacles of women's participation in employment by suggesting special vocational programmes, changing in socialization and developing awareness in people about women's overall well-being.

In light of the above objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Favourable attitude towards female employment, liberal female role perception, and more social support increases women's participation in paid employment.

Method

Participants

A total of 300 purposively selected women participants were from Dhaka city. Distribution of women according to work status was as follows: working full-time-100, working part-time- 90, non-working- 110. Women who are working 30 hours (excluding meal break and overtime) or more in a week are treated as full-time and those who are working less than 20 hours in a week are treated as part-time. The working women respondents had experience in different professional services (teacher, lawyer, doctor, researcher, administrative officer, banker, social worker, business, clerk & labour). The

respondents' education varied between fifth grade to Ph.D. with ages ranging between 17 to 55 years whereas monthly family income ranged between 3,000 to 100,000 taka. The marital status of participants was married, unmarried, divorced or widowed.

Instruments

The following instruments were used in this present study:

1. *The Attitude Towards Female Employment (ATFE) Scale* ⁽³⁸⁾: The ATFE scale is a 12-item Likert type scale in Bangla. Items of the scale cover questions related to paid employment of women. It includes items related to opportunities and difficulties of female employment. Some items are concerned with equality between sexes in appointment, choice, and promotion at work. Other items are related to the conflict experienced by employed mothers in coping with both domestic and paid employment.
 Each item has favourable-unfavourable response dimension and has three response alternatives ordered according to their degree of favourableness regarding attitude towards female employment. For each item score 2 indicates favourable work attitude, score 1 moderately favourable work attitude and score zero indicate unfavourable work attitude. A subject's total score in the scale is the sum of the numerical values of responses to all items of the scale. The possible range of scores (rs) for full scale is from 0 to 24 where 0 expresses most unfavourable and 24 most favourable work attitude. Items of ATFE scale have face validity and high Discriminative Power (DP) [range from 0.06 to 1.17]. Corrected item-to-total correlation coefficient (rs) and alpha coefficient suggest high scale reliability. The rs range from 0.323 to 0.522 and each of these rs is significant at $p < 0.005$ level. The alpha coefficient (α) is 0.7581. Significant F-ratio of ATFE score by work status [$F(1, 945) = 87.395, p < 0.005$] indicates the validity of the scale.
2. *The Female Role Perception (FRP) Scale* ⁽³⁹⁾: The FRP scale contains 21 items. Each of the first 20 items of the scale includes statements dealing with adult female role situations particularly related to family, occupation, and social life. The items are all short statements expressing either traditional or non-traditional role performance with three response alternatives: "yes", "uncertain" and "no". Traditional preference suggests that a woman's family responsibilities are more important than her personal career; her primary purpose is to be responsible for household and child care tasks, subordinating her own interests for well-being of husband and family. Nontraditional preferences, on the other hand, stress equality between sexes, and consider a woman's satisfaction and achievement equally important to those of her husband and family. Among these 20 items, 8 items are phrased in traditional way and 12 in nontraditional way. The last item contains two paragraphs. Paragraph A states that women should focus

attention on home and family affairs, while paragraph B states that women should be equal to men in opportunities, pay and type of occupation chosen. Subjects are asked to respond to his item by selecting one of the five possible answers indicating their degree of agreement with the two paragraphs. The scale was reliable and valid. Item-to-total correlation coefficient (r_s) was calculated for determining the reliability of the scale. The r_s ranged from 0.1979 to 0.5337 ($p < 0.0001$ for each r_s). Significant point biserial correlation coefficients (r_{pbi}) of the total scale with place of residence [$r_{pbi} (1478) = 0.301, p < 0.01$], and work experience [$r_{pbi} (1478) = 0.412, p < 0.01$] indicated the validity of the scale.

3. *The Bangla version* ⁽⁴⁰⁾ *of Provision of Social Relations (PSR) Scale:* The Bangla version of the provision of social relations (PSR) questionnaire has been used to measure social support of participants. The original scale was developed by Turner, Frankel, and Levin.⁽⁴¹⁾ The PSR containing 15-items is based initially on the conceptualization of five components of social support (attachment, social integration, reassurance of worth, reliable alliance and audience). Factor analysis revealed the PSR to have essentially two dimensions, family support (items 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14) and friend support (items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 13, 15). The PSR has few instruments that examines environmental variable of social support. Here, PSR is scored by reverse scoring items 7 and 15 then summing the items scores on each of the sub dimensions to get a score for that dimensions.

In addition to these questionnaires, a Personal Information Form (PIF) was used to collect information about sexual orientation, age, educational qualification, marital status, duration of marital life, profession (including designation), types of job, duration of working hour, monthly income (participant's & her family excluding her), husband's profession and educational qualification, number of child and age of first born.

Procedure

To collect data, the questionnaires mentioned above were administered individually by the interviewers to the participants selected in the sample. Each participant was given separate instructions for each questionnaire and was allowed to ask freely if she has question regarding any item of the scale. Respondents who were spontaneous and showed positive attitudes towards the research, were administered the questionnaires. At first, each respondent was briefed about the purpose of the study and was requested for cooperation with the researcher. The interviewer gave assurance to the participants of dealing their information confidentially.

Results

The obtained scores were analyzed by one way ANOVA (shown in Table 3, 4 & 5). The *descriptive statistics* (mean scores and standard deviation) given in Table 1 were also calculated. The multiple comparison of mean scores

on attitude towards female employment, female role perception, and perceived social support in terms of work status by using *Post Hoc* test is presented in Table 2.

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation of Work Status Groups [Working Full-time (n=100), Working Part-time (n=90) & Non-working (n=110)] in terms of Attitudinal Variables

Attitudinal Variables	Work Status					
	Working Full-time		Working Part-time		Non-Working	
		<i>D</i>		<i>D</i>		<i>D</i>
Attitude towards Female Employment	9.00	.86	7.10	.43	6.10	.20
Female Role Perception	1.80	.83	6.10	.66	6.94	.57
Perceived Social Support	2.65	.88	3.44	.51	4.63	.66

Table 2
Mean Score Differences among Work Status Groups according to
Attitudinal Variables by using Post Hoc test

Personality & Attitudinal Variables	Work Status	Work Status		
		Working Full-time (1)	Working Part-time (2)	Non-Working (3)
Attitude towards Female Employment	2)	1.90000**	-	-
	3)	2.90000**	.00000*	-
Female Role Perception	2)	5.70000**	-	-
	3)	4.86364**	.83636	-
Perceived Social Support	2)	.79444	-	-
	3)	1.97727*	.18283	-

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

Table 3
Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Attitude towards Female
Employment by Work Status

SV	SS	<i>f</i>	MS	<i>F</i>
Work Status	449.667		224.833	22.423*
Error	2978.000	97	10.027	

* $p < .001$

Table 3 shows that attitude towards female employment significantly varies [$F = 22.423$; $df = 2, 297$; $p < .001$] in terms of work status. In multiple mean comparisons shown in Table 1 & 2, the difference (1.90000) between mean scores for working full-time ($X = 19.00$) and working part-time ($X = 17.10$) group according to attitude towards female employment is significant at .001 level. The mean difference (2.90000) between working full-time ($X = 19.00$) & non-working ($X = 16.10$) and that (1.00000) between working part-time ($X = 17.10$) & non-working ($X = 16.10$) are also significant at .001 and .05 level respectively. The working full-time group shows more favourable attitude towards female employment than other two work status group. Then the working part-time group reveals more favourable attitude towards female employment than the non-working group.

Table 4
Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Female Role
Perception by Work Status

SV	SS	<i>f</i>	MS	<i>F</i>
Work Status	1865		932.5	28

	.132		66	.837*
Error	9604		32.33	
	.655	97	9	

* $p < .001$

Table 4 shows, the female role perception (FRP) differs [$F = 28.837$; $df = 2, 297$; $p < .001$] significantly as a function of work status. The mean differences (5.70000 & 4.86364 respectively) of the working full-time group ($X = 31.80$) with the working part-time group ($X = 26.10$) and the non-working group ($X = 26.94$) are significant at .001 level [shown in Table 1 & 2]. Table 1 & 2 also shows that there is no significant mean difference (.83636) between the working part-time group ($X = 26.10$) and the non-working group ($X = 26.94$) at .05 level. So, the working full-time group has more liberal female role perception than the working part-time group and the non-working group.

Table 5

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Perceived Social Support by Work Status

SV	SS	f	MS	F
Working	208.		104.2	2.
Status	456		28	596*
Error	1192		40.15	
	6.690	97	7	

* $p > .05$

The ANOVA of perceived social support shown in table 5 indicates that there is no significant difference [$F = 28.837$; $df = 2, 297$; $p > .05$] among the work status groups. But the multiple mean comparison reveals, the mean difference (1.97727) between the working full-time ($X = 32.65$) and the non-working group ($X = 34.63$) is significant at .05 level [according to Table 1 & 2]. The mean scores of perceived social support for three work status groups shown in table 1 indicates the non-working group ($X = 34.63$) has the highest need for social support and the working full-time group ($X = 32.65$) has the lowest need for social support.

Discussion

The formulated hypotheses (women who have more favourable attitude towards female employment, liberal female role perception, and more social support increases women's participation in paid employment) were partially supported by the results. The relation to women's participation in employment with attitudinal factors under the study may be reciprocal.

Attitude towards female employment in the study differed significantly among three working status groups. Working full-time group showed more favourable attitude towards female employment than the other two groups. Then working part-time group had a greater mean score in female work attitude than the non-working group. This finding is consistent with previous studies conducted by Katelman & Barnett⁽⁴²⁾ and Ilyas.⁽⁴³⁾ In explaining the findings, it can be said that women with more favourable attitude towards female

employment view the world as a work arena. Moreover, they accept employment as a basis and a source of self-respect, sense of worth, gaining prestige, enjoyment and gaining financial benefit. Such feelings may inspire them to engage in different occupations. On the other hand, non-working women may feel working outside would complicate their lives further. It would overload their responsibilities and create obstacles to a happy marital life or their children's well-being. These may be the reasons of showing unfavourable attitude towards females working outside hence avoiding employment. A reverse relationship may exist between female work attitude and employment. Experience of enjoyment, prestige and economic independence for participating in employment may make female work attitude more favourable.

Another finding revealed that the working full-time group has significantly more liberal female role perception than the working part-time group and the non-working group. The working part-time and the non-working groups did not differ significantly in terms of sex role perception. The result was supported by previous researches conducted by Pistrang⁽⁴⁴⁾, Whitley⁽⁴⁵⁾, Thornton and Freedman⁽⁴⁶⁾. This finding may be explained by the theory of cognitive dissonance which suggests, in spite of having young children, women's participation in employment may increase,⁽⁴⁷⁾ because it is difficult for them to believe that this activity is harmful to their marriage or to their children's well-being. Moreover, with increasing educational levels and the negative exposure of traditional sex roles, working women may undermine the beliefs rationalizing the traditional sex division of labour. These are the factors which may impact women work participation. Their beliefs were reflected in the previous findings obtained by Jimenez, who found, working women had a more positive motherhood experience and better adjustment ability.⁽⁴⁸⁾

Direction of the relationship between work status and female role perception may be interchangeable as shown in the study of Thornton, Alwin, and Camburn.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Employed women enjoy economic independence, they have a broader social horizon i.e. colleagues and friends with whom they can talk and release tension, if any. They are viewed as an important figure by the family members for contributing in family expenditure. They also participate in family decision making. This background may make them more positive in egalitarian sex role. On the other hand, working women may show unfavourable attitude towards liberal sex role if they faced with problems, such as, lack of proper care for children and proper management of home, unequal status in the office etc. These circumstances make it difficult to live a harmonious life by managing both work and family responsibilities. Consequently, they may quit their job permanently/temporarily or prefer part-time work in order to reduce their work hours. For example, many researchers [e.g Schwartz⁽⁵⁰⁾, Meiksins and Whalley⁽⁵¹⁾] found such evidence in their studies.

In case of social support, results showed that the only difference between the two groups (working full-time & non-working group) was significant. This finding was consistent with other studies conducted by Killien, Habermann and Jarrett⁽⁵²⁾; Killien⁽⁵³⁾. Women with a high score in social support seem to experience more positive (desirable) events in their lives, have higher

self-esteem, internal locus of control and take a more optimistic view towards life as opposed to women with lower social support. They also rate themselves as socially more skilled persons.⁽⁵⁴⁾ These characteristics may help them to persist in doing a task that does not yield a ready solution and inspire them to perform multiple activities (homemaker & worker roles) properly. In light of the research findings [e. g. research conducted by Lazarus, DeLongis, Folkamn and Gruen⁽⁵⁵⁾; Barnett, Marshall and Singer⁽⁵⁶⁾], it can be said that multiple role playing may be a source of role conflict which in turn creates fatigue, stress, depression and physical illness. But working women's perceived sufficient social support can mitigate the role conflict and its derivatives. As a result they can continue their earning work activities. Referring to the findings of the study by Gjerdingen and Chaloner,⁽⁵⁷⁾ it can be concluded that women perceiving more social support have higher self-esteem, which in turn enhances mental health conditions, decreases depression and anxiety levels. Such conditions are facilitative of women's work participation. On the other hand, women with inadequate perceived social support have low self-esteem and face difficulty to play multiple roles. Due to lack of social support, they cannot ensure their children's well-being or effective marital adjustment. This situation may keep them away from work participation.

In contrast, work experience may also increase social support of working women. Employed women have broader social network, for instance, colleagues and friends with whom they can share any problems and get directions to overcome their difficulties or release stress by talking. Homemakers, on the other hand, have to stay at home to perform household activities resulting in a lack of economic independence and little recreational facilities in this society, apart from the possibilities of their husbands being more dominating. Due to economic vulnerability, they may often become victim to different forms of domestic violence. This background may be the reason for difference in perceived social support among working and non-working women.

The research results also revealed that the working part-time group did not significantly differ from the non-working group in terms of female role perception and perceived social support. The reason of having no significant difference may be that social position, economic insufficiency, scope of social support, familial environment are similar amongst them.

But the relationship between women's work participation with attitude towards female employment, female role perception and perceived social support may not be straight forward. The literature review suggests that this relationship may be mediated by other factors, such as, education, difficulties of pregnancy, number of children, availability of daycare, husband's income, profession & attitude, type of job, economic development of the country, the demand for female workers, job security, ill-health, family problems, non-availability of suitable jobs, lack of adequate tolerance and respect in the work place, housing and transportation problems, inadequate pay, mother's profession and education etc. Considering these factors, an interdisciplinary approach may help us understand women's participation in employment better.

However, this study cautions generalization because of having some limitations. The sample did not represent the whole country as it was only limited to the Dhaka city area. The proportion was not considered strictly in terms of socio-economic status index (education, income, profession and capability of family expenditure). These limitations may claim for further study with better methodological sophistication. Nevertheless, the knowledge of the study makes awareness about some facilitator and inhibitory factors of women's participation in employment. In light of such awareness, the vocational programme for women and the appropriate child-rearing techniques may be suggested so that the existence of facilitator factors is increased.

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