

A Study of Economic Globalization and its Impact on Women Workers of Industrial Sector and Export Processing Zone of Karachi

Abstract

This study draws upon two field-based researches, one conducted in the Industrial Sector of Karachi and second conducted in the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) of Karachi during the years of 2008 and 2011 respectively. The objectives were to explore the socio-economic conditions of women workers and their experiences. The paper begins with a brief overview of policies of economic restructuring namely trade liberalization, privatization and fiscal austerity which have drawn map for changes in the economy and through the establishment of export-oriented industries. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect primary data by implementing questionnaires and by listening to women workers' narratives. Results show that formal jobs for women were already low, while informal and contract based jobs is increasing. Along with that, in some sectors, more women are hired because of their perceived docile, tolerant behaviour and their satisfaction with substandard wages. Majority of women hired in textile and garments are on assembly line jobs. High inflation, no job security and absence of unions in EPZ makes it difficult for women to get decent work opportunities. The data from the sample is also evident that how women maintain a balance between their waged-work, domestic chores, parenting responsibilities, and various other roles they are expected to play as part of a family.

Key terms: *Economic globalization, Women workers, Industry, Export Processing Zone (EPZs)*

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INTRODUCTION

Restructuring of economies, often termed as economic Globalization, is based on the neo-liberal policies and increased role of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) (Moghadam,1999). Critics of globalization argue that globalization has led to unequal and under representative of all the nations. The notion of free trade based on comparative advantages worked primarily to the benefit of industrialized countries. They take advantage of cheap labour by goods production in developing countries. Proponents of globalization, however, think that it was very successful and there is ample evidence about its success from different countries of the world. Some of the benefits are increase of access to a wider variety of goods and services, low prices, better-paid jobs, improved health conditions and higher overall living standards.

Globalization and economic restructuring has altered the economies of many countries across the globe. Pakistan, as a developing country, has experienced vulnerable economic conditions and financial crisis leading to acceptance of economic restructuring in its policies. Although it was assumed that macroeconomic changes would bring a positive change in the economic conditions, the results, however, were not as expected. In addition, there is a need to analyze the impact of instability in employment trends, particularly among women in Pakistan, because with the emerging trends new forms of jobs have been created as a result of growth of interconnected economies of the world. Furthermore, restructuring of Pakistani's economy initially increased its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) but the growth rate increase contrast with social indicators showing huge gaps in gender equality and social justice (SDPI, 2008, p.21).

In Pakistan, the process of globalization started along with the other developing countries. Analysts observed a shift in policies from 1988 and 1990, when Pakistan signed agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (Irfan, 2008; Sayeed, 2001; Zaidi, 1999) to implement various structural adjustments and stabilization programs. The first policy initiative was the Economic Reform Order 1991, which aimed at making an approximate number for the cost of capital or the interest rate market, the removal of exchange rate controls and the devaluation of local currency in order to maintain a competitive real exchange rate (Sayeed, 2001). Research shows that in preceding years increased inflation, unstable employment conditions, closure of factories due to downsizing and right sizing, increase in

utility prices, financial shocks and natural disasters left indelible imprint on family life, employment behaviour and economic well-being (Sayeed, 2001; Irfan, 2008; Kardar, 1987; Zaidi 1999; Khan, 2006; Kemal, 1999).

Economic globalization, undoubtedly, promised increased job opportunities for people. It was expected that open markets and free trade would create new job opportunities. Consequently, the focus shifted to employ more and more women in Industries and in Export Processing Zones (EPZs) as contract workers. Pakistan, a developing country with a population of more than 180 million, is a male dominated society. Nevertheless, women are gradually assuming positions of influences in their communities, schools, and workplaces. One constant challenge faced by Pakistani women, however, is the right to work. According to a recent report, women stand at 24.3 percent of the salaried labour force (Pakistan Employment Trends, 2013). This report also draws attention a disturbing fact that the ratio of females in industry declined from 14.8% to 11.3% during 2012-13. On the other hand, it shows a rise in the share of female employment in the informal sector reaching to 70.9% as compared to males which is 60.8%.

EPZ: A brief overview

Economists perceived that the economic policies followed by developing countries in the era of 1990s, increased growth and expansion of global market. One of prominent feature was increase in number of Export Processing Zones (EPZs) across the globe where incredible number of employees is mostly young women (Romero, 1996). Tracing the history of the birth of EPZs, Akhtar comments that the phenomenon of export-processing zones is “a part of broader context of structural changes in global economic development” (Akhtar, 2003). Most of the countries affected by these structural changes were the recently freed former colonies. The global restructuring, in turn created among several other things, inequalities, transnationalisation of production, and feminization of labour. According to ILO estimates there are currently 3,500 EPZs throughout the world operating in around 130 countries and territories and employing over 66 million people, however, there is a lack of comprehensive data on employment trends regarding EPZs. The workforce may be larger in size since there are enterprises outside EPZs but still involved in export-oriented production (Suthanka & Gopalakrishnan, 2012). An important feature to be noted is that females comprises majority of the workforce in EPZs.

Sklair (1988) examined that developing countries offered incentives in terms of holidays, export and import duties, infrastructural facilities, in some cases

exemption of labour laws and payment of contribution of social security schemes. Research shows that workers in EPZs are severely exploited. They have no job security, long working hours and are restricted from unionization. Different work patterns are followed when it comes to observation of EPZs. In some countries, employers provide boarding facilities to the work force on a bachelor basis. However, lodging facilities curtail their meeting with outsiders during their employment with the EPZs (Jayanthakumaran, 1997).

On one hand it seems that employer is providing facility to workers but actually they are minimizing the time that would be spent in reaching the work place. A most common and prominent feature noted in EPZs is the absence of trade unions, though unions are not banned according to applicable laws within the jurisdictions of EPZs. Any inkling effort made by the workers to get organized in a union is met with severe repression, often resulting in job termination or investors threat to move their businesses to countries with comparatively cheap and less organized workers (Bhagwati, 1988). However, in case of Pakistan, the EPZ ordinance IV adopted in 1980, totally suspends national labour legislation in the zones. According to which workers are deprived of the right to form or belong to a trade union. They are also not allowed to take part in strike action to defend their rights (Diwan, 1993). Work conditions are very hard in EPZs, for instance social security is not guaranteed, wages are low as compared to the work and often workers spend extra time on work to avoid losing their jobs (ICFTU, 1996).

Feminist perspective of Globalization

Feminist scholars and researchers have explored different aspects of globalization. Rege maps three overlapping perspectives of feminist studies about globalization. She categorizes them as the first, gender and political economy of the development perspective focusing the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) in South Asia, Africa and Latin America. The second transnational feminist perspective draws upon post-colonial analysis of uneven and dissimilar circuits of culture and capital. The third perspective draws upon women experiences living through the post-communist transitions (Rege, 2007). Drawing from first perspective, this study draws its analysis of gendered character of the neo-liberal discourse. After 1990s, a prominent feature in the workforce of developing countries is feminization of workforce, facing malnutrition, economic pressures and social inequalities. Analysis of women's labour bring into focus the four areas of labour generally overlooked: subsistence, unpaid work, domestic production and voluntary work. Sparr (1994) criticize the Structural Adjustment Programs introduced in 1990's in developing countries, after which, studies show that

women participation in labour increased in some parts but their status and position has not shown a marked increase. In fact it has created triple burden for them where they are taking care of children, doing paid employment and community role. Mostly women are employed in informal sector which is low paid with no job security.

In the process of globalization gradually the state control over resources declines and corporations capture the markets which usually lead to suppression of union organization and degradation of environment. Apart from urban and rural divide within a country this divide is also on international level where developed countries do the research and management and developing countries do the 'unskilled' work (Horton, 1996). Susan Horton observes changes in employment patterns after globalization. It has become urban centred, industries have changed as well as occupations and the wage gap between men and women has reduced due to increase in women education and experience. At the same time she notes some exploitation especially for those who have migrated from rural areas. Momsen (2004) explore that there is new international division of labour (NIDL) associated with the process of globalization, which mainly seek for discounted labour and is reinforced by national and international trade agreements and policies.

Economic globalization is not only strongly gendered but also urban based. There are some positive aspects of it such as increased link of rural areas with the outside world through migration, better communications and the growth of multinational agro-industries and mining projects. As a result women move in to the labour force in response to new employment opportunities and increasing poverty. This leads to a change in social relations, including gender relations, as markets recruit specific gender, age, ethnic and religious groups. A significant feature identified is that women workers are concentrated in light industries producing consumer goods, ranging from food processing, textiles and garments to chemicals, rubber, plastics and electronics. In Egypt, Hong Kong, India, Kenya, Philippines and South Korea over three quarters of the female industrial labour force is employed in these seven industries. However, men are mostly hired in manufacturing and in managerial positions.

Mohanty examine both the global and local conditions of women's lives and conclude that global capitalism generate exploitation and domination which is similar in case of globalization. If the base of Multinational corporations is maximizing profits and minimizing costs then they offer certain kinds of jobs in

different locations of the world (Mohanty, 1997). She used Maria Mies study about Lace maker of Narsapuram example of low paid job in which women are involved fulfilling their household responsibilities and this paid work and still they think they are not part of the workforce. The second case is of Silicon Valley, California in which 90 percent women were Asian immigrants doing labourers job. They are considered suitable for these jobs because they fulfil the criteria subordination. Fussell (2000) explore another aspect that MNCs exploit the women workers of third world countries because of absence or ineffectual labour laws. She analyse that Mexican women consider themselves as supplementary workers as compared to their male members so they agree to low paid jobs (Fussell, 2000). The importance of economy and its role in empowerment is recognized. Therefore, the objectives of these two studies focused to explore the socio-economic conditions of women workers and their experiences in industries and export processing zones.

METHODOLOGY

To analyze the conditions of work for women in formal sector of Karachi, two recent studies were conducted by selecting a framework for analysis. First study was conducted to explore the impact of economic policies and its impact on women workers in urban industrial sector. Based on both qualitative and quantitative data, it explored the linkage between the economic policies and their impact on the economy and the effects of the economy on Women's lives in particular. For study 1, factories from the three industrial areas of Karachi, namely the Sind Industrial Trading Estate (SITE) Karachi, SITE North Karachi and Korangi Industrial areas were selected. The first task was to identify the number of industries in which women are employed. From earlier studies it was noted that women are mostly employed in textile, food industries, and pharmaceutical industry (Hafeez, 1989).

In study 1 a total of 200 women workers were interviewed from 13 garments industries of Karachi. Interviews were conducted by interview schedule comprising of both close and open ended questions. Some of the hurdles and challenges faced during the study and collection of data was lack of sex segregated data of workers, unwillingness in sharing of information, reluctant administrative staff of the factories, long distances, poor transport facilities, the law and order situation in the city, sudden disappearance of the respondents etc. The raw data obtained from the questionnaires filled by the respondents was converted into statistical form of tables and graphs. In study one another method

used in this research was secondary analysis. This method was used to study official data and reports of government to relate employment with selected macroeconomic indicators in the period between 1980- 2009. This helped in analysing the economic conditions developed due to Globalization. For this purpose Economic Survey of Pakistan 1980- 2009, labour force surveys and other relevant documents were analysed. Unstructured interviews were also conducted with three women rights activists and four employers/ supervisors in these factories. The study 11 was the study of Karachi Export Processing Zone (KEPZ). The universe of population was KEPZ and nearby localities from which women workers were coming. The first task for conducting this study was to identify the number of industries in which women are employed. To identify the total number of working industrial units in KEPZ Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) and KEPZ were contacted. During meetings, they informed that garments, stuffed toys, and plastic industrial units have more women workers as compared to other units. Total 330 women workers were interviewed from 25 factories located in KEPZ.

In both studies an interview schedule was designed to seek information regarding the women workers personal profile, family profile, nature and type of work, nature of appointment, wages, working hours, including overtime and work on holidays, wage deductions, and fine impositions. They were also asked about any form of harassment if they have faced. For data collection interview schedule consisted both open-ended and close ended questions. Through close ended questions usually statistical data is received while by open-ended questions we get detailed information. This method also allowed the researcher to note respondents' attitude towards their work and allowed them to observe the physical conditions under which they work and they are living. To collect the in-depth qualitative information from the respondents' case studies were also taken. Detailed interviews could not be conducted within the factory area, as it was time consuming so several home visits of the respondents were made by the researcher for this very purpose. For this study, 12 case studies were collected. In this paper a comparison of selected variables namely working hours, job security, unionization, wages, marital status, self-esteem and level of confidence are discussed in detail.

RESULTS

Initially, statistical information for industries in Karachi and EPZs was collected from relevant departments and documents. A major finding regarding data of industries and number of workers was that they lack sex segregated data. For

example The “Development Statistics of Sindh 2011” shows that number of manufacturing establishments in Sindh was 1825 in the year 2005-06 with average daily employment 290, 376. It is in total with no distinction for male or females. The data is same as noted in 2008 report which also questions the validity of data. Further, all the major organizations such as Industries and Commerce Department, Government of Sindh, Sindh Small Industries Corporation, Sindh Bureau of Statistics, Sindh Employees Social Security Institution (SESSI), Employers Federation of Pakistan (EFP) and the Sindh Technical Education & Vocational Training Authority (STEVTA) generalize the employment data with sex aggregated data. During informal interviews and conversation all agreed that the ratio of male and female in industry is 80 and 20 percent as workers in industries. Studies related to women working in industry shows that they are concentrated in some areas. The study of Sabiha Hafeez in 1989 showed the same industries as identified in 2009-2010 in which women are employed. These are mainly garments, pharmaceuticals, food and beverages.

The detailed information about women workers in industries was provided by STEVTA which gives quite a lot of details about industries with number of women workers and their ratios. It shows that in heavy industry such as motor companies and Ghee industries there are no women workers because it is considered heavy work, requires more skill and women are never tried for such work. In textile mills again the situation is that women are if employed are in office jobs in manufacturing area women are not employed. Pharmaceuticals and garments are the main areas where women are employed and the ratio of workers there is fifty percent for both.

Karachi Export Processing Zone (KEPZ) is adjacent to Landhi Extension Area, fully in operation, garment is the dominant sector followed by electronics, chemicals etc. The official websites for EPZ are focused on explaining its area and information to the investors mainly. While the total number of workers was difficult to find, a study quoted that around 35000 people, including 20,000 women from nearby areas, work in KEPZ.² Results showed that weak economic conditions of women, they are earning but their economic status is not improving. It also reflects working conditions of women in industries and level of satisfaction with their job. Some of the selected variables for comparative analysis of women workers in industrial sector and EPZ, Karachi are as follows:

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents According to Personal Income of Women Workers on Monthly Basis

Monthly Income (PK R)	Frequency	Percentage %	Monthly Income (PK R)	Frequency	Percentage %
Less than 1500	7	3.50	2001 – 3000	22	6.66
1500-3000	20	10.00	3001 – 4000	20	6.06
3001-4500	31	15.50	4001 – 5000	50	15.15
4501-6000	65	32.50	5001 – 6000	146	44.24
6001-7500	43	21.50	6001 – 7000	55	16.66
7501-9000	14	7.00	More than Rs. 7000	37	11.21
9001-10500	15	7.50			
More than 12000	5	2.50			
Total	200	100	Total	330	100

(Data from Study 1)

(Data from study 2)

Table 1 shows a comparison of wages of women workers in industrial sector and KEPZ. The data was collected during the period of 2008 to 2011. Minimum wages were Rs. 6000/ in 2008. Taking it as a level, the data shows a lot of variations in wages, although these workers were part of formal sector. With low household income it is very difficult to maintain a healthy lifestyle in such low wages.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents According to Working Hours

Working hours (per day)	Frequency	%	Working Hours (per day)	Frequency	%
9:00 am to 5:00 pm (8)	171	85.50	7 – 9 hours	299	90.60
8:30 am to 3:30 pm (7)	6	3.00	More than Nine Hours	31	9.39
8:00 am to 5:00 pm (9)	23	11.50			
Total	200	100	Total	330	100

(Data from study 1)

(Data from study 2)

Working hours for majority of women workers are constant across the sample. This is according to the prescribed national laws and International Labour Organization (ILO) convention on work. Women workers said that they were satisfied with working hours. Some of them said that workload is high as compared to the timings and it leaves very little time for doing household activities. This shows that they were facing double burden doing paid job as well as doing household work. For women, the term ‘work’ is a varied term. When a woman is asked do you work? If she is a housewife she says ‘NO’ because in general people think work means paidjob. This is the reason that when we use a term ‘working hours’ it excludes the preparation time which they spend before going to job and the time they spend on home chores after their job.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents According to Presence of Trade Union

Factory has Trade Union	Frequency	Percentage %	Factory has Trade Union	Frequency	Percentage %
No	112	56.00	No	330	100
Yes	88	44.00			
Total	200	100	Total	330	100

(Data from study 1)

(Data from study 2)

Out of the total women in industrial sector, 56% replied negative to the existence of a trade union. Those who were members of trade unions can be categorized as two types. Active members thought it is their right and it help in approval of their demands. Others said it was not useful because whatever is decided by the owners becomes a policy. They also shared that representation was unequal or women were mostly just to fill up the gaps. On the contrary, the data collected from EPZs indicated 100 percent absence of trade unions as it is not allowed in the zones. But most of them were in favour of unionization in EPZs.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents According to Marital status

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage %	Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage %
Unmarried	125	62.50	Unmarried	220	66.66
Married	63	31.50	Married	101	30.60
Divorced	07	3.50	Widowed	9	2.72
Widow	05	2.970	Total	330	100
Total	200	100			

(Data from study 1)

(Data from study 2)

Both studies showed that majority of women workers were unmarried. It shows that due to economic pressure either they or their families have delayed their marriages. It was also revealed during study that that employers prefer unmarried women for work because they assume they have less family responsibilities, can do long working hours and are not expected to apply for maternity leave or day care facilities.

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents According to Achievement of Confidence due to Job

Improvement In confidence due to job	Frequency	Percentage %	Improvement in confidence due to job	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	185	92.50	Yes	293	88.78
No	15	7.50	No	37	11.21
Total	200	100	Total	200	100

(Data from study 1)

(Data from study 2)

Both the study shows that an overwhelming majority (92.50 per cent) and (88.78%) responded that they have become confident after doing job because they can take decisions by themselves, their mobility has increased, they can spend money as they wish, they have become important for the family and their self-esteem is high. Others who stated no change has occurred think that males are dominant so they have to follow their decisions. Few of them considered that “elders can make better decisions for us” so they have internalized the subordinate role of women. One of them also thinks that traditions and norms of society do not allow women to show their confidence.

DISCUSSION

Due to Economic restructuring in Pakistan, many changes occurred in the economy. Especially the focus shifted towards export oriented growth. It increased the number of women workers but the status of women has not improved accordingly. In this paper findings of two researches are analysed to explore the similarities and differences that women face at work place. As discussed in review of literature, the number of women in workforce has increased as compared to the past but their work conditions and income has not improved accordingly. According to ILO, an average employment- to-population ratio is in the range of 55 to 75 percent in different countries. In Pakistan, the ratio is very low i.e. 49.9 % however it has improved from 46.5% in 2001-02(Suthankar & Gopalakrishnan, 2012). As earlier discussed in introduction, studies analyzed in this paper also show that labour participation rate of women in formal sector is low while in in-formal sector it's very high share of employment in the informal economy for both male and female is Male 73.6 and Female 70.9 respectively.

Pakistan Employment Trends (2013) shows that own account workers in total employment for both sexes is 34.9%, for Male 40.1% and Females 15.9%. Similarly, most of the women are working as contract workers, with low wages even in informal sector. This leads to another problem known as vulnerable employment. According to ILO, “vulnerable employment is calculated as the sum of contributing family workers and own –account workers as a percentage of total employment of the relevant group. It includes workers who are in in-formal sector, therefore, they are unable to avail the opportunities associated with decent employment”. Workers in vulnerable employment are unable to benefit from the social protection and safety nets. Moreover, they are unable to support their

families when they lose job or when economic activities are low. One of the women during interview for case studies told that:

My main duty is to supervise the work between stitching and packing. There are three departments in her factory.

1) Stitching 2) Cropping 3) Finishing and packing”

With the time and experience her work increased but her wages remained the same. After few months back, the finishing and packing supervision was also given to her but there was no increment in her pay. She has been working in this department since 1991. “The salary is the same but I have more work to do. I usually make bills of factory payments, the staff’s payment related work. I also have to watch workers for checking and provision of material.

Another influencing factor is poverty, which is linked to limited choices that one can make about work (ILO, 2002). Poverty is categorized in absolute and relative terms. “A definition of absolute poverty assumes that it is possible to define a minimum standard of living based on a person’s biological needs for food, water, clothing and shelter. It is mostly used rather than relative terms. The measurement of relative poverty involves comparing the standard of living of those who are considered to be poor with that of non-poor members of the same society. Relative approaches view poverty as a social construction, based on the belief that a certain standard of living is desirable for everyone in a given society at a given time” (Kane and Mark, 2003). According to Economic Survey of Pakistan, 2013-14, 60.19 percent of the population lives below poverty line in Pakistan.³It was confirmed by majority of the respondents who revealed that poverty is the main reason that these women are doing paid jobs.

I discontinued education because of financial problems. Although I was a position holder and I won many debate competitions. Since I was the eldest of all my sisters and brothers I had a strong intention to support my parents financially and emotionally. We were very poor. My father was jobless and my mother was a housewife, that’s why I couldn’t continue my education.” Narrative of a female factory worker

Given this situation, a large number is unable to fulfil their basic needs and lack opportunities of education, good job or work, poor housing facilities, poor health

facilities. The impact on the economy directly impact on women. With high prices more women are pushed into jobs. These jobs are not improving their standard of living but fulfilling their basic needs. In these researches, it was identified that women decision making power has not changed. The reason is lack of acceptance for female role as 'bread winner' in the society. Social norms and customs consider males as head of the household, even though many households are being financially headed by females, they do not have the decision making power. The assumption of the researcher based on review of literature that that women workers gain self-confidence due to economic independence, contradict the findings. During interviews, these women workers shared that even though they are working in formal sector, they are not permanent. They are waiting for their confirmation letters. Job security, therefore, is one major problem faced by these women. During case studies they revealed, they have been working from more than three years and according to the labour laws the probation period is three months, yet they are working on contract bases.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion the present day Pakistani society women roles are changing. This change is brought by many factors and globalization is one of it. For many their first priority has become the survival for which they accept all conditions of employment. Women in this case are more affected. In discharging her dual role at home and work place and to strike an optimal balance amongst them, her satisfaction level varies. They are victims of poverty that has a central role to join industries and EPZs. They are concerned about bad working conditions, bad environment, and harassment but they have no choice rather than accepting these jobs due to poverty. They are not usually active in unionization. Policy makers continue the export led economy and policy of liberalization, austerity and privatization because they think it is the only way to improve the economy. But in this process they only count women as labour force participation rates. At the time of decision making or budgeting, the priority is not gender equality or empowerment rather increases in GDP growth and other macroeconomic indicators. Although, work conditions are harsh and these women have to struggle a lot but they have high hopes. According to one respondent from study 1:

My children are my life I am living and earning only for them".
I request the government to provide machines and material for poor ladies to work. By this they will earn money and add a share in the country's development".

End Notes:

1. <http://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/ib/2008/053008.htm> Retrieved August 18, 2010
2. <http://www.just-style.com/news/japanese-investors-back-export-processing-zone/id115964.aspx>
3. <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/business/03-Jun-2014/earning-2-a-day-60-19-population-live-below-poverty-line>

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