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Jordanian Working Women's Perception of Life Difficulties

By Siham D. Abueita¹

Abstract

This study is an attempt to identify Jordanian working-women's perception of their life difficulties. Areas of life's difficulties include: psychological, social, political and career. Such difficulties were investigated across five variables: age, education, employment, years of experience and civil status. Each variable included subgroups. The sample consisted of 186 subjects living in the Amman district. Subjects responded to a questionnaire about life difficulties. The questionnaire's internal reliability as well as test-retest reliability ranged from .79 to .92. Statistical analysis of data consisted of ANOVA analysis of variance and the Scheffe test of differences between groups. Results were tested at the .5-level or better. Jordanian women reported significant differences in all four areas of life's difficulties.

Keywords: Working women, Life difficulties, Jordanian women

Introduction

Research studies carried out in many countries report that women face difficulties, obstacles and inequalities in several aspects of life. That is mainly in education, career, social life, and political involvements. American women have been leaders in their efforts to advance women's rights. Women have been engaged in every facet of national and international affairs, such as policymaking, decision-making, arms control, trade, courtroom, and key positions in state departments.

However, Harrison (1997) reported that the transformation to a society of complete equality has not yet been fully realized. Bander (1997) documented that changes in law, politics and society have had significant impact on contemporary women's lives including their choice of careers. Yet, the battle of parity, equal opportunity and enlightened attitudes have not yet been completely won. McGivney (1993) found that for British women, the most effective reentry threshold learning activities shared features common to all good community education. However, women experienced problems in moving from an informal to a formal education. This was largely due to lack of information and guidance, coherent learning Reuters, support and practical assistance.

Jordan has adopted many programs that aimed to enhance women's participation in the country's development and improve their life conditions. These programs have been designed to support women throughout the country. That is, in realizing a positive change in their lives, and improving conditions in the society as a whole. So, women's participation in the development process, both as a beneficiary and partner, is designed to correct the demographic balance, through the provision of literacy and education program as well as family participation in household affairs.

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Jordanian Women's Life Conditions

Jordan has adopted legal frameworks regulating Jordanian women's rights based on broad equality basis with men. These frameworks emanated from the international agreements and declarations pertaining to women rights which Jordan has ratified. In addition, there are the articles of the Jordanian constitution (1990), which reinforced the Jordanian national charter. In which, article (8a) of chapter five reads; "Jordanian men and women are equal before the law with no discrimination between them in rights and duties". where\as in" (8;b). Women and men are partners in the growth and development of Jordanian society".

However, Jordanian women participation in decision-making positions is still limited. Three women were appointed as members in the Upper House. Only one woman succeeded in getting the membership at the Lower House of the Parliament in 1997 and 2001. One woman has been appointed Minister in every cabinet of Ministries. Five women joined the judicature office. In addition, the percentage of women's participation in political parties has been around 10 %. At the trade unions level, total women's participation has been 18 %.

The General Statistics Department (1999) clarified that Jordanian women prefer to work in public sectors particularly in education, health, and office work. The main reason is, short working hours which enables them to look after their homes and children, besides the job security of public sector. The largest portion of workingwomen is concentrated in the education sector. This sector incorporates about 56 % of the entire number of men and women workers. It is followed by the health sector, which employs around 45 % of employees from both sexes (Civil Services, 2001).

Jordanian women predominantly work in the services sectors, but not in the commercial and productive sectors. This is explained by the interaction between cultural, social, economic and political variables. This relationship is influenced by the prevalent value system, standards of education, social awareness, and economic factors. So, the active role of women is in the public sphere.

There are many obstacles related to the participation of the Jordanian women in work and in social life. Such obstacles are; social values, legal barriers, and the interaction between cultural, social, economical and political values. The participation in economic activity has slightly risen from 7.2 % in 1995 to 8.5 % in 1997 of the total number of women. This participation, however, is still below required levels, when compared to men. Men's participation was 42.4 % in 1997 of the total number of men. Women have benefited from compulsory education, as reflected in their rising percentage. Yet, the illiteracy among females over 15 years old remained high, amounting to 14 % compared to only 6 % among males, in the 1980s.

Previous Studies

A. Jordanian studies:

Jaber's (1984) research results showed that female participation in the development of the public affairs, contributed to improving women's social and economic status. Such participation led to enhancing women's economic independence and their active role in decision-making, both at the family and the society levels. This contributed to realization of a certain measure of development in women's status within

the Jordanian society. Nevertheless, women faced difficulties in handling the dual roles of career and home.

Shakhatra (1992) emphasized the economic dimension which involves human resources. So, women's participation in the national economy realizes development in women's daily life. However, women's participation in the economic dimension was very limited. Khadairi (1994) assessed the conditions of rural women, to identify the problems confronting them, and the underlying causes. The study results revealed that customs and traditions play a restrictive role in defining women's work, and the nature of the work they can hold in daily life. Significant correlations were found between levels of income and levels of education in this rural women's sample.

Nasir (1985) clarified the condition of working women in rural society. Long working hours added to domestic obligation contribute to the low incidence of the female projects. These were the major restrictions that faced married women who wished to take part in the work market.

Abueita (1996) studied Jordanian women who hold a university degree and participate in public life activities. Results showed that having a paid employment or attain social support as volunteer, have higher self-concept than women who work in other fields. In addition, the results showed divorced women have lower self-confidence than married and single women.

B. International studies:

Studies in other countries also showed that women face difficulties and obstacles. Gove, (1972) Barchrach (1975) Glen (1975) Pearlin and Johnson (1977) found that married persons are better adjusted than singles. That is: a) there is less mental disorder, b) they are freer of depression caused by life stresses, such as economic hardships, and c) as a group they report greater happiness. Schultz (1978) found that married men and women of all ages have a longer life expectancy than single persons.

Yogev and Harris (1993) asked academics and medical professional women, about their perception of their advantages and disadvantages in their life-style, as women and as professionals. Results showed that women who work significantly more hours per week have significantly lower satisfaction. Foroehlich (1999) found that American woman's life conditions were characterized by widespread poverty, psychological and academic stress. These were due to the competing demands of work and family as well as the lack of organized political and economic forces to alleviate women's predicament. Women who have been socially isolated showed negative socioeconomic pressures for them and their families.

There is controversy concerning married versus never-married person regarding psychological disturbances as well as other aspects. Barchrach (1975) in his review of research reported that the never married showed lower symptoms rates of psychological disturbance and were likely to be users of psychological drugs than married persons. The greatest number of important admissions to psychiatric facilities involved married persons. However, the greatest number of never married men and women face less psychological disturbance. But Rico Velasco and Manko (1973) found no significant difference between never married and married men and women. Gubrian (1975) found

that single men and women were similar to the married persons in terms of loneliness and satisfaction with life.

Martinson (1975) proposed that women, who remain single, demonstrate lower feelings of ego deficiency but showed better overall adjustment. Baker (1968) found no significant differences in terms of personal and social adjustment between never married and married women. Stein (1975) proposed that the lesser adjustment of the unmarried does not result from failure to marry as such, rather represents the toll paid by singles that live in society with rigid social morals that view singles as deviants, as unstable and incomplete. Personal and social identity of unmarried persons is demigod by the lack of social definition of and support for a single life-style.

Bernard (1972) concluded that mental health profiles of single women are better than those of married women. They are more upwardly, mobile, both educationally and professionally. Stein (1975) proposed that providing opportunities for personal development influenced positively on the life-style of single adults, the freedom was considered as one of the most important assets of their life-style. Weis (1973) identified two types of relationship that help in dealing with loneliness emotional attachment to at least one person, and social ties, including a group of friends. Gigy (1980) found that there were little differences in the morale or happiness of the two groups. Baruch et al (1983) revealed complex results. Women showing the highest level of well-being were those who were married and had high prestige jobs. Yet, being single and in a low level had diminished well-being.

In summary, most of the previous studies about Jordanian women, and women from other societies are not primarily concerned with women's life adjustment difficulties. They highlight women status, while the present study attempts to address life adjustment difficulties of working-women. This includes married, single and divorced women with different educational levels residing in the city of Amman.

Study Question

Are there significant differences among Jordanian working-women in their report on life difficulties: career, political, psychological and social pertaining to the study variables: age, education, employment, years of experience and civil status?

Method

Subjects

The sample consisted of 186 women who completed the study questionnaire. About half of the subjects (90) were below 30 years old. Seventy-eight women's age ranged from 31 to 40 and only 18 were 41 to 50 years old. Forty-four held a high school certificate, 76 had a bachelor degree and 66 a post graduate degree. Teachers (76) had the highest frequency in work places. Thirty-six health services providers (physicians and nurses) and administrators (33) were about equal. Some were employees (15) and a few (8) were counselors and social workers. (75) had less than five years of experience. Forty-five worked for 5 to 10 years. Sixty-six subjects had more than ten years of experience. Married women (91) were about equal in number to both single (52) and divorced (43) women.

Measurement

The administered questionnaire consisted of 65 items derived from previous studies relevant to life difficulties aspects. Such difficulties were selected as being most influential on women's daily life, notwithstanding civil status, type of work, education, years of experience or age. The items included four areas of difficulties: career, political, psychological and social. Each item consisted of a 3-point Likert scale, where one presents lowest and three highest difficulties.

Definitions of difficulties: Career difficulties: finding a suitable employment, ability to fulfill obligations, skill development and family support. Political difficulties: understanding and participating in office management as well as public politics, leadership abilities and participating in decision-making processes. Psychological difficulties: self-control, self-concept, assertiveness, mood and temperament, acceptance of criticism and positive attitudes. Social difficulties: maintaining friendships, handling nuclear and extended family problems, ability to relate to men as equals, agreements with males in family about roles and freedom in spending leisure time.

Five professors in the department of educational psychology examined the initial questionnaire. The questionnaire was then revised on the basis of their recommendations.

Reliability. Internal consistency or reliability coefficient for each area of difficulty was calculated using Cronbach Alpha: Social .89, Psychological .85, Political .92, and Career .89. Test-retest reliability was employed on 15 women. Administrations were two weeks apart. The Kuder Richardson formula was used to calculate reliability coefficients. These were: Social .82, Psychological .81, Political .84, and Career .82.

Statistical Analysis. ANOVA one-way analysis of variance and the Scheffe test of differences between groups were employed on the data.

Procedure

The questionnaire was individually administered in an interview at participants' work places.

Results

One-Way ANOVA was used to identify statistical significance among subjects in their self-report on life difficulties: career, political, psychological and social, pertaining to the study variables of: age, education, employment, years of experience and civil status.

Tables 1-6 show "F" values and Scheffe mean differences that indicate significant differences between groups but not within groups. Such differences examined the association between the study variables of: age, education employment, years of experience and civil status, and areas of life difficulties: psychological, social, political and career. The associations between each of the study variables and each area of life difficulties are displayed below.

Age and life difficulties

Statistically significant associations were found between *age* and (a) *social* difficulties at the .001 level as shown in Table 1. This result is further specified by the Scheffe mean differences significant at the .001 level for women 30 years old and

younger (Table 6). (b) *Political* difficulties significant at the .05 level (Table1). The Scheffe test indicates significant differences for those who are 41 to 50 years old at the .05 level.

Table 1. Variances Between Age and Difficulties Categories

Age / Variables	Source of Variance	Sum of squares	d f	Mean square	F value	P.
Career	Between groups	41.61	2	20.81	.408	.67
	Within groups	10043.6	197	50.98		
Political	Between groups	581.30	2	290.65	3.51	.03*
	Within groups	16296.2	197			
Psychological	Between groups	41.38	2	20.69	.575	.56
	Within groups	7013.45	195			
Social	Between groups	336.25	2	168.13	5.87	.00** *
	Within groups	5301.98	185	28.66		

*** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$

Education and difficulties

Table 2 shows level of *education* to significantly relate to all investigated life difficulties: (a) *career* at the .001 level, (b) *political* at the .05 level, (c) *psychological* at the .001 level and (d) *social* at the .02 level. As shown in Table 6, the Scheffe test also revealed significant differences between educational levels within all life difficulties: (a) *career* high school certificate holders more than both of bachelor and graduate degrees holders at the .05 and the .001 levels respectively, (b) *political* those who had bachelor more than graduate degrees holders at the .05 level, (c) *psychological* women with high school certificate more than those with graduate degrees at the .001 level, and (d) *social* subjects with high school certificate more than graduate degrees holders at the .02 level.

Table 2. Variances Between Education and Difficulties Categories

Education/ Variables	Source of Variance	Sum of squares	d .f.	Mean square	F value	Sig.
Career	Between groups	697.19	2	348.59	7.32	.00***
	Within groups	9387.99	197	47.66		
Political	Between groups	538.49	2	269.25	3.25	.04*

	Within groups	16339.01	197	82.94		
Psychological	Between groups	376.75	2	188.37	5.50	.00***
	Within groups	6678.08	195	34.25		
Social	Between groups	223.42	2	111.82	3.82	.02*
	Within groups	5414.82	185			

*** $p < .001$, * $p .05$

Employment and life difficulties

Types of *employments* were significantly related to life difficulties concerning (a) *career* at the .001 level (Table 3). The scheffe mean differences indicated that women who work at health services (physicians and nurses) had more difficulties than teachers, at the .01 level, and more than employees at the .02 level (Table 6), and (b) *psychological* difficulties at the .001 level (Table 3). The scheffe mean differences indicated more difficulties for women working in health services than for employees, at the .05 level (Table 6).

Table 3. Variances Between Employment and Difficulties Categories

Employment/ Variables	Source of Variance	Sum of squares	d. f.	Mean square	F value	Sig.
Career	Between groups	990.19	5	198.04	4.22	.00** *
	Within groups	9094.98	194			
Political	Between groups	719.37	5	143.87	1.73	.13
	Within groups	16158.13	194	83.29		
Psychological	Between groups	655.96	5	131.19	3.94	.00* **
	Within groups	6398.87	192	33.33		

Social	Between groups	300.88	5	60.18	2.05	.07
	Within groups	5337.36	182	29.33		

*** $p < .001$

Years of experience and life difficulties

Associations were only found between *years of experience* and *social* difficulties at the .001 level (Table 4). In Table 6, the Scheffe test showed significant differences between (a) those who worked 5-10 years had more difficulties than women who worked over 10 years, at the .05 level, and (b) less than 5 years of experience had more difficulties than those who worked over 10 years, at the .01 level.

Table 4. Variances Between Years of Experience and Difficulties Categories

Experience Years/ Variables	Source of Variance	Sum of squares	d f	Mean square	F value	Sig.
Career	Between groups	239.99	2	119.99	2.40	.09
	Within groups	9845.19	197	49.98		
Political	Between groups	909.99	2	119.99	2.40	.09
	Within groups	15967.0	197	81.10		
Psychological	Between groups	103.01	2	51.51	1.44	.24
	Within groups	6951.82	195	35.65		
Social	Between groups	302.76	2	151.38	5.25	.00* **
	Within groups	5335.47	185	28.84		

*** $p < .001$

Civil status and life difficulties

The *civil status* of working-women was related to all areas of life difficulties as seen in Table 5: (a) *career* at the .02 level, (b) *political* at the .02 level, (c) *psychological* at the .02 level, and (d) *social* at the .001 level. Similarly, in Table 6, the scheffe test indicated differences between divorced women and other categories of subjects' civil status pertaining to all life difficulties: (a) *career* divorced more than married women at the .05 level, (b) *political* divorced more than single subjects at the .05 level, (c) *psychological* divorced more than married working-women at the .05 level, and (d) *social* divorced more than married women at the .001 level.

Table 5. Variances Between Civil Status and Difficulties Categories

Civil Status/Variables	Source of Variance	Sum of squares	d. f.	Mean square	F value	Sig.
Career	Between groups	354.30	2	172.15	4.29	.02*
	Within groups	8080.98	195	41.34		
Political	Between groups	394.69	2	197.35	4.01	.02*
	Within groups	9690.49	197	49.19		
Psychological	Between groups	298.69	2	194.35	4.31	.02*
	Within groups	6756.13	195	34.65		
Social	Between groups	404.97	2	202.48	7.16	.00**
	Within groups	5233.27	185	28.29		

*** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$

Table 6. Scheffe Test of Mean Differences in Difficulties Categories

Depend. Variable	Independent variable		Mean differences	Std. Error	<i>p.</i>
Political	Age	41-50	2.991	1.36	.05*
Social		< 30 yrs.	4.63	1.40	.00** *
Social	Experience	5-10 yrs. > over 10 yrs.	4.26	1.67	.04*
		Less than 5 yrs. > over 10 yrs.	2.78	.901	.01**
Career	Employment	Health > Teachers	5.27	1.34	.01**
		Health > Employee	7.32	1.99	.02*
Psychology		Health > Employee	5.63	1.68	.05*
Career	Education	H.S. > BA	3.49	1.27	.03*
		H.S. > Graduate	4.97	1.31	.00** *
Political		BA > Graduate	4.24	1.67	.04*
Psychology		H.S. > Graduate	3.53	1.11	.00** *
Social		H.S. > Graduate	2.91	1.02	.02*
Career	Civil Status	Divorced > Married	3.08	1.25	.05*
Psychology		Divorced > Married	2.85	1.05	.03*
Social		Divorced > Married	3.70	.981	.00** *
Political		Divorced > Single	3.61	1.39	.03*

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Discussion

The youngest chronological **age** group consisted of women 30 years old or younger. They reported more political and social difficulties than women 41-50 years old. This may be due to new circumstances which younger women were faced with. They needed more time to understand required office management and social obligations. Women in the age range of 41-50 were in a stage of either leaving job or looking for higher position. They have had several years of experience to familiarize themselves with social and political conditions. This result is consistent with McGivney(1993), as well as with Abueita (1996). That is, those who newly entered a job or another level of education had more difficulties than well-established persons. The present study specified the nature of such difficulties.

Length of work experience was only associated with social difficulties. Working women who had less than ten years of experience reported more social difficulties than those whose work experience exceeded ten years. It is likely that it takes a long time to comprehend social obligations and to confront social challenges.

In general, types of **employment** were significantly related to career and psychological difficulties. Concerning career difficulties, physicians and nurses confronted more difficulties related to their career than teachers and employees. They also faced more psychological difficulties than employees. The nature of their work required constant alertness. It exposed them to high level of physical and psychological stress. They get emotionally involved with patients' suffering and their families' worries. Such conditions exceed what employees handled. This result is consistent with previous research findings (Baruch, et al. 1983; Nasir, 1985; Al-Khadairi, 1994). They found that long working days, irregular working hours and shifts constitute psychological stress.

The most important result indicated that **education** was related to all four areas of difficulties, psychological, social, political and career. There were also substantial differences between subgroups of women who differed in educational levels. Those who had only high school certificate had more career, psychological and social difficulties than bachelor or graduate degree holders. The main reason is that higher education qualifies for good working conditions in higher positions. Besides, the society respects people who are in jobs related to higher, more than to lower degrees. Al-Khadairi (1994) also pointed out that customs and the traditions play restrictive roles in defining women's participation at work. Traditions allow women to work if they have a university degree. Usually, most workingwomen in low-income jobs that do not require much education are not Jordanian. However, well educated women who held a BA or higher faced political difficulties. That is, they aspired to have a role in decision-making situations. They simply could not. Men in Jordan almost always hold such positions.

Recommendations

Women need validation of their chosen roles in career, political, psychological and social context to improve their adjustment to work and family.

1. Offering workshops related to active political and social life, coping strategies and social relationships.
2. Planning educational training programs related to the above mentioned aspects.

3. Conducting more local research on women difficulties and needs, this would result in rendering effective services.
4. Women's organizations and unions to play a better role in upgrading women efficiency and reducing their difficulties.

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