The Impact of Women’s Employment on Marital Stability in Qatar Society

Noora Ahmed Lari
(Social and Economic Survey Research Institute, Qatar University, Doha, Qatar)

Abstract: The State of Qatar has implemented several family policies in order to improve the wellbeing of Qatari families and ensure fair distribution of development benefits for both men and women. However, there is a linkage between female employment outside the home and instability in the marriages of Qatari families. This paper investigates the impact of female employment on marital stability, based on the results of primary data collected in Qatar, a questionnaire that consisted of several sections such as challenges in the workplace, supervisor, family and spouse relations, work motivation and performance. Of the 824 questionnaires that were returned, 807 were completed and valid for analysis. Regression analysis and an ANOVA test have been used to test the relationship between the variables. The results of the research have produced mixed findings about how wives’ employment increases marital instability and have yielded few significant differences on mean scores of discuss on work demands, insufficient time together, housework, financial matters, communication, relatives and rearing children. The results indicates that in general Qatar working women face several challenges in relation to their marital life as part of cultural and social constraints.

Key words: Qatari women; employment; marital stability; gender equality; economic progress

JEL codes: Z13

1. Introduction

Qatar government aimed to improve the conditions of women to go in line with the global commitment to stimulate their equal rights and expand their participation in the public sphere. It realizes that “there is much more that women can contribute to society apart from their role in the home” (NDS 2011-2016, p. 175). The structure of the “labour” market is visible both in the increasing presence of Qatari women in the workforce and the clear causal link between women’s employment and reduced gender inequality. Improving the public perceptions of women and loosening the grip of tradition could be an important step towards the achievement of Qatari women’s empowerment.

At the same time, women significantly face social challenges because of this conventional, gender-segregated tribal society, which is governed by Islamic (Sharia) Law, maintains honour by keeping strong associations with its past. Traditionally, the role of women was limited to core domestic chores and childcare while the man worked to provide for the family’s needs. The dynamics of the marriage institution have significantly changed as women’s entry into the labor has reduced the time available for household work; there has been little change in household chores distribution, which creates favorable conditions for conflict in marriage (Greenstein, 1990). It also may

Noora Ahmed Lari, Ph.D., Research Assistant Professor, Social and Economic Survey Research Institute, Qatar University; research areas/interests: qualitative analysis, cultural sociology. E-mail: n.lari@qu.edu.qa.
restrict their presence in the workforce and create limitations to their progress. It has been indicated that Qatar women tend to perceive their identity as deeply embedded in the family and religion, particularly Islam (Golkowska, 2014). This means that the governmental commitments to improve the status of Qatari women in the labour force are also related to the core societal settings in Qatar society (e.g., marital status, childcare, extended family dimension, the recruitment of domestic help etc.). From this perspective, women’s career can be used as a decisive factor in determining their overall economic progress and marital stability in the modern Qatar society.

The main objective of this paper is to identify the demographic and employment characteristics of women, to examine the relationship between women’s employment and marital stability and to analyze factors affecting marital instability. The main simple question to be addressed here is: how does Qatar women’s labor-force participation affect their marital instability? To study this relationship, the paper examined results of primary data collected in Qatar.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Cultural and Social Constraints

Previous literature has illustrated that the leading factors that greatly hinder women’s economic progress in the workforce (i.e., restricting women’s career development) are related to social and cultural constraints. Woman’s role in the household (i.e., household work, childcare responsibilities and marital responsibilities) might be affected by their absence from home and thus prevent women from participating in jobs that require long working hours, such as managerial positions. Thus, the traditional ties of creative women to their families hinder them from mingling with other creative minds in the public domain (Bradley, 2005). Consequently, women experience numerous dilemmas in balancing traditions, customs and family roles with individual aspirations (for education, employment etc.).

Therefore, the increased participation of married females in the workforce could have many consequences, including less time for their families and different ambitions for the future (Macionis, 1995). Several studies show that when working at home as a full-time housewife, a woman works for an average of 55 hours each week which is actually more than the average time spent when working in employment full time. Employed women, on the other hand, spend about 26 hours or less a week on childcare and house chores. Research has shown that just like husbands of homemakers, husbands of employed women are not likely to hare in the responsibilities of childcare and house chores (Bhattarai et al., 2015). These issues can have a negative influence on marital relations and contribute to the growing divorce rate, as some individuals may be reluctant to change their conventional beliefs concerning the roles that women and men ought to perform.

Studies also show that over time, the number of women who are engaged in paid work has been increasing steadily. For instance, just 15% of married women had paid employment in 1940 but the numbers had risen to 37% by 1960 and 55% in 1980. Evidence suggests that the eventual increase in women's participation in labor markets over the past century can be specifically attributed to the increase in married women's participation. In the US, women's labor force participation is majorly driven by the trend among women who are married. Similar historical trends are seen in Germany, Canada and the UK (Heckman & Killingsworth, 1986). Due to these demographic changes in female labor force participation, marital instability has become a common phenomenon.

Qatar women are experiencing a gradual change in the patriarchal discourse while maintaining Islamic principles and social norms. As a part of the Arab world, social norms in Qatar were shaped by Islamic religion
which is obvious in terms of behaviour, social interactions and social relations (Madsen, 2009). Qatar society has
indeed made progress in terms of gender equality compared to twenty years ago, but as a country under Islamic
(Sharia) Law, the patriarchal views of gender roles is still the norm. Patriarchal views of gender roles, such as in
the domestic sphere where women are expected to be wives and mothers. The most fundamental family principle
in Qatari society is that of the clear division between gender roles. Traditionally, strict segregation has dictated the
roles of husband and wife: men must earn money for household expenditures, and women must be in charge of
household work and childcare.

In other words, the gender division is based upon the distinction between the public and private spheres. Men
occupy the public world of work, and women occupy the private domestic sphere. According to Sharabi (1988),
there is still “a conservative relentless male-oriented ideology, which tends to assign privilege and power to the
male at the expense of female” (p. 33). In a male-dominated society, family norms regulating family life maintain
a male-centred and female subordinated structure. Restrictions exist regarding how successful an individual could
be in a job depending on his or her gender (Richardson, 1993). Several factors can hinder Qatar women’s
participation and efficiency in the labour force and affect their marital stability. It has been observed that customs
and traditions have a negative influence on women’s participation in the labour market (Berrebi, Martorell &
Tanner, 2009; Mufta, 2010). The following discussion shows the impact of marriage on women’s economic
progress.

2.2 Marital Instability and Women’s Employment

The link between female employment outside the home and instability in the marriages of married women
has long been investigated. Marital instability is defined as a process characterized by the breakdown of marriages
through desertion, separation or divorce and there is also the possibility of the individuals involved to re-partner
later on. In examining the relationship between women’s employment and marital stability, Sayer and Bianchi
(2000) argue that marital stability is dependent on the gains from marriage. In Becker’s model of role
specialization, these gains in marriage are achieved when marriage experiences specialization in the sense that
while the husband specializes in employment, the wife should specialize in household work. This, therefore,
means that when women become increasingly attached to the labor force, the specialization gains from the wife
reduce which in turn increase the likelihood of divorce. Greenstein (1990) explains that working women do not
get adequate time to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers and therefore husbands become dissatisfied and
divorce occurs. Working women have the necessary coping mechanisms of the financial implications associated
with divorce and separation. Thus, it could be argued that when women specialize in household work, chances are
high that they will tolerate an unhappy marriage because their alternate options are low forcing them to be
economically dependent on men (Sen, 2002). Sen adds that socio-cultural norms also have an impact on
influencing the impact that women’s labor supply has on marital stability.

More specifically, working on the basis of gender norms-based models, if the wife’s labor supply makes the
society to criticize the husband’s ability to provide for his family, there are high chances of the husband’s utility
decreasing (Jalovaara, 2003). This will in turn trigger discords and create misunderstandings in the family thereby
increasing marital instability. More recently, however, critics have argued that the role of the household today has
shifted from role specialization and production to income pooling and consumption. Based on the model of
economic interdependence, when partners contribute to the household economically, their living standards
improve and the risk of one losing a job does is diversifies thereby making the marriage more stable (Engemann
& Owyang, 2006; Raz-Yurovich, 2012). To best understand the role of women’s employment on marital stability,
it is important to consider a number of factors that create the context for making decisions on employment and partnership.

Ortiz-Ospina and Sandra (2017) add that in countries where welfare policies promote the dependence of women on their partners, the economic resources of women have a high tendency of destabilizing marriages. Bhattarai et al. (2015) indicate that marital stability is dependent on three major factors namely intimacy which is determined by the frequency of disagreements among couples, leisure time spent together, sharing household activities, interaction with children and sharing income. Stability in marriage is also affected by affection and happiness which is determined by the ability to agree about spending money, sexual satisfaction, pleasant conversations and spousal relations with immediate family and in-laws (Jalovaara, 2003). Stability also depends on satisfaction with marital life which is determined by among other factors commitment to marriage, sharing common interests, decision-making, settling disputes and conflicts and having the partner as a best friend.

Qatar society remains relatively traditional and conservative. Indeed, the slow pace of social reform is one of the common complaints of progressives. The emergence of several challenges, which was caused by an influx of cultural, social and organizational factors relating to gender equality in the workplace. There have been arguments that women’s employment has brought about marital instability because women no longer specialize in their traditional roles of childcare and housework. In the recent past, women have been taking on more engaging and demanding roles that make them spend more time away from home. For this reason, most of the problems observed in marital relationships today such as financial issues, communication breakdown, interference from in-laws, misunderstandings in how to complete household tasks and childcare and even limited couple time have been attributed to women's employment.

Qatar government produced policies resulting in “the family cohesion agenda”, in the Qatar Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategy of 2011-2016. These agendas emphasises that it is necessary to ensure a delicate balancing act between household and workplace responsibilities for women in order to: “preserve and enhance the traditional Qatari family core while empowering women to participate in all spheres of society, especially in economic and political decision-making” (NDS 2011-2016, p. 174). This means that the government realises that: “the extent to which women are able to participate and remain in the labour market is intrinsically linked to the support available to help women balance family and professional responsibilities” (p. 175). In order to implement this strategy, the government planned to adopt more family-friendly work measures, such as flextime, part-time and special leave. It is essential to take various measures to maintain a balance in women’s personal life and improve their working conditions: “including provisions for a 60-day maternity leave, allotted time (two hours a day for a year) to breastfeed a baby and extended care leave for women with disabled children under age of 6” (p. 175). The target here is to: “put in place measures that support working women, including revising the current human resources law and maternity leave policy” (p. 175). Based on the literature review, the main objective of the study is to measure whether these strategies have been implemented in the labour market and to identify the factors affecting marital instability.

3. Methodology

The research utilized a cross-sectional design whereby primary data was collected using questionnaire guided interviews and analyzed quantitatively. The data was collected by the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) at Qatar University in collaboration with the Doha International Family Institute (DIFI) in 2017.
The survey sampled Qataris working women and men. Sampling plays a critical part in any survey process since the ability to make any valid inference to the population, which is the target of the investigation, relies upon a rigorous sampling design. A total of 824 individuals purposively sampled from private and public institutions were surveyed. Informed consent was obtained and respondent’s identification details were not collected for the purposes of maintain their privacy and confidentiality in the study.

The structured questionnaire was prepared and respondent administered. The questionnaire is designed to collect all necessary information related to the study. It was programmed into a CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interview) system using BLAISE software. After the data collection, all individual interviews were merged and saved in a single BLAISE data file. This dataset was then cleaned, coded and saved in STATA formats for analysis of the data, including the ordered logistic regressions, marginal effects, and predicted probabilities discussed in the following section. Returned questionnaires were reviewed for completeness after which only 807 were found to be completely filled and thus valid for analysis. The analysis is restricted to Qataris who are employed and married as the theory deals primarily with citizens, which is allowable given the sampling method.

The study used several statistical tools to analyze the data. Simple descriptive statistics were done statistics as well as inferential tests was applied to interpret the data. One-way ANOVA, Independent samples t-test, and Chi-square test has been used in the study accompanied with regression analysis to determine relationship among variable.

3.1 Demographics

The population of the study comprised of individuals in with both husband and wife employed. Majority of the respondents were aged 45, 49 and 50 years in equal percentages whereby 71.25 were married and the majority (38.29%) highest level of education was university while 30.73% had attained secondary education. The participants were employed at different organizations and fields, including business, sociology, arts and humanities, media, health, education and psychology, whose spouses too were employed. Respondents who reported earning less than 40,000 monthly income were 39.53 % and the majority of respondents (55.14%) were very satisfied with their income. The size of the family ranged from one member to fifty five members with the most recurring size being five members.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Spouse Relationship

This section examines the relationship between women’s employment and spouse relationship. The socio demographic data is descriptively analyzed and data related to marital stability is analytically interpreted. Women’s role as an employee and breadwinner is a positive change on the gender equity platform but simultaneously it is having implications on spouse relationship and family life. The data shows the spouse relationship from the point of view of married working individuals whose spouse too were employed. The findings showed that most participants had encountered several challenges in their marital life, which called other aspects into question.

The marital stability has been measured on the basis of three major indicators as found through extensive review of the past literature. They are listed below:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Indicators (Dependent Variable)</th>
<th>Possible Determining Factors (Independent Variable)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>My relationship with my spouse is very stable.</td>
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</table>
Our relationship is strong.
I really feel like part of a team with my spouse.
My relationship with my spouse makes me happy.

### Affection and Happiness

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<tr>
<th>Rate degree of happiness in their relationship with their spouse.</th>
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### Intimacy

- Insufficient time together
- Rearing children
- Housework
- Work demands (e.g., hours, workload)
- Financial matters
- Communication

Marital life satisfaction is measured with four item 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Somewhat agree, 3 = Somewhat disagree and 4 = Strongly disagree). To analyze the average scores of 807-sample participant, the data shows that all the mean scores depict that Qatar working couples are satisfied with their married life.

Regarding affection and happiness for married working couples; participants were asked to rate their degree of happiness in their relationship with their spouse compared to other relationships using a scale from 1 to 10 where the middle point, “happy,” represents the degree of happiness which most people get from relationships. The mean scores of affection and happiness are measured on the scale and reveal the level of affection between couples and marital life happiness of the working couples. Around 42% of participants reported that they are perfectly happy in their relationship with their spouses. Overall, this finding reveal that the working couples are happy with their married life because their level of happiness is high.

Several factors can affect marital instability and cause conflict in marriage. Participates were asked about how often certain problems do occur in their marital relationship which can be considered as indicators for intimacy such as work demands, financial management, family and relatives, lack of communication, leisure time and sharing household activities. This is measured with four item 4-point Likert scale (1 = Always, 2 = often, 3 = Seldom and 4 = Never).

The household is important for the conduct of relations between men and women. Significant life experiences might somehow affect the marital life of individuals. Yet the findings shows that most working couples are generally happy with financial management, family life and their social circle, which indicates that working couples have affectionate relationship. However, several problems do occur in their marital relationship. A key problem in marital relationships today is strained and sometimes total lack of communication between marital partners. For instance, 30% of working couples may felt that they have insufficient time together. This might be because of pressures of their workloads, which had affected their family life, time schedule, social communication with others.

Moreover, 23% of participants claimed that they fight with their spouses about the work demands issues (e.g., hours, workload). These might be overwhelmed by their double burden, and they could not create the required balance between the two domains (i.e., home and workplace). Particularly, women’s employment has contributed to most of the problems associated with marital relationships. Working women mostly face family conflicts caused by their participation in the labor market, or they have to cope with the additional pressure in order to fulfil their family duties (i.e., balancing domestic chores and career responsibilities). Women are increasingly taking on more engaging roles in the modern day workforce, which means that they have increased workloads and work demands characterized by long working hours. In this regard, they are also less available for their spouses both physically and emotionally (Maciver & Dimkpa, 2012). Because long working hours rob women of the time spent with their families, therefore they may not be willing to take jobs with long working hours (Berrebi, Martorell & Tanner,
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2009). For instance, some conservative individuals still consider that home is the women’s place because women are not able to reconcile the responsibilities of home and work.

Furthermore, more couples are now forced to work in shifts to look after the children. Around twenty percent of participants claimed that they often fight about issues related to rearing children. As a result, there is no time for communication and couples are likely to talk at each other instead of communicating during the little time they spend together like on weekends. When this happens, disputes and conflicts are likely to remain unresolved as they accumulate until couples get to a point where they cannot stand each other and one decides to leave the union or separate.

Financial matters are very common among working couples whereby despite the woman working, she will still expect the man to be the sole breadwinner and the man may decide to lag behind in his duties because he knows the wife is also earning (Robb, 2005). However, the data shows that disagreement about financial matters is either seldom (37%) or never happen (39%).

These findings shows that there is a positive correlation between women employment and marital instability. As women get increased and more demanding responsibilities at work they have less time for housework and taking care of children. Based on the economic contribution they make to the household, they are likely to demand that their husbands support them in childcare and house chores and this is not something most men are likely to embrace (Jalovaara, 2003). When women feel unsupported and unappreciated, they are likely to consider the marriage unsatisfactory which in turn leads to separation or divorce because women have the resources to sustain themselves. In-laws have also been noted to be a major cause of problems in marital relationships. Studies have shown that sometimes when a wife makes more money than the husband, the husband becomes insecure and in-laws begin to interfere in the couple's marriage (Maciver & Dinkpa, 2012). When this is done on a constant basis, it may end up being too unbearable for the wife who then decides to walk away from the marriage either through separation or divorce.

4. Conclusion

The present paper provided evidence on the employment-instability linkage. Qatar continues to encourage the active participation of women in the labour market. However, the issue arises some concerns about the ability of women to be employees and fulfil their responsibilities to the family. Qatar is a state in which laws are designed, at least to some extent, in accordance with a traditional religious agenda. The development of the country is supposed to occur with the family at the center. In this context, the participation of women in the labour market should be limited by her duties to the family, such as raising children and promoting traditional values. Therefore, Qatar women face the problem of prioritising the tasks related to work and the family.

A combination of social policy recommendations for policy makers could pave the way to develop both marital stability and women’s career progress and provide specific guidelines to reduce barriers to their development. Although Qatar government has implemented several human rights and gender equality document, it is apparent that there are no clear mechanisms to ensure that governmental organizations actually implement state policies. Therefore, procedural steps should be taken to enforce adherence to frameworks by governmental institutions and to amend existing legislation to tackle the challenges faced by women such as promoting work/family policies.

The enforcement and the implementation of comprehensive policies that acts in accordance with the
requirements of labour market whereby it would improve the lives of Qatari families broadly can be achieved through several significant steps:

1) updating the Human Recourses Law of 2016 to provide flexible working hours for working women, and incorporate part-time, job sharing or other reduced-hours options;

2) providing an onsite childcare facility with proper staff qualifications to improve the personal and professional life of women, as it has a positive contribution towards the development of children; and

3) raising awareness among the nation regarding the significance of practicing shared responsibility among family members.

References