

## Socio-Economic Profile of Home Based Women Workers (HBWWs) in Shoe Making Industry: A Case Study from District Lahore

Iram Shahid<sup>1</sup>, Sitwat Farooq<sup>2</sup> Hafiza Faiza Arshad<sup>3</sup>

1. Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Govt. Post Graduate College for Women, Kamoke, Gujranwala, Punjab, Pakistan
3. M. Phil Scholar, Department of Social Work, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

### Abstract

*Home-based women workers constitute the largest part of the informal work force in Pakistan. However, for decades, they have been invisible and no official data are available even about their socioeconomic statuses. Specifically, females belonging to shoe making industry are unrecognized and excluded from mainstream economy. This scarcity of data not only excludes them from main workforce of the country but also leads towards absence of any policy formation regarding their rights and wages. Thus, present study aims to explore the socio-economic profile of home-based women workers specifically in shoe making industry apart from general leather industry. Using two staged non probability sampling, 200 respondents were interviewed from four hubs of Lahore while results are presented in simple figures with percentages. The study revealed that mostly women supplement their family income but poverty is still a static concept for them. This data will also explore the preferences, options, determinants of specific setup and their demographics. It will also help in analyzing further trends and problems of HBWWs in Pakistan.*

**Key Words:** Home Based Workers, Shoe Making Industry, Socio-Economic Status

### Introduction

According Informal sector in Pakistan has emerged as one of the major employment hub in recent years. It comprises of multiple units that involves production of different items in order to generate income for people (Blunch, Canagarajah, & Raju, 2001). Since the world is facing economic and financial turmoil, the job market is not providing enough opportunities for people which have created a desperate situation of scarcity all around the world. A major dimension of this set back is the economic downturn in third world countries including Pakistan (Shah, 2007). The low-income families or people belonging to lower-class usually suffer the most due to the economic recession. In such a situation, many people in Pakistan are seeking jobs in informal sector to support their families and to overcome the financial burden (Ali & Afzal, 2012).

Home based workers are the core of Informal industry. These are the employees who carry out work within their homes for wages or recompense by providing service or product specified by the proprietor, employer, or business manager (Carr, Chen & Tate, 2000). These workers are contributing members of their families and own-account employees who are involve in the provision of services within their living space as the production process is usually carried out in their own homes (Masuo, Walker & Furry, 1992). According to HomeNet South Asia's

Kathmandu Declaration, South Asia constitutes 50 million of total 100 million home based workers worldwide. Within this 50 million more than 80% of workers are women. However, the data available is not calculated from every region (Donna, 2007). Number of Home based workers in Pakistan is also vague and it is usually exhibited through estimated figures of workers in informal industry. A projected ratio of women in informal sector is approximately 50% and within this ratio around 83% of women are home based workers (Homenet Pakistan, 2005).

Home based work is an evident source of earning for women in Pakistan. It is important to note that previously, families in Pakistan did not use to encourage women employment (Khattak & Sayeed, 2000). However, now, the situation has changed dramatically because of the financial crisis that has compelled women to leave their homes in search of jobs. Most employers correspondingly want women as home-based workers for the reason that there is more flexibility for them in terms of working hours and wages (Dale, Fieldhouse, Shaheen&Kalra, 2002). Women workers constitute a major part of this category for multiple economic and social constraints. Women working from home are usually linked with weaving, craft, garment and shoe making industries (Khan, 2007).

Footwear industry of Pakistan is one the mega industries which has flourished mainly on local resources and consumption. On average the export of Pakistani footwear is around \$200 million which significantly determine price of each pair as \$10 (Akhtar, Zakir& Ghani, 2008). However, the socioeconomic status of labor force behind the fundamentals of this industry portrays a backward and oppressed status. Similarly, the circumstances of home based workers associated with this industry are far behind normal and recommended working conditions (Akhtar & Vanek, 2013).

Shoe making industry in Pakistan is an eminent source of earning for many home based women workers. It is mainly distinguished by significant association of middlemen with home based workers in order to assign and evaluate their tasks. Absence of contract and registration of these workers give resourceful liaisons a fair chance to exploit them by depriving them from basic work place facilities (Shahab & Mahmood, 2012).

The community of women employed in informal sector and particularly in shoemaking is subjected to great gender discrimination than in formal economy and public sector. Women in the following industry face severe health issues without any compensation and social security. Regardless of the fact that HBWWs in footwear industry give up all the amenities of workplace which majorly includes preventive and precautionary measures yet they are remunerated with low wages (Carr & Chen, 2002).

## **Literature Review**

In the home based division, over time, the process of degradation of women evolved in the harsh environment of informal labor relations. Not only women are more prone to exploitation in home based industry but also it largely affects their physiological, social, and economic status. All these viewpoints and opinions have strong socio-economic implications. According to Akhtar (2011), the informal sector

is most commonly known as the grey economy as it is a key part of the economic sector in South Asia including Pakistan. At the same time, fluctuations in this sector are not included in Pakistan's "gross domestic product" or "gross national product". Baidaric (2011) stated that people working in the informal sector are self-employed and these workers are not on payrolls and therefore they are not counted as a part of mainstreamed economy. In addition, it is worth knowing that this sector is not monitored or taxed by government. However this flexibility also opens more ways of exploitation for them in terms of unfair and unjustified payment for their work and absence of social security benefits.

Saigol (2010) estimated that one fourth of Pakistan's economy is contributed through informal sector. Informal division majorly contributes 32% of the labor force in wholesale and retail, around 21% to the industrial manufacturing, 17.5% in domestic and social sector and almost 24% in transport and construction.

Chen & Chan (1999) investigated the impact of material used in shoe making industries of China on workers within small enterprises. They indicated that aplastic anemia was much prevailed among workers in shoe industry and their risk of infliction was 5.8 times higher than the rest of the population. This study also marked deteriorating impact of adhesive benzene among workers of footwear industry. Budlender (2009) found that many informal workers carry out their business in unsecured and unprotected places. Following study also highlighted major factors dragging socio-economic status of women workers associated with shoe making industry. It investigated that unfair payment per piece for HMWWs and hazardous working conditions without any protective measures are most prior issues for them.

Chhachhi (2009) argued that home based industrial employees are a very sensitive part of informal economy characterized by latent and dynamic character of middleman, blurred working boundaries, hectic working hours and in terms of complexity of the statistical determination of the level, scale, intensity and other socially significant parameters of employees. Kabeer (2012) indicated that informal sector consists of two million home based women workers in Pakistan. Most of them are employed in construction, manufacturing, shoe making, vending and domestic work. This study also figured out that more than 80% of the HMWWs get paid through per piece rate and their wages remain same for years regardless of market fluctuations.

Fields (1990) explained that globalization, technology development, migration, demographic trends, climate change are the core issues which are not addressed for home based workers. This study also emphasized that the lack of direct access to market among home based women workers expose them to more economic exploitation and they live by minimum wages offered in return to their hectic work. Chen, Jhabvala & Lund (2002) argued that the payment strategy for HMWWs as per piece rate is only beneficial and convenient for industrial owners and middlemen as they save the expenses of utilities, workplace, transport and only pay for labor per product.

The problem of inadequate housing is another big challenge for HBWWs in shoe making industry as their home serves as a workplace. It is not possible for them

to accept work orders in bulk if there is no storage space and the risk of harm from adhesive and harmful material is extremely high. Apart from that there is no definite boundary between their working and living space thus the exposure of their family members to hazardous material is as high as of their own (Srinivas, 2008).

One of the social consequences of the powerlessness of informally employed people is the exploitation of their efforts through underestimation of wages. Khan, Sultan, Zamani & Rahman (2013) identified that majority of home based employed women in shoe making industry have low socioeconomic background and it enhances their exposure to the cons of home based working industry. This study has also highlighted the great difference between prices paid to home based worker per piece rate with that of product sold in the market. Prime findings of this analysis declared unfair wages the sole reason of oppressed social status of home based workers.

Sinha (2006) elaborated that home based women workers are also considered as less competitive in the labor market and are compelled to do multitasking to put up with the need to combine household duties and work. The findings of following study depicted that on average, the total time of employment for home based women workers per week is twice than that of men and they are usually paid very unjustified amount for their work.

The basis of different positions of men and women in labor market and in economic sphere contribute more towards low social status of women. Even in informal industry women are far behind a deserving and ideal status of working women. Despite the high level of labor activity of women that took shape in the second half of the 20th century, an unwritten "social contract" still exists which enshrines the 'role distribution' in the family and the work sphere. This traditional "social contract" remains firmly attached to women in the working world (Blossfeld & Huinink, 1991). Not only they have the primary responsibility for housekeeping and child care but also they manage working from home in very shredded environment (Gallin, 2001).

The alignment of positions in labor activity should be complemented by the alignment of positions in the household (Burgess & Borgida, 1999). But in reality, the role of HBWWs is stressful both physically and mentally. Considering the role of state in this dimension, the heavy workload of women managing household and work can be easily "corrected" either by administrative or political means. Furthermore, significant incentives in the labor market are also effective substitute which evidently lack in developing countries like Pakistan. The present study is an effort to highlight the issues faced by HBWWs particularly the community linked with shoe making industry. It also inquires adverse impact of invisibility of home based women workers that deprive them from acquiring a better socioeconomic status in society (Hassan & Azman, 2014).

## **Material and Methods**

It is a cross sectional and exploratory study facilitated (but not funded) by Home Net Pakistan. Because of scarce research in shoe making sector, no scientific data was available to draw sample. However, Home-based work households involved in shoe-making are generally residing in clusters and locations were identified by

Home Net Pakistan. Thus, using Two Staged Non-probability sampling procedure, 200 HBWWs of ages between 18 – 65 years were selected from four hubs (Muhajirabad, Shadrah, Ghaziabad and Batapur) of Lahore district. Piece-rate workers and own account workers were included in the sample but no special effort was made to distinguish between them for getting data. Data was collected through interview schedule as most of the respondents were illiterate and unable to understand the meaning and context of questions. Variables include socio-demographic characteristics of respondents such as age, education, familial income, socio – economic status, marital status, type of family structure and duration of work, etc.

## Results and Discussion

The sample of the study included 200 respondents from shoe making industry between ages of 18 – 50 years. Majority of them (26.5%) were between 18 – 25 years. Most of the respondents were illiterate (53.5%) and were married (63.5) whereas major occupation of husbands or fathers was laborer (44.1%). They were living in the nuclear family system (76.5%) with 5 -7 family members (53.3%).

From total sample, 61.5% were residing in their own houses within the premises of 3 – 4 marlas (41.0%) while the construction of houses was stated as Pacca house by majority of respondents (42.5%).

A vast majority of women (93.0%) was working as piece rate workers with 1 – 5 years of work experience (39.5). While another majority (31.0%) was working for more than 11 years.

From married respondents, mostly respondents (90.9%) started their work before marriages. Major reason for this occupation (59.7) was to supplement the household income. Therefore, a vast majority (84.5%) got training for work with involvement of other family members (57.5%).

The respondents were receiving very low wages as more than half of women were receiving (55.0%) only Rs. 1500 – 5400 as total familial income per month while the schedule of payments was weekly for majority (80.6%). Work for respondents was not available of regular bases as most of them (56.4%) were dependent on the availability of work. Most of the respondents were satisfied with their work.

Majority of the respondents (97.5%) did not know about the existing organization working for home based workers and most of them (94.5%) did not avail any loan for work. Only 5.5% of total respondents availed loan and Kashf Foundation (54.5%) was major microfinance organization.

Mostly respondents were receiving their incomes themselves (80.5%) and work for 6 – 8 hours per day (58.0%). While stating suggestions regarding improvements in working conditions majority of respondents (30.5%) desired increase in wages to support familial income (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Socio demographic characteristics of respondents (N=200)**

Variables	Frequencies (%) N = 200
<b>Age of Respondents</b>	
18 – 25	53 (26.5)
26 – 33	32 (16.0)
34 – 41	49 (24.5)
42 – 49	29 (17.5)
≥ 50	37 (18.5)
<b>Educational Qualification</b>	
Illiterate	107 (53.5)
Primary	42 (21.0)
Middle	32 (16.0)
Matric and above	19 (9.5)
<b>Marital Status of the Respondents</b>	
Never Married	34 (17.0)
Presently Married	127 (63.5)
Widow	27 (13.5)
Divorced / Separated	12 (6.0)
<b>Family Structure</b>	
Nuclear	153 (76.5)
Joint & Extended	47 (23.5)
<b>Number of Family Member</b>	
2-4	39 (19.5)
5-7	107 (53.5)
> 8	54 (27.0)
<b>Father's/Husband's Occupation</b>	
Laborer	68 (44.1)
Self Employed	7 (4.5)
Govt./Private Job	46 (29.8)
H.B Shoe Makers	6 (3.8)
Unemployed	27 (17.5)
*This question is applicable to 154 respondents; fathers of 7 respondents were died.	*154
<b>Possession of the House</b>	
Own	123 (61.5)
Rented	71 (35.5)
Parents' House	3 (1.5)
House Given for living without rent	3 (1.5)
<b>Rent of the House</b>	
1500 – 2400	9 (12.6)
2401 – 3400	21 (29.5)
3401 – 4400	23 (32.3)
4401 – 5400	6 (3.0)
	9 (4.5)

5401 – 6400	3 (1.5)
<b>Area of the House</b>	
1-2 Marla	71 (35.5)
3-4 Marla	82 (41.0)
5-6 Marla	37 (18.5)
≥ 7 Marla	10 (5.0)
<b>Nature of Construction of House</b>	
Kacha	19 (9.5)
Pacca	85 (42.5)
Semi-Pacca	96 (48.0)
<b>Nature of Work</b>	
Self Employed	14 (7.0)
Piece-rate Worker	186 (93.0)
<b>Duration of work (in years)</b>	
> 1	10 (5.0)
1-5	79 (39.5)
6-10	49 (24.5)
≥ 11	62 (31.0)
<b>Starting of work</b>	
Before Marriage	151 (90.9)
After Marriage	15 (9.0)*
*This question was applicable to 166 respondents.	
<b>Reasons for Doing this Work</b>	
To Supplement the Household Income	168 (59.7)
Education of Siblings/Children	30 (10.6)
Domestic Labour / Family Trend	26 (9.2)
Unemployment of Father/Husband	19 (6.7)
Disaster occurrence	17 (6.0)
Have no other skill	6 (2.1)
No other work available	6 (2.1)
Dowry	6 (2.1)
Flexibility to meet other domestic responsibilities	3 (1.0)
	*281
*This table has multiple responses	
<b>Involvement of the Family Members in Work</b>	
Yes	115 (57.5)
No	85 (42.5)
<b>Received any training of work</b>	
Yes	169 (84.5)
No	31 (15.5)
<b>Family Income per Month from this Work</b>	
1500-5400	110 (55.0)
	48 (24.0)

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5401-9400	20 (10.0)
9401-13400	22 (11.0)
≥ 13401	
<b>Schedule of Payments to the Respondents</b>	
Weekly	150 (80.6)
Fortnightly	5 (2.6)
Monthly	11 (5.9)
On Delivery	10 (5.3)
On Demand	10 (5.3)
	*186
*This question is applicable to 186 respondents	
<b>Availability of Work</b>	
Regularly	57 (30.6)
Periodically	4 (2.1)
Seasonally	20 (10.7)
On basis of availability	105 (56.4)
	*186
*This question was applicable to 186 respondents	
<b>Satisfaction Level Regarding Income</b>	
To Great Extent	7
To Some Extent	6
Not at All	1
	*14
*This question was applicable to only 14 respondents.	
<b>Knowledge about Union/Organization working for HBWs</b>	
Yes	5 (2.5)
No	195 (97.5)
<b>Availing Loan for work</b>	
Yes	11 (5.5)
No	189 (94.5)
<b>Sources of Loan</b>	
Kashf Foundation	6 (54.5)
Akhuwat	4 (36.3)
Brother	1 (9.0)
	*11
*This question was applicable to 11 respondents	
<b>Working Hours per Day</b>	
3 – 5	44 (22.0)
6 – 8	116 (58.0)
≥ 9	40 (20.0)
<b>Income Receivers</b>	
Self	161 (80.5)
Husband	17 (8.5)
Parents	12 (6.0)
Son	7 (3.5)
In Laws	3 (1.5)

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### **Suggestions by the Respondents for Improving Conditions and Removing their Problems**

	38 (8.2)
Provision of interest free loans	15 (3.2)
Provisions of machines on easy installment	140 (30.5)
Increase in wages	110 (24.0)
Availability of regular work	50 (10.9)
Payment equal to male workers	20 (4.3)
Financial assistance for dowry	25 (5.4)
Houses on easy installment	60 (13.1)
Free, quality medical treatment	*458
*This question carried 458 multiple responses.	

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### **Conclusion**

Women home-based workers in shoe making industries are an additional part of invisible and uncounted labor force which contributes significantly to country's economy but lack recognition (Absar, 2001). In Pakistan, HBWWs are in substantial number yet they live by low socioeconomic indicators and are deprived from basic work facilities (Hassan & Azman 2014).

Home based women workers in shoe making industry encounter severe dispossessions. They are unaware of their legal rights and barely understand the importance of contract in their employment sector (Unni & Rani, 2001). They live in constant fear of losing jobs and avoid bargaining with middlemen. HBWWs work within confined living space for long hours and they lack all the basic amenities required for their operational work (Appadurai, 1990). Among all other deteriorating factors, occupational health risks, lack of awareness on rights, exploitation of middlemen, unreasonable working hours, low wages and harmful working conditions are more alarming (Hassan, 2014).

In Pakistan, the industrial sector is afflicted with corruption, venality, and fraud. Likewise, the government has not been able to make successful industrial reforms for the last couple of decades, which has caused the poor and deprived people to seek alternative resources in order to make their living. Informal sector also remains ignored in policy making and federal and provincial budget allocation. Despite the substantial efforts put into action by the non-governmental and human rights organizations, this issue is gaining enormity (Sudarshan & Sinha, 2011).

In the present study, poverty has come out as one of the most problematic issue faced by home based women workers. The findings revealed that around 55% of the respondents receive income between 1500-5400 per week and 56.4% of the total respondents expressed that the consistency of their work engagement depends on the availability of work which creates a constant fear among them with respect to their job security. Data of following study also figured out that 53.5% of the respondents were illiterate and their source of work training was their own family

members. This dimension also confirms that HBWWs are not trained officially by their agencies and because majority of them is uneducated so they are unaware of their rights as employees.

Evident findings of this research indicate that HBWWs in footwear industry are living beyond healthy and normal living standards. They are more prone to deteriorating health issues as they lack all the required preventive measures recommended in their industry. Not only they survive on low wages but also they are excluded in terms of opportunities and social security (Kazmi, Khan & Khattak 2005). In addition, they also lack quality education and their access to advance training in their occupation is very rare. Thus, it limits their chances to do better in their profession. The role of home based women workers in the economy of this country is highly productive yet they are underprivileged and possess low socioeconomic status (Sudharshan & Jhabyala, 2006).

### **Recommendations**

- There is a dire need of Legislation and implementation on laws made for home based workers to facilitate them for decent working hours with fixed wages.
- Mainstreaming of HBWWs should be assured by registering them under the relevant departments. Their visibility will open ways for them to enjoy social security benefits.
- There must be formal and legal documentation of Agreement between middleman and HBWWs to save them from exploitation.
- Micro-credit loan schemes should be more accessible on easy conditions for HBWWs to avail.
- Home based women workers should be given advance skills training through public and non-government institutes to aware them about the new trends of the market. It will help them in getting along with changing trends and eventually improve their earnings.
- NGOs must be directly involved in investigating the transparency of working conditions for home based women workers.
- Media should keenly highlight the violations faced by Home based women workers to relevant regulatory agencies for action.
- HBWWs should get the justified payment for their work which must be close to market rates.
- There should be inclusive interaction between all the stakeholders in home based industry to sell their products on better price per piece rate.
- Home based workers must have access to all the work place facilities so that they could have a better working environment to minimize the occupational health issues of workers along their families.

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