

Household Labor, Mental Health and Job Satisfaction: Evidence from Female Domestic Workers in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined psychological distress, resilience, and job satisfaction among the women household workers in Pakistan with consideration of family system (joint vs. nuclear) and area of residence (urban vs. rural). A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 500 women aged 20–58 years ($M = 36.4$, $SD = 8.2$) recruited through purposive sampling in Gujrat and Sialkot. Standardized measures including the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale, Brief Resilience Scale, and Job Satisfaction Survey were administered. Results revealed that women living in joint families reported significantly lower psychological distress ($M = 14.48$, $SD = 6.09$) than those in nuclear families ($M = 17.43$, $SD = 5.23$; $t = 5.77$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.52$). Similarly, joint-family participants scored higher on job satisfaction ($M = 89.76$) compared to nuclear-family participants ($M = 72.90$; $t = -5.98$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.54$). Urban workers demonstrated lower distress ($M = 14.39$) but greater job satisfaction ($M = 88.17$) than rural workers ($M = 17.37$; $t = 5.83$, $p = .022$). Findings underscore that socio-cultural contexts, particularly collective family support, buffer psychological distress and enhance well-being among female household labors in Pakistan. Despite the financial advantages of urban employment, city-based workers face heightened stressors linked to exploitation and social stigma. The study highlights the urgent need for labor protections, mental health resources, and culturally informed interventions to improve the resilience and psychological well-being of this marginalized yet essential workforce.

Keywords: Job Satisfaction, Household Labor, Mental Health, Women, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

The most vulnerable and undermined group include household labors and especially women in South Asia, especially in Pakistan. Their precarious situation is often not visible in the official statistics on labor and not covered by labor rights policy, which makes it even more challenging (Rehman et al., 2023). These are women, predominantly unprivileged families, and in many cases, rural migrants, who do unrecognized domestic labor, being exploited and shunned by society (Riaz et al., 2019).

Pakistan is home to a high number of female labors who are engulfed by the informal economy, and household labor is one of the major industries (Shahzadi et al., 2025). Domestic labor is not recognized as a formal work arrangement, thus leaving little job security, lack of contracts, and negligent adherence to the minimum wage laws (ILO, 2020). Women domestic workers have to work too long, experience abuse of verbal and physical nature, and because they are women and work informally, they are doubly

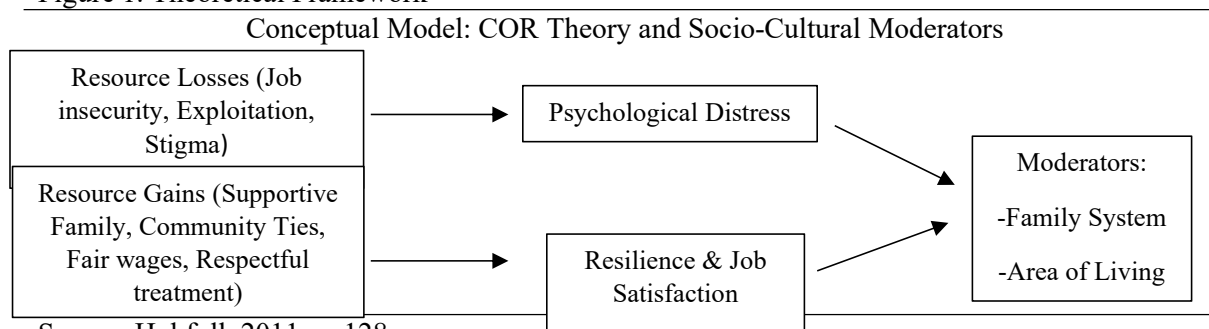
stigmatized (Majid, 2020). Rural-to-urban migration path complicates their realities, which are offering them employment opportunities and subjecting them to increased costs of living and employment insecurity (Mahmood et al., 2023).

These workers have a serious psychological toll as studies have reported a rise in anxiety, depression, and helplessness because of their employment (Ali and Zaman, 2025). However, resilience emerges through social support, strong family networks, and community solidarity (Maqsood et al., 2025). Mental health depends on job satisfaction which is achieved through the payment of fair wages and being respected, in which burnout and distress are caused by dissatisfaction (Husain et al., 2022).

These women are affected by the family systems; either joint or nuclear. The family support, emotional support, and financial support are usually offered by joint families, and the nuclear families might cause isolation and stress as a result of being left alone (Bashir et al., 2029). Resilience is also influenced by living conditions because urban locations provide better wages and, in most cases, can be accompanied by exploitation and discrimination (Maqsood et al., 2025). Although rural settings restrict employment options, they may also encourage community support, so the key to enhancing the psychological health of domestic workers is to comprehend such a phenomenon (Shahzadi et al., 2025).

Women working in domestic settings suffer and are exposed to psychological distress due to precarious working conditions and marginalization, which causes a high level of anxiety and depression, especially in South Asia (Shafeeq et al., 2022). Their vulnerability is increased by low salaries, harassment, and legal protection deficiency (Shaikh et al., 2023). Pakistan In Pakistan, the work status is stigmatized, making work inferior, which also affects the self-esteem and worsens the isolation condition (Zia et al., 2024). A resilience that is formed through social networks and family backing is crucial in dealing with adversity. Joint families provide emotional and practical help and nuclear families can leave women alone (Thakkar, 2021). Job satisfaction is associated with psychological well-being; decent treatment and decent pay contribute to satisfaction and decreases distress (Zulfiqar, 2021). The disparities between rural and urban living conditions impact the opportunities and support networks and determine general well-being. Although there is current research, there are certain gaps in the knowledge about the psychological outcomes, resilience, and socio-cultural factors that affect the experience of domestic workers.

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework



Source: Hobfoll, 2011, p. 128

This paper utilizes the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory previously to examine the psychological constructs psychological distress, resilience, and job satisfaction among Pakistani female domestic workers. COR postulates that stress arises from perceived resource threats, actual losses, or unreciprocated resource investments (Hobfoll, 1989). Household workers face job insecurity, low wages, and stigma, leading to distress. Resilience emerges from social support and personal strengths, while job satisfaction increases with resources like fair wages and respect. Socio-cultural moderators, such as

family systems and living areas, affect resource availability: joint families offer support, while urban settings present wage opportunities with resource losses (Rehman et al., 2023).

The study explores psychological distress, resilience, and job satisfaction among female domestic workers in Pakistan, highlighting the mental health issues faced by the marginalized group. By considering family systems and living areas as moderating factors, it addresses neglected socio-cultural dynamics in labor and mental health research. Findings aim to guide policymakers and NGOs in developing interventions for improved well-being. While existing literature touches on economic exploitation and gender discrimination, there is limited research on the psychological effects and socio-cultural influences on coping strategies in this context, revealing a crucial knowledge gap.

Hypothesis

H1: Female household labors living in joint family systems significantly report higher job satisfaction than those in nuclear families.

H2: Female household labors from urban areas significantly report higher psychological distress compared to those from rural areas.

METHODS

Research Design and Participants

A correlational research design was used to collect data to make inferences about condition of women working in different workplace. The sample population was based on the women working regularly and respondents are taken overall from different Gujrat and Sialkot public and private institutions. By using purposive sampling technique 500 working ladies were contracted.

Instruments

In order to collect data self-built demographic sheet along with Kessler Psychological Distress-Urdu version scale (Ghafoor, Sitwat & Kausar, 2016) was used. The respondents were asked to rate the 6 items of (KPD) on the Likert scale (1 none of the time to 5 all of the time). The brief resilience scale-Urdu version (Khan & Batool, 2020) was used as second assessment tool. This scale includes 6 items with five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), indicating its frequency and intensity of resilience. Lastly, job satisfaction survey-Urdu version (Abbas & Khanam, 2020) was used, it includes 36 items with six-point scale from (strongly disagree to strongly agree). Before the questionnaires were given out, the participants' verbal consent was obtained to confirm their willingness to be involved in the study. Independent sample T-test analysis was calculated for descriptive analysis.

Procedure

A cross-sectional survey design was employed. The sample comprised 500 female household workers aged between 20 and 58 years, recruited through purposive sampling from Gujrat and Sialkot, Pakistan. Inclusion criteria required participants to be regularly employed as household labors, with a minimum of one year of work experience. After obtaining verbal consent, participants were briefed about the study's purpose in simple and culturally appropriate language. Data were collected individually through structured interviews to accommodate participants with limited literacy. Standardized Urdu versions of the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K-6), Brief Resilience Scale, and Job Satisfaction Survey were administered. Each session took approximately 25–30 minutes. Demographic information, including age, marital status, family system (joint or nuclear), and area of residence (urban or rural), was recorded.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to the ethical principles of the **American Psychological Association (APA, 2017)**. Participation was voluntary, and verbal informed consent was obtained due to varying literacy levels among participants. Respondents were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any stage without consequences. No identifying information was recorded. The instruments used were culturally adapted and had previously established validity in the Pakistani context. Care was taken to ensure that questions were asked respectfully, without reinforcing stigma or distress. The study was conducted with sensitivity to participants' socio-economic vulnerabilities, and findings were reported in aggregate form to prevent identification. Institutional approval was obtained from the university's ethics review committee prior to data collection.

RESULTS

The sample's demographic characteristics show that most participants were aged 31-40 (32.2%), followed by 41-50 (28.0%) and 20-30 (20.6%), with the least from the 51-58 range (19.2%). A majority were single (57.6%), with others being widowed (18.8%) or divorced (14.4%). Most had three to five children (46.8%), and family structures included joint (47.0%) and nuclear families (53.0%). Urban (50.4%) and rural (49.6%) living arrangements were almost equal. Most participants were in lower socioeconomic classes, primarily earning between 3,000 to 7,000 yen (50.4%), surveyed by 8,000 to 11,000 (33.0%) (Table 1, Table 2). The findings revealed significant mean difference on basis of family system, nuclear family household workers face greater psychological distress ($M=17.43$) compared to joint family workers ($M=14.48$), alongside increased resilience and job satisfaction (Table 3). Where as, rural workers experience more distress ($M=17.37$) and lower job satisfaction ($M=75.40$) than urban workers ($M=14.39$, $M=88.17$) (Table 4).

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentage of Demographic Variables of the Age, Marital Status and Number of Children (N=500)

| Variables | Categories | <i>F</i> | % |
|---------------------------|-------------|----------|------|
| Age Group of Participants | | | |
| | 20-30 years | 103 | 20.6 |
| | 31-40 years | 161 | 32.2 |
| | 41-50 years | 140 | 28.0 |
| | 51-58 years | 96 | 19.2 |
| Marital Status | | | |
| | Married | 46 | 9.2 |
| | Unmarried | 288 | 57.6 |
| | Divorced | 72 | 14.4 |
| | Widow | 94 | 18.8 |
| Number of Children | | | |

| | | |
|-----|-----|------|
| 0-2 | 127 | 25.4 |
| 3-5 | 234 | 46.8 |
| 6-8 | 139 | 27.8 |

Note: F = Frequency, % = Percentage

Table 2

Frequencies and Percentage of Demographic Variables of the Family System, Area of Living, Socioeconomic Status and Monthly Level of Income (N=500)

| Variables | Categories | F | % |
|-------------------------|-------------|-----|------|
| Family System | | | |
| | Joint | 235 | 47.0 |
| | Nuclear | 265 | 53.0 |
| Area of Living | | | |
| | Rural | 248 | 49.6 |
| | Urban | 252 | 50.4 |
| Socioeconomic Status | | | |
| | Lower | 270 | 54.0 |
| | Middle | 230 | 46.0 |
| Monthly Level of Income | | | |
| | 3000-7000 | 252 | 50.4 |
| | 8000-11000 | 165 | 33.0 |
| | 12000-18000 | 83 | 16.6 |

Note: F = Frequency, % = Percentage

Table 3

Mean, Standard Deviation of in Relation to Family system

| Variables | Nuclear | | Joint | | t | p | Cohen's d |
|------------------------|---------|-------|-------|-------|--------|------|-----------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | |
| Psychological Distress | 17.43 | 5.239 | 14.48 | 6.092 | 5.771 | .000 | 0.519 |
| Job Satisfaction | 72.90 | 27.96 | 89.76 | 34.23 | -5.984 | .000 | -0.539 |

**p<.01

Table 4

Mean, Standard Deviation of in Relation to Area of living

| Variables | Rural | | Urban | | t | p | Cohen's <i>d</i> |
|------------------------|-------|--------|-------|--------|--------|------|------------------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | |
| Psychological Distress | 17.37 | 5.524 | 14.39 | 5.587 | 5.838 | .022 | 0.536 |
| Job Satisfaction | 75.40 | 30.577 | 88.17 | 33.187 | -4.472 | .049 | -0.400 |

**p<.01

DISCUSSION

Women working in household duties show that their effective performance helps decrease their psychological distress and enhances job satisfaction (Thakkar, 2021). Women belonging to nuclear family structures have higher psychological distress than those in joint families because they receive less social support and carry more domestic responsibilities (Hodzi et al., 2021). Joint family structures benefit their members with both shared work and familial support which helps them cope with stress more easily and enhances their endurance (Hussain et al., 2022). Research findings indicate that female family members in joint households perform better on tests of resilience along with satisfaction in their work than their counterparts residing in traditional nuclear households (Riaz et al., 2019).

Women in nuclear families reported higher psychological distress ($M = 17.43$) compared to those in joint families ($M = 14.48$), while joint family workers showed greater resilience and job satisfaction. These findings align with previous research suggesting that extended family systems provide emotional and instrumental support that buffers against stressors (Shah et al., 2022). Joint families are the most common protective social resources in collectivistic societies like Pakistan and increase resilience and diminish susceptibility to mental distress (Mahmood et al., 2023). On the other hand, women in nuclear families can feel lonely, have little support, and more responsibilities at home, which leads to more psychological tension (Hussain and Javed, 2021). These findings bring out the sociocultural significance of family systems in influencing the psychological well-being of women amid the marginalized labor groups.

The variation between residential areas also gives significant insights. The level of job satisfaction was greater in urban household workers ($M = 88.17$) than rural ones ($M = 75.40$), but contractively they claimed more psychological distress. This doubleness is an urban paradox of low-income environments where urban areas offer higher wages and opportunities and at the same time, they contain workers who are vulnerable to exploitation, discrimination, and social stigma (Ali & Zaman, 2025; Rehman et al., 2023). Although female workers in rural areas have fewer employment opportunities, they can enjoy more robust community connections, which help them become resilient (Khan et al., 2024). The results are in line with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2011) where stress is viewed as a result of loss of resources and failure to have an effective recovery. Urban migration can give Pakistani domestic workers a win in their financial benefits at the expense of emotional comfort. The results underscore the use of policy interventions to protect the psychological well-being of this vulnerable labor force, including protection labor laws, easily available mental health services, and community-based support programs (ILO, 2023; Zulfiqar and Batool, 2022).

Rural women are more psychologically distressed than urban women due to the absence of mental health resources and the increased workload (Khan, Ali & Shahzadi, 2024). Pakistani women are significantly affected in terms of their mental health and job satisfaction that relies on their family structure (Shafeeq, Naz & Awan, 2022). The level of job satisfaction among urban women is found to be high as compared to that of rural women (Mahmood et al., 2023). The urban women enjoy enhanced living standards coupled with equal roles in the house along with enhanced access to resources (Maqsood et al., 2025). The level of satisfaction is lower among rural women who spend more time at work but do not have enough support regarding their needs (Shaikh et al., 2023). The correlation of psychological distress causes reduced job satisfaction but the resilient people handle the stress better hence leading to increased levels of satisfaction hence necessitating greater resources and support in mental health (Shahzadi et al., 2025).

In Pakistan, where domestic work is not valued and is to a large extent unregulated, the results show that there is an urgent need to appreciate that female household labors are a vulnerable work force. The psychological distress can be reduced by strengthening family and community support systems and fair labor protection and it will result in increased resilience. Feminists, nongovernmental organizations and mental health experts should work together in such a way that women in domestic labor are not only sustaining themselves economically but also protecting their psyche.

Conclusion of the Study

The research question studied the psychological distress, resiliency and job satisfaction of female household labors showing disparities according to family systems and residence. Resilience and job satisfaction were reported to be greater among women in joint families, which revealed the relevance of family support in dealing with stress. On the other hand, urban participants were more psychologically distressed because of city demands and exploitation but better-paid because of higher earnings and employment opportunities. The mental health of domestic workers is greatly influenced by social-cultural backgrounds. Although the financial gain of urban jobs is noteworthy, it is complemented by emotional stress, which confirms the necessity of developing stronger social support networks and equitable labor relations to improve the quality of life of the vulnerable population.

Limitations and Recommendations

The study's limitations include a sample focused on female household labors in Sialkot and Gujrat, limiting generalizability to all of Pakistan. Relying only on quantitative data restricted understanding of participants' experiences, suggesting the need for qualitative research. Increasing the sample size and observing outcomes across diverse cultures and demographics could enhance findings and insight into psychological distress, resilience, and job satisfaction.

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