

Women's Work in the Field of Care and Rehabilitation in Jordan

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Introduction

In the last few decades, Arab society has witnessed remarkable changes at the social, economic, and demographic levels. These changes have left their mark on the size of the family, its function, role, and interrelations among its members. As a result, fertility rates among women have dropped, late marriages have become common, and the percentage of women and young girls seeking education has sharply increased. In addition, more women have joined the labor market.¹

As a result of these changes, the Arab family has abandoned some of its traditional roles, such as providing continuous care for babies and house-care for the elderly, the bedridden, and the sick. Other examples of these chores include babysitting, educating, feeding, cleaning, and attending to the health of the family and its disabled members. All these tasks were traditionally done by the women due to the division of labor along gender lines in the family. Women's abandonment of their care-taking roles has led to the transfer of those roles to social institutions founded to replace the family in providing care and service to those in need.

The care and rehabilitation sector refers to all labor and chores that have to do with the physical, psychological, and developmental needs of those

receiving care, namely, children, the sick, the elderly, and disabled people, whether these services are provided by the government, the private sector, or non-profit organizations. These services vary in type and duration, ranging from watching over individuals for several hours to intensive personal services that cover details of day-to-day life, such as feeding, cleaning, nursing, training, escorting, and round-the-clock monitoring.

In response to the increasing demand for caretaking and rehabilitation, many social institutions, such as day-care centers, kindergartens, orphanages, and homes for the elderly, as well as rehabilitation centers for the disabled, were established. Women rushed to work in these institutions, driven by a desire to enter the labor market and restricted by the scarcity of job opportunities for females in other fields.

The care and rehabilitation sector in many Arab countries has developed in part as a result of women's increasing interest in joining educational institutions and in entering the labor market, as well as women's abandonment of some of their traditional household roles. In addition, many employers in this sector believe that women have an innate readiness and a natural gift to carry out care tasks, and do not, as such, require prior training.

Despite the increase in demand for care services and the development this sector has witnessed, many challenges still face both givers and recipients of care services and rehabilitation. The

sector is unable to meet the increasing demand for such services at a reasonable cost. Moreover, the poor infrastructure of governmental and non-governmental organizations for care services has contributed to a deterioration in the quality of services offered by these organizations. This has led care recipients to seek services outside the institutional framework through hired caretaking at home, and through the recruitment of foreign domestic workers.

In light of these facts, it is important to comprehend the nature of the work in this field, and to highlight the obstacles facing working women as far as level of training, rehabilitation, gender pay gaps, working hours, leaves, breaks, insurance, and job security are concerned. Being aware of those obstacles would ensure that services being provided to those in need are of a high quality and contribute to the development of work in this sector and to human development, more broadly.

Awareness of the obstacles working women face has led the International Labor Organization (ILO) to take the initiative to conduct a regional study on the conditions of working women in the area of care and rehabilitation in many countries, including Jordan. The study is part of an overall ILO project to identify the working conditions of women in the area of care and rehabilitation. ILO also seeks to determine the level of commitment of the employer - whether the government, private, non-profit organizations, or families - to work conditions and regulations, and to labor rights, including contracts, wages, leaves, working hours, insurance, professional development, and job security. The importance of this study lies in the fact that it tackles, on the one hand, an area of work in which performance and quality of labor entail a degree of love, affection, and compassion shown by the caregiver toward the recipient. On the other hand, the quality of service can be negatively affected if the caretaker does not feel s/he is being treated with dignity and equality.

Therefore, exploring the challenges that face

female workers in this field, and giving adequate recommendations, may help develop this sector and improve the quality of services. This will, in turn, enable the sector to offer suitable job opportunities for women. Furthermore, it will attract women who are capable and willing to perform these services under appropriate work conditions that ensure their freedom, justice, and rights, and help create ideal circumstances for quality service.

Women and Labor in Jordan

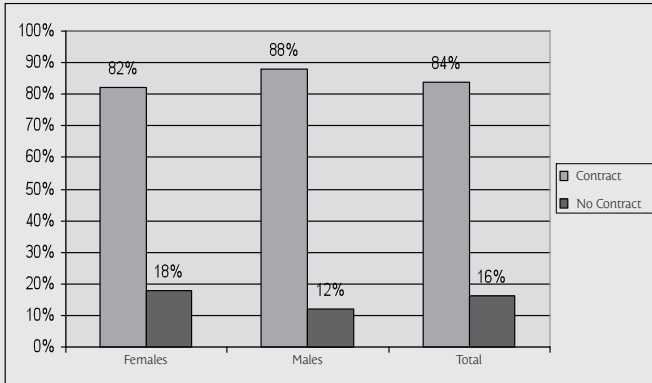
Female participation in the Jordanian labor market is 12 percent, and might reach 20 percent if the sectors of agriculture and security are excluded. Fifty-six percent of working women in Jordan work in the fields of education and health whereas men work in the fields of public administration and commerce.² Reports reveal the existence of a total of 1,047 institutions for care and rehabilitation, 32 of these are governmental organizations and the other 1,015 are either private or non-profit organizations. They offer services to orphans, pre-schoolers, youngsters, beggars, abused women, delinquent girls, in addition to the elderly and the disabled.

While accurate numbers of people receiving care services at home are unavailable, unofficial reports estimate the number of female foreign workers to vary between 40,000 and 70,000. These foreign helpers are in charge of caring for children, the disabled, and elderly people.

Methodology

In order to explore the extent to which working women in the area of care and rehabilitation enjoy labor rights, and the effect of gender on the conditions of laborers, in addition to exploring the quality of services provided and the characteristics of the recipients, a field study was conducted on a sample of 207 individuals from government and private institutions as well as non-profit organizations. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with female foreign workers in the area of care and rehabilitation within families. The sample included both males and females from different parts of Jordan.

Work System: With or Without a Contract



work more hours than stipulated by law, in some cases reaching as many as 120 working hours, in obvious violation of laborers' rights. They are denied rest and money in return for their additional working hours. The weekly rate of working hours for the entire sample was 46. It also reflected a slight difference in working hours per week between males and females (47 hours for males and 45 hours for females).

After having analyzed the findings, the following conclusions were made:

1. Work System

Eighty-four percent of the sample work under the umbrella of labor regulation, whether the Civil Service Law or the Jordanian Law of Labor and Laborers' whereas 16 percent work outside of this umbrella. The study also revealed a slight difference between males and females, whereby 18 percent of the females and 12 percent of the males work outside the umbrella of labor regulation. As such, the likelihood of their labor rights being violated thus increases. There was no big difference in legal status between workers offering rehabilitation to the disabled and those offering care services to other categories, such as the elderly. The percentages reached 85 percent and 80 percent, respectively.

2. Salaries and Wages

The study revealed that 91 percent of the individuals sampled earn monthly salaries that do not exceed 300 dinars (every 1 Jordanian Dinar is equivalent to 1.4 US Dollars). Fifty-three percent said they earned less than 200 dinars, while 4 percent still receive a salary less than 100 dinars per month even though the minimum salary according to the Jordanian Law of Labor and Laborers is 150 dinars.

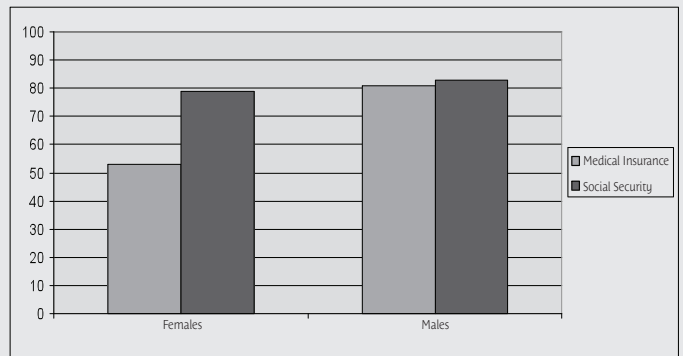
3. Work Hours

The study showed that 14 percent of the sample

4. Work Insurance

According to the results of the study, 80 percent of the sample benefited from the social security law while 20 percent worked without receiving social security. As for health insurance, 59 percent of the sample enjoyed health insurance while 41 percent did not. Reports have revealed that a high percentage work in the area of disability services compared to those working with other groups, with percentages reaching 69 percent and 38 percent, respectively. Sixty-one percent of laborers said they felt secure in their jobs as opposed to 39 percent who said they did not.

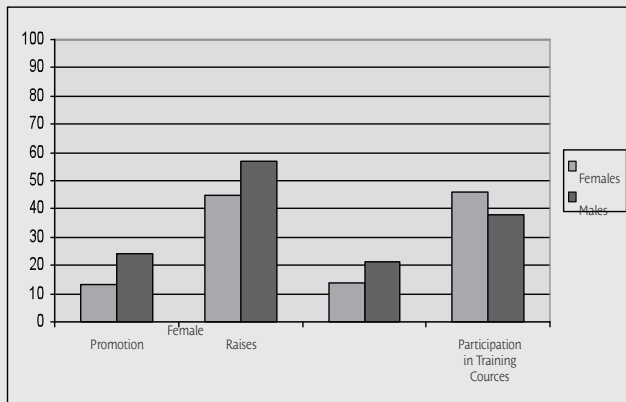
Work Insurance



5. Opportunities for Training, Promotion, and Raises

The study has revealed that more than 50 percent of the workers do not receive any training. This rate reached 58 percent for workers in the area of care and rehabilitation of the disabled, and

Opportunities for Training, Promotion, and Raises Based on Gender



51 percent in other areas. Although females participate more than males in training programs, which are considered a requirement for job promotion, results have indicated that females receive fewer employment benefits than do their male counterparts.

6. Leaves

Ninety-six percent of the sample said that the terms of their contracts stipulated that they had the right to leaves while 4 percent said the terms of their contracts did not include leaves. As far as the different kinds of leaves are concerned, 12 percent reported that they did not get days off during weekends and 18 percent did not get leaves on holidays. Nineteen percent of the workers in the study receive no annual leave, and 25 percent are denied emergency leaves. Eighteen percent of the workers in the study did not benefit from sick leave whereas 51 percent were denied maternity leave and 44 percent were denied leave to observe religious rituals.

Female Foreign Workers

As far as the circumstances of female foreign workers are concerned, the study has revealed that the latter faced more problems than Jordanian women who work in the area of care and rehabilitation in both the public and private sectors, and in non-profit organizations. The interviews conducted with a number of female foreign helpers working for Jordanian families

for the purposes of this study have confirmed the reports released by Amnesty International in 2008, and the National Center for Human Rights in 2006-2007. The report by Amnesty International released in 2008 has revealed that many house helpers are paid only a small portion of their already meager salaries or do not get paid at all over many years. In its report, the organization relied on testimonies of foreign workers who confided that they suffered from isolation, abuse, and exploitation. Many of these women work 16 to 19 hours daily without any vacation, are treated like prisoners, and endure physical and psychological abuse. They are frequently beaten up and cannot leave the country because their employers do not renew their residency and, as a result, these workers have to pay fines. They are also subject to rape or other types of sexual molestation in the workplace.

The extent of suffering that female foreign domestic workers endure and the types of human rights violations they are subjected to were revealed in the interviews conducted. Here are some cases illustrating the work conditions of some of these foreign domestic workers:

Case-Study Number 1

Taisy, a Philippina helper, has been working for a family in Amman for 4 years, without a contract and with a salary below 150 dollars (below the official minimum wage in Jordan). She has not received her salary in 4 years. Thirty-four year-old Taisy works 18 hours daily spent between the household and a beauty parlor owned by the family. Taisy, who has a B.A. degree in Hotel and Restaurant Management, does cleaning, laundry, and cooking, and washes the four cars owned by the family members. As soon as she finishes housework, she rushes to the beauty parlor to clean and prepare for the arrival of customers. Then, Taisy carries out tasks such as manicures, pedicures, foot massages, facials, and hairdressing. Sometimes she does that outside the beauty parlor. Taisy misses her 4 family members in the Philippines and contacts them by phone only on special occasions. As for

the work atmosphere, Taisy has no sleeping space or privacy of her own, for she has to sleep in the living room. This means she has to wait until all family members have gone to bed so that she can sleep, and she wakes up ahead of them all. Taisy suffers from malnutrition, and says she is fed up of eating *shawarma* sandwiches which she often buys using customer tips. Taisy is very annoyed with her employers because they force her to wear second-hand clothes. What adds to her sadness is that she cannot afford to send gifts and money to her children during holidays and on special occasions. She sometimes borrows money from her fellow-workers.

Case-Study Number 2

Erany is a 31-year old Srilankan house-helper who has not completed her education. She is satisfied with her work conditions and circumstances. Erany works for a Jordanian family on the basis of a legal contract. She is treated well and receives her monthly salary on time. The family respects her privacy concerning sleeping arrangements and residency, and sets her working hours according to need. Although Erany earns the same salary as Taisy, she is satisfied with her employers' treatment and the quality of food and clothing they provide her with. She feels secure in her job and contacts her family by phone once a month. Erany sees no need for vacations.

Case-Study Number 3

Twenty-year old Anda, who is single, came to Jordan from Indonesia 3 years ago after finishing ninth grade. She was encouraged to seek employment abroad by other Indonesian house helpers. She also had a personal desire to work and become independent. Anda signed a work contract with a Jordanian family based on which she earns 125 US dollars per month. She receives her salary every 4 months and is very happy with her own bedroom overlooking the swimming pool in the garden. She feels secure because of her employers' good treatment, and although her contract does not include health insurance coverage, Anda is not worried about that; the family addresses her needs just as it does those of its own members.

Anda takes care of all household chores, including washing dishes, cleaning, helping in preparing and serving food, laundry, ironing, and attending to the needs of employers who require help while walking, for example. She does not find her work exhausting as she has time-off when she can watch television, for instance. Anda has her own cell phone and can send text messages to her family anytime she wants.

Clearly, there is a difference in the work conditions of the above-mentioned three foreign house helpers as far as salary, labor rights, working hours, overtime, breaks, medical insurance, and safe work atmosphere are concerned. This difference reflects a contrast in the employers' levels of commitment to giving full rights to their employees and avoiding exploiting them, rather than their abiding by the law and avoiding violating its terms. Lack of implementation of work regulations have left female foreign workers at the mercy of their employers. This has led to a violation of these helpers' human and labor rights. It has exposed them to dangers and crimes as serious as human trafficking at times.

Amnesty International is demanding that female foreign house helpers be able to work without fear of abuse and threat of imprisonment and deportation. These women play a huge role in the economy, both in Jordan and in their own countries. Their work contributes to the well-being of the families they serve, and they are providing a substantial income to their own families and societies back home.

Recommendations for Change

In light of the findings of the current study, it is recommended that the government, civil society, and human rights organizations, supported by ILO and international organizations, direct their efforts towards achieving the following goals:

- The development of a national program adopted by the Ministry of Labor in partnership with media institutions and labor syndicates to boost social awareness about the conditions and criteria for productive work. This kind of productive work can only be done in an atmosphere of freedom,

competence, security, and human dignity equally applied on men and women. Furthermore, there should be dialogue between the parties concerned; namely the laborers, the employers, and the government, in order to achieve such goals.

- The development of a comprehensive national strategy to train female graduates of humanities and social sciences faculties for work in the field of service, care, and rehabilitation, based on the principles of social service. Moreover, female workers should be able to climb the professional ladder, bearing in mind the individualized character of the service based on the needs of the recipients. In addition, the graduates of the training programs should be familiarized with the labor market.

- The adoption by the Ministry of Labor and the judiciary system of effective measures to ensure the commitment of parties offering care services and the prevention of violation of the terms of labor laws.

- The adoption of a just system for rewards and motivation, and ensuring faster promotion and advancement at work.

- The creation of effective mechanisms to detect and censor violations and prevent their recurrence.

- The creation of hotlines to report violations and ensure a swift response and immediate action.

- The establishment of broad partnerships with the media and human rights organizations to diminish violation of laborers' rights, with special emphasis on foreign workers.

- Building new partnerships between diplomatic missions and labor liaisons of countries exporting laborers on the one hand, and the Ministry of Labor, human rights organizations, and labor syndicates, on the other, in order to strengthen coordination and cooperation between countries importing and exporting laborers and ensure that measures are taken to safeguard female foreign workers' rights.

- Encouraging the establishment of training programs and professional standards to modernize and develop jobs based on the changing needs of recipients, and implementing those programs widely and making them part of the criteria for promotion and professional advancement.

Translated by Nazih Khater

ENDNOTES

1. In the past decade, the Arab women's participation in the labor market rose by 7.7 percent, a percentage higher than any rise in other sectors. There has also been a 33.3 percent increase in woman's participation in the labor market (International Labor Organization, 2008).
2. Indicators of Jordanian work market, reported by the Department of General Statistics, 2007.

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