

DECISION-MAKING TRAJECTORIES OF WORKING WOMEN IN AZAD JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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ABSTRACT

The position of working women has been subject of debate across societies. However, they remained unexplored in many developing countries including, Pakistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). This study was conducted to know the intersection of working women's decision-making in AJK. The main objective was to examine the inclusion of working women in decision-making within the family. We used quantitative research design and conducted a cross-sectional study. We employed a random sampling technique and collected data of 98 respondents using questionnaire. The findings of the study revealed that working women are included in the decision-making process within the family. They receive overwhelming responses from family members in the decision-making process. They also decide their personal matters including health as well as take educational decisions of their children. Here, we substantiate the argument of Crenshaw (1989) that structural inequalities disproportioned women in public spheres. However, working women's inclusion in decision-making is a good gesture for the women's progress in the state of AJK.

Keywords: Women, Decision-making, Intersectionality, Inclusion, Careers

INTRODUCTION

Research on working women is result of global trend of increased gender diversity (Seguino 2016; Hazaea et al., 2023). Women are entering in the workforce at large numbers in both public and private spheres (Kaur & Arora, 2020). This upsurge is due to many factors of diversity and equity programs, mentoring of women, and work-life balance policies. This shows a broader societal change that overwhelmingly contributed to increasing gender equality across societies (Beloskar et al. 2024). Traditionally, women were confined to roles within the home, and their participation in the workforce and decision-making was limited (Biswas et al., 2023). However, Crompton and Sanderson (2024) argued that, due to gender reversal change, sociocultural, and economic shifts led to greater opportunities

for girls and women to get education and pursue careers across various fields in public and private spheres. Consequently, women make up a significant portion of the global workforce, contributing to the growth of economies and reshaping traditional roles in both professional and domestic spheres (Barakat, 2024). This increased presence of women in the workforce has become an important area of study, particularly in the context of gender studies (Nanni, 2023). Decision-making, whether in professional settings or within the family, involves a complex interplay of individual autonomy, cultural expectations, and societal norms (Olwanda et al., 2024). Historically, women have faced challenges when it comes to decision-making, especially in patriarchal family structures (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). Despite

these challenges, women have demonstrated resilience, adapting to and, in many cases, redefining traditional roles.

Presently, women's workplace in public and private spheres have been transformed due to increased gender equity programs. Research shows that working women are taking multiple roles and they are highly engaged in decision-making within the family (Ferrant et al., 2014; Baldwin & Twigg, 2024). For instance, they are taking leadership roles, making critical decisions in business strategy, operations, and management. They are also leading the household chores by contributing to their families (Deshpande & Kabeer, 2024). Due to their economic end, they became autonomous in many ways (Dewitt et al., 2023). For example, they decide at their own to satisfy their personal decisions of education and health. Similarly, Emon and Nipa (2024) stated that women are also concerned in the decision-making of children's education because of children's better educational future. However, women involvement in decision-making is often under the societal pressures including gender biases, glass ceilings, and unequal opportunities. Simultaneously, women continue to navigate decision-making within the family, balancing career ambitions with responsibilities such as childcare, eldercare, and managing household affairs.

Study Context:

Understanding the intersection of women's careers and decision-making is crucial for promoting gender equality, fostering supportive work environments, and empowering them to take ownership of personal and professional lives (Allen & French, 2023). This exploration involves examining the factors that influence women's decisions, the obstacles they face, and the strategies they use to navigate both their careers and family responsibilities (Fapohunda, 2023). It is pertinent to mention here that women's workplace and decision-making is ignored area of research in AJK. Thus, recognizing the role of decision-making in shaping women's career trajectories, we can work toward more inclusive, equitable workplace, and societies. By looking at the lack of literature coupled with our

observations and experiences, we conducted this research with working women in various public sector institutions of AJK.

Objective: This study was guided by the following objective.

1. To examine the inclusion of working women in decision-making within the family.

Hypothesis: The following hypothesis was formulated.

1. There is a significant difference between decision-making, autonomous and family decisions, role taking, dealing with personal matters, health and educational decisions and workplace activities.

Literature Review

The literature on women's decision-making and autonomy highlights the complex interplay of personal, social, and cultural factors that shape women's ability to make choices in various domains of their lives, including career, family, and health (Daraz et al., 2023; Khaliq, 2024). Autonomy, often defined as the capacity to make independent decisions, is a central concept in understanding women's empowerment and agency. Studies have shown that women's autonomy in decision-making is often influenced by factors such as socio-economic status, educational background, cultural norms, and familial expectations (Andeskebtso et al., 2023; Bitew et al., 2024; Khaliq, 2024). These studies show that in patriarchal societies, women have historically had limited decision-making power, particularly in family and career matters, with traditional gender roles often confining women to subordinate positions in both public and private spheres. However, as women increasingly participate in the workforce and gain access to education, their decision-making power has expanded, though challenges such as gender bias and discrimination persist (Anfaara et al., 2024).

Research also indicates that women's autonomy in decision-making is not a uniform experience; it can vary based on geographical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts (Khaliq, 2017; Ang et al., 2023; Idris et al., 2023). For example, women in more egalitarian societies tend to have greater

control over career choices and family decisions, whereas women in more conservative or patriarchal contexts may experience significant constraints, especially in personal or health-related matters. Additionally, women's decision-making in the workplace is often shaped by gendered expectations, where assertiveness and leadership qualities are sometimes penalized, reinforcing traditional roles that prioritize men as decision-makers (Khaliq, 2012; Gausman et al., 2023). Despite these barriers, many studies have also highlighted the strategies women employ to assert their autonomy. These include building supportive social networks, negotiating boundaries in both professional and domestic spheres, and relying on personal or collective agency to challenge established norms (Khaliq, 2019; Mallick & Chouhan, 2023). Overall, the literature underscores the importance of autonomy as a critical aspect of women's empowerment, which not only allows women to make choices but also fosters a sense of control over their lives (Abdullah et al., 2016; Negash et al., 2023). Yet, achieving full autonomy in decision-making remains an ongoing challenge for many women, requiring societal shifts toward greater gender equality and an acknowledgment of the structural barriers that women face (Abdullah & Ullah, 2022; Belachew et al., 2023).

The intersection of work, health, and family responsibilities presents unique challenges for working women, with significant implications for both their physical and mental well-being. Numerous studies have explored how the dual roles of professional work and family responsibilities impact women's health and overall quality of life. Working women often face a "double burden," where they are expected to excel in their careers while simultaneously fulfilling traditional roles as caregivers, mothers, and homemakers (Abdullah et al., 2015; Idris et al., 2023; Baldwin & Twigg, 2024). This dual responsibility can lead to high levels of stress, anxiety, and physical health problems such as fatigue, sleep disturbances, and cardiovascular issues (Muhammed et al., 2015). The pressure to balance both work and family can also contribute to mental health concerns, with working women experiencing higher rates of depression and

burnout compared to their male counterparts (Ullah et al., 2017).

Family-related issues, such as childcare, eldercare, and household management, further exacerbate the stress experienced by working women (Abdullah et al., 2023; Nepal et al., 2023). In many cultures, women are still predominantly responsible for caregiving tasks, which can lead to role conflict and reduced job satisfaction. Research has shown that working mothers, in particular, struggle with the "work-family conflict," where the demands of their professional lives interfere with their ability to care for their families, and vice versa (Abdullah & Shoaib, 2021; Fapohunda, 2023; Beloskar et al., 2024). This conflict is often compounded by a lack of workplace policies that support work-life balance, such as flexible hours, parental leave, and affordable childcare. In the absence of such support, women may experience feelings of guilt, stress, and a decline in both family and work performance.

On the other hand, there is evidence that working women who can manage the demands of both work and family responsibilities report greater levels of personal fulfillment and empowerment (Abdullah & Kauser, 2023; Nanni, 2023). The financial independence gained from work can enhance women's autonomy, while the social and intellectual stimulation provided by professional engagement can contribute to overall well-being (Shahzad et al., 2020; Emon & Nipa, 2024). However, achieving this balance often requires structural changes in the workplace, as well as a shift in societal attitudes towards gender roles and caregiving responsibilities. Promoting policies that support working women's health, such as access to healthcare, workplace flexibility, and family-friendly policies, is crucial to alleviating the pressures they face and improving their overall health outcomes and family life.

Theoretical Framework:

This study is guided by the intersectionality theory given by Crenshaw (1989). She argued that intersectionality is a core metaphor to understand the ways that multiple forms of inequalities create obstacles that are often not understood among the conventional ways of thinking. She further argues

that different forms of discrimination and privileges often interact and create challenges to women's active participation. Here, we relate this concept with the structural inequalities faced by the women in locating their position aspirations and decision-making in public spheres. Due to patriarchal structure of the society, they were not included in the decision-making process.

Methodology

We employed a quantitative research method within the positivistic tradition to examine the intersection of decision-making trajectories of working women in AJK. The objective of the study was to examine the inclusion of working women in decision-making within the family. The decision to use quantitative methods was based on several factors, i.e. data availability, time constraints, and limited financial resources. This approach was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of how working women are included in decision-making process. We used a cross-sectional research design, which enabled the investigation of multiple variables simultaneously. The study was conducted in public sector institutions. Initially, we identified eight government departments for the data collection where 131 women were working on various

positions. Due to low number of women in higher positions, we also included the women working on lower echelons of accounts, clerical, and contingent paid staff. Using the Taro Yamane formula, we determined a sample size of 98 to ensure a reasonable margin of error and improve accuracy. We collected data using a questionnaire and selected respondents by employing a random sampling technique. Simple random sampling was chosen because it is an efficient method that allows for the random selection of a small sample from a larger population, increasing the likelihood of representing the entire group. We formulated a hypothesis and employed T-test to compare the means, helping to identify significant differences and correlations between variables.

Key Findings

Key findings are the most significant and relevant results that directly support the study's purpose and provide a clear explanation of the conclusions for the readers.

Demographic Information

The demographic information of the women academicians is tabulated and interpreted in the following table.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Women Academicians.

Age	Frequency	Percent
25 – 30 Years	17	37.8
31 – 36 Years	19	42.2
37 – 42 Years	6	13.3
43 Years and above	3	6.6
Total	45	100.0
Residence		
Personal	79	71.4
Rented	19	28.6
Total	98	100.0
Income		
60,000-80,000	14	14.3
80,001-100,001	19	19.4
100,002-120,002	23	23.5
120,003-140,003	32	32.6
More than 140004	10	10.2
Total	98	100.0
Employment		

Permanent	71	72.5
Contract	27	27.5
Total	98	100.0

The above table presents the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. The data reveals that 37.8% of the respondents were aged between 26-30 years, while 42.2% fell within the 31-35 years age group. A smaller proportion, 13.3%, were aged 36-42 years, and only 6.6% were over 41 years old. In terms of residence, 71.4% of respondents owned their homes, while 28.6% lived in rented accommodations. Regarding income, the distribution was as follows: 14.3% earned between 60,000-80,000, 19.4% earned 80,001-100,001, 23.5% earned 100,002-120,002, 32.6% earned 120,003-140,003, and

10.2% earned more than 140,004 per month. The employment status of the women showed that 72.5% were permanent employees, while 27.5% were on contract.

Hypothesis Testing

The following hypothesis was tested by employing the T-test statistics and results are tabulated and interpreted.

There is a significant difference between decision making, autonomous and family decisions, role taking, dealing with personal matters, health and educational decisions and workplace activities.

Table 2: T-test Distribution of Working Women in Decision Making.

Variables	T	df	P-Value
Autonomous Decisions	19.000	44	.000
Family Decisions	28.365	44	.000
Appreciation in Role Taking	46.000	44	.000
Dealing with personal matters	19.501	44	.000
Health problems	23.452	44	.000
Educational Decisions	28.365	44	.000
Children's Future	24.387	42	.000
Workplace Activities	18.863	44	.000

The table above indicates that women who make independent decisions are more likely to be involved in family matters. The involvement of employed women in household decisions reflects their active participation in family affairs. The findings suggest that the family members of working women value their decision-making abilities, which points to greater involvement in household matters. When working women independently manage their personal affairs, including taking care of their health, it suggests a higher level of engagement in family matters. Additionally, the study shows that the families of working women recognize the importance of their jobs, and involvement in family decision-making fosters further integration into family life. Furthermore, joint decisions regarding children's education and future demonstrate even greater involvement in family matters.

Discussions

In the first section, the findings of the study are discussed with existing empirical literature cited while Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality is also integrated in the last section.

The findings of our study showed that majority of the working women take independent decisions. These include their excessive engagement in family decisions. This means that working women build their credibility to be included in the decision-making within the family. Similar findings are given by Ang et al. (2023). They stated that working women earn respect in public spheres and, thus, they are included in the familial decision-making processes. By the same token, Baldwin and Twigg (2024) also supported our findings that working women are mainstreamed in the family decision-making process. The findings also revealed that working women receive appreciation for their roles in the family. This

appreciation usually comes from the parents and other family members. Daraz et al. (2023) conducted a study on the working women and argued that working women take multiple roles and they are appreciated by elders in the family. They further added that working women also receive appreciation from the society. However, it depends upon the contribution of women in the society. Similar findings are given by many studies that endorse our study findings. It is unveiled that working women achieved autonomy of making their personal decisions. These findings are in-line with many studies. For example, Idris et al. (2023) analyzed that working woman got potential to decide their personal matters. Similarly, Dewitt et al. (2023) concluded that working women are more likely engaged in deciding their own fate. However, Seguino (2016) stated that cultural expectations restrict working women to take their personal decisions solely. Moreover, the trend of taking personal decisions is an increased phenomenon of the modern world. The findings of our study showed that working women take decisions regarding their health issues. Similar findings are given by Deshpande and Kabeer (2024). They substantiate that working women deal their health issues at their won. However, Ferrant et al. (2014) said that deciding health issues may come in conflict with the cultural expectations. Moreover, Kaur and Arora (2020) also maintained that women deal their issues in the modern society including their education. Similarly, they also take liberty in deciding the education of their children. Findings also divulged that women are interested in the educational attainments of their children, and they wanted to contribute to their better future. Same findings are reported in many studies. As Ang et al. (2023) asserted that women take decisions about their children's education. Our study findings indicated that women take many decisions while managing their workplace. These findings are supported by many studies. As Bitew et al. (2024) stated that working women receive masculine traits to manage the workplace in public spheres.

The concept of Crenshaw (1989) is relevant in this study. According to her, the societal structural perpetuate gender inequalities and exclusion of

women in public and private spheres. This is reflected in the broader sense of workplace of women in various fields. Due to structural changes taking place in the modern society of AJK, although number of women in public sphere is at rise however, at slower pace. It is worth mentioning here that women are entering in public sphere workplaces and working in various departments. In doing so, they are included in the decision-making process. It is also reflected in families where women who were previously denied access are actively contributing to the decision-making within the families while their present position is accepted generally in society and particularly in the family. Here, we substantiate the argument of Crenshaw (1989) that structural inequalities disproportioned women in public and private spheres. However, the increasing proportion of working women and their participation in decision-making is a good gesture for the women inclusion in decision making in the state of AJK.

Conclusion

The findings of the study showed that working women take independent decision in family. This denotes that working women build their credibility to be included in the decision making within family. Similarly, they receive appreciation from parents and other family members for their roles. Further, they reached autonomy to decide with their personal matters. It is also revealed that women take decisions regarding their health and education of the children. Besides, they independently manage their workplace activities. Here, we substantiate the argument of Crenshaw (1989) that structural inequalities disproportioned women in public spheres. However, working women's participation in decision-making is a good gesture for the women inclusion and progress in the state of AJK.

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