

ASPECTS OF FAMILY LIFE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN COMMUNITY

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Factory and Family : Indian Factory Workers in Durban

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INTRODUCTION

I should start by clarifying the theme on which I will speak, namely Indian women's attitudes towards their jobs and their perceptions of how their jobs affect their family lives. To this end I will draw on the findings of two major research projects that I have been involved in during the past three years.

The first study, conducted in 1982, investigated the level of job satisfaction experienced by Indian women employed in the Clothing Industry in Durban, and the effects of this on their interpersonal family relationships. A probability sample of 270 workers was interviewed in their homes for this purpose. The main study was preceded by a pilot study in which the interview schedule was pre-tested for shortcomings. In general, the questions were easily understood by the respondents and the interviewers found the scale uncomplicated to administer. The research procedure allowed for resultant data to be quantifiable and easily expressed in a form which readily indicated the total distribution of work satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The interview schedule used was divided into two parts. Part One measured the level of job satisfaction. Part Two was designed to ascertain the perceived effects of job satisfaction/dissatisfaction on family life. A summated rating scale developed according to Likert principles was used in both cases. Item analysis was employed in order to eliminate non-discriminatory items with the possibility of response set being reduced by the randomisation of items in the interview schedule.

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At the time of the survey (February, 1982), Indian women constituted 69% of all women employed in garment manufacture in Natal, i.e., 24 408 Indian females and a total of 11 066 African, Coloured and White females worked in clothing factories in Natal. At the time, 59% of all economically active Indian females in metropolitan Durban were employed in the manufacturing industry.

The second project, which is currently being written up at the Institute for Black Research, went into the field under the direction of Professor Fatima Meer in 1983. In-depth interviews were conducted with almost a thousand Black women: 454 African, 429 Indian and 109 Coloured — 992 in total. The Indian women workers, 73% of whom were in manufacturing, 24% in clerical and sales and 3% in other occupations, were selected from Chatsworth, Phoenix and Overport. Therefore, although the 1982 study relied upon a smaller sample size, the homogeneity of the elements under study and the selection of women from all over Durban — not just three residential areas — allowed for inferences to be made with a greater degree of accuracy. However, the 1983 study facilitated the collection of detailed information, including demographic details, housing patterns and problems, working hours, respondents' personal histories of employment, husbands' employment, travel arrangements, community involvement and satisfaction with family life.

Given the time constraints in a presentation such as this, it is possible to elucidate only the major findings of the two projects just outlined and offer brief attempts at analysis. This is best executed under the following sub-headings:

1. Overall job satisfaction
2. Wages and reasons for working
3. Work and leisure
4. Social norms and comparisons
5. Task performance and role conflict within the family
6. Decision making within the family
7. The family's general attitude towards the working woman
8. Child care arrangements
9. Satisfaction with family life
10. Job satisfaction and family life.

OVERALL JOB SATISFACTION

In both the 1982 and 1983 studies, the majority of the women interviewed were, surprisingly, found to be satisfied with their jobs — jobs in which they were under close supervision, jobs that were repetitive and allowed for little worker initiative.

Since the different social phenomena are interrelated, no area of social life can be satisfactorily analysed in isolation. Job satisfaction must therefore be viewed together with its social structural concomitants. In this regard, following Wiendieck (1979), the degree of freedom inherent in the social structure must be seen as being of utmost importance for an adequate understanding of job satisfaction. Form and Geschwender (1962), Hulin (1966) and Blood and Hulin (1967) have all documented evidence supporting our findings that workers from socially deprived strata in society often show a relatively high degree of satisfaction, despite the demeaning conditions of life and work they have to endure. Findings such as these indicate the human tendency to accommodate oneself within the existing social structure if more attractive alternatives are not visible. The concept of satisfaction should thus be seen against the background of the degree of freedom workers have or perceive they have in society. People often tend to accept even the most inhuman conditions if these are perceived as unchangeable — because of existing power structures and cultural norms. In support of this contention, it was found (in 1983) that only 26% of the workers felt that pressure should be exerted for improved conditions; the majority thought that nothing could be done.

Sometimes appalling conditions are accepted and lived with simply because the possibility of comparison has been systematically reduced or eliminated via techniques of social segregation and ideological attempts at political socialisation retarded. However, politicised workers would not necessarily be satisfied with the same conditions.

WAGES AND REASONS FOR WORKING

In 1983, 84% of the women interviewed stated that they worked because they needed the money; the remaining 16%

worked for personal independence, or because they loved working or because they were bored at home.

In both 1982 and 1983, wages were found to be the area creating dissatisfaction, although overall job satisfaction levels were high.

Distribution of Workers by Wages

Weekly Wages (Rands)	1982 Sample N = 270	1983 Sample N = 429
	%	%
10 - 19	1	1
20 - 29	15	3
30 - 39	49	18
40 - 49	31	39
50+	4	39
	100	100

In 1982, 1%, and in 1983, 4%, of the women interviewed were being paid below the minimum weekly wage stipulated in the Government Gazette (see accompanying Table). Had the women interviewed (in both studies) been sole breadwinners, their families would have been forced to live in abject poverty, averted only by other contributions to family income often made possible because of the extended family system. (Extended families comprised 20% of the 1983 sample). It may, therefore, be asserted that economic necessity is an important factor in the continuation of the extended family system.

According to the Institute for Planning Research, in 1982 the average Indian family of six needed R412,00 a month to cover the costs of basic needs and immediate essentials. None of the clothing workers interviewed in 1982 earned anywhere near that sum.

WORK AND LEISURE

In 1982, the women were evenly divided on whether work or leisure was the more satisfying life activity: 47% agreed that the things they did in their spare time gave them more satisfaction than their jobs, 47% disagreed and 6% were uncertain.

It was hypothesised in 1982, and verified in 1983, that home and family based activities predominate in the leisure of women in wage labour. Seventy-two percent were found to sew, read, listen to the radio or do house work in their spare time; 21% visited friends and relatives; 3% went to church; and the remainder went to dances or the cinema.

Thus, Indian women workers were found to engage less in those activities which necessitated planning, co-ordination and purposeful action, and more in sociable activities. Besides the economic constraints (which are most important) placed on these workers, the fact that the workers' choice of action was suppressed by constraints of the work process, was also a reason for their limited capacity to meet the demands of spare time activity with discretion. The findings thereby indirectly supported Reismann's (1954) conclusions that people in higher social class occupations were more active and diverse in their social and leisure participation than those in lower classes.

SOCIAL NORMS AND COMPARISONS

In general, women viewed their jobs as being favourably evaluated by friends and relatives, mainly because they were seen as contributing to family income. It may also be argued that factory workers who envisaged the social structure to offer few alternatives are bound to rationalise that society regards their jobs as being of value, since whether society values these occupational roles or not is inconsequential to their work reality.

The workers also felt that their reputations were enhanced because they worked and the following types of response were not uncommon:

“People respect me because I earn.”

“People respect me because I am a good housewife and a

good working woman.”

“Men like to marry working women. It is a help to them.”

Almost half the women interviewed in 1983 felt that working improved a woman's chances of marriage, but over a third felt that it had no effect. Only a small number of conservative women saw work as being an obstacle to marriage.

About 30% of the women stated that their relatives felt that their responsibilities at home might be neglected due to their work. When the respondents' scores on job satisfaction were correlated with their perceptions of how relatives viewed their jobs, a moderate positive correlation was found to exist (0,43), the implication being that as a woman's level of job satisfaction increases, the more likely would she be to perceive that relatives deem the effects of her job on her family to be positive.

TASK PERFORMANCE AND ROLE CONFLICT WITHIN THE FAMILY

The traditional division of labour gave the husband sole responsibility for earning the family income and the wife general responsibility for the housework. Only heavy and technical tasks were performed by the husband. However, in many Indian homes today, husbands and wives share the responsibility for earning and producing goods on a roughly equal basis. This should affect both the division of tasks and the total amount of work done in the household. Many authors (Hoffman and Nye, 1974; Moore and Sawhill, 1978) note that in general, husbands of working wives engage in slightly more child care and housework than do husbands of women who are not earning an income, although it does not appear that the rapid movement of women into the labour force has been matched by a very significant increase in the husbands' willingness to help around the house. Only 37% of husbands were found to assist their wives in household task performance significantly. However, 61% of the women who were not helped felt that women should do the housework themselves. In general, therefore, women's expectations that housework was women's work was reinforced by their husbands' limited contributions towards the household routine.

The women interviewed in 1982 felt that, in general, their jobs did not make them lose interest in family activities nor did their jobs negatively affect their task performances within the home. When household task performance scores were correlated with job satisfaction scores, a positive correlation indicated that as a woman's level of job satisfaction increases her satisfaction with her performance of household tasks after work will also increase.

Sociologists generally expect major role changes to be initially characterised by increased conflict because of confusion, lack of predictability of behaviour and different perceptions of social norms. This conflict is assumed to be transitory, persisting only until a new consensus is reached. This conflict does not seem to have emerged in the case of Indian women factory workers, mainly because their roles have *not changed but merely increased*, i.e., they are still required to perform the tasks of housewives in addition to enacting occupational roles outside the home. Responses such as the following were often heard:

“My husband works hard. I feel that he should have a rest at home. We are women. We just got to work.”

This trend became clearer when questions on family leadership and decision-making were posed.

FAMILY LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING IN THE HOUSEHOLD

A number of studies reviewed by Moore and Sawhill (1978) have found that wives who are employed exercise a greater degree of power in their marriages. Employed women contributed to family income and their work experience may provide them with valuable new knowledge and contacts which serve to enhance their power. However, it was found that in the majority of Indian homes, males made the major decisions and unmarried women often let their mothers or fathers make important decisions for them. Nine percent of the women interviewed in 1983 had to ask permission for almost everything; 61% had to ask permission to go out and 30% had to ask permission if they wanted to buy something. Therefore, male domination, accepted by the women,

was still prevalent in the homes of Indian women workers. One reason for this may be the greater economic power wielded by husbands, since, in general, women's earnings were about one-third those of their husbands. The women's perceptions of the situation as being unchangeable or legitimate, i.e., that leadership roles are masculine, played a significant part in allaying role conflict. Such acceptance was exemplified in the following comments:

"Women should ask for certain things. It is the right way to listen to your husband and not have your own ways."

"Women must ask permission from men."

"I don't ask permission for small things. It is not necessary if a woman is on the right track."

THE FAMILY'S GENERAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE WORKING WOMAN

In general, women gave the impression that their families were happy that they worked and, although the 1982 findings were consistent with this, almost three out of every ten workers (29%) said that their families would like them to change their jobs. Fifty-seven percent of these workers felt that overtime work often caused problems at home and 20% said that the job made them lose interest in family activities. About 25% of the workers whose families wanted them to change their jobs were also found to be dissatisfied with their jobs. Thus, job dissatisfaction, overtime work and diminished interest in family activities were inferred to be the three main reasons for families wanting their working women to change jobs. However, the majority of the women perceived their families to be satisfied with their going out to work presumably because of the important contributions being made by these women to total family income.

CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS

Half the women participating in the 1983 study said that relatives cared for their children while they were at work. The

importance of the extended family and the close-knit nature of the Indian family is thus made clear. The following represents the full breakdown of child care arrangements being made by working women:

Relatives	50,2%
Creche	1,3%
Maid	6,6%
Neighbours	8,2%
Other children	6,6%
Nobody	27,1%

These findings also indicate the inaccessibility of adequate child care facilities for many working class families. In 1983, there were no creche facilities in any of the Indian townships from which the sample was drawn, with 1,3% relying on creche facilities in a Coloured residential area.

The separation of mother and child for routine, brief non-traumatic periods does not seem to be harmful if adequate substitute care is provided. Indeed, a number of studies have suggested that the children of employed women compare favourably in intellectual and social development with the children of mothers at home. However, a finding indicating that 33,7% of working women leave their children (under the age of 16) unattended or attended to by other children, certainly constitutes a notable degree of inadequate supervision.

SATISFACTION WITH FAMILY LIFE

In 1982, 92% of the workers expressed satisfaction with family life. American researchers in the early 1960s found that working wives in the low income group (and non-working wives in the high income group) rank highest in marital satisfaction. One reason for the high satisfaction of working wives in the low income group is their relatively more important contribution to family income — evidence of which may be inferred from the finding that four out of every five workers (81%) stated that their families were happy that they worked, presumably because of the contribution being made to total family income.

JOB SATISFACTION AND FAMILY LIFE

A spillover effect was found to exist between job satisfaction and family life, i.e., a strong positive correlation was found to exist between job satisfaction and perceived effects of job satisfaction on the family. Thus, the higher the worker's level of job satisfaction the more satisfied the worker is likely to be with the effects on the family.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it may be stated that most jobs today are regarded by most people as only a means to the end of earning a living. Jobs are generally not a source of positive satisfaction -- the fact that in surveys most people say they are satisfied with their jobs simply means that they expect very little from them or that they can find no better job, i.e., because the social structure offers few alternatives.

As far as the effects of maternal employment on family life are concerned, the following findings were clarified:

1. total family income necessarily increases;
2. child care arrangements are, to a large extent, inadequate;
3. the mother's job satisfaction spills over onto family life;
4. working women feel that their families are pleased that they work, mainly because of the increased family income;
5. the distribution of power and household tasks between husbands and wives is not significantly altered.
6. role conflict is averted because of the continuation of traditional sex-roles.

However, in South Africa, maternal employment is only one factor affecting interpersonal family relationships. The breadwinner's (more often than not the male) job has also significantly affected family life.

The implementation of the Group Areas Act, including the provisions of mass housing schemes and the absence of well-organised community services and amenities, also have significant effects on family life. This paper has dealt with only one aspect of the total picture, i.e., the working women's perceptions.

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