

## **Women Employment as an Opportunity and Challenge in the Context of Nepal**

Mala Bhandari

Assistant Professor

Durgalaxmi Multiple Campus, Attariya Kailali

Far Western University, Nepal

MPhil Scholar

Faculty of Education, Far Western University, Nepal

Email: bhandarimalajee2@gmail.com

### **Background**

As per the change in global environment, the condition of women in Nepal is also changing. Along with the changing global environment and political changes in the country, the situation of women has also changed drastically. Historically, Nepal has been a patriarchal society where women are generally subordinate to men. Men were considered the leaders of the family and women were confined to the household chores. Similarly, social norms and values were in the favor of men. This strong bias in favor of sons in society indicates that daughters were discriminated from birth and did not have equal opportunities to achieve all aspects of development. Daughters were deprived of many rights, including right to education, health care, Patriarchal property, social status, funerals of deceased parents, and were considered property of males and responsibilities of other members.

The political, socio-cultural situation of a country helps to study the situation of women in that country. Before 1990, Nepali society was almost like a closed society. The political changes of the 1990's have increased women's access to policy-making. Recent changes have given it more strength. Along with these changes, there have been big leaps in the field of employment as well, although it cannot be considered as satisfactory.

According to the Nepal Labour Force Survey 2017-18, for every 100 males in the working-age population, there are 125 females, but for every 100 employed males, there are only 59 employed females. The working-age population has been defined as people with age 15 and above. Population of working-age females in the country is higher than that of males, females still lag far behind when it comes to employment and the pay gap between the genders is also huge. The population of working-age males stands at 9.2 million while that of working-age females stands at 11.53 million. Of the total working-age women, only 8.5 million are in the labor force who are either employed or are in search of employment, and only 2.6 million from the total women labor force are employed, according to the report. This shows only 22.5 percent of working-age women are employed. The

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survey has considered only those who are receiving wage or salary for doing work and making profits for being self-employed. So, people employed in subsistence farming and household chores do not fall under the definition of the “employed”. Women employment has become an opportunity for career development and challenge to discharge the responsibilities in the context of Nepal. With the majority of women involved in non-profit making and non-wage earning works, the employment ratio of women is very low, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics which published the report in 2019.

Women employment has been an opportunity for career development in Nepal. The person who has a job and devotes a lot of time and energy towards is a concretization of work for pay. Through her work, she is producing wealth which she can later use to pursue her goals. Based on the age, circumstances, needs and desires of individuals, work takes different shapes. It is important for the individual to see work as a means towards achieving one’s goals. Work provides individuals with the medium to realize most of their aspirations. Therefore, it is an important tool for forming the individual and the community as a whole, since we are all interconnected with each other. We produce and benefit from our work and that of another individual whose work might have an influence upon us. “Work is at the root of a meaningful life, the path to individual independence, and a necessity for human survival and flourishing. It is also the distinctive means by which men concretize their identity as rational, goal-directed beings.” – Edward W. Younkins. D. Work has a common human practice since the beginning of civilizations. It is the secret behind social progress and the defining characteristic of man. Work as we see it, is a virtue and a necessity. In times of uncertainty, interdependence and market economy, the individual has to rely on his/her work to ensure his/her own well-being. Work provides the individual with the ability to be independent, to flourish, to develop, and most importantly, to find a meaning to life.

Work provides individuals with the necessary means to sustain themselves both economically and socially, provides the freedom to be part of a society. It is through work that we establish ourselves as a woman or a man. Work is an essential tool through which individuals can achieve their goals, flourish and have a meaningful life. According to Younkins meaningful life is interconnected with reason, productive work, goal achievement, human flourishing and happiness. Since productiveness is one of the most important elements of a meaningful life an individual should work in order to be productive. Productive work on the other hand is the process by which we can control our existence by acquiring knowledge and translating our ideas and values into physical form. Thus, it is through work that we can actualize our abilities and desires, and give meaning to our existence. Work is important because it helps us shape our personal identity.

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It is also the building brick of the community. In order to lead a meaningful life, we have to be rational human-beings who choose work as an undisputable way of flourishing our lives. For instance, if we take into consideration the labor market and the people who get paid for their work, we can say that they can sustain themselves, their families and maybe have enough wealth left to spend on entertainment. These people give meaning to their existence and shape their life based on the work they do. Work organizes your life, gives you a reason to wake up in the morning and makes you understand the importance of other things in your life. In the similar manner, the women holding various jobs in Nepal have got opportunities for their career development. They have got chances to attend various seminars, trainings, workshops and so on. They have good participation in different social networks due to their jobs. In the context of Nepal, women empowerment and priorities provided to women in the case of job have become fruitful.

### **National Policy**

Labour and Employment Policies and Programs: Employment generation was one of the four pillars of the Tenth Plan (2002-2007), which was formulated under the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) framework. As an offshoot, a new Labor and Employment Policy was introduced in 2005. It aims to alleviate poverty by creating income generating employment by exploring and tapping into new opportunities and potentials. The policy focuses on 19 eliminating forced labor practices, including bonded labor, and establishing congenial labor relations by introducing international labor standards at the workplace in both formal and informal sectors.

With the majority of women involved in non-profit making and non-wage earning works, the employment ratio of women is very low, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics. Investment in employment stimulating economic sectors, generating youth targeted employment and promotion of self-employment are some of the strategies envisaged in it. A major breakthrough in this area took place after the historic political change of 2006. Grounded in a more inclusive and participatory democratic system, plans and program have focused on employment generation, particularly growth induced employment. However, there are many challenges faced by women in career development.

### **The challenges Experienced by Women in Career Development**

#### **Occupational stress**

Occupational stress is the stress that is caused due to work. In some cases, jobs are challenging, demanding and require individuals to work long hours. When one is engaged in work for long hours and is under pressure to complete the assignment or project, then one may feel stressed. When individuals are unable to complete the job duties or the required target on time, this causes occupational stress. When they lack the knowledge, skills and abilities to meet the job

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requirements, then too occupational stress takes place. For women employees, occupational stress at the workplace is one of the major challenges within the course of career development.

### **Household and Family Responsibilities**

Women have important roles to play in the household and family. They are the ones, who are primarily responsible for the functioning of the household, child development and in taking care of the needs and requirements of other family members. When women have to create a balance between family and work, then it may give rise to challenges within the course of their career development. In some cases, family obligations may compel them to take leave from works; hence, they are not able to concentrate upon their job duties. Creating a balance between work and family roles has become a key personal and family issue in many societies.

### **Mental Harassment**

There has been prevalence of the viewpoint among communities that women are less capable, efficient and skilled as compared to men. This attitude among the other individuals within the working environment proves to be an impediment within the course of their career development. They are usually discouraged from getting engaged in any kinds of jobs and functions that require manual labor. Therefore, possession of the viewpoint among the individuals that women are not capable of performing certain job duties is a mental harassment to them. Gender bias gives rise to barriers within the course of their recruitment and women are paid less than men for the same work. The prevalence of this kind of attitude makes them less interested in their work.

### **Sexual Harassment**

In the present world, almost all working women are prone to sexual harassment, irrespective of their background and categories, personal characteristics and the types of employment. Sexual harassment is not only at the workplace, but it is also prevalent in educational institutions, hospitals, and public places. The main reason that causes the occurrence of this criminal act is, when women are concentrated in subordinate positions and deprived of service jobs, whereas men are in the supervisory positions. This gives them an opportunity to exploit and subordinate women. When women experience this act within the working environment, they even get compelled to leave their jobs.

### **Discrimination at the Workplace**

Nepalese women still experience discriminatory treatment at the workplaces. They are often deprived of promotion and growth opportunities, but this does not apply to all working women. In the present context, women are getting higher education and are engaged in reputed jobs. On the other hand, on the basis of their skills, qualifications and experience, they get promoted and are working in higher positions in educational institutions and other organizations. A majority of

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working women continue to be denied their right to equal pay, under the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 and are low paid in comparison to their male colleagues. This is usually the case in factories and labour oriented industries.

### **Absence of Safety of Working Women while Travelling**

Usually, the traditional mind-set of the individuals within the Indian society makes it difficult for working women to create a balance between the domestic environment and professional life. In some families, it may not be acceptable to stay at work after six PM. Those families that do accept these working hours may experience considerable anxiety on a daily basis regarding woman's safety, especially while traveling. So, most of the issues affect a working woman, the reason being, she is closely protected or watched by her family and society. In the present existence, there have been number of women, who have experienced violent and criminal acts while travelling. Hence, this is a major impediment within the course of career development.

### **Lack of Family Support**

Lack of family support is another issue that working women experience. At times, the family members encourage women to get engaged in household work and not in employment opportunities. Elderly members of the household in some cases, possess this viewpoint that women are meant to stay at home and participate in domestic chores, whereas employment opportunities are meant for men. When women have to work late in the office, the family members normally have an objection. When family members are not supportive towards working women, then it is an impediment within the course of their job performance, promotional opportunities and career development. In order to achieve the organizational and personal objectives, it is vital to have family support.

### **Job Insecurity**

There are numerous factors that cause job insecurity. These include lack of knowledge, skills and abilities, inability to complete the job requirements, long working hours, lack of facilities within the working environment, inability to get along with the employers or colleagues, lack of proper infrastructure, lack of promotional opportunities, insufficient pay and so forth. Unrealistic expectations, especially at the time of corporate reorganizations, which sometimes put unnatural, unhealthy and unreasonable pressures on the employee, can be a major source of stress and anxiety. Increased workload and strong pressures to perform at peak levels, all the time for the same pay, can actually leave an employee physically and emotionally drained. Excessive travel and too much time away from family also contribute to an employee's stressors.

### **Workplace Adjustment**

Adjusting to the cultures and norms of the workplace can be cumbersome for the individuals. There are number of factors within the working environment,

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regarding which employees may experience problems. For instance, the working environmental conditions, inability to get along with others, occurrence of conflicting situations, lack of participation in decision making and other functions, inability to get engaged into effective communication processes and so forth. When individuals are unable to adjust within the working environment, then they would certainly encounter problems and challenges within the course of their career development. In many cases, office politics and gossips can be major stress inducers.

### **Other Reasons**

Other reasons that can be impediments within the course of career development can be personal demographics, such as, age, educational qualifications, marital status, number of children, place of residence, other sources of income, length of employment and so forth. Work situation characteristics, such as, job tenure, size of the organization, hours worked per week, skills and abilities possessed by the employees, experience and so forth. These factors in all kinds of employment opportunities determine, whether employees are capable of promotional opportunities that may lead to their career development. When a person within the organization has to be promoted, it is vital to take into consideration, all the demographic factors, personality traits, skills, capabilities, experience, time duration, he has been in the organization and the terms and relationships that he has established with the other members. Thus, Nepalese women working in various jobs are found facing the similar challenges in present time.

### **Conclusion**

Women in Nepal, in urban as well as in rural areas have an important role to play in the functioning of the household. They are possessed with the responsibilities to perform all kinds of domestic chores, child development and in meeting the needs and requirements of family members. The household and family responsibilities are the major challenges that hinder their career development. The other challenges that women experience include, occupational stress, mental harassment, sexual harassment, discrimination at the workplace, absence of safety of working women while travelling, lack of family support, job insecurity, workplace adjustment, demographic and work situation characteristics, stereotyping and perceptions of roles and abilities of women, commitment to family responsibilities, exclusion of women professionals from informal networks and communications, lack of significant general or line experience, lack of mentoring and lack of gender-sensitive policies by the employer.

It is important to put into practice the measures to curb the challenges and make provision of room for career development. Family responsibilities are fundamental, but career development of a well-educated woman is also important and any kinds of responsibilities should not impose any barriers. The women

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employees appeared to think that they are not able to utilize their complete potential and at times they had to make career trade-offs because of family responsibilities. This could also be because of the fact that they believed that putting career ahead of family led to social discontentment and rejection, and they also felt that major responsibility of child development hindered the abilities of women employees to progress.

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