Women's Career Success in Pakistan: Does Hijab Matter?

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ABSTRACT

Quite opposite to the former trends, the issue of career success has become vital for women in Pakistan and there is a reasonable amount of scholarship available on the career growth of women in various sectors of Pakistan. The literature has also highlighted the popularity of wearing hijab among Pakistani working women as per the emerging international trends due to the controversies surrounding Islamophobia. Despite the presence of a fair number of women wearing hijab in the local organization, this issue has been overlooked in research and no published research is available on it. Consistently, this paper reduces the knowledge gap for Pakistan, a country under represented in the discourse on career and supports the calls for contextualizing knowledge.

KEYWORDS: Career success, hijab, contextualizing knowledge, professional women, Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Career is a person's job-related positions that is acquired through the course of whole life (London & Stampf, 1982). It is gained through a set of skills and knowledge which one has attained during his life time whereas career success is vertical growth of an individual on the career echelon. Consistently, career success has been viewed as a job promotion and development (Oplatka and Tamir, 2009). Scholarship highlighted gender as a significant phenomenon influencing career success across the world (Arif, 2011; Green et al., 2004). This is because it is one of the fundamental factors that shapes the workplace models and lifestyle (Green et al., 2004); again, career satisfaction comes by following masculine performance norms and models (Broadbridge, 2007). So, if women really want to move forward on career echelons, they have to follow masculine ways otherwise their career growth will not be smooth. An explicit justification for this phenomenon is that women experience more challenges on the path of career growth as compared to men (Madsen and Blide, 1992). With this intellectual background, one can understand the severity of the impact of gender on the career growth of women in Pakistan (Arif, 2011). Gunz, Mayrhofer and Tolbert (2011) have already highlighted that specific context (e.g., socio- economic, political and technical arrangement) is the fundamental factor in which a person achieves and enjoys career success. Literature on working women in Pakistan have highlighted the challenges women face at workplace (Saher, Matloob, Ali and Batool, 2014; Grünenfelder, 2012; Saher, Khan and Khan, 2012; Saher, 2010; Syed, 2010: Syed, Ali and Winstanley, 2005). The prevailing situation would become severe when these women would further seclude themselves even within women in the organization by wearing hijab/headscarf as Syed et al. (2005) mentioned women situation in conflicting role demand.

This paper sets off to see the relationship of hijab with career growth of women in service sector firms. To actualize this preposition, the model of 'bureaucratic career' is used as it is more relevant to our context. The main purpose of this approach is to monitor, track, and to make employees' behavior compliant with organizational norms. This is because the basic values of Pakistani culture i.e., collectivism, inequality and gender segregation match more with this approach. According to this model employees more aligned (comply) with organizational practices and norms get higher chances for career progression (McKinlay& Wilson, 2006). This approach administers employees' integration through official mechanisms of control (such as performance appraisals and ratings), as well as un-official mechanisms (social networking/socializing, professional attire in dress, hair, colors, where socializing with colleagues and customers, long working hours are accepted as organizational norms and part of the job (Grey, 1994:494). This will help to study the issue at hand more effectively. The key questions to effectively handle this paper is, how does hijab in any way have an impact on women's career growth and how do these women perceive the impact of this phenomenon on their career success?

This paper comprises five (5) sections: 1. literature review to develop intellectual basis of the study; 2. research methods; 3. data presentation and discussion; 4. conclusion;

5. Implication, weakness and future directions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of career is highly significant for both individuals and organizational management. Generally, the important issues related to proactively planned careers choices have been overlooked like how to manage discrepancies between job and individual personal life and how to approach career goals (Hall, 2002). The objective career success is a hierarchical advancement and progress interm of material gains and better position (Houghes (1984) whereas subjective career success is individuals own perception and satisfaction (Judge et al., 1995). Interesting, individuals being the rational being compare their career success usually with the colleagues Heflin (2005). The most significant conceptualization in literature is "boundary less" career i.e., a set of jobs that moves individual beyond the set of a single employment setting (De Fillipe and Arther, 1994); and "protean career" i.e., individual's own arrangement of career development independent of the organizations. Whatever position towards the career success one takes, professional success is always relational referring to person-related aspects of a career (Mayrhofer**,** Meyer, and Steyrer, 2007). In line, there are different layers of external factors which influence one's career like context of origin, work, society, culture and global context.

McKinlay and Wilson (2006) highlighted the concept of a bureaucratic career (in developing countries context) in which the main purpose of organizational routines is to monitor, track, and to make employees' behavior compliant with organizational norms. If an employee is more aligned (comply) with organizational practices and norms, there are higher chances for career progression. Likewise, Savage (1998) defines a linear or bureaucratic career as a disciplinary practice used by organizations to control employees' career paths. Similarly, Mckinlay (2002) also considers a career as an approach of supervision in which an employee regulates his behavior according to the organizational norms and compliance with norms results in career advancement. Along with these official mechanisms of control (such as performance appraisals and ratings), organizations also deploy un-official mechanisms (social networking/socializing, professional attire in dress, hair, colors, where socializing with colleagues and customers, long working hours are accepted as organizational norms and part of the job (Grey, 1994:494). The concept of a bureaucratic career seems more relevant to Pakistan. As specific context (e.g., socio- economic, political and technical arrangement) is the fundamental factor in which a person achieves and enjoys career success (Gunz, Mayrhofer, & Tolbert, 2011)**. S**ocial cognitive career theory has also highlighted the connection between contextual factors and satisfied career (Lent & Brown, 2006). Gunz et al., (2011) also stresses the strong relationship between construct of a context and career success. To sum-up, contextual factors are highly significant in determining career success and are culturally specific. In accordance with this debate, our paper is focusing on the issue at hand in the context of Pakistan.

Women's spaces are defined and are given specific space protocol and often segregated (secluded from "male space") (Grünenfelder, 2012; Syed, Ali and Winstanley, 2005; Saher, Khan and Khan, 2012). Local service sector firms with gender egalitarian work environments, demands free interaction among all

members (both males and females). This creates a conflicting situation for working women-- a conflict between her expected societal values and organizational roles. Syed and associates (2005) underscore this situation from a social psychological perspective and point out the moral and emotional dilemma that women experience in service sector organizations (following US HRM model) in Pakistan. In this context hijab with normal dress has been taken as a solution for working women. Though research further points out multi-layered issues faced by these women to work in liberal workplace contexts. Ghunman and Jackson (2008) figure out comparatively lower job prospects for women wearing hijab in the USA. Even in Pakistan, as Shareef (2015) figures out, the management of modern organizations show discrimination in taking women wearing hijab despite their relevant qualifications and skills for a particular job on the plea of liberal policies/image demands. In a country like Pakistan where working women are experiencing biases in all spheres of life biases in organizations are fairly understood; these are prevalent at all stages of career (recruitment, selection, evaluation, promotion etc.) (Saher, Ali, Matloob, 2014; Arfi, 2011). Further scholarship highlights the phenomena of glass walls (Amos-Wilson,1999), and glass ceiling (Shah, 1999) to limit the progress of women on horizontal and vertical level. These women are not only ignored in the formal mechanism of career success but also in informal career mechanisms of mentoring and social networking (highly significant for career success in the context of Pakistan see Saher & Mayrhofer, 2014; Khilji, 2003; Saher, 2010). The intellectual insight and general observations depict that all these phenomena will become severe for the women wearing hijab as they are explicitly announcing their identity and further

secluding themselves in all the processes and mechanisms necessary for career success in Pakistan. With this background, the aim of this paper is to explore the relevance and impact of hijab on career success of women.

Research Methodology and Methods

Qualitative research methodology with descriptive methods is used for the present study to develop a more holistic, in-depth and detailed view of the issue at hand. This method systematically examines the phenomenon of hijab and its relation with the career growth of women working in organizations with modern human resource management practices. The reasons to opt these methods were manifold – i) to describe the field observations, ii) to collect and present the information and women's life experiences with their relation to previous scholarship, iii) to carefully summarize the obtained responses through interviews, iv) to draw meaningful inferences by carefully analyzing the data and to v) to describe the social phenomenon to develop new knowledge and more holistic understanding of the issue.

This research was conducted in twin cities of Pakistan i.e., Islamabad and its adjacent city Rawalpindi. These cities were selected for three reasons: first, the most of the modern organizations (following western human resource management practices with more liberalized organizational culture) are based in these cities; second, these cities have a high literacy rate of 87% (Islamabad) and 80% (Rawalpindi) therefore people are more aware of new trends and ongoing debate on various issues at national and international level; and third, due to the established trends and benchmarks professionalism in the organizations in these cities. For data collection, researchers used an in-depth interview method and

observation techniques. Depending on the nature of the study, the maximum variation sampling strategy was opted to get maximum diverse perspectives from different institutions relevant to our research questions (Cohen, and Crabree, 2006). A total of 25 interviews were conducted from working women who wear hijab in these organizations. For the analysis of the collected data, an inductive approach was used to extract the themes manually from the responses and then categorized into multiple themes with the mutual consensus of the researchers. Finally, the obtained information is classified into particular themes, and a conclusion was drawn. We selected and disclosed the most relevant comments/opinions of the respondents (content) in the result section. We assigned IDs to each respondent and their names and designations are kept secret.

Field Data and Discussion

The fundamental aim of this paper is to see the ways in which wearing hijab influence women's career growth and document their perception about this phenomenon. The field data unravels the hindrances they face in becoming the mainstream workers, developing positive interpersonal communication and relationship, social networking and incorporation in career growth opportunities. Though differences are witnessed in the responses of the respondents from various organizations. In the upcoming paragraphs, we present data in themes, sub-themes and verdicts of respondents to validate our results.

At the interpersonal level, the results of the current study indicate that Hijab/headscarf has directly influenced interaction and communication patterns of females in organizations. Women reported that they remain careful during interacting with male colleagues or customers. They use words carefully and do not talk frankly at their workplaces. Specifically, in cross-gender conversations, these women use more formal words to address their colleagues and customers. s one respondent elaborated that

> "I have to be strict in my professional relations with my office co-workers. I reserve myself; my interaction, voice tone, and accent to give them a message not to perceive me as friendly. It is Pakistani society; more open interaction is considered something else among other staff members. So, I have to remain extra conscious regarding my interaction and communication with males as I am coming from an honorable family" (ID, 20).

However, findings also indicate that often male colleagues feel hesitant to interact with women wearing hijab during meetings, conferences, or social gatherings. Likewise, women with Hijab also feel uneasy and socially alienated at the workplace that creates a challenging situation for them to become part of mainstream organizational activities and to integrate themselves in organizational culture. One respondent from the telecommunication sector shared that

> "I think higher authorities perceive that women employees with hijab are not confident, assertive and formal in their interaction, and communication with male colleagues. They also consider these women less productive and less efficient. So, they don't take interest to

place these women into organizational administrative and decision-making positions" (ID, 18).

Some respondents showed their inconvenience while sharing the offices with the male colleagues and figured out its fair impact on their performance. Many were of the view that organizations should consider these limitations seriously and should develop a system to adjust diverse employees in the organization for the effectivenessof the individual, department and the whole system.

The field data has revealed the impact of wearing a hijab on women's access to in-group membership, mentoring relations, and social networks within their organizations which are essential for career growth. Results show that access to social networks and groups in modern organizations is an elusive phenomenon for women wearing hijab. In this regard, one respondent from the health sector reported her experience of isolation and exclusion from her departmental social networks and its effects on her access to different opportunities and career growth. She explained:

> "I maintain a specific distance with the male colleagues and don't get mixed up with them. Besides, I do not stay in office after my duty hours and surely, do not attend late-night dinners and other parties. I know my absence from these gatherings is negatively perceived because my other female colleagues participate in all activities. These gatherings are vital to have good contacts with senior male colleagues and to be part of these social circles; off-course it has a very positive impact on career progression." (ID, 14).

A similar perspective was shared by one respondent from the education sector. She believed that these activities which were considered important for career growth in our social context, create a more difficult situation and inequality in professional opportunities for women wearing hijab specifically when they do not want to participate in these social gatherings. She further explained that higher authorities considered it important for their employees to participate in these activities for better integration and assimilation with each other and organizational culture; so, the employees avoiding to participate missed out important opportunities to become part of in-groups and networks. She further shared;

> "These gatherings are a crucial platform to develop working relationships with other colleagues from different departments that are helpful in different situations. Sometimes, I want to be part of these gatherings and meetings because I am clear about its results on my career growth. But as a representative of an honorable family, it does not suit me to attend these events such as parties after job hours, or sometimes late-night dinners at other places" (ID, 6).

The influence of hijab on working women's career growth at workplaces has been explored in many western contexts. These

studies indicate that hijab as a distinct social institution signifies the wearer's identity and associated ideological meanings (Hoodfar, 2003). The obtained information from our respondents' experiences reflects that working women in Pakistan also consider wearing of hijab as a declaration of their religious faith, cultural mores, and ascribe strong implicit connotations to it.

The results of the field have shown that women with hijab find it difficult to adhere to formal and informal requirements of organization which are in sharp contrast to their religious values of modesty and purdah. The results indicate that women's preference to maintain a particular dress appearance (like Hijab/headscarf) and segregation create challenges for them to progress in their professions. The inconsistency between their expected organizational roles and cultural roles place women with hijab at a disadvantaged position. This exclusion minimizes their chances to professionally grow and achieve career success. In addition, results figure out that women feel psychologically suppressed at workplaces for carrying particular attire that negatively affects their careers and commitment within their respective organizations. Besides, our results show that Hijabi women experience interpersonal discrimination at their workplaces. This discrimination includes negative treatment towards these women and often overlooked by their authorities during meetings, seminars, conferences, or other important events. It also includes authorities' unfavorable judgment in the selection and promotion processes and exclusion of some women with hijab. Findings further reveal the negative influence of this discrimination on workers' employment, job outcomes, and career progression (Priola & Brannan, 2009: Krings& Olivares, 2007). Results revealed that women face challenges to have access

to networks and interaction with senior male colleagues. The specific boundaries regarding women's interaction led to weak relationships with male colleagues and less integration with different in-groups or networks within their organizations. Further, women also face challenges for not having any women mentor to support them. Many respondents associated women's less access to social networks with women's exclusion from managerial positions within these networks. These women experience more exclusion and isolation, less support of a network, or role models as womenmentors to support them in a highly male-dominated work environment. This is in line with the previous research that points out that women experience glass wall (Amos-Wilson, 1999) and glass ceiling (Shah, 1999).

CONCLUSION, WEAKNESS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The study aimed to explore the influence of the hijab on the career success of females in service sector firms (following modern HRM practices) Pakistan. For this purpose, the model of 'bureaucratic career' is used as it is more relevant to our context. The main purpose of this approach is to monitor, track, and to make employees' behavior compliant with organizational norms. This is because the basic values of Pakistani culture i.e., collectivism, inequality and gender segregation match more with this approach. According to this model employees more aligned (comply) with organizational practices and norms get higher chances for career progression (McKinlay& Wilson, 2006). This approach administers employees' integration through official mechanisms of control (such as performance appraisals and ratings), as well as un-official mechanisms (social networking/socializing, professional attire in dress, hair, colors, where socializing with colleagues and customers, long working hours are accepted

as organizational norms and part of the job (Grey, 1994:494). Now with model, we answer effectively to the key questions of this paper (how does hijab in any way have an impact on women's career growth and how do these women perceive the impact of this phenomenon on their career success?) that hijab adds to the already existing hurdles in the way of women career success because it does not allow them to align themselves with the performance model and integrate themselves in the organizational culture. Therefore, females wearing hijab have faced more problems in all aspects of career advancement; to become mainstream workers, develop positive interpersonal communication and relationship with colleagues (at horizontal and vertical levels), social networking and career growth opportunities. Furthermore, findings reflect that women wearing hijab face discrimination by being under-valued for different organizational activities that limit their chances for career advancement compared to other women without a headscarf. These women are considered less active, conservative in their outlook; hence, they face discrimination to have access to different organizational opportunities for prestigious decision-making positions within their organizations due to associated negative perceptions with hijab. Besides, not being considered in key projects leads to a poor profile of these females which affects their promotion possibilities later on.

Despite the fact that this paper is the only paper unraveling the impact of hijab on career success of women in Pakistan through qualitative in-depth research. But still it has weakness; first, The results can not be generalized on all organizations in Pakistan as it has just focused on service sector firms (with the US HRM practices) and data is acquired only from two cities; and second. the current paper has only focused on the

women wearing hijab so it is not holistic in any way. Though this study is highly significant in a situation where there is no other published material is available.

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