

Hardiness: A Comparative Study of Employed and Unemployed Married Women in Iran

Irاندokht Asadi Sadeghi Azar, PhD¹
Promila Vasudeva, PhD²

¹ Faculty of Nursing and Obstetrician, Zabol University of Medical Sciences, Zabol, Iran

² Department of Psychology, Punjab University, Chandigarh, India

Corresponding Author:

Irاندokht Asadi Sadeghi Azar,
PhD in Psychology, Faculty Member of
Nursing and Obstetrician Faculty, Zabol
University of Medical Sciences, Ferdosi
Street, Zabol, Iran.

Email: iransadeghi@yahoo.com
Telefax: +98-542-2223943

Objective: Paid employment has become increasingly very important in the lives of women, as the rapid social changes in different classes of the Iranian Society affects roles and positions of women with great changes at a rapid pace. Hardiness as a predicting factor for mental health is selected in this study to evaluation the effects of employment on the women.

Method: 250 employed married and 250 unemployed married women were selected by stratified convenience sampling. Subjects aged 24–41 years; were from the lower, middle, and upper socioeconomic status groups; with a level of education of 10±2 grades and higher; and had at least one school-going child. The Personal View Survey (PVS), was used to collect data.

Results: The results showed that Professional employed married women scored significantly higher on hardiness and three of its dimensions (commitment, control, and challenge) than the unemployed. Among employed married women, professionals scored significantly higher on hardiness and the control dimension than non-professionals. Professional and non-professional employed women did not differ significantly on commitment and challenge. Non-professional employed and unemployed women did not differ significantly on the scores of hardiness.

Conclusion: Paid employment increases hardiness in the professional, employed women. Status of work is an important factor for creation of positive effects of working in women.

Keywords:

Employment, Mental health, Psychological theory, Unemployment, Women

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Traditional role theories suggest that the competing demands of different social tasks produce role strain or conflict (2, 3). These theories imply that people have limited energy and resources and may become overburdened by too many roles, relationships and demands. In contrast, more recent studies on the risks and benefits of having multiple roles indicate that people who have more social roles, experience less psychological distress and mental illness (4), and greater life satisfaction and well-being (5, 6). Enacting multiple roles thus appears to promote the individual's global well-being. A number of studies indicate that multiple roles confer benefits to women's physical and mental health (7, 8). It could be argued that women who hold multiple roles may be better copers or be less susceptible to psychological distress, and women who have fewer roles may be more vulnerable psychologically, and drop or lose roles (9). Multiple roles widen horizons of mind in women and lead to better social growth. A pertinent question that arises here is whether women are happier and better adjusted by relinquishing their traditional role or by combining the two roles. Adjustment of women with both roles—working at home and out—depends on their personality, family relationships, type of their job, satisfaction in marriage, and the support from their husband and family. Their career being affected by the

adjustment to their roles (10). Kobasa and colleagues argued that the ability to be resilient increases individual's chances of improving physical and psychological health. According to Kobasa (11), 'hardy persons' are considered to possess three general characteristics: (a) the belief that they can control or influence the events of their experience, (b) an ability to feel deeply involved in or committed to the activities of their own lives, and (c) the anticipation of change as an exciting challenge for further social development. The concept of individual hardiness was originally developed by existential psychologists (12-14) to describe individuals who continuously rise to their life challenges and turn stressful experiences into opportunities for personal growth (15,16). Kobasa *et al* described hardiness as significantly influencing how people cope with stressful events. Keeping in view the above, the investigator proposed to compare employed (professional and non-professional) and unemployed women in Iran on hardiness and its three dimensions.

Material and Methods

Stratified convenience sampling was used. The sample consisted of 250 employed married women (175 professionals and 75 non-professionals) and 250 unemployed married women (not including divorcees, widows or women living apart from their husbands), in

Table 1. Summary of ANOVA for work status on Hardiness, and its dimensions separately (commitment, control, and challenge) value is significant for employed (professionals vs. non-professionals) and unemployed married women on hardiness (F=3.066, df=2.497, p<0.05), and the control (F=2.707, df=2.497, p<0.10) and challenge (F=2.402, df=2/497, p<0.10) subscales. F value for the three groups of women on the commitment subscale was not significant.

Variable	df	Between sum of square	Within sum of square	Between Mean sum of square	Within Mean sum of square	F	P
Commitment	2/497	95.031	18712.671	47.516	37.651	1.262	N.S
Control	2/497	399.818	36707.350	199.909	73.858	2.707	< .10
Challenge	2/497	208.591	21580.271	104.295	43.421	2.402	< .10
Total Hardiness	2/497	214.981	17424.277	107.491	35.059	3.066	< 0.05

the age range of 24–41 years; from the lower, middle, and upper socioeconomic groups; with 10±2 grades of general education and higher; and having at least one school going non-professionals (clerks working in the banks, offices; and secretaries employed in different organizations). The sample of 250 unemployed married women was selected on the basis of the following inclusion criteria: 1) those who had never taken up a job before or after marriage; 2) those who did not plan to take up a job in the near future; and 3) Those who were not engaged in any kind of part-time or full-time independent business, and not helping with the family business.

The investigator proposed the following hypotheses to be tested; 1) it was expected that professional employed married women would score significantly higher than unemployed married women on hardiness (commitment, control, challenge); 2) it was expected that professional employed married women would score significantly higher than non-professionals, on hardiness; 3) it was expected that non-professional employed married women score significantly higher than the unemployed hardiness features.

Instrument

The Personal View Survey (PVS) (1) consists of 50 items and three subscales of challenge, commitment, and control; with 17, 16, and 17 items respectively. Scores of 39 items are reversed as they are negative phrases. Rating of each item ranges from 0 ("Not at all true") to 3 ("Completely true") in 4 escalations. Each score indicates positive value of hardiness.

Kobasa computed scores of all components and divided the result by 3 for hardiness score as a single trait(1). Ghorbani translated the PVS to Persian language and used the scale for the Iranian population (17). The author, in one pilot study on 110 Iranian women, estimated a reliability of 0.74 for the 50-item total score, and 0.70 for commitment. Estimates for challenge and control were, however, some what low, ranging from 0.68 to 0.65. Ghorbani also calculated scores of all components, and then divided the result

by 3 for hardiness score as a single trait. Domain scores were scaled in the positive direction (i.e. higher scores denoted higher hardiness) (17). Scores were reversed in case of negatively phrased items (39 items) and the mean score of the three subscales showed the total score of hardiness.

Results

The present study was conducted to find out differences between employed married women (professionals vs. non-professionals) and unemployed married women on hardiness and its dimensions (commitment, control, and challenge). The statistical test of ANOVA was applied between these groups. Results are shown in Tables 1 and 2 and Figure 1. P values were computed for the variables which yielded significant F values (Table 2). The t-ratios were computed to see the significance of difference between means for the unemployed and the employed, and for professionals and non-professionals on hardiness and its three dimensions, separately.

Discussion

The significant F ratios for the main effect (Table 1) of the work status on hardiness and two of its dimensions i.e. control and challenge, revealed the significant difference of the three groups of married women (professional, and non-professional employed, and unemployed women). A glance at the table of comparisons of means (Table 2 and Fig 1) indicates that professional employed married women scored significantly higher on hardiness, commitment, control, and challenge than unemployed women. Thus, the findings of the present study support hypotheses 1.

There are few studies on hardiness that have specifically compared employed and unemployed women. The strongest predictor of depression–happiness states is the cognitive hardiness (18). Individuals high on hardiness, experience less anxiety and worries than the individuals low on hardiness (19). Control is measured by the absence of powerlessness that an individual feels (20). The second dimension, commitment, is reflected by the ability to feel actively

Table 2: Means, SDs, and t-ratios for Hardiness and its dimensions (commitment, control, and challenge) for Employed (Professional/Non-professional) and Unemployed women A glance at the table of means (Table 2) shows that professional employed women scored higher than unemployed women on hardiness (M=27.978 vs. M=26.562), commitment (M=27.280 vs. M=26.372), control (M=28.605 vs. M=26.684), challenge (M=28.051 vs. M=26.632). Table 2 shows that significant t-ratios were obtained for hardiness (t=1.460, P<0.10) and control (t=1.438, P<0.10) between professional and non-professional women. A glance at the table of means (Table 2) shows that professional employed women scored higher on hardiness (M=27.978 vs. M=26.782), and the control subscale (M=28.605 vs. M=26.920).

Variable	Means			SDs			t-ratios		
	UN N=250	Pw N=175	NP N=75	UN	Pw	NP	UN-P	P-NP	UN-NP
Hardiness	26.562	27.978	26.782	5.904	5.940	5.929	2.428***	1.460 [†]	N.S
Commitment	26.372	27.280	26.346	6.139	6.200	5.971	1.494 [†]	N.S	N.S
Control	26.684	28.605	26.920	8.691	8.479	8.532	2.266**	1.438 [†]	N.S
Challenge	26.632	28.051	27.080	6.454	6.743	6.671	2.190**	N.S	N.S

Significant (one tailed) * P<.10 ** P<.05 *** P<.01

Pw= Professional women NP= Non- professional women UN= Unemployed women

involved with others and a belief in the truth, value, and importance of one's self and one's experiences 21-23). The third dimension, challenge, reflects the belief that change is not a threat to personal security, but an opportunity for personal development and growth (21-24).

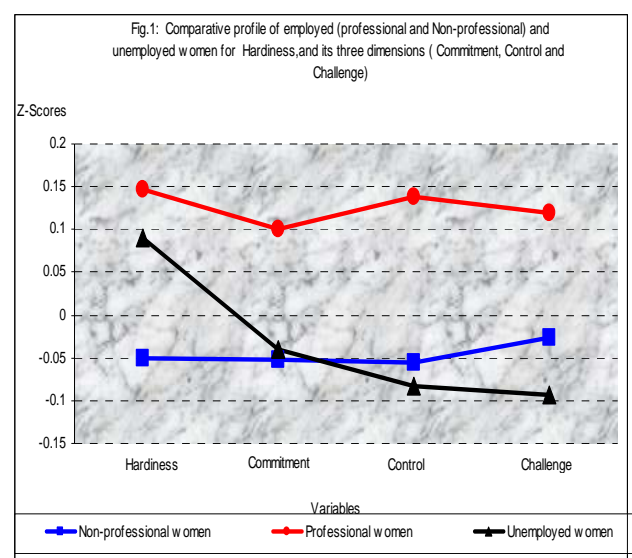
Many of the findings have indicated that multiple roles benefit women's mental health (25-27). The results of this study also show that women with multiple roles have a better mental health. Other researchers have found less depression among working women than the non-working (28-30). This is in agreement with the results obtained by the investigator. Some researches have found less anxiety among working women than the non-working (31-34). However, there are other investigators who have found contradictory results. They have shown depression and stress to be significantly more prevalent among the employed than unemployed immigrant women (35). Obtained results suggested that employed mothers are frequently vulnerable to stress. Molla- Mohammad-Rahimi in a study among the Iranian women stated that working women revealed more anxiety than non-working women because of the combined dual roles of the working women (36).

Moreover, and contrary to the present findings, there are some investigators who have found employed women and full-time homemakers have similar levels of psychological distress (37-38).

The reason for the higher hardiness amongst professional employed women than the unemployed—because the former need to combine paid employment and family roles—clearly depends on the characteristics of the individual, her family and her job situation. In general, however, taking up more than one role appears to buffer women from the stress within each role (35). Role accumulation hypothesis has received significant empirical support suggesting

that in general, multiple role involvement is psychologically beneficial to women (4, 39). Women with many roles may actually have more stressful lives, but they may reduce stress by redefining what they consider to be stressful or by changing their expectations and coping strategies.

If one looks at different dimensions of hardiness, it explains as to why professional employed women will score higher on hardiness than unemployed women. Professional employed women are higher on the internal locus of control and have non-traditional gender role attitudes than unemployed women. Challenge as a dimension of hardiness is based on the belief that change rather than stability is the normative mode of life, anticipated as an opportunity for personal growth (40). This explains as to why professional employed women are higher on the dimension of challenge. Unemployed women are significantly lower



on control than professional employed women and probably that is why they accept the traditional role of homemaker and are low on the belief that they can control or influence events in their lives.

Individuals high on the dimension commitment are committed to various aspects of their lives including interpersonal relationships, family, and self and also fundamental sense of worthiness (41).

Unemployed women with traditional gender role attitudes have been found to be more other-oriented than professional employed women who are more self-oriented—believing in self-growth also. This clarifies professional employed women being higher on commitment than unemployed women.

A glance at the table of comparison of means (Table 2) indicates the significantly higher scores on hardiness and its dimension of control among professional employed than non-professional employed women. These results are in line with the hypotheses 2. The significant level came out to be $P < .10$, which indicates that results are not conclusive but suggestive of a trend and need further probation.

A study by Enjozab et al in Iran showed that employment has a negative effect on the mental health of women (42), especially in non-professional women. Professional women had greater satisfaction with both the housework and the paid work (43). They revealed less depression than non-professional women (44, 45). Non-professional women are higher on role conflict than their counterparts (46), and they receive less support from their husband and family, and since only few can afford professional help, and thus have to work for long hours daily. They always have a feeling of guilt and incapability which predisposes them to mental health problems (47). Professional women enjoy their jobs and have more feelings of worthiness (48).

There are some contradictory findings to the present results. They found that professional employed women would experience slightly higher role conflict than the non-professional employed women (49, 50). However, Sekaran found no significant difference in the two groups suggesting that the distress caused by similar stressors in the two groups, could be different (51). It is quite possible that the professional women who consider their career as very integral to their lives have learned not to let the stress of multiple roles negatively impact on them.

It is understandable as to why professional employed women are higher on control dimension than non-professional employed women. Control is measured by the absence of powerlessness that the individual feels (20). Studies also have reported professional employed women to be higher on the internal locus of control than non-professional women. Professional women have more autonomy with their jobs and can achieve control.

The fact that they take up gainful employment, both professional and non-professional are high on

commitment, entailing sense of purpose and accountability. They are also high on challenge and have positive attitude towards change.

Data in Table 2 indicates that non-professional employed women did not differ significantly from unemployed women on hardiness, commitment, control, and challenge. These results do not support the hypotheses 3. A plausible reason could be that there are other factors that contribute to a woman's work orientation such as vocational maturity (52), self-efficacy, personality and religious orientation (53). However, the nature of the relationship between multiple roles and health is exceedingly complex. Social scientists contend that the number of roles alone does not account for the beneficial impact of multiple role involvement for women. Rather, features such as the quality of roles (54), available financial resources (55), children and spouse characteristics (56), and job characteristics influence the effect of multiple role involvement in working mothers (57).

The lack of significant differences between non-professional and unemployed women could be due to several factors. Considering the lower educational status of non-professional women and lack of recognition and rewards, they are likely to feel as powerless as unemployed women (the control dimension). Hardiness is a personality construct that helps individuals deal with stressful life events and such individuals use successful coping strategies. Some of the unemployed women, too, are good at coping with stress and have adaptive personality traits. Perhaps that is the reason many studies have reported no significant differences on adjustment, symptoms of stress or psychological well-being (58-59).

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