Special Working Women: Problems at offices in Islamabad, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the effects of problems and difficulties faced by special working women at offices in Islamabad, Pakistan. For this purpose four institutions from the Ministry of Social welfare were selected for carrying out the present study. Eight special working women were employees in these four selected institutions, all of them were interviewed. A case study method was used to highlight the issue. During literature review it was found that till this time

no special policy is formulated for special working women by the Government of Pakistan. The results of the study showed that special working women faced somewhat attitudinal problems in offices. Their suggestions are not valued by the high-ups during meetings at offices. Government buildings are not constructed according to their disabilities. Homes are neither constructed by the concerned ministry according to special persons needs and nor near to offices.

Key words: Special Working Women, Disabilities, Problems, Office.

I. INTRODUCTION

Disability is a lack of ability relative to a personal or group norms. In reality there is often simply a spectrum of ability. Disability may involve physical impairment, sensory impairment, cognitive or intellectual impairment, mental disorder or various types of chronic diseases. A disability may occur during a lifetime or may be present from birth. Disability may be seen as resulting directly from individuals in which case the focus is typically on aspects of those individuals and how they could function better. This view is associated with what is generally termed a medical model of disability (Kasnitz. D, n.d). Alternatively, the interaction between people and their environment/society may be emphasized. Here, the focus may be on the role of society in labeling some people as having a disability relative to others, while causing or maintaining disability in those people through attitudes and standards of accessibility that favor the majority (a prejudice dubbed "able-ism"). This view is commonly associated with a human rights or social model of disability.

The distribution of different disabilities within the defined population of disabled persons, as indicated by the 1998 census of Pakistan, provides a useful guide for planning program as; physically handicapped (19%), mentally handicapped and insane (14%), multiple disability (8.21%), Visually impaired (8.6%), hearing impaired (7.40%), and others (43%) (Pakistan Census Report (1998). Calculated on the national policy for education and rehabilitation of disabled persons, the employment quota fixed for total disable population is 2%.

Pakistan from 1980s focused on special persons and felt the need for formulating a special policy for this group with the observance of 1981 as the United Nations International Year of Disabled Persons. While taking many steps for the betterment of persons with disabilities it finalized the first ever National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2002.

This study has been designed to highlight the problems encountered by the special working women. Major objective of the study was to find out problems and difficulties faced by special working women in Islamabad, Pakistan. The main objective was further specified as; to investigate problems and difficulties faced by special working women at Offices and in the light of the study findings recommendations were forwarded to the quarter concerned.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Thomas & Thomas (2002) concluded that although there is a world-wide trend towards women with disabilities emerging from their isolation to establish their own self help groups and rights groups, the situation in developing countries remains quite different. In the available literature on women with disabilities in developing countries, it is often stated that these women face a triple handicap and discrimination due to their disability in the working area,

gender and developing world status. In the South Asian context, gender equity is an issue for a large majority of working women who are disabled, given the socio-cultural practices and traditional attitudes of society. Therefore, many of the issues that are faced by women in general in a male dominated society, such as limited access to education and employment, the problems arising from traditional cultural practices that tend to seclude women from public life, and so on, also have an impact on women with disabilities. Although disability leads to inequality and marginalization of both men and women, disabled people are not a homogenous group. Women with disabilities from developing countries face certain unique disadvantages compared with disabled men, such as the difficulties in fulfilling traditionally expected gender roles, or the difficulties in accessing rehabilitation services which tend to be dominated by male professionals. In many developing countries, poverty can exacerbate these disadvantages, by limiting access to resources and to rehabilitation services. There is little literature describing potential strategies to overcome the disadvantages that are specific to disabled women, for example, the training of women service providers in the community. Further, meager research is conducted on the problems/issues of the special people especially problems of special working women. It is assumed by the society that securing a job by the special people means that every problem is solved. This invisibility further intensifies the situation for the disabled (Gill, 1997).

The physical limitations of individuals tend to be one of the major problems faced by individuals with disability. Ability/ inability in carrying out activities of daily living are a common focus. In a study by Boylan (1991) found that individuals with leprosy were not able to carry out major activities such as washing cloths and washing dishes carrying water pots, watering the land and pouring water, women with disability are facing difficulties relating to functional activities such as mobility, household chores and self care. They identified pain as a limiting factor in carrying out daily activities.

Evidence indicates that working women with disabilities experience more abuse than women without disabilities. Also it is more difficult to escape abuse due to their social and economic circumstances. With very few choices for economic independence, many women with disabilities become more dependent on others than their disability requires (Ali, 1990).

Independent living institute Disability Awareness in Action (DAA) (1996) published that the waste of human potential that unemployment ensures cannot be justified on the grounds that disabled people are not capable of working or are often absent from work - the opposite is true. High unemployment and limited opportunities are caused by ignorance, prejudice, a reluctance to make even minor changes to support disabled people and discrimination in education and training which means disabled people are less qualified than their peers. Even when disabled people find work, discrimination continues in the lack of promotion and training opportunities.

LaPlante, Hendershot, & Moss (1992) found that a great many barriers continue to impede the full social participation of people with disabilities. One-quarter (24 percent) of the respondents to the '94 Harris poll said that access to public buildings was a problem for them. And only a tiny fraction (2.9 % according to 1990 data from the NHIS) of Americans live in homes with any accessibility features, such as ramps, extra-wide doors, elevators, or stair lifts.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Universe of the study

The study was conducted in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), Pakistan.

3.2 Sampling

The study was qualitative in nature. Case study method was used and data was collected from the selected respondents through interview. The study was under taken in the four selected Governmental Organizations i.e. Ministry of Social Welfare, Special Education & Vocational Training Institute for Disabled Children, Al-Maktoom National Special Education Center for Visual Handicap Children and Al-Farabi Special Education Center for Children in Islamabad, Pakistan. A total of eight respondents were interviewed where one (1), two (2), four (4), and one (1) respondents were interviewed from the above mentioned organizations respectively.

3.3 Data collection

The investigator personally visited the special working women in their work place. The data was collected directly from the special working women by using Semi-Structured Interview (SSI), as the subject area was lacking the previous researches and further, the respondents were also not able to fill the structured questioner. Apart from this, the researcher also used non participant observation as a tool of data collection.

IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The special working women shared that they faced problems of communication, quick attention, movement in office, attitude of some of the normal co-workers and major problem faced from the management side. The management ignores the views of higher position holders of disabled working women. The protection from psycho-sexual abuse is not fully ensured in the organizations. The construction of the office buildings and facilities thereof are not provided according to the needs and requirements of the disabled employees, hence, special working women faced mobility problems in the working areas. Neither separate room nor any recreation facility is allowed in the working area for special women that can be utilized as gathering point or meeting ground for refreshment and relaxation. Homes provided on hiring basis, not constructed near to working area according to any kind of disability. It is also highlighted that generally n a society mostly their rights are discriminated.

V. DISCUSSION

Majority of the respondents were highly qualified. They were doing job to be independent and to support family. All of the respondents focused on "independence" that could be due to the feelings society is inculcating in them through its behaviour and remarks regarding their disabilities. This finding is in consonance with Thomas & Thomas (2002) who found that societal attitude is mainly responsible for multiplying the feelings of disabilities.

All, except one respondent, were of the view that job was easily secured as it was on merit and on special people quota system. The one who said that she got the job after a long and hard struggle with disability, she was serving from the last twenty years, it could be deduced that twenty thirty years back jobs could not be easily secured and the society could not be as

cooperative, further, only one percent quota was provided to them in government departments. All of the respondents showed their preferences for Government jobs instead of private jobs. Such preferences could be due to the fear of non-cooperative rather insulting environment in the private sector. Further, it is encouraging for government that special people feel relaxed in government jobs more than private jobs. However, one of the problems raised by all respondents was the non availability of separate room for them in their office where they can set in break time to be relaxed.

Regarding the chances for recreational facilities most of the respondents replied that no such facility or program is prescribed in the policy of the institution where they are working. They wished to have such chances like to go for picnic, get-together etc. such feeling on the one hand could be due to the non suitable social environment outside that restrict their movement in their private life and on the other hand the social environment at office might be good enough that raise the feelings even to go for picnic etc with official staff.

Majority of the respondents were of the view that government is providing house facilities on hiring policy; however, the houses are either far from the offices or not constructed according to the needs of the special people where movement is problematic. This is in accordance to the study of LaPlante, Hendershot, & Moss (1992) and Boylan (1991) who found that individuals with disability could not move freely and the access to public buildings was a problem for them. And only a tiny fraction (2.9 % according to 1990 data from the NHIS) of Americans live in homes with any accessibility features, such as ramps, extra-wide doors, elevators, or stair lifts.

Majority of the respondents were of the opinion that protection from psycho-sexual abuse is not fully ensured in the organizations where they are working. It could be due to their feelings of fear, lack of physical strength, mobility problem and attitude of the colleagues and society in general. This issue is supported by Ali (1990) where evidence indicated that working women with disabilities experience more abuse than women without disabilities. Also it is more difficult to escape abuse due to their social and economic circumstances. With very few choices for economic independence, many women with disabilities become more dependent on others than their disability requires. All of the respondents were issued medical certificates by government upon which health care facilities were freely available to them in all government hospitals in Pakistan.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Disability is natural however, in the process of social interaction it brings some socio-psychological consequences for those who born with. There is no specific Governmental policy available for special working women in Pakistan against their problems and issues as they are facing in the working places. The special working women faced with problems of communication, quick attention, movement in office, attitude of some of the normal co-workers and major problem faced from the management side i.e. the management ignores the views of higher position holders of disabled working women. The protection from psycho-sexual abuse is not fully ensured in the organization. The office buildings are not constructed according to disabled working environment, thus they face mobility problems in the working area. No recreation facility is provided in the working area for disabled women

and also there are no refreshment visits /picnic programs. Homes provided on hiring basis, not constructed near to the working area according to any kind of disability. In a society largely their rights are discriminated. Each State and Country has the responsibility to give jobs and services to their people and can work for their prosperity and benefits in all respect but for the special women it is very important and necessary because they are special.

VII. SUGGESTIONS

In light of the study conducted and literature reviewed the following suggestions/recommendations are made to minimize their problems;

7.1 Policy formulation

The Government of Pakistan should formulate a special policy for special working women that should target the problems and difficulties faced by special working women in their office work routine.

7.2 Minimize Problems at Offices/ Buildings

Any type of disability women working in their working area, the role of the co-workers/ colleagues and management should need to be insured cooperative, polite and assistive. The protection of their physical, psychological and from sexual abuse should be made ensured, providing them responsible assistance / guide because they are special and sensitive creature of the society. Their rights /rules should be made special in the organization, may not be discriminated and provide them equal employee rights in the organization. These are special people and can not express their views; however, the management should provide them a full cooperative environment and take their views, suggestions during meetings and in decisions making process according to their position in the organization. Recreational facility in the working area should be provided at least 4-5 visits of some educational as well recreational places in a year may be arranged. Furthermore, official gathering may be arranged where their community fellows may be invited along with normal community people in order to develop the social relationship and understanding between the two groups. The government should ensure proper construction of offices and home that should meet the needs and requirements of the special working women.

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