

Self-Efficacy and Self-esteem: A Comparative Study of Employed and Unemployed Married Women in Iran

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Abstract

***Background:** Paid employment has become increasingly significant in the lives of women. The pertinent questions that arise: Is the woman happier and better adjusted by relinquishing the traditional role or by combining the two roles? Self-efficacy and self-esteem was selected to evaluation the effect of employment on women in this study.*

***Methods:** The samples consisted of 250 married employed and 250 married unemployed women in the age range of 24-41 years, with educational qualification of 10+2 and above and having at least one school going child. Stratified convenience sampling technique was used for the selection of the sample. The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI) was chosen for collection of data. SPSS was used for analyzing data.*

***Results:** Professionally employed women were found to be significantly higher on self-Efficacy and self-esteem than unemployed and non-professionally employed women. Non-professionally employed and unemployed women did not differ significantly on self-efficacy and self-esteem.*

***Conclusions:** Status and level of works is important factor for creation the positive consequences of work in women (German J Psychiatry 2005; 9: 111-117).*

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Introduction

The positive consequences of women's employment in large scale studies are likely to be obtained only for those women who regard their paid work role as a significant source of self-fulfillment (Paula et al., 1987). However, even in less selective samples, employed mothers appear to be psychologically healthier than mothers who are not employed (Ross and Mirowsky, 1988). It is important to understand whether holding multiple roles increases or reduces psychological risks.

The role of paid worker is a source of self-esteem; self-identity, social rewards, but is also a source of stress for women under conditions of role conflict and role overload. Low self-esteem is there when self-regard and social position is devalued (Chodorow, 1974). Bala and Lakshmi (1992) too found that self-concept varied with types of employment,

highest being amongst teachers. Mary and Good (2005) suggested that employment brings self-esteem and independence. However, low paid jobs contribute to oppression rather than independence.

Self-efficacy has been found to be intimately associated with capacity to change one's situation and has been used as a predictor of behavior, usually job seeking behavior, (Wenzel, 1993). In a study by Eden and Aviram (1993), self-efficacy levels were found to be associated positively with looking for work and with re-employment. According to Flammer (2001), People with higher perceived self-efficacy to fulfill job functions consider a wide range of career options. The construct of self-efficacy, which was introduced by Bandura, represents one core aspect of his social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1997). Valiante (2004) believes that efficacy contributes more heavily to occupational preferences. Perceived efficacy is a robust contributor to career development. Self-efficacy characterized by spiritual improvement creates a set-back and variations in the

rate of progress. Perceived self-efficacy affects how well individuals manage requirements and challenges of occupational pursuits (Bandura, 2005). Career choice and development is one example of the power of self-efficacy beliefs to affect the course of life paths through choice-related processes. Bandura (1997) and Flammer (1990) found that individuals with high self-efficacy beliefs also report strong feelings of well-being and high self-esteem in general.

The National Association of Self-Esteem (NASE) defines self-esteem as “the experience of being capable of meeting life’s challenges and being worthy of happiness”. According to Joubert (1990), self-esteem can be defined as a “person’s judgment of general self-worth that is a product of an implicit evaluation of self-approval or self-disapproval made by the individual”. According to Tesser (2000), “self-esteem is a global evaluation reflecting our view of our accomplishments and capabilities, our values, our bodies, other’s responses to us, and events, or occasions, our possessions”.

Many researchers over the years have made comparative studies of employed and unemployed women on various psychological variables. There have been contradictory results. Moreover, there is dearth of such studies on Iranian population. Most of the studies have been done outside Iran, from which it is difficult to generalize for Iranian population. It is therefore doubtful if the replication of such studies done abroad will yield similar results in Iran, with different social, cultural and political set-up. Therefore, there is a need of such a study in the Iranian set-up and culture.

Methods

A stratified convenience sampling technique was used for the selection of the sample. The sample consisted of 250 married employed women (175 professional and 75 non-professionally employed women) and 250 married unemployed women (divorcees, widows or women living apart from the husbands were not included in the study) in the age range of 24-41 years belonging to lower, middle, and upper socioeconomic status groups, with educational qualification of 10+2 and above and having at least one school going child. Sample of 250 married employed women with the above mentioned demographic characteristics were drawn from various organizations in Zabol City in Iran. In the sample of employed women, 175 professional women, i.e., doctors, teachers, lawyers, obstetricians, and 75 non-professionally employed women, i.e., officers, clerks working in banks, offices, and secretaries employed in different organizations were selected. A sample of 250 unemployed married women was drawn for this study. Following were the inclusion criteria for selection of the sample: (i) those who had never taken up a job before or after marriage, (ii) those who did not plan to take up a job in the near future, and (iii) those who were not engaged in any kind of part-time or full-time independent business or helping in the family business.

The investigator proposed the following hypotheses to be tested. (1) It was expected that professionally employed

married women will be significantly higher than unemployed married women on self-efficacy and (1.a) self-esteem. (2) It was expected that professionally employed married women will be significantly higher than non-professionally employed women on self-efficacy and (2.a) self-esteem. (3) It was expected that non-professionally employed married women be significantly higher than unemployed married women on self-efficacy and (3.a) self-esteem.

ANOVA was applied to test for differences among employed women (professional/non-professional) and unemployed women on self-efficacy and self-esteem. Post-hoc *t*-values were computed for the variables which yielded significant *F* values. *T*-ratios were computed to see the significance of difference between means for unemployed and employed, professional and non-professionally employed women on self-efficacy and self-esteem.

Scales

The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE)

The scale in German Language was developed in 1979 by Jerusalem and Schwarzer and later revised and adapted to 26 other languages including English and Persian by various co-authors. The scale was developed to assess a general sense of perceived self-efficacy with the aim in mind to predict coping with daily hassles as well as adaptation after experiencing all kinds of stressful life events. The scale is designed for the general adult population, including adolescents. Persons below the age of 12 should not be tested. The scale is usually self-administered, as part of a more comprehensive questionnaire. The scale has 10 items with 4 point scale, ranging from 1 to 4 (1=not at all true), (2=hardly true), (3=moderately true), to (4= exactly true). Responses to all the 10 items have to be summed up to yield the final composite score with a range from 10 to 40. In samples from 23 nations, Cronbach’s alphas ranged from 0.76 to 0.90, with the majority in the higher range of 0.80. The scale is unidimensional. Criterion-related validity is documented in numerous correlational studies where positive coefficients were found with favorable emotions, dispositional optimism, and work satisfaction. Negative coefficient was found with depression, anxiety, stress, burnout, and health complaints.

The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI)

The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI; Coopersmith, 1989) was designed to measure the respondent’s attitudes toward self in personal, social, family, and academic areas of experience. The original CSEI, called the School Form, was constructed to measure self-esteem in children. Most of the 50 self-esteem items in the School Form were adapted from scale items used by Rogers and Dymond (1954) in their classic study of nondirective psychotherapy.

The self-esteem inventory (SEI) Adult Form has been adapted from the short form for use with persons over fifteen years of age. Adult Form consists of 25 items, most of these based on items selected from the School Short Form. This form includes two types of positive and negative re-

Table 1: Means (SD), for Self-Efficacy and Self-Esteem for Employed (P=Professional/NP=Non-professional) and Unemployed (UN) Women

Variable	UN N=250	P N=175	NP N=75
Self-efficacy	28.94± 6.18*	30.31±5.68†	28.21±6.39
Self-esteem	63.81±13.97*	67.18±15.21†	62.89±12.55

*UN vs. P, p<0.05

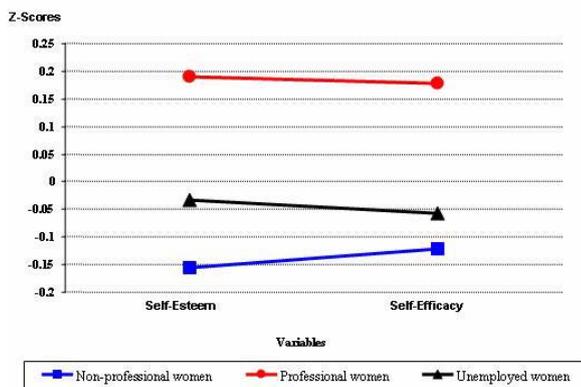
†P vs. NP, p <0.05

sponses. In all questions, the subject will find a list of statements about feelings, it is expected that he selects “Like Me”. If statement does not describe how he usually feels, it is expected that he chooses “Unlike Me”. Therefore, the subject’s response to each question is specified using a two-point scale such as “Like Me” and “Unlike Me”. The SEI (Adult Form) yields a total score. With 25 items, scores range from 0 to 25, and obtained score is multiplied by 4. The maximum possible total score is 100. Low score indicates low self-esteem and high score shows high self-esteem. The test retest reliability for the SEI was originally reported by Coopersmith (1967) to be .88 for a sample of 50 children in grade V (five week interval) and 0.70 for a sample of 56 children 12 years old (three year interval). The Self-Esteem Inventory Adult Form with 25 items can be safely considered as valid for the purpose of data collection in Iran (Tabatabaei Yahya Abadi, 2003).

Results

The present study was conducted to find out the differences amongst employed women (professionals/non-professionals) and unemployed women on self-efficacy and self-esteem. The results are shown in Table 1 and Figure 1. Table 1 shows the mean scores were obtained for self-efficacy and for self-esteem between professionally employed and unemployed women. A glance at Table 1 shows that professionally employed women are significantly higher on self-efficacy than unemployed women (t=2.31, P<0.05), and significantly higher on self-esteem than unemployed women (t=2.36, P<0.05). Also, the table shows that profes-

Figure 1. Comparative Profiles of Employed (Professional and Non-professional) and Unemployed Women for Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy. Means were transformed to z-scores



sionally employed women are significantly higher on self-efficacy (t=2.57, P<0.05) and significantly higher on self-esteem (t= 2.15, P<0.05) than non-professional women. Unemployed women and non-professional women did not differ significantly on self-efficacy and self-esteem. Z scores obtained of self-efficacy and self esteem show that professionally employed women are higher on self-efficacy and self esteem than non-professional and unemployed women, and that unemployed women are higher on self-efficacy and self-esteem than non-professionally employed women.

The GSE scores (ANOVA; F=4.079; df=2/497; p<0.05) and the CSEI scores (ANOVA; F=4.764; df=2/497, p<0.05) showed significant differences. The ANOVA was followed by Scheffe’s post-hoc tests.

Discussion

The work status on self-efficacy and self-esteem revealed that the three groups of women (professional, non-professionally employed and unemployed women) differ significantly on self-efficacy and self-esteem. The professionally employed women were significantly higher on self-efficacy than unemployed women. Thus the findings of the present study support hypothesis 1.

The present findings are in consonance with the findings of Messias et al. (1997). According to them, occupying multiple roles is thought to increase the women’s chances to learn, to develop self-efficacy and self-esteem, to build social network and open access to informational, instrumental and emotional support, and to buffer life’s stresses and strains. Playing multiple roles also provides cognitive cushioning and alternative sources of self-esteem and gratification when things go poorly in one’s life domain.

Self-efficacy can be viewed as a catalyst for an increase in well-being. Individuals with high self-efficacy beliefs also report strong feelings of well-being and high self-esteem in general. According to Bandura (1998), women who have a strong sense of efficacy to manage the multiple demands of family work and are able to get their husbands' support and assistance for childcare, experience a positive sense of well-being. But those who are beset by self-doubts in their ability to combine the dual roles suffer physical and emotional strain.

There are several studies that reported higher psychological well-being amongst employed women in comparison to unemployed women (e.g, Bernard, 1971; Walker and Walker, 1980; House et al., 1988; Flmmer, 1990; Ozer, 1995;

Bandura, 1997; Bryson and Warner-Smith, 1998; Martire et al., 2000; Murray et al., 2003; Rao, 2003).

In contrast to the above, there are studies which confirmed that employed women are lower on psychological well-being (e.g., Walker and Best, 1991; Macran et al., 1996). Whether or not employment outside home is beneficial to women's well-being depends on the work conditions, quality of organization, the person's subjective perception, and satisfaction with the job. However there are other studies which found less or no difference in psychological well-being between employed and unemployed women (e.g., Campbell et al., 1976; Menaghan, 1989).

The professionally employed women were significantly higher on self-esteem than unemployed women. Thus the findings of the present study support hypothesis 1.a.

These results are in consonance with the findings of several other researchers who found higher self-esteem among employed women than unemployed women (e.g., Feld, 1963; Bernard, 1972; Coleman and Antonucci, 1983; Paula et al., 1986; Messias et al., 1997; Mary and Good, 2005).

Contrary to the above results, Suh (1994) found employed women had lower score on self-esteem than unemployed women. There are a few researchers who found that different social tasks produce role strain or conflict amongst employed women (Goode, 1960; Slater, 1963; Sarbin, and Allen, 1968).

However, there are other studies which reported no differences between career women and home oriented women in regard to their self-esteem (e.g., Allen-Kee, 1980; Hartley, 1980; Tabatabaei, 1999c).

One of the main reasons for higher self-esteem among professionally employed women is that women who hold multiple roles may be better at coping or less susceptible to psychological distress, and women who have fewer roles may be more psychologically vulnerable and drop or lose roles. Holding more roles is associated with higher self-esteem and job satisfaction (Paula et al., 1986).

Higher self-esteem among professional working women as compared to unemployed could be due to the fact that these women would something positive (such as higher status and economic independence) in an opportunity to work outside the home. A feeling of contributing to the welfare of their families as well as society might enhance their self-esteem. Taylor and Spencer (1988) found that working mothers acknowledge the joys of combined employment and family responsibilities. When a woman goes out to work, she shakes off the feeling of subordination (Stein, 1978). Work provides a woman with more self-esteem and to some extent satisfies her need for recognition freedom, power, independence, and the need for social contacts. And sometimes, job might operate as a safety valve through which frustrations which could be expressed in the family are avoided or diverted (Ross, Mirowsky, and Huber, 1983; Krouse, 1984). In a way, working outside the home provides a set of social ties for women (Baruch et al., 1987). Beside, women are quite communicative and want to discuss their problems with others (Gupta, 1998). This opportunity

would be there more in case of working rather than non-working women leading to their better self-esteem.

Professionally employed women have more autonomy, higher worthiness, less discrimination at work place, lesser role conflicts, more positive attitude of family and husband towards her job (Chaudhry, 1995), they are higher on self-esteem (Bernard, 1972; Winefield & Tiggemann, 1990; Messias et al., 1997; Mary & Good, 2005), higher on well-being (Pearlin, 1975; Bartley et al., 1992; Rao, 2003), have strong ability, committed interests and sound psychological health (Donelson and Gullahorn, 1977), and have a high level of education. All of these positive characteristics make them higher on self-efficacy and self-esteem than unemployed women.

The professionally employed women were higher on self-efficacy than non-professionally employed women. The result is in consonance with hypothesis 2.

This finding is similar to the results obtained by Park (2000). He revealed that Korean professional working women have higher gratification and than do housewives. Worker women or women belonging to low socio-economic level and having non-professional career had less support from husband, and did not have any person for helping them and had to work long hours daily and had less efficacy. Park (2000) stated that these professional women enjoyed more in their job and had feeling of worthiness.

Geigner and Crow (2004) reported that women who select non-traditional female jobs exhibit certain characteristics that are not present in women who select traditional female jobs. The characteristics such as their perceived gender-role, demographic factors, their occupational activity and self-efficacy are different from their more traditional counter parts.

Professionals were found to be higher on self-esteem than non-professionally employed women. The obtained results substantiate hypothesis 2.a.

The present results lend support to findings by confirmed by Poloma (1972), Yogeve (1983), Park (2000), and Kazemi Haghighi (2002). They stated that professionally employed women see themselves as able to integrate their roles effectively as career persons with their roles as wives and mothers. They have a very positive feeling about themselves and most of them managed role strain through compromise and compartmentalization as compared to non-professionally employed women. Braboy and Mustillo (2001) too reported that less prestigious occupation is associated with poor self-esteem.

The reason for higher self-esteem among professionally employed women than non-professionally employed women may be because of the fact that employment is associated with enhanced self-esteem and life satisfaction only when it is regarded as a career or significant life work. For those women who did not think of the paid work role as a long-term life goal, employment was not linked to higher self-esteem or life satisfaction. Satisfaction with job and salience of the occupational role has been found to be higher in professional working women and this explains their being

higher on self-esteem than non-professionally employed women.

Another reason is that the Iranian women with multiple roles especially in non-professional jobs face more stress, because of lower income and support. They have less family support, social acceptance and less governmental support. Thus, employment status alone can not enhance the self-esteem of non-professionally employed women.

The sample was collected from city of Zabol which is traditional in set up as compared to metro city like Teheran. Sharing of household work by spouses is not the norm. So the non-professionals are over burdened with dual roles and carry guilt for not performing their roles well, leading to low self-esteem.

A plausible reason for higher self-efficacy and self-esteem amongst professionally employed women than non-professionally employed women is that, there are a variety of environmental and social factors which have been proposed as mediators of the relationship between employment and self-efficacy. Among the factors that control the role of paid work leading to greater well-being are occupational involvement and quality of work relationships (Warr and Parry, 1982) and how much responsibility a woman's partner accepts for household and child care tasks (Kessler and Mc Rao, 1982). Professionally employed women as compared to non-professional women have more support from spouses, have better quality of work, relationships and also have better learning for skills required in the profession. All these have positive impact on self-efficacy of professional women.

One important factor in determining the relationship between paid work and self-efficacy and paid work and self-esteem, is level of employment. Professionally employed women are higher on social status and have better support from society and less discrimination at work place (Chaudhry, 1995) and they have better work facilities than non-professionally employed women. This can ensure better self-efficacy and self-esteem amongst Professionally employed women.

The unemployed and non-professionally employed women did not differ significantly on self-efficacy. The result does not support hypothesis 3.

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, factors such as the quality of roles (Barnett and Baruch, 1985), available financial resources (Home, 1998), job characteristics (Bond & Bunce 2003), social support (Riefman, Biernat and Lang, 1991; Thakar & Misra, 1999), influence the effects of multiple roles involvement for working mothers.

Lennon (1994) found similar results. He found that full-time housework involves more autonomy, more interruptions, greater physical effort, more routine, fewer time pressures and less responsibility for matters outside one's control than paid work.

Since large number of non-professional women work not by choice as compared to the professionally employed women, (Chaudhry, 1995) this reflects their lower motivation and confidence for jobs which in turn is indicator of low self-efficacy. The non-professional women may not be very different from unemployed women in their antecedent variables particularly family variables- an important source of self-efficacy.

The unemployed and non-professionally employed women did not differ significantly on self-esteem. The results do not substantiate hypothesis 3.a.

The obtained results are in line with some of the previous findings (Hartley, 1980; Tabatabaei, 1999c) who failed to find any significant differences both employed and unemployed women on self-esteem.

According to Pietromonaco, Manis, and Markus (1987), full-time employment does not enhance self-esteem and well-being for women who are not career-oriented but does for career oriented women. Thus, the effect of multiple roles may differ among employed women depending on their career orientation. If women consider career as a source for fulfillment of self, employment can increase their self-esteem. Most of the non-professionals are not career-oriented because they work not by choice or for self-growth, their reason for being employed is earning money and most of them occupy stressful and low level jobs. This may be the reason that career can not increase their self-esteem and they are at the same level as unemployed women regarding self-esteem.

Paula et al. (1987) found that employment was associated with higher self-esteem only for women who thought paid role as a significant and meaningful part of their lives. For women who were not career oriented, full time employment was not related to positive feelings. Perhaps that is the reason; larger number of non-professionally employed women than professionally employed women tends to leave jobs for the sake of family once the financial position improves.

Another reason for finding no differences between non-professionally employed and unemployed women on self-efficacy and self-esteem may be because of, non-professionally employed women career is not a significant source of self-fulfillment. Because most of them work for fulfillment of their physical needs such as financial needs. They are low on social status and level of employment and feel more discrimination at work place. They have less of husband or family support and less positive attitude to their jobs and family, they have less opportunity to learn for coping with changing patterns because of lower level of education and more work overload. When a person is going through a phase of stressful life events and role conflicts, one is bound to have certain ill effect of these experiences. It can affect the general well-being, quality of life and self-efficacy of an individual. There may be emotional, cognitive or psychological disruption. When people are asked how they feel under stress, they usually respond with terms like anxious, irritable, anxiety, depressed or guilty. Women and their self-efficacy is multi-dimensional theme and have to be viewed from a wide range of perspective. Self-efficacy is linked to self-confidence, self-esteem, self-respect and right

attitude to face life. For all these reasons, career per se may not increase the self-efficacy and self-esteem of non-professional women.

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