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Brief Report

A comparative study of mental health and life satisfaction in employed and unemployed woman

Mohammad Reza Tammanaeifar¹; *Hakimeh Leis²

¹Associate professor of psychology department, Kashan University, Kashan, Iran

²MA. student in psychology, Kashan University, Kashan, Iran

Abstract

Introduction: Regarding to the increasing rate of women's social cooperation, the importance of their mental health and life satisfaction and women's crucial role in the establishment of healthy family and society, the present research aimed to compare mental health and life satisfaction among employed and unemployed women.

Materials and Methods: In this descriptive study, 120 employed women in governmental offices and 120 unemployed women were selected through random cluster sampling. 24 of them (experimental and control groups) were selected by purposeful method. For data collection, General Health Questionnaire-28 and Diener's Life Satisfaction Inventory were used. Data analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics through SPSS software.

Results: The results showed that employed women had higher scores in life satisfaction and general health questionnaires compared to unemployed women ($P < 0.05$).

Conclusion: It seems that employee has a positive impact on life satisfaction and mental health of women so providing for women's social cooperation and entrepreneurship in congruence with women's status and dignity and facilitation of interaction between working and family life are recommended.

Keywords: Employed, Mental health, Life satisfaction, Women

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*Corresponding Author: Department of psychology, Kashan

University, Kashan, Iran
hakimeh_leis@yahoo.com

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Introduction

One of the important changes of the modern life is increasing number of women who working out of home. Women's participation in the occupational world is increasing in all societies, and this tendency has caused the alteration of traditional roles (1). The WHO has identified women's health as one of the developmental indicators of countries (2). In examining the differences in the level of women's health, a number of sociologists and researchers have focused on women's employment within the framework of their social roles (3). The concept of mental health means the inner sense of being good and ensuring the individual's efficiency, self-reliance, competitive capacity, intergenerational membership, and self-development of intellectual and emotional potentials, etc. (4). Women's employment increases the chances of learning, expanding the social network, and taking advantage of informational, emotional and instrumental support through increasing their roles for coping with stress and life challenges. Also, playing multiple roles helps develop self-esteem and satisfaction (5), and if compatible with skill and expertise, it can contribute to the quality of women's lives.

One of the key issues in the field of women's health is the mental health of employed women. The research results in this regard are not in harmony. Approaches such as, multiple roles, role conflict, and excessive burden of role suggest that the expectations and pressures associated with playing multiple roles make working women more vulnerable and expose them to undesirable condition as compared to women who only have the traditional roles. In contrast, other models, such as the role enhancement hypothesis and role-expansion theory emphasize that employment as a new role added to the traditional roles of women

leads to greater self-esteem, greater financial independence and wider social support (6). Nelson and Heath state that in general, employed women are healthier than women who work full-time at home term of mental health (7). Findings of Zanjani and Bayat, Kerman Saravi et al. have shown that employed women have a higher level of mental health than housewives (8,9). However, the results of some studies do not confirm these results (10,11).

One of the indicators and predictors of mental health is life satisfaction (12). Myers and Diener (1995) showed that life satisfaction is associated with high levels of mental health (13). Life satisfaction means the individual's attitude and general assessment of life or some aspects of life, such as familial life and educational experience (12). Life satisfaction is relatively sensitive to the environmental changes, and the perception of one's well-being is of paramount importance (14). It has different dimensions including self-satisfaction, satisfaction about relationships with family and friends, satisfaction with the living environment and work environments (15). Ying (1992) found out in a study that different demographic variables explain life satisfaction, but the role of job is more prominent than the other variables. The results of some studies indicated that life satisfaction in employed women is higher than house wives (17-19). However, some studies did not confirm more this finding (20,21).

Accordingly, given the controversy about the positive and negative consequences of women's employment and different results of previous studies, and the growing rate of employed women, there is a need to conduct further studies on the various dimensions of women's professional life. Hence, the present study compares the mental health

and life satisfaction of employed and unemployed women.

Materials and Methods

The present research is a cross-sectional study. 120 employed women (according to Morgan table) and 120 unemployed women were selected by stratified random sampling. To enter the study, the female gender, aged 20-55years, the level of education (diploma and higher degree) and the willingness of the participants to cooperate were considered as inclusion criteria. The purpose of the research, the necessity for the accuracy and integrity of the respondents' answers, the confidentiality of the information and the instructions of the questionnaires were explained. Moreover, the participants were asked not to mention their names in this study. The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28) and the Diener's Life Satisfaction Inventory (SWLS) were used to collect data.

Research instrument

A) *Diener's Life Satisfaction Inventory (SWLS)*: It is a ten-item questionnaire which is scored on 7-point Likert scale from totally agree to totally disagree. Diener et al. (1985) have reported its Cronbach's alpha as 0.87. Schimmack et al. have reported its Cronbach's alpha among the American, German, Japanese, Mexican and Chinese nations to be 0.90, 0.89, 0.79, 0.76 and 0.61,

respectively (22, 23). Asgari and Shabaki have reported the reliability of scale using Cronbach's alpha and bisection to be equal to 0.86 and 0.82. Sheikhi et al. have obtained the Cronbach's alpha and test-retest of SWLS equal to 0.85 and 0.77, respectively (24).

B) *General Health Questionnaire (GHQ)*: This is a 28-item questionnaire with four subscales of anxiety/insomnia, depression, social dysfunction and somatic symptoms (each of subscale includes 7 items). This scale is scored on Likert scale (0, 1, 2, 3). The higher scores indicate the lower levels of health and vice versa. Goldberg and Williams have reported its bisection reliability to be equal to 0.95. Another similar study in Hong Kong reported its alpha to be equal to 0.88 (25,26). Reliability coefficients have been reported to be between 0.84 and 0.92 by Houman and Mirkheshti (cited in 27).

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (correlation test and t test) using SPSS software.

Results

The mean scores of mental health and life satisfaction are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Scores of mental health and life satisfaction variables in employed and unemployed women

Indices	Employed women			Unemployed women		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Variables						
Mental health	120	19.05	5.41	120	24.75	6.75
Somatic symptoms	120	4.83	1.85	120	6.65	3.06
Anxiety/insomnia	120	4.63	1.17	120	6.82	1.45
Social dysfunction	120	5.72	2.02	120	6.43	2.14
Depression	120	3.87	2.72	120	4.85	2.81
Life satisfaction	120	29.21	4.23	120	23.42	4.75

The findings of Table 1 show that the mean scores of mental health in employed and unemployed women are 19.05 and 24.75,

respectively. The mean scores of life satisfaction in employed and unemployed women are 29.21 and 23.42, respectively.

Table 2. T-test results of employed and unemployed women in the variables of mental health and life satisfaction

Variables	t value	df	P
Mental health	-2.06	238	0.02
Somatic symptoms	2.7	238	0.01
Anxiety/insomnia	-.76	238	0.01
Social dysfunction	-02.08	238	0.02
Depression	1.9	238	0.04
Life-satisfaction	2.07	238	0.03

As shown in Table 2, according to the mean difference, employed women have higher scores of mental health and life satisfaction.

Table 3. The results of the correlation test between the scores of life satisfaction and mental health in employed and unemployed women

Variables	Groups	Correlation coefficients	P
Life satisfaction and mental health	Employed	-0.54	0.001
	Unemployed	-0.39	0.001
	Total	-0.47	0.001

Table 3 shows that there is a significant negative correlation between life satisfaction and mental health in both employed and unemployed women. In addition, the correlation between these variables is stronger in employed women. It should be noted that the results of regression analysis showed that the component of social function is the strongest predictor of life satisfaction.

Discussion

The findings of this study showed that employed women had higher scores of mental health and life satisfaction compared to unemployed women. Many scholars believe that women's employment can be effective in the increase of self-esteem, self-reliance, social health, academic

achievement, continuing education, self-efficacy and accountability. Participation in valuable social activities also improves the individual's health (28).

The findings also showed that employed women enjoy a higher life satisfaction than housewives (17-19). Life satisfaction is one of the indicators and predictors of mental health. Research literature shows that a person who is satisfied with oneself can also satisfy his needs and desires. According to the humanism approach, such as the cognitive approach, the individual's ability to grow personally, the freedom to choose the goals of life and the positive attributes such as being sensitive to others is emphasized instead of emphasizing reinforcement and punishment as the main source of motivation. Employed women have higher levels of life satisfaction because of the diversity in the place (entering an environment other than home), diversity in activity (having a job outside home), financial independence and psychological self-esteem (29). The results of Khosravi and Khaghanifard's research have shown that positive emotional experiences such as the feeling of doing a worthwhile work and the sense of economic

independence that emanates from employment confirm a part of the coordination of roles theory. This theory believes that although multiple roles can create conflicts, women's ability to organize the overall system of roles is more rewarding than risky and provides them with resources of satisfaction, sense of productivity, and self-esteem that can reduce the effect of the conflict of roles (30).

According to the results of this study, providing the ground for women's social participation and employment opportunities in line with the status of women and facilitating the interaction between working life and family life of working women is effective in increasing the mental health and life satisfaction of working women. The current research has some limitations, including the administration of questionnaire as a self-report tool which might give way to

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human error. Moreover, this study is a descriptive-correlational study which makes it impossible to induce the casual relationship between the variables. This limitation may also decrease the generalization of the results. Performing further research with different questionnaires, studying other variables (other than life satisfaction and mental health) and conducting comparative studies in different occupations would be helpful.

Conclusion

It seems that employee has a positive impact on life satisfaction and mental health of women so providing for women's social cooperation and entrepreneurship in congruence with women's status and dignity and facilitation of interaction between working and family life are recommended.

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