

Men's Joblessness and Women's Supportive Strategies: A Qualitative Study in Pakistan

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Abstract:

The present study investigates the significance of spousal support in moderating economic and psychological effects of involuntary job loss. We purposively interrogated ten couples in which husbands had lost their jobs by using interview guide. Findings revealed that families faced serious economic problems and they adopted certain strategies to cope with the situation. The study pointed economic crisis as a major reason for the psychological problems however gender differences were evident regarding behavioral changes like anger and irritation as these traits were more reported by the males. Nonetheless women were found more resilient and tried to

support husbands in this situation by providing emotional support, reducing expenses and avoiding conflicts. We found that husbands acknowledged the wives' emotional and material support but were reluctant to openly appreciate it because of cultural reasons. In addition, support, from other social networks such as friends and relatives, was not as effective as that of wives.

Key words: spousal support, involuntary job loss, emotional support, economic crisis

Job displacement may be a consequence of global economic down turn, globalization, technological advancements or employee restructuring. Sudden deprivation of job lowers the standard of living and leads to the economic strains (Conger & Elder. 1994; Yeung and Hofferth 1998; Haraba et al 2002; Kwon et al 2003). Generally job deprivation precipitate change in consumption behavior patterns such as cutting back expenses that includes reducing entertainment food and major household expenses, shifting to less expensive housing along with the increased efforts for generating additional income (Conger & Elder 1994; Yeung and Hofferth 1998). Usually in two- parent families husbands' unemployment stimulates wives' labor supply and makes them more active in generating additional income to lessen the economic strains (Conger & Elder 1994; Yeung and Hofferth 1998; Kohara 2008; Skoufias and Parker 2004).

Moreover financial intricacies have consistently found significant in creating psychological distress among unemployed (Kim 2007), increasing their stress (Benokrait 2005: 371; Strong 2005: 408-409; Conger et al 1992; 1994; 1999; 2002; Hraba et al 2002; Kwon et al. 2003), impairing physical health (Turner 1995; Price et al. 2002), decreasing personal control, raising depression and enhancing inability to reemploy (Price et al. 2002). Research reveals that job loss is equally stressful for wives as for displaced husbands. Wives'

attachment with their husband, role strain related to enhanced household financial or parenting responsibilities could be the reason for emotional distress in them (Rook et al. 1999).

Furthermore, financial setback has significant relation with the change in spouses' behavior. Studies reported that economic strains directly and positively connect with hostile, irritable behavior established by men towards their wives (Conger et al. 1990; Hraba et al. 2002). Culture is also an important predictor of determining the patterns of behavior change in crisis. As Kwon et al. (2003) found that husband's emotional distress was not directly related to the marital conflict and it was due to Korean culture that assigned men outside duties and restricted them to express their emotions at home. Among wives the reason of conflicts was demand of money for monthly expenses especially for adolescent education. Additionally loss of spousal resources (such as income) reduced husbands' status at home that was another reason for conflict.

Moreover, marital hostility destabilize marriage (Conger et al. 1990) create marital distress (Conger et al. 1999; Known 2003; Hraba et al. 2002; Forthofer et al. 1996) lead to marital conflicts (Conger & Elder 1994; Kwon et al. 2003; Hraba et al. 2002) and marital dissolution (Diron & Mendolia 2010; Eliason 2011; Charles & Stephens 2001). Unemployment build chain of adversities for whole family as studies have depicted job loss to be an important predictor of distress among children by affecting their academic career (Steven and Schaller 2009; Skoufias and Parker 2004).

Although above mentioned are the realities associated with income loss but spousal support could intervene as mediator and help in moderating the depressive influences of financial pressures (Simon et al 2008; Conger et al 1999). Spousal support is regarded as assistance or understanding provided by spouses to one another in marital relation (Adam, King & King 1996). Support could be emotional or

instrumental. Emotional support consists of listening, affection or advice whereas instrumental support is regarded as tangible help. Existing literature have found spousal support significant in mitigating psychological distress (Lorenz et al. 1993) work stress (Miller et al., 2011) reducing work family conflict (Aycan & Eskin 2005) enhancing marital satisfaction (Brook et al. 2008) and avoiding conflicts during the period of economic stress (Conger et al. 1999).

Literature describes (Lakey& Cohen 2000, 30-36) that providing support to the partner depends on the level of companionship, intimacy and attachment to the other spouse. Quality of relationship elevates self-esteem, contributes to positive appraisal and promotes active coping with stressful events. Nevertheless, taking decisions about providing support is an individual decision that depends on the past as well as on the present and on perceived interaction with important others. The decision regarding the response to a partner's desire for support is also affected by the length of period in which partner has played the role of support provider. Being in the role of support provider for a long time can make that partner less helpful.

In addition, quality of relationship equally important to approach someone for support. Some other issues such as wish to protect a partner who is already heavily burdened by worries, reluctance to face the emotional reaction of a partner, fear that disclosure of problem will lead to conflict and past experience of unsatisfactory efforts by the partner prevent one partner approaching another (Badr et al. 2000, 3-11). Gender differences are found in terms of receiving and providing support as researches have revealed that spousal support function differently for men and women. Men receive more support from women whereas women do not get benefited from support as men do (Schwarzer & Dona 2005) and approach same gender to get support in stress (Uno et al. 2002; Turner 1995).

Keeping in view the significance of spousal support in mitigating stress this study is an attempt examines how spouses help each other in Pakistan where mostly families have strong kinship ties. Although, due to industrialization the proportion of people living in urban areas has increased (13.1% in 1961 to 32.5% in 1998, revised) families are transforming from the joint to nuclear family system and pushing females into the labor force (Baqai 1965) but apart from these changes, most of the families in Pakistan are traditional where the wife plays a supportive role and the husband is primary bread earner and his income is a major source of household expenditures. Keeping in view the situation this study was an attempt to trace out the changes in family dynamics after sudden deprivation of income and add new body of knowledge as this not much explored side in Pakistan. The research questions of this study are to investigate (i) the economic and psychological consequences faced by lower-middle income nuclear families in Pakistan after the husband's job loss (ii) and how spouses support each other to cope with crisis during the period of joblessness.

Methods

The study was qualitative in nature and the case study method was adopted among various qualitative research methods. Ten couples belonging to nuclear family structure were selected as research cases in which husbands were not more than 40 years of age and had been laid off in the year 2009-2010. Purposive sampling technique was used and only those couples were interviewed who had experienced at least six months after involuntary job loss.

The rational for husband's age criteria was that in Pakistan usually men and women get married in their twenties so husbands more than 40 years of age may have grown up children, especially grown up sons to support them after job loss

and they may not be affected by the job loss to that extent as a couple with younger children may be. Nuclear families manage all their expenses and daily routine matters by themselves and don't have elderly or other members to support them. So the reason for selecting a nuclear family was to examine the circumstances couples go through after job loss.

The researcher personally knew four couples, whereas the rest of the six couples were approached through personal contacts. It was not possible to personally meet all of the respondents for interviews due to availability issue. Those who were living out of Lahore were interviewed telephonically. It was effort of the researcher to meet at least one of the spouses personally. Only in one case the researcher could not meet any of the spouses because both were living in Raheemyar Khan. All of the respondents were assured of confidentiality that their information will only be used for research purposes and will not be disclosed elsewhere.

In-depth interview guide was prepared to ascertain details regarding the couples' experiences after job displacement. After collecting data, significant themes of the interview were derived and findings were interpreted by using thematic analysis technique and consolidating field notes taken during the interview.

Participant's Characteristics

Majority of the respondents belonged to the age bracket of thirties. Half (five) male respondents were belonged to the age bracket of (31-35) years and more than half (six) of the female respondents were of (30-34) years of age. No wide gap was found in the ages of husbands and wives and the mean age difference between them was 3.5 years. Same as the ages, no major difference was found between the educational level of the husbands and wives. More than half of the male respondents (seven) were studied up to F.A or B.A level where as half (five)

of the female respondents were graduated. The higher degree or professional diploma holders were only found among male respondents as in two cases among males, one had done M.sc and one had done diploma in civil engineering.

Half of the couples (five) had spent (6-10) years of their marital life and children range of all of the couples was between (1-5) children among them four couples had two or three children and three couples had one child. More than half (six) of the males had job tenure of less than 10 years and four were working for last ten or more years with organizations, where from they laid off. Three of the displaced workers lost their jobs due to plant closure and rest of seven were displaced in the consequences of downsizing. It shows that no matter what the job tenure is, employees with longer job tenure or shorter tenure, both are likely to be laid off. The monthly incomes of the respondents prior to job loss were varying between 11000Rs to 23000Rs. Majority (eight) of the displaced workers found alternative source of income within the six months after job loss but the quality and income of new source was not equivalent to the previous one. Among eight respondents (five) self-employed themselves and (three) started working on daily wages.

Findings

The primary purpose of this research was to examine the significance of spousal support in moderating the effects of job loss, making family survival possible in economic crisis and keeping family members hopeful and motivated. Job loss has many residual effects on family but in present research economic and psychological problems faced by victims of layoffs had been described. Economic effects of job displacement were analyzed by examining the economic hardships couples go through, the way they managed their expenses and arranged money to meet material needs.

Conger et al. (1992; 1994; 2002) postulated in "Family

Stress Model of Economic Hardships” that immediate set back of negative financial event was in form of economic pressures that made chain of adversities for family. Researchers claimed that economic hardships put economic pressures on family in form of unmet material needs, unpaid debts and painful cut backs. Furthermore, they defined economic pressure as an inability of earning member of the family to buy material resources, necessities of life for family and continuous reduction in household expenses (Conger et al. 1992; 1994; 1999; 2002). In present study economic pressures were explored under three main headings (i) difficulties to make both ends meets (ii) adjustments to reduce expenses and (iii) management of money after layoff.

Results revealed that immediate effect that couples faced after income loss was in form of economic pressures that made it difficult for all couples to fulfill their monthly expenses. Monthly expenditures consisted of payment of utility bills, school fee, house rent and purchasing of food. Furthermore it was found that in spite of hardships for making both ends meet, all of the couples showed their preference to pay bills because all were of the view that without utility facilities (electricity, gas and water) life will be worst for them and their survival will be at stake. Additionally, cultural variation was noticed in terms of economic pressures. In Pakistan it is common practice among wives to save money initiating monthly saving scheme. However, after husband’s layoff it became difficult for wives to add their monthly share of money in scheme.

Results showed that buying cloth and entertainment were not major expenses. It may because of the limited family income. Families interviewed in this research were occasionally buying cloths. It was mentioned by the respondents that they preferred to bring cloths only for their children especially on festive occasions like Eids. Out of ten couples, (seven had Eid-ul-Adha and three had both Eids (Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha) after job loss but not even single of them could be able to buy

clothes for their families. Same trends were observed regarding spending on entertainment. Couples did not go for picnic or eating out with their kids because they could not afford such expense in their inadequate salaries.

Adapting Strategies to Reduce the Monthly Expenses/Adjustments to Manage Expenses after Job Loss

Economic pressures have strong relationship with family adaptation strategies, such as cutting expenditures, planning to generate income (Conger et al. 1992; 1994; 1999; 2002), cutting on food expenditure, receiving of public assistance, residential shift, increased wife work effort and divorce or separation (Yeung and Hofferth 1997). Almost the same cut back strategies were adopted by the couples but cultural variation was noticed to adopt cut back strategies. All of the respondents were not able to spend lavishly on food even when they had a job. They used to cook simple food but after job displacement managing meals became very difficult for them. Half of the respondents started skipping meals due to unavailability of money and the remaining half curtailed food expenditure as much as they could to manage during the period of economic crunch.

Moreover, it was found that wives were adopting some other strategies such as adding less or no cooking oil in food, skipping the dish ingredients i.e. garlic, ginger or tomatoes and preferring to give their share of food to the children and the husbands. A (Mrs. M) provided details in this regard and shared:

One day the dish I prepared for dinner was not enough for the whole family. After cooking I directed my elder daughter to serve the dinner and I lay down on the bed and pretended that I was not feeling well and wanted to sleep. When they finished dinner I got up offered prayers and checked the pot, there was

only half a chapatti left. I ate that piece of chapatti with a glass of water and sleep.

Shifting to Less Expensive House

In this study, couples (four) living in a rented house moved to less expensive house or left the rented house and started living with relatives (wife's parents). Husbands also admitted that they might have to shift to shrine with their families for shelter if they did not get any help from their in-laws. Additionally, payment of rent by husband's brothers was another prominent findings regarding support received by families affected from economic strains. Families who moved to less expensive houses explained that the house was congested, smaller in size than the previous one and lesser in rent. The selection of house was only to curtail expenses in economic crisis. It can be predicted that living in smaller congested housing areas could harm the family health in future.

Change of Children's School

Coelli 2005; Oreopoulos, Page and Stevens 2008; Steven and Schaller 2009 have found father's job loss effected academic career of their children and same relation was also noticed in this study. Couples opted to change the school of their children to curtail tuition expenses or even stopped sending them to school altogether owing to lack of money. As eight of them had school going children, among them one had changed the school of their children to minimize the educational expenses and three mentioned that they were not sending their children to school because they did not have money to pay their school fee and related expenses. Furthermore, it was found that families who had school children dropouts or had to change their kid's school, belonged to the lower end of income bracket that also did not receive any financial compensation at layoffs as

compared to those families who received any financial compensation or had prior savings.

In Pakistan, it is quite common that the earning male member of a family does not only fulfill his family needs rather he also has the responsibility of maintaining his old parents or younger siblings too. Therefore, job loss does not only make one family vulnerable rather it also brings misfortune to others as well.

As 'K' described:

After job loss it was very difficult for me to pay the school fee of my children. So I decided to drop out my children out of school. When I have a proper source of income then I will send them back to school. Even my sister was very fond of studying and was preparing for B.A exams but I wasn't been able to pay her exam fee as well.

Psychological Effects of Job Loss

Conger et al. 1992;1994; 1999;2000; 2002; Kim 2007; Hraba et al. 2002; Kown 2003 claimed that economic hardship negatively affects the psychological well-being of family. That proved to be right in this study as well. The main reason of causing distress among couples was unmet material needs. Psychological problems were examined by depression, behavioral change and self-esteem level.

Depression also caused physical problems (such as sleeplessness and headache) among respondents. The frequency of sleeplessness was more than the headache and change in appetite. A slight gender difference was noticed in this regard as husbands were suffering more from sleeplessness than wives. The five wives, who started providing financial support to their husbands, also had some other physical problems like backache and fatigue. Additionally, husbands were also worried at not getting a proper source of income even after six months of job loss and wives expressed their worries regarding

managing the household budget in less or no money. Furthermore six wives explained that worries and concerns of their husbands to restore their status as to uphold and maintain family once again was additional reason for wives to get tensed.

As 'A' (A's wife) mentioned:

After passing seven months without proper income and due to my illness the level of my tension has been increased and it is difficult to sleep well at night. I get irritated soon and speak harshly to my children. I am unable to do household chores due to problem in spinal cord and I get upset by watching my husband washing cloths and kitchen utensils. My husband work very hard in hot summer days to earn and perform household task on my behalf and that is very depressing for me.

Behavioral changes such as irritation and anger were found to be greater in husbands. In the present study, seven of the husbands mentioned that they felt change in their behavior after the stress full event of job loss otherwise; they did not hold these personality traits. Such behavioral changes were making them hostile towards wives whereas it was not the same in the case of wives. Anger or irritation was not common among wives but a small number (two) of wives admitted that they had such kind of behavioral changes. Their anger was due to economic stress or illness. Results show that wives were more wisely adopting in such manners that could be effective in avoiding conflicts. They did not respond to their husbands when they were in rage and did not disclose their tensions to their husbands. These were the effective strategies adopted by the wives to overcome the conflicts.

Effect on Self-Esteem and Level of Motivation

It is pertinent to mention here that no underlying signs of hopelessness were found among most of the couples. It was

found that support (emotional/ financial) from spouses to each other was significant in avoiding marital conflicts and for family survival. It is true that spousal support does not make all the negative consequences of job loss vanish but it helps members to stay motivated and encouraged to cope up with the crisis. In patriarchal societies, loss of income means the loss of power for the husbands in the family and losing power means losing value at home (Known et al, 2003) but in the present study in most of the families even after the husbands' job loss wives maintain their respect and value and support them in coping with the effects of layoff. Couples' religiosity was another important factor to keep them motivated and hopeful for the future.

Financial and Emotional Support provided by the spouses

It was found that wives were more supportive and wise to keep their husband motivated and hopeful. Five wives self-employed themselves or started teaching at school for generating money to accomplish household expenses. Income generation by the wives was in a way supported by the wives for their husbands and releasing their economic pressure. Wives were also providing emotional support to their husbands by keeping them positive for better jobs. Six husbands admitted that their wives consoled them by showing positivity for their jobs which helped them to maintain hope for the future. Moreover, it has been noticed that the wives managed all the expenses in very limited budget, saving money for expenses by delaying doctor's visits in pregnancy, looking for a way out to handle the situation was a great source of motivation for husbands. All of the husbands were of the view that if their wives did not curtail expenses and demanded for money then the situation could be worst for them.

Although, income loss did not bring change in the power

position of husbands but interestingly, in two cases, it was noticed that a prolonged period of unemployment and change in circumstances affected the level of support provided by the spouse. It justifies the argument made by (Badr et al. 2000, 9) that being in the role of support provider for long time can stop that partner to provide support.

As 'S' said:

In the beginning, my wife was quite positive about the future and my new job. She often used to encourage me. She said that I don't need to be worried; soon I will get a good job. With the passage of time, her optimism for my job and future converted into pessimism. She started arguing over money problems. Now she resides at my in-laws with children and again she advises me to not worry everything will be fine again.

Adopted Strategies to Avoid Stress

It was found that husbands were more likely to express anger after job loss but wives tried to be silent in the situation when their husbands used to behave angrily towards them. Out of seven respondents, who had a change in their moods after job loss and got angry over petty issues and spoke harshly or rudely to their wives and sometimes with children, among them wives of five respondents did not respond to them with anger and kept silent to avoid the dispute and to cool them down. No talking back by wives may be counted as a strategy to avoid dispute. Otherwise disputes can increase the level of depression in spouses and can also affect the children negatively.

K's wife (R) also said:

My husband works as street vendor. He gets tired because of hectic work and the hot summer weather, due to this he often shouts at me on coming back to home. But I keep silent because if I will do the same then the situation may worsen and he will be tense.

Another strategy adopted by the wives was hiding tensions and worries from their husbands. All of the wives were tense due to improper income and unmet needs but most (nine) of them did not disclose their worries to their husbands. They were of the view that if they would do so it could increase their husbands' level of tension. None or little evidence was found in cases of husbands to adopt such strategies to console their wives. As they were the victims of job loss and were giving more priority to be care of and were not thinking of consoling their wives.

Discussion

Sudden deprivation of job has adverse effects for family survival and economic pressures are one of the immediate consequences on family. It leads to several strategies to meet family needs (Conger et al. 1992; 1994; 1999; 2002; Yeung and Hofferth 1997). In this research the most prevalent strategy opted by the respondents was cut on grocery budget that built a contrast with the results of Yeung and Hofferth (1997). They found that lower income families were not active in spending less on eating during financial setback because they may already have low food consumption level. Moreover, it was found that few wives were tactfully giving their share of food to other family members. These are the significant results that contribute in existing literature by finding out which partner got more affected by the crisis and contribute in more effective and wise manner to cope with crisis. Those who were living on rented house shifted to less expensive ones or they started living with relatives or in-laws and it was not to search for better job opportunity as founded by (Yeung and Hofferth 1997) rather it was done in order to curtail house rent or because of absence of money to pay the rent. Support from in-laws is one of the prominent findings of this research. Such kind of support from social network was highlighted in very few researches. Moreover, in Pakistani society, people do not receive any kind

of public welfare assistance in crisis like economic set back or unemployment, however social support network in Pakistan is somewhat active for making family survival possible in crisis or in disasters like these.

Termination of studies or change of school to curtail expenses was causing depression in children because they wanted to continue their formal studies. School dropout or change of school was not the only reason that was making children sad; they were also upset due to economic anxiety of parents. Repetitive questions by the children from mothers about fathers job loss was sign of children's worries due to changed attitude of mothers and parental conflicts. It can be predicted that in future, parent's economic hardships and its related consequences can create behavioral problems in children. Same as Conger et al., (1992) claimed that economic pressures created emotional distress among parents and lead to marital conflicts that impaired children socialization and generate behavioral problems among adolescents.

Conger et al. (1992; 1994; 1999; 2002; Hraba et al. 2000; Kwon 2003) further claimed in that economic hardships negatively affect psychological well-being of family. A connection between economic pressures and psychological problems was found and the main reason of causing distress among couples was unmet material needs. It was found that job loss was not only depressing for husbands but was equally depressing for wives as well. Same relation between husband's job loss and wives' distress was found by Rook et al. (1991). He mentioned that emotional attachment of wives with husbands was one of the important reasons for wives distress. They were worried by seeing their husbands stressed. Same reason was explained by the wives in present study that worries and concerns of their husbands to restore their status as to uphold and maintain family once again was additional reason for wives to get tensed.

It was found that wives were more supportive and wise

to keep their husband motivated and hopeful. They did not only start providing financial support rather they were the important source of emotional support for their husbands. Wives entrance in labor market was in response to husband's joblessness and it relates with the findings of previously done researches (Conger et al. 1994; Yeung and Hofferth 1998; Skoufias and Parker 2004, Kohara 2009). They were giving positive appraisals to husbands' job seeking efforts that helped them to stay hopeful and motivated. No doubt, husbands were also concerned to hustle hard to pull their families out of the mess but husbands admitted that they feel better when they share their worries with their wives and they encouraged them by giving hope for better future in return.

Findings were not same in case of wives as they were discussing their tension and worries with their mothers, sister or with the lady in neighbor instead of sharing with their husbands in order to avoid additional stresses and anxieties. These results were quite similar to the findings discussed in literature by (Rook et al. 1991; Uno et al. 2002; Turner 1995) that wives contact social network (family/friends) in crisis because husbands proved less likely to provide emotional support in distress.

Quality of marital relation matters in providing support in stress. In present study most of the couples appraised their marital relation positively. It was also true that job loss was reason for disturbance in marital life (although the number of couples was not significant) but the couple who were accommodating and compromising was successful in protecting the family from sever dispute as compare to those who did not have such traits had high frequency of marital disputes between them. Culture and value system of Pakistani society may be an influential factor for wives supportive behavior towards their husbands. In Pakistani families, generally more value is given to the husbands and it is more strengthen in traditional families where bread earning responsibility is only

performed by the husbands. Badr et al. (2000) gave argument that culture significantly influences on support seeking and support providing behavior in relationship context. Supportive attitude of wives may be an influence of culture. Pakistani women are considered to be hand in hand with husband in any circumstances to support them. Leaving husband in hardships is not welcomed in Pakistan that may be the reason that because of cultural values wives were with husband and providing support in crisis. Moreover, it government responsibility to launch family welfare policy should to provide financial assistance for unemployed families so that family can be able to fulfill its basis needs.

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