

Lived Experience of Women Regarding Their Job in Tehran Municipality (Case Study: Informally Employed Women)

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of this study was to explore the lived experiences of women employed under informal contracts in Tehran Municipality.

Methods and Materials: This qualitative research employed a phenomenological approach, with data collected through unstructured interviews with 25 women employed under informal contracts in Tehran Municipality. The interviews were analyzed using MAXQDA software, and axial coding was conducted to identify key concepts and categories. The sample was selected based on theoretical saturation, ensuring in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences.

Findings: The analysis revealed several key challenges faced by these women, including significant job insecurity, lack of emotional attachment to the organization, difficulties in career advancement, and exposure to psychological stress and verbal sexual harassment. The study also highlighted issues such as injustice in salary and bonuses, weak social security, and violations of human dignity. These factors collectively contributed to a negative work environment, leading to decreased job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment.

Conclusion: The study concluded that informal employment significantly impacts the professional and personal lives of women, with job insecurity and lack of organizational support being primary concerns. The findings underscore the need for policy interventions and organizational reforms to improve the working conditions of women in informal employment, ensuring their rights, dignity, and professional development opportunities are protected.

Keywords: Lived experience, women with temporary contracts, Tehran Municipality

1. Introduction

In recent decades, significant changes have occurred in the way women work globally, particularly in the labor market. These profound transformations have spanned various areas, including changes in the labor market and educational achievements, reductions in women's fertility rates, shifts in family relationships, and improved access to decision-making. In Iran, the increase in educational attainment, social participation, and the desire to enter various economic business sectors are among the changes that many women have experienced in recent years. In Iran, homemaking and child-rearing are considered primary responsibilities for women, and their significant roles in managing household affairs, childbirth, and fulfilling the emotional needs of their spouses and children are viewed as crucial issues for women. Therefore, when women allocate time to work outside the home, they also continue to perform most of the domestic tasks. As such, in the current context, conducting studies that reflect women's experiences in simultaneously managing occupational and familial responsibilities across different groups is of great importance (Heydari et al., 2022).

On the other hand, women's socio-economic participation in the present era is closely tied to the process of reproduction. Over the past half-century, this trend has manifested in various forms across different societies. That is, with the entry of women into formal work and employment, the fertility process has inevitably been affected. Women's participation in economic sectors and activities outside the home has had a significant impact on their fertility decisions, meaning that fertility is adjusted based on work and job conditions. However, this does not imply that employment is absolutely dependent on fertility (Arabi & Atashi, 2022; Bozorg Nejad Shiyadeh et al., 2020; Rajai Ghazilou et al., 2021; Razaghi Nasrabad, 2021). Over the past half-century, with the gradual entry of women into the labor market, the value system related to fertility has been somewhat modified, societies have adapted to new conditions, and employment as a deterrent to fertility has become less prominent. By necessity, the required facilities have been provided, and societies have made changes in their laws to benefit women so that they can maintain their dual roles—both as mothers and economic contributors. Moreover, many women work during pregnancy, and many employed women become pregnant. Many of these women work during their pregnancy and do not return to work soon after giving birth. Despite the ability of many pregnant

women, or most of them, to work for pay, pregnancy, though temporary, sometimes imposes limitations on women's working capacity. Therefore, understanding these limitations and taking action to facilitate working conditions for employed mothers will not only keep them from being excluded from the labor market and from earning wages but will also play a significant role in ensuring that their work processes are not disrupted. Conversely, when considering women's employment and the need to study it alongside declining fertility, if women's employment is supported and the necessary assistance is provided to integrate their roles, there appears to be no conflict between the roles. However, in the absence of sufficient support, women may be forced to choose between their job and their family, and under such circumstances, they usually prefer to leave their job and protect their family (Razaghi Nasrabad, 2021). At the macro level, if individuals leave their jobs easily, society incurs losses. At the micro level, within a family, a woman not only fulfills family roles but also contributes to the family's income and well-being. She has invested time in training to grow and advance, and if she leaves her job, all the investment in this process will be lost, and the family will face tougher conditions due to the loss of income. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that with the arrival of a child, family expenses increase (Alavi, 2021; Arabi & Atashi, 2022; Bozorg Nejad Shiyadeh et al., 2020; Heydari et al., 2022; Razaghi Nasrabad, 2021).

Although gender discrimination in job allocation to women and the high rate of men exploiting the precarious employment conditions of many working women is a global phenomenon, even a simple search reveals that many academic studies have addressed this issue, and the results of these studies have significantly improved women's employment conditions (Kermani et al., 2023; Mireskandari et al., 2023; Rajai Ghazilou et al., 2021; Razaghi Nasrabad, 2021). Unfortunately, in our country, due to the reluctance of women employed on temporary contracts to share their unfavorable experiences in the workplace and its impact on their personal lives, as well as the difficulty of conducting such research, there is a research gap domestically. It is for this reason that the researcher, aware of this deficiency, which is clearly felt by analyzing the domestic research background on this issue, has focused their efforts on examining the lived experiences of female employees on temporary contracts in the public sector.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study design and Participant

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach, to explore the lived experiences of women employed under informal contracts in Tehran Municipality. The phenomenological method was chosen to gain deep insights into the participants' perceptions and experiences related to their employment. The study focused on women with informal employment status in various departments of Tehran Municipality, who were either directly employed or contracted through subsidiary companies. A purposive sampling method was used, selecting 25 participants based on the criterion of theoretical saturation, which means that data collection continued until no new themes or insights were emerging from the interviews.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Interview

Data was collected using unstructured interviews, which is a common tool in phenomenological research. This method allowed participants to freely express their thoughts and experiences without being constrained by predefined questions. The unstructured nature of the interviews facilitated an in-depth exploration of the participants' professional lives, focusing on the challenges and perceptions related to their informal employment status. The interviews were conducted in a private and confidential setting to ensure that the participants felt comfortable

sharing sensitive information about their work experiences. All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed for analysis.

2.3. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the qualitative analysis software MAXQDA. The analysis process involved three main steps: open coding, axial coding, and the identification of categories and concepts. Open coding was used to break down the data into discrete parts and identify initial codes representing significant themes in the participants' narratives. Axial coding was then conducted to establish relationships between these codes, grouping them into broader categories and concepts that reflected the participants' experiences and perceptions. Finally, these categories were synthesized to generate a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of women employed under informal contracts in Tehran Municipality. Throughout the analysis process, efforts were made to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, with all identifying information removed from the transcripts.

3. Findings and Results

For this purpose, the findings from interviews with 25 women employed under informal contracts in Tehran Municipality were analyzed using MAXQDA software. Subsequently, axial coding was performed with the aim of generating concepts and categories (Table 1).

Table 1

Extraction of Categories and Concepts

Category	Concepts	Secondary Codes	Frequency
Lack of Mutual Dependence between Employee and Organization	Job Insecurity	Lack of Long-term Job Vision	12
		Lack of Mental Focus	13
	Lack of Emotional Attachment to the Organization	Ambiguity in Professional Future	18
		Feeling of Lack of Support from Managers	18
		Unstable Relationships with Colleagues	18
Difficult Path to Growth in the Organization	Belief in Lack of Self-actualization in the Organization	Feeling of Alienation from the Organization	19
		Feeling Ignored	19
	Job Promotion Discrimination	Belief in Wasting Abilities	14
		Belief in Ignored Experiences	21
		Feeling Stuck	18
	Promotions Based Solely on Relationships among Permanent Employees	20	
	Lack of Promotion Based on Capabilities	22	

Lack of Psychological Security in the Organization	Unstable Mental and Psychological State	Exposure to Depression	17
		Exposure to Job Burnout	15
		Sexual Insinuations toward Female Employees	17
Violation of Human Dignity of Female Employees	Verbal Sexual Harassment by Some Male Colleagues Towards Temporarily Employed Women	Insulting Sexual Behavior toward Them	23
		Labeling Temporary Employees as "Assistants"	20
		Lack of Respect for Ethical Norms	18
	Lack of Respect for Human Dignity of Temporarily Employed Staff	Deprivation of Temporary Employees from Bonuses	19
		Minimum Wage without Consideration for Education and Experience	24
	Injustice in Salaries and Bonuses	Exploitative Employment Contracts for Temporarily Employed Women	16
		Lack of Supplemental Health Insurance Coverage	19
Low Retirement Pension		21	
	Weak Social Security		

It is worth noting that in some qualitative methods, such as grounded theory, it is recommended that after identifying the categories, selective coding is performed, and the research's paradigmatic model is drawn. However, in the phenomenological method, which is the method used in our study, this is not necessary, and awareness of the categories is sufficient for drafting and writing the qualitative report.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Main Research Question: What is the lived experience of women employed under informal contracts in government offices regarding their jobs?

Sub-question 1: What issues, problems, and limitations do women employed under informal contracts in the public sector face?

Sub-question 2: How do women employed under informal contracts in government offices perceive and experience their employment differently from those with formal contracts (as viewed by the interviewees, who were all women employed under temporary contracts in Tehran Municipality)?

The researcher's findings, derived from impartial analysis of unstructured interviews with a group of women employed under informal contracts in Tehran Municipality, yield the following results in response to these questions:

Job insecurity has serious consequences for this group of female employees, profoundly affecting their lived job experiences. These consequences include social effects, reduced innovation and creativity, decreased organizational capabilities, diminished organizational commitment, stress and anxiety, financial instability, and decreased job satisfaction. The results of this section align somewhat with the findings of studies by Kermani et al. (2023), Mir

Eskandari et al. (2023), Tabrizi Kahoo et al. (2023), Teymoori Darian et al. (2023), Tosli et al. (2022), Razaghi Nasrabadi (2021), Bozorgnejad Shiyadeh et al. (2020), Spiliopoulou and Whitcomb (2023), Sigriður Daðeyardóttir et al. (2022), and Xiao et al. (2021).

Lack of emotional attachment to the organization can lead to negative outcomes for the organization and its members, such as reduced organizational cohesion, decreased job satisfaction, lower motivation and performance, and diminished organizational commitment. The findings in this section are generally consistent with previous studies (Kermani et al., 2023; Mireskandari et al., 2023; Sadrnabavi et al., 2021; Tabrizi Kaho et al., 2023; Tavassoli et al., 2022).

When employees feel their talents are not being nurtured, they may take various actions against the organization, resulting in outcomes such as a tendency toward resignation, reduced effort and participation, increased fearlessness in leaving the job, protests, and seeking alternative job opportunities. The findings in this section somewhat align with prior research (Alonso Gallo & Gutiérrez López, 2023; Arabi & Atashi, 2022; Kermani et al., 2023; Mireskandari et al., 2023; Sadrnabavi et al., 2021; Tabrizi Kaho et al., 2023; Tavassoli et al., 2022)

Unstable mental and psychological conditions in individuals can significantly impact their organizational performance, leading to decreased focus and attention, reduced cooperation and interaction, decreased motivation and enthusiasm, increased leakage of information, a focus on negative aspects, and increased safety risks. In this regard, the research findings align somewhat with prior the studies (Kermani et al., 2023; Mireskandari et al., 2023; Sadrnabavi et al., 2021; Tabrizi Kaho et al., 2023; Tavassoli et al., 2022).

The lack of opportunities for in-service training for employees can lead to the loss of several advantages and have negative impacts on the organization. These impacts include decreased employee trust and motivation, reduced innovation and re-evaluation, decreased job satisfaction and motivation, inability to cope with changes, and a decline in capabilities and skills. The research findings in this section are generally consistent with the studies by (Kermani et al., 2023; Mireskandari et al., 2023; Rajai Ghazilou et al., 2021; Razaghi Nasrabad, 2021; Razaghi Nasrabad & Hosseini, 2019; Sadrnabavi et al., 2021; Tabrizi Kaho et al., 2023; Tavassoli et al., 2022).

The failure to respect the human dignity of female employees can lead to serious and negative consequences, including discrimination and gender-based discrimination, decreased job satisfaction and motivation, reduced professional growth and development, increased violence and harassment, weakened organizational performance, reduced professional opportunities, and increased violence and harassment. The research findings in this section align somewhat with the prior studies (Heydari et al., 2022; Rajai Ghazilou et al., 2021; Sadrnabavi et al., 2021; Tabrizi Kaho et al., 2023; Tavassoli et al., 2022; Teymouri Darmian et al., 2022).

Verbal sexual harassment of temporarily employed women can lead to serious and negative consequences, including harm to the organization, psychological impact and discomfort, reduced job participation and performance, the creation of an inappropriate and unprofessional environment, and psychological impact and discomfort. The research findings in this section align somewhat with the prior studies (Tabrizi Kaho et al., 2023; Tavassoli et al., 2022; Teymouri Darmian et al., 2022).

Discrimination in job promotion has widespread negative effects on employees' lives, leading to outcomes such as increased organizational dissatisfaction, increased stress and anxiety, decreased job satisfaction, reduced professional opportunities, and decreased self-confidence. The findings in this section align somewhat with the prior studies (Heydari et al., 2022; Kermani et al., 2023; Razaghi Nasrabad, 2021; Razaghi Nasrabad & Hosseini, 2019; Rozelle et al., 2020; Sadrnabavi et al., 2021; Tabrizi Kaho et al., 2023; Tavassoli et al., 2022; Teymouri Darmian et al., 2022).

Injustice in salary and bonuses has a significant impact on the lived work experiences of employees, including decreased focus and job performance, the creation of unhealthy competition, reduced job satisfaction, increased

financial and economic dissatisfaction, and decreased motivation and attachment to the organization. The findings in this section are generally consistent with the prior studies (Kermani et al., 2023; Mireskandari et al., 2023; Tabrizi Kaho et al., 2023; Tavassoli et al., 2022; Teymouri Darmian et al., 2022).

5. Limitations and Suggestions

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The primary limitation is the focus on a specific group of women employed under informal contracts in Tehran Municipality, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or populations. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data through unstructured interviews could introduce bias, as participants may have selectively reported their experiences. Furthermore, the study's qualitative nature, while providing deep insights into lived experiences, may not capture the broader, quantifiable impacts of informal employment on women's professional and personal lives.

Future research should aim to broaden the scope of investigation by including a more diverse sample of women employed under informal contracts across different sectors and regions. Comparative studies between women with formal and informal employment statuses could provide a clearer understanding of the disparities and commonalities in their work experiences. Moreover, longitudinal studies would be valuable in tracking changes over time in the professional and personal lives of women in precarious employment, offering insights into the long-term impacts of informal employment.

The findings of this study have important implications for policymakers and organizational leaders. There is a pressing need to develop and enforce regulations that protect the rights and dignity of women in informal employment, including fair wages, career advancement opportunities, and protection against workplace harassment. Organizations should also consider implementing support systems, such as counseling services and professional development programs, to help women navigate the challenges associated with informal employment. Additionally, fostering a more inclusive and supportive workplace culture can mitigate the negative impacts of informal employment on women's job satisfaction and overall well-being.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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