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**Hypothesizing the Factors of Well-being and Satisfaction with Life among Women  
Employees in Pakistan**

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## **Hypothesizing the Factors of Well-being and Satisfaction with Life among Women Employees in Pakistan**

### **Abstract**

The economic significance of women employees is well recognized; yet, their participation in Pakistani employment sector is understated. The lowering share of women participation in this population has been attributed to many reasons but for health. Women employees' well-being and satisfaction with life are important, yet widely neglected notions in the research and practice. Especially, in Pakistani patriarchal society; where women are expected to work with disproportionate family and work responsibilities. With dual role responsibilities and job pressures, their well-being and life satisfaction are compromised. In line with affective events and JD-R theory, the authors argued that workplace fun and humour practices trigger positive emotions among women employees. These positive affective experiences increase their energy levels and enthusiasm for work. As a result, their work engagement is increased, which is an important determinant of women employees' well-being and satisfaction with life.

**Keywords:** Women employees, well-being, satisfaction with life, engagement, workplace fun, humour

Word Count: 2493

## Introduction

Employee well-being is a broad concept with scope and application in various fields of knowledge including psychology, sociology, organizational psychology and behavioural studies (Diener and Seligman, 2004; Grant et al., 2007; Seligman, 2002; Warr, 1987). Prior studies have reported findings on well-being outcomes including turnover intention (Wu et al., 2017), job crafting (Hakanen et al., 2017) and performance (Edgar et al., 2017). However, little attention is paid to women well-being and its role in improving their satisfaction with life. Satisfaction with life is often confused with happiness and well-being at work. Happiness is relatively transitory in nature and it is “*in-the-moment experience*”; in contrast, satisfaction with life is broader in scope and stable in nature (Ackerman, 2018). Satisfaction with life is the evaluation of employees’ feelings at and beyond the workplace. It is important; yet scarcely investigated well-being outcome especially in the Pakistani context.

According to statistics, 48.63% of total population is comprised of women (Indexmundi, 2018); yet Pakistan ranks lower on women participation in the labour force when compared with other Asian economies (World Economic Forum, 2018). Pakistani women continue to face the challenges of societal role expectations, dual roles and work-related stress. Unlike men, women are expected to prioritize their domestic roles (as a wife, mother, and daughter-in-law) over their career aspirations. All these factors are impeding their well-being and life satisfaction. Despite their growing contribution to active employment and GDP (Indexmundi, 2018), no published research has addressed the well-being and life satisfaction concerns of employed women.

According to Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) model, employee well-being is best understood by two psychological processes. On one hand, health impairment is a process in which excessive job demands result in energy depletion due to the exhaustion of physical and mental resources. On the other hand, the motivational process is concerned with extra-role performance and engagement promoted by job resource (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). In line with the latter, work engagement is a motivational variable contributing to well-being in the workplace. The variable is defined as a positive fulfilling state of mind, which is characterized by mental resilience, sense of inspiration and a feel of fully engrossing in work activities (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Earlier researchers have found that work engagement is inversely associated with ill-health indicators such as psychological distress and physical complaint (Shimazu et al., 2015; Shimazu and Schaufeli, 2009).

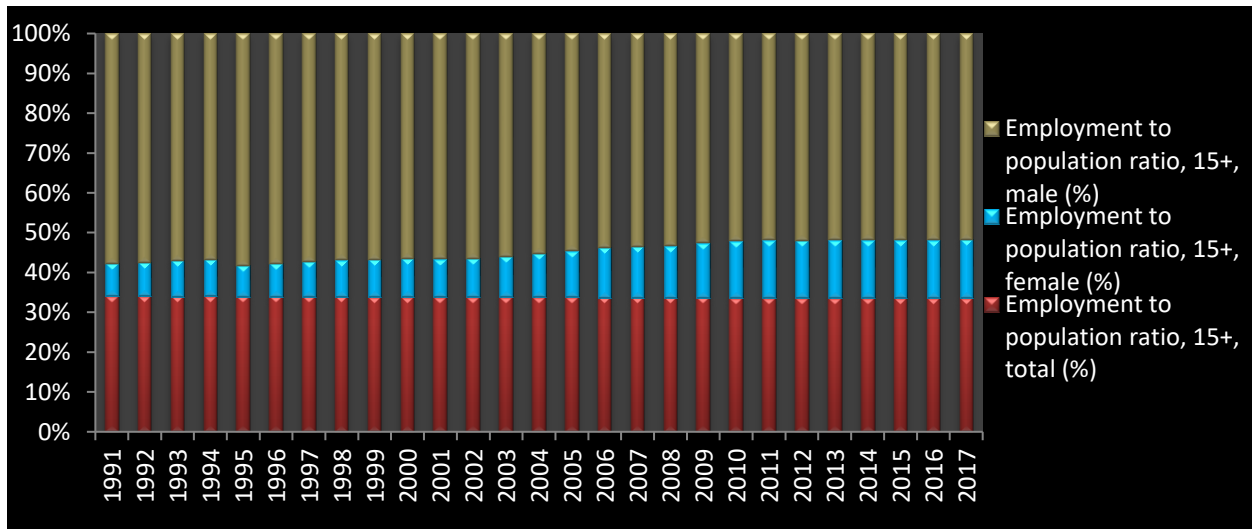
In line with positive psychology and Affective Events Theory (AET), workplace fun and humour enable individuals to cope with their work-related stress by triggering positive emotions, which can be a source of improved work engagement and well-being (Fredrickson, 2004; Pearson, 2008). For example, Romero and Cruthirds (2006) stated that humour with positive intent creates positive cognition and emotions among individuals; thereby bringing them together. Likewise, research showed that work activities such as staff celebration are likely to improve employee well-being by creating a pleasant work environment (Chan, 2010). The two practices are argued to facilitate individual needs for social connectedness, mental calmness, physical health and a purposive life by triggering positive emotions that enhance work engagement. In this study, it is argued that workplace fun and workplace humour increase women employees’ engagement, which enhances their well-being leading to improved satisfaction with life. To the best of our knowledge,

theoretical and empirical evidence on workplace fun and humour leading to engagement is scant, especially in case of Pakistan with women as a social lab. This paper is first in a series to develop a conceptual model of well-being and life satisfaction among Pakistani employed women. The earlier identified gap has set the tone of the present study by refining the research purpose through key questions (i) How workplace fun and humour increase women engagement at work? (ii) How women engagement contributes to their well-being and satisfaction with life?

## Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

### Women Employees in Pakistan

In 2016, Pakistan’s total population was recorded to be approximately 193million, out of which 48.63% were women residing in the rural and urban areas (Indexmundi, 2018). Across the country, these women have been dedicating their lives to meet societal expectations attached to women’s role as a mother, wife, daughter, sister, and daughter-in-law and working women. Except for the ‘working title,’ these are few of the typical gender roles expected of women in Pakistan. Statistics show that besides their domestic roles, women have always been striving to make their representation in the labour market and business (Indexmundi, 2018). However, the stereotypical society and cultural values have been impeding the true economic contribution and business potential of this 48.63% population segment. For instance, in 2017, the total employment to population ratio of Pakistan was 51.1% with 22.2% female employment to population ratio relative to 78.7% that of men (see Chart 1). In the 22.2% share of the employed population, women are still committed to playing their economic role as an employer, self-employed, wage and salaried worker and contributing family worker. Despite their active participation, women continue to face discrimination in numerous areas of life and one of those is health (United Nations, 2018).



**Chart 1: Employment to Population Ratio Trend**

Increasing numbers of women in the workforce have also raised concerns on their mental and physical well-being due to the detrimental effects of multiple roles (Rao et al., 2003). In Pakistan, the economic burden of mental illness is estimated to be USD4264.27million. Also, the cost of productivity losses and medical care is reported to be 58.97% and 37% respectively (Malik

and Khan, 2016). Statistics related to general population have reported the prevalence of depressive disorders and anxiety among 34% Pakistanis; a greater proportion of which i.e. 29%-66% are women when compared with 10%-33% men (Sohail et al., 2017). In addition to this, WHO statistics indicate the prevalence of physical inactivity among women (age 18years+) i.e. 31.7% and men i.e. 20.2% (WHO, 2015). In line with these statistics (see Figure 1), women well-being is one of the pressing concerns that can have detrimental effects not only on their health and life satisfaction but also on the organization.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Source</b>
<b>Population (FY2016)</b>	<b>99,244,840</b>	<b>93,958,640</b>	<b>(Indexmundi, 2018)</b>
<b>Labour Force Participation (% of population ages 15+)</b>	<b>82.70%</b>	<b>24.93%</b>	
<b>Employment to Population (ages 15+)</b>	<b>78.70%</b>	<b>22.20%</b>	
<b>Depressive Disorders and Anxiety</b>	<b>10%-33%</b>	<b>29%-66%</b>	<b>(Sohail et al., 2017)</b>
<b>Physical Inactivity</b>	<b>20.20%</b>	<b>31.70%</b>	<b>(WHO, 2015)</b>

**Figure 1: Gender-wise Statistics**

### **Workplace Fun and Engagement**

Work engagement is a positive fulfilling state of mind and individuals’ ability to engage in a specific role or task. People are expected to engage more in work-related activities when they feel a sense of inspiration and mental resilience. Instinctively, people show greater engagement at work when they enjoy their selves (Plester and Hutchison, 2016). On the other hand, Fun at work is defined as a set of activities that reflect various aspects of the work environment (Michel et al., 2018; Tews et al., 2016). These aspects exhibit the potential to promote individuals’ positive affective reactions such as amusement, light-hearted pleasure and enjoyment (Michel et al., 2018). In the management literature, fun is viewed as a desirable work attribute for tackling day-to-day work life problems (Georganta, 2012). Bolton and Houlihan (2009) argued that fun is a mechanism for employee engagement in organizations of different sizes. With a sample of 66 Malaysian respondents, Jamaludin et al. (2016) reported a positive relationship between workplace fun and engagement. Likewise, Muceldili and Erdil (2016) investigated fun at work and engagement among Turkish white-collar employees. Their results based on a sample of 195 employees showed a positive impact of workplace fun on employee engagement. Using fun as a multi-layered concept, Plester and Hutchison (2016) found a significant association between workplace fun and work engagement stating that fun encourages engagement at two levels including (i) engagement with the task or work role (ii) engagement with the work team or overall organization.

Following positive psychology, positive emotions boost engagement at work by increasing individuals’ ability to flourish (Hazelton, 2014). Similarly, AET views emotions as integral to employees’ experience in response to a discrete event occurring within an organization. When organizations introduce workplace fun practices, women employees view these practices as an event happening at work. At the individual level, each woman employee delves in efforts to understand why fun at work is happening and what does it imply to her. If the resulting perception of WPF is positive, women experience positive emotions such as joy, enjoyment, excitement. These positive emotions trigger their motivation to do good work; this motivation drives their

work-related positive attitude, which in turn, triggers their engagement at work. Therefore, it is hypothesized that the workplace can serve as a mean to increase engagement among employees.

*Hypothesis 1 (H<sub>1</sub>): Workplace fun increases women employees' engagement at work*

## **Workplace Humour and Engagement**

Humour is a component of interaction among humans with the potential to influence work groups and organizations (Romero and Cruthirds, 2006). On a gender basis, referring to Hay (2000), Romero and Cruthirds (2006) argued that men use humour for emphasizing similarities while women use humour for building solidarity. Humour and engagement are affective capacities of individuals (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008); when employees enjoy work, they are better able to engage in their jobs. Using Affective Events theory (AET), Goswami et al. (2016) reported a correlation between leader's positive sense of humour and positive emotions at work that in turn, was found to be related to work engagement. Following Benign Violation Theory (BVT) and Social information processing theory, Yam et al. (2018) found a positive association between a leader's use of humour and employees' work engagement.

On employees' use of humour, Mesmer-Magnus et al. (2012) found a positive relationship between employee humour (EH) and related organizational and employee outcomes. For instance, the major EH outcomes were reported to be lower stress, improved satisfaction, coping effectiveness, health, reduced burnout, and work performance (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012). In line with positive psychology, AET posits that events occurring inside a workplace trigger positive/negative affect, which influences employees' work-related attitudes and behaviours. Women employees view WPH practices as an event happening around them; their encounter with the event results in positive or negative perceptions of the event leading to affective reactions that determine their affect-driven attitude and behaviour at work. Correspondingly, it is argued that workplace humour triggers positive emotions among women employees. These emotions increase their energy levels, enthusiasm and focus on work-related activities; thereby, boosting their work engagement.

*Hypothesis 2 (H<sub>2</sub>): Workplace humour increases women employees' engagement at work*

## **Engagement and Women Employees' Well-being**

Engaged employees share an effective connection with their work activities and they have a sense of energy enabling them to deal with their work-related demands (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Under the JD-R model, Bakker and Demerouti (2007) viewed work engagement as an underlying motivation that generates positive emotions among employees. These emotions such as enthusiasm and joy encourage them to dedicatedly invest their personal resources (such as psyche, effort and time) into work. In the workplace, when employees experience positive emotions they tend to exhibit productive work behaviour by engaging themselves in work (Wu et al., 2017). With happiness and productive work behaviour, engaged employees create their personal and job-related resources. Hence, they experience better health by reporting lower physical complaints and psychological distress (Shimazu and Schaufeli, 2009).

The JD-R theory proposes that individuals, who are engaged at work, stay engaged by creating and mobilizing their job resources. In contrast, employees who experience burn-out,

jeopardize their health and well-being by creating more job demands for them (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014). Following the JD-R model, Adil and Baig (2018) studied well-being via two pathways (i) high job demand causing health impairment through burnout (ii) job resource reducing exhaustion effects of demand through engagement. They argued that job autonomy leads to improved work engagement, which positively influences employee well-being (Adil and Baig, 2018). In line with the literature, women employees who demonstrate vigour (Work hard), dedication (get involved) and absorption (fully concentrated) are found to exhibit better psychological, physical, social and spiritual well-being. Thus, work engagement is argued to play the well-being enhancing role at work.

*Hypothesis 3 (H<sub>3</sub>): Work engagement enhances women employees' well-being at work*

### **Women Employees' Well-being and Satisfaction with Life**

Diener et al. (1985) defined life satisfaction as a global assessment of a person's quality of life. They viewed life satisfaction as a general evaluation of life rather than grounding it in a specific life domain. On well-being and life satisfaction relationship, Hakanen and Schaufeli (2012) argued that employees' well-being is linked to their general well-being. They stated that work-related well-being extends to context-free well-being; in other words, employee well-being at work is found to determine their general well-being i.e. life satisfaction over time (Hakanen and Schaufeli, 2012). Addressing employee well-being's subjective component, earlier researchers have significantly analysed life satisfaction as a representative of employee well-being (Wheatley, 2017). However, this study posits life satisfaction as an outcome of employee well-being rather than its component because satisfaction with life is different than satisfaction with the job, which is a representative of employee well-being.

In psychology, meaning in life is an important construct, which is found to be strongly associated with well-being. In the absence of a sense of meaning, people experience isolation from their self and society. In contrast, when people find purpose in life they are likely to exhibit more positive dimensions of well-being than negative dimensions (Zika and Chamberlain, 1992). Following the set-point theory of SWB and broaden-and-build theory, Lipovčan et al. (2018) argued that past positive events tend to have a lasting influence on different well-being components. When people experience positive emotions and demonstrate a sense of happiness; they are expected to make a positive conscious cognitive evaluation of their life. Besides emotions, physical activity is also important. Morgan et al. (1991) found a positive correlation of life satisfaction with pleasure and home maintenance among women while life satisfaction results for men only reported a significant positive correlation with home maintenance. Social connectedness and spiritual need satisfaction are also important to satisfaction with life. Social relations tend to reduce individuals' loneliness while increasing their satisfaction with life (McAuley et al., 2000). Based on the global sample data, Helliwell and Putnam (2004) reported gender differences in satisfaction with life. Their results showed a slightly higher overall life satisfaction among men than women (Helliwell and Putnam, 2004).

*Hypothesis 4 (H<sub>4</sub>): Women employees' well-being increases their satisfaction with life*



## **Conclusion**

In a traditional male-dominating economy, Pakistani women are striving hard to make active economic contributions. However, their societal gender role expectations, excessive job pressures and dual responsibilities exert detrimental effects on their well-being and life satisfaction. In line with JD-R theory and AET, this study posits workplace fun and humour as predictors of work engagement. The more an employee is engaged at work, the higher her work-related well-being, which in turn, increases her cognitive evaluation of the whole life. When women employees experience a positive and fulfilling state of mind, they are argued to show better quality of experience and overall functioning at work with an improved sense of contentment. In this study, the authors tried to present a conceptual model of well-being and life satisfaction. Later, this model will be used to empirically test and validate the hypothesized relationships between key variables.

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