



THE IMPACT OF WORKING MOTHERS ON CHILDREN'S SOCIAL BEHAVIOURS, CLASSROOM INTERACTIONS, AND EMPATHY IN SOUTH PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This research paper has discussed the effects of mother employment on the social behaviours, classroom interactions, and empathies development in South Punjab, Pakistan. Convenience sampling was used to recruit 200 mothers (N=200) all of whom had professional backgrounds (44 percent education, 25 percent medical field and 31 percent other fields). The social-emotional competencies of children were assessed with the help of the maternal reports with the help of the standardized measures that evaluated the social behaviour, interactions with the classmates, and empathy. Findings showed moderate levels of prosocial behaviour (M=2.17, SD=0.21), classroom interactions (M=2.23, SD=0.27) and manifestation of empathy (M=2.10, SD=0.25). The number of job hours and nature of the employment (public versus private sector) were found as important variables and the determinants of children developing socially and emotionally. The results indicate that the South Asian context of maternal employment and child development is a complex issue, and the employment status is not a leading factor that determines social-emotional outcomes of children. Rather, job quality, parental involvement and family dynamics are significant mediating factors.

Keywords: Maternal Employment, Working Mothers, Social Behaviours, Empathy, Classroom Interactions, Children Development, South Punjab, Pakistan.

Introduction

Mother employment is a growing phenomenon in developing nations, and especially South Asia (Rashdi et al., 2025). In Pakistan, the rate of participation in the labour force among women has significantly increased during the last 20 years, and women have begun to work in various fields of education, health, and administration (Amir and Kizilbash, 2024). This demographic transition has also brought significant issues to the topic of the impact of maternal employment on the social-emotional growth of children, their behaviour in the classroom, and their interpersonal skills.

The maternal employment-child outcomes relationship is a very important crossroad of family life, economic need and developmental psychology. It has been reported that early childhood is the key time to form a social competence, prosocial behaviours, and empathy (Hay et al., 2021). Social-emotional developmental quality in these developmental years creates grounds to academic success, peer bonds, and psychological health in the later years (Qudsi and Rizkillah, 2023).

Working mothers in the South Asian region, and especially in Pakistan, have to overcome complicated cultural norms that historically assigned childcare as a female role (Hussain and Usman, 2025). The connection between the career goals and the established gender roles poses a special challenge to the families who strive to reconcile the work demands with the developmental needs of children. The past studies in South Punjab have reported mixed results about the impact of maternal employment on the development of children (Rashdi et al., 2025), which indicates that the correlation is complex and depends on many context-specific influences.



Development of social-emotional status can be both beneficial and detrimental to children of working mothers. According to some studies, maternal employment offers economic resources that maintain the educational opportunities of children and material well-being (Waldfogel et al., 2002). On the other hand, maternal employment, which can be marked by long working hours or high-stress employment, can decrease the quality of mother-child interactions and the parental engagement in the educational and social activities of children (Thabrew, 2022). It becomes highly significant that nature, duration, and quality of maternal employment, but not its existence become critical mediating variables.

The research paper fills this gap by considering the relationship between maternal employment characteristics such as job sector, working hours, and professional field and social behaviours of children, interaction in a classroom and development of empathy in South Punjab. Knowing about such associations is the key to creating family-supportive policies and interventions that would help working mothers to promote the social-emotional development of their children.

Literature Review

Mother Employment and Child Development

The available literature shows that there exist intricate relationships between maternal work and the developmental outcomes of children. Based on the results provided by the UK Millennium Cohort Study, Del Bono and his colleagues (Bono et al., 2016) concluded that maternal time contributions have a great impact on the skill formation in early childhood, but the effect decreases with age. According to their study, the amount of time mothers spend with their children is directly related to cognitive development in early childhood, however, the association is not very direct as children get older. Noteworthy, they found the long-run implications on subsequent outcomes, especially cognitive development that the developmental implications of maternal employment might be long-term through middle childhood and beyond.

More recently, Rashdi et al, (2025) organized a study in Khairpur City within the Pakistani context, which aimed at investigating how maternal employment affects the educational achievement of children at primary school level. Their results showed that children whose mothers were working showed much better academic performance and were more involved in extracurricular activities and were more confident and independent than children whose mothers were not working. They, however, observed a significant difference depending on the level of education of mothers, the nature of their employment, and the nature of their working schedule. The results defy the simplistic beliefs that child development must be undermined by maternal employment, and instead, employment quality and the economic situation of the family mediate results.

A study conducted in the United Kingdom and other Western settings indicates the same complexity. The results of the NICHD Study show that child outcomes are not affected by maternal employment in infancy (Waldfogel et al., 2002). Rather, the results rely on various variables such as the time of employment, the quality of alternative childcare, maternal mental health, and family income. The researchers established neutral or marginally negative effects between early full time maternal work and certain cognitive indicators, but all of this had been significantly mediated by the effect of employment-based income, maternal sensitivity and quality of childcare arrangements.

Mother Employment and Social-Emotional Development

The early childhood social-emotional competence includes several domains that are closely interconnected: prosocial behaviour, emotional regulation, empathy, and social interaction skills (Hay et al., 2021). The longitudinal study by Hay and colleagues followed parallel development of prosocial behaviour and aggression between infancy and childhood and showed that these behaviours exhibit developmental patterns dependent on individual differences, gender and family backgrounds. Most importantly, they discovered that the social-emotional abilities of children are a product of their early interactions with caregivers and their peers, which may lead to conclude that parental presence, maternal quality of interaction, and family relationship mechanisms have a significant impact on social-emotional development.

Parent-child interaction quality turns out to be one of the most significant processes that maternal employment affects the social-emotional outcomes. Studies of mother-child attachment show that positive relations of attachment insulate against adverse outcomes of maternal employment (Izzati et al., 2024). Secure mother-child attachment with good caregiver relationships in alternative care facilities can facilitate sufficient



social-emotional development in dual-earner families. On the other hand, insecure attachment relationships, especially when coupled with a low-quality alternative care, portend high levels of internalizing and externalizing issues.

A randomized controlled trial by Baranov and colleagues in rural Pakistan to study the treatment of maternal depression (Baranov et al., 2020) found significant mechanisms of the relationship between maternal psychological well-being and parenting quality and child outcomes. Their results showed maternal depression treatment did not only lead to better maternal mental health but also parental investment in their children with effect sizes of 0.2 to 0.3 standard deviations. This is an indication that maternal psychological condition plays a major role in parenting practices despite the employment status and it is therefore important to consider maternal wellbeing in conjunction with employment attributes when analysing child outcomes.

Job Characteristics and Quality of Parenting

The nature of employment other than attendance or absence has a profound effect on the parenting quality and child development. Johnson et al, (2012) looked at the relationship between low-income mothers and their employment patterns and behavioural outcomes of children. Their study found that employment stability was found to forecast reduced child behavioural issues than unstable employment, even after income was controlled. It is interesting to note that full-time employment and job tenure were more effective than part-time employment or unstable employment, which indicates that employment predictability and stability are important in family functioning.

Another variable of great importance is the job hours of the working mother. The mothers who work more than 40 hours per week (excessive work time) have less quality time with children and experience increased maternal stress and fatigue (Thabrew, 2022). All these are factors which contribute to the decline in good parent-child interactions and parental participation in the educational and social growth of the children. On the other hand, moderate working hours and flexible working schedules enable mothers to be involved and at the same time contribute economically to the welfare of the family.

The difference between the employment in a public and private sector is also worth considering. The government jobs are usually more secure, offer better benefits and have more predictable hours than those of the private sector jobs. Such factors can have different effects on the stability of the family and the levels of parental stress which in turn will affect the quality of parenting and social-emotional development of children (Rashdi et al., 2025). There is a possibility of reduced occupational stress and increased flexibility of schedule, which can ensure increased parental participation among public sector workers.

Cultural Background and Gender Role Expectations

The perception and experience of maternal employment is deeply rooted in the traditional gender role expectations in South Asian societies, especially Pakistan (Hussain and Usman, 2025). A study of working mothers in South Punjab showed that most of them face stigma and social reproach as well as internal conflict concerning maternal role performance (Amir & Kizilbash, 2024). This psychological load can augment parenting stress and diminish parenting quality even in case objective employment hours are moderate.

The clash of gender roles with the economic need makes decision-making situations complicated among mothers. Hussain and Usman, (2025) reported that rural Punjabi women are continuously stigmatized by society when taking or having to take up jobs, being emotionally abused and socially isolated by their extended relatives. These experiences are likely to exert more maternal stress, which is repeatedly associated with high levels of child behavioural issues and low parenting quality (Maulana et al., 2023).

Children and Social-Emotional Development and Empathy

The development of empathy in early and middle childhood is associated with the fact that children are beginning to develop the ability to take a perspective, have emotional awareness, and prosocial reactions (Hay et al., 2021). Empathy, as has been shown in research, is developed slowly in infancy and early childhood and is upgraded in middle childhood. Parent-child relationships marked by parental warmth, emotional responsiveness and sensitive atonement are associated with quality relationships that predict greater empathy development (Sun et al., 2023).

Social-emotional development Lay models argue that parental modelling, emotional coaching, and access to social interactions in peer settings are important (Abbasi et al., 2025). Children whose parents



explicitly talk about feelings, legitimize emotions and model empathic reactions are more likely to have good empathy. On the contrary, children who witness harshness, criticism, or emotional unavailability of their parents exhibit a decreased ability to empathize and higher resistance to aggressive responding (Arlianty et al., 2025).

Classroom social interactions reflect children's developing social competence and peer relationship quality. Teachers' reports of children's peer interactions provide important indicators of children's social-emotional functioning in group settings ("Child Care and Children's Peer Interaction at 24 and 36 Months," 2001). Research demonstrates associations between home relationship quality and classroom peer interactions, suggesting that family dynamics shape children's broader social competence.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the frequency and distribution of children's social behaviours as reported by mothers across different professional categories and work hour configurations.
2. To investigate associations between maternal employment characteristics (professional field, sector, work hours) and children's social interaction patterns in classroom settings.
3. To assess the relationship between maternal employment variables and children's empathy and social support behaviours.
4. To identify which maternal employment characteristics most significantly predict variations in children's social-emotional outcomes in the South Punjab context.

Research Questions

1. How frequently do children of working mothers in South Punjab demonstrate prosocial behaviours (eye contact initiation, facial expression communication, appropriate greetings, sharing, speech respect) across different maternal employment contexts?
2. Do children's social interactions and classroom behaviours (requesting favours, permission-seeking, work completion, desk organization, helping behaviour, peer support) vary significantly based on mothers' professional field, employment sector, or work hours?
3. What is the relationship between maternal employment characteristics and children's empathy manifestations, including emotional sympathy, problem listening, emotional understanding, peer advocacy, and respectful communication?
4. Which maternal employment variables represent the strongest predictors of children's social-emotional competence as reported by mothers in this sample?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative survey design investigating associations between maternal employment characteristics and children's social-emotional outcomes. The design allowed for examination of multiple variables across a relatively large sample within a defined geographical region.

Sample and Participants

The study sample comprised 200 mothers (N=200) employed in various professional sectors within South Punjab, Pakistan. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling techniques from urban and semi-urban areas, targeting working mothers with school-aged children (ages 5-12 years). No exclusionary criteria were imposed regarding children's special needs, status or family structure. Participants represented diverse professional backgrounds: 88 mothers (44%) worked in education; 50 mothers (25%) in medical fields; 22 mothers (11%) as office workers; 20 mothers (10%) as beauticians; and 20 mothers (10%) identified as housewives who maintained previous professional credentials. The inclusion of housewives in the sample, while initially appearing inconsistent with the "working mothers" focus, reflects research participants' self-identification and the fluid nature of employment in the study region where some women engage in part-time or informal work while primarily managing households. Regarding employment sector, 102 mothers (51%) worked in private sector positions while 98 mothers (49%) held public sector employment. Work hours varied considerably: 79 mothers (39.5%) worked 6-hour days; 58 mothers (29%) worked standard 8-hour days; 41 mothers (20.5%) worked 10-hour days; and 22 mothers (11%) worked more than 10 hours daily. These variations reflect the diverse employment contexts within Pakistan's urban professional landscape.



Data Collection Instruments

Social Behaviours Assessment: Children's social behaviours were assessed through maternal report using a structured questionnaire addressing nine behavioural indicators: eye contact initiation during conversation, facial expression communication of feelings, appropriate greeting expression, toy/food sharing, speech interruption restraint, happiness display, peer classroom conversation, friendship problem-helping, and compliment giving to opposite-sex peers. Each item was rated on a three-point frequency scale: Never (1), Sometimes (2), Very Often (3).

Classroom Interaction Assessment: Children's social interactions and classroom behaviours were measured using seven items assessing favour-requesting from peers, permission-seeking before using others' belongings, classroom work completion timing, desk organization and cleanliness, bringing cheer to lonely friends, comforting peer failure, and peer success praise. Identical three-point frequency scaling was employed.

Empathy and Social Support Assessment: Children's empathy manifestations were evaluated through six items: sympathy expression when bad events occur to peers, listening to friend problems, emotional understanding of peer anger/sadness, peer advocacy during unfair criticism, telling others of peer accomplishments, and respectful request making to parents. Again, three-point frequency scaling was used.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions were calculated for all demographic variables and outcome measures. Scale totals were computed for each assessment domain (social behaviours, classroom interactions, empathy/social support). Preliminary Pearson correlation analyses examined bivariate associations between maternal employment variables (professional field, sector, work hours) and children's outcome measures. Independent samples t-tests compared children's outcomes by employment sector (private vs. public). One-way ANOVA tested differences across professional field categories and work hour groupings. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d for t-tests and eta-squared for ANOVA. Alpha level was set at .05 for statistical significance.

Results

Figure 1

Visually Frequency of Profession

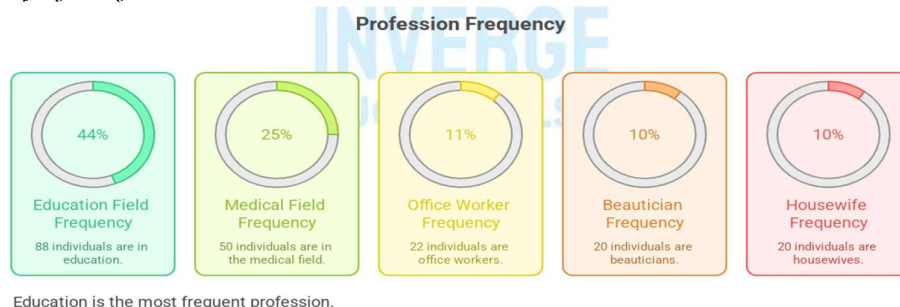


Figure 2

Visually Frequency of Nature of Job

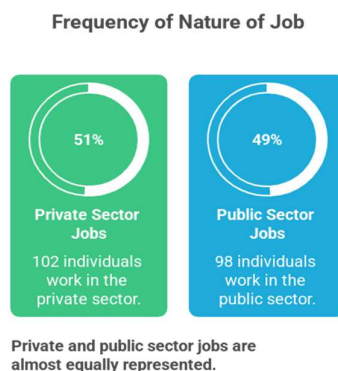




Figure 3
Visually Frequency of Job Hours

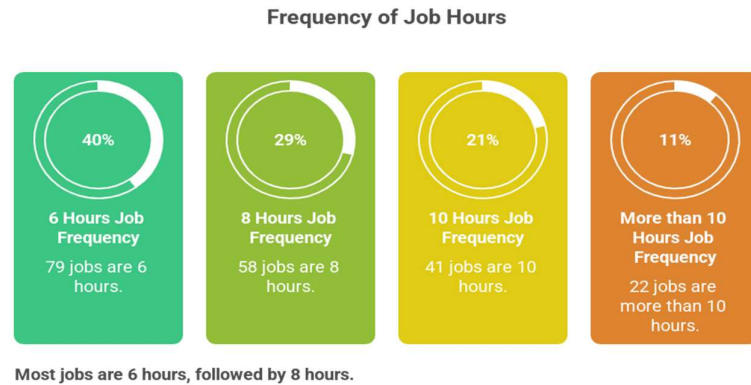


Table 2
Frequency Distribution of Children's Social Behaviours as Reported by Mothers

Statement	Never		Sometimes		Very Often		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	Mean	S.D
My children initiate eye contact when talking to others.	78	39.0%	103	51.5%	19	9.5%	1.70	.63
My children show feelings through facial expression.	20	10.0%	97	48.5%	83	41.5%	2.32	.65
My children express appropriate greetings to others.	39	19.5%	64	32.0%	97	48.5%	2.29	.77
My children share toys or food with others.	39	19.5%	58	29.0%	103	51.5%	2.32	.78
My children do not interrupt speech with others.	19	9.5%	81	40.5%	100	50.0%	2.40	.66
My children display happiness.	19	9.5%	139	69.5%	42	21.0%	2.11	.54
My children talk with class members.	80	40.0%	59	29.5%	61	30.5%	1.90	.84
My children help friends in any problem.	0	0.0%	100	50.0%	100	50.0%	2.50	.50
My children give compliments member of opposite sex.	19	9.5%	161	80.5%	20	10.0%	2.01	.44
Total							2.17	.21

Table 3
Frequency Distribution of Children's Social Interactions and Classroom Behaviour as Reported by Mothers

Statement	Never		Sometimes		Very Often		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	Mean	S.D
My children ask friend to do favours for him.	39	19.5%	39	19.5%	122	61.0%	2.42	.80
My children ask before using other people things.	39	19.5%	81	40.5%	80	40.0%	2.21	.75
My children finish classroom work on time.	0	0.0%	122	61.0%	78	39.0%	2.39	.49
My children keep his desk neat and clean.	39	19.5%	78	39.0%	83	41.5%	2.22	.75



Statement	Never		Sometimes		Very Often		Total	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	Mean	S.D
My children bring cheer to friend who look lonely.	42	21.0%	77	38.5%	81	40.5%	2.19	.76
My children cheer up and comforts persons who fail.	39	19.5%	103	51.5%	58	29.0%	2.09	.69
My children praise friend success.	40	20.0%	100	50.0%	60	30.0%	2.10	.70
Total							2.23	.27

Table 4

Frequency Distribution of Children's Empathy and Social Support Behaviours as Reported by Mothers

Statement	Never		Sometimes		Very Often		Total	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	Mean	S.D
My children feel sorry for others when bad things happen to them.	62	31.0%	60	30.0%	78	39.0%	2.08	.83
My children listen to my friends when they talk about problems they are having's	61	30.5%	79	39.5%	60	30.0%	1.99	.78
My children try to understand how my friends feel anger or sad.	39	19.5%	142	71.0%	19	9.5%	1.90	.53
My children stand up for their friends when they have been unfairly criticized.	19	9.5%	117	58.5%	64	32.0%	2.22	.61
My children tell other people when they have done something well.	20	10.0%	103	51.5%	77	38.5%	2.28	.64
My children make request from parents in polite way.	39	19.5%	100	50.0%	61	30.5%	2.11	.70
Total							2.10	.25

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Table 1 presents demographic characteristics of the 200 participant mothers. Professional field distribution showed education sector representation (44%, n=88), followed by medical field (25%, n=50), office work (11%, n=22), beautician work (10%, n=20), and housewife designation (10%, n=20). Employment sector composition was nearly balanced between private sector (51%, n=102) and public sector (49%, n=98) positions. Work hours were distributed across four categories: 6-hour workdays (39.5%, n=79), standard 8-hour days (29%, n=58), 10-hour days (20.5%, n=41), and more than 10-hour days (11%, n=22).

Children's Social Behaviours as Reported by Mothers

Table 2 presents frequency distributions and descriptive statistics for children's social behaviours. Eye contact initiation during conversation showed relatively low frequency, with 39% reporting "never" initiating eye contact, 51.5% "sometimes," and only 9.5% "very often" (M=1.70, SD=0.63). Facial expression communication of feelings demonstrated more favourable patterns, with 41.5% reporting "very often" expression (M=2.32, SD=0.65). Appropriate greeting expression showed 48.5% "very often" (M=2.29, SD=0.77). Toy/food sharing was reported "very often" by 51.5% of mothers (M=2.32, SD=0.78).

Speech interruption restraint proved relatively strong, with 50% reporting children "very often" avoiding speech interruption (M=2.40, SD=0.66). Happiness display was common, with 69.5% indicating "sometimes" display (M=2.11, SD=0.54). Classroom peer conversation occurred "sometimes" in 40% of cases (M=1.90, SD=0.84). Importantly, helping friends with problems was reported uniformly, with 50% indicating "sometimes" and 50% "very often" (M=2.50, SD=0.50). Compliments to opposite-sex peers showed lower frequency, with 80.5% indicating "sometimes" (M=2.01, SD=0.44).

The overall social behaviours scale mean was 2.17 (SD=0.21), indicating moderate average frequency



across items. This suggests children generally demonstrated prosocial behaviours with varying consistency rather than consistently high or consistently low frequencies.

Children's Social Interactions and Classroom Behaviours

Table 3 presents classroom interaction frequencies. Requesting peer favours occurred "very often" in 61% of cases ($M=2.42$, $SD=0.80$). Permission-seeking before using others' possessions showed 40% "very often" ($M=2.21$, $SD=0.75$). Classroom work completion on time was reported "very often" by 39% and "sometimes" by 61% ($M=2.39$, $SD=0.49$). Desk organization and cleanliness showed 41.5% "very often" ($M=2.22$, $SD=0.75$).

Bringing cheer to lonely friends occurred "very often" in 40.5% and "sometimes" in 38.5% ($M=2.19$, $SD=0.76$). Comforting peer failure showed 51.5% "sometimes" ($M=2.09$, $SD=0.69$). Peer success praise occurred "sometimes" in 50% of cases ($M=2.10$, $SD=0.70$). The overall classroom interactions scale mean was 2.23 ($SD=0.27$), marginally higher than social behaviours mean, suggesting relatively consistent moderate engagement in classroom social interactions and prosocial classroom behaviours.

Children's Empathy and Social Support Behaviours

Table 4 presents empathy and social support behaviour frequencies. Sympathy when bad events occur to peers showed 39% "very often" ($M=2.08$, $SD=0.83$). Listening to friend problems was reported "sometimes" in 39.5% ($M=1.99$, $SD=0.78$). Emotional understanding of peer emotions showed 71% "sometimes" ($M=1.90$, $SD=0.53$). Advocating for unfairly criticized friends occurred "sometimes" in 58.5% ($M=2.22$, $SD=0.61$).

Telling others of peer accomplishments showed 51.5% "sometimes" ($M=2.28$, $SD=0.64$). Respectful parent request making was reported "sometimes" by 50% ($M=2.11$, $SD=0.70$). The overall empathy scale mean was 2.10 ($SD=0.25$), slightly lower than classroom interactions and social behaviours scales. This pattern suggests that while children demonstrated prosocial and classroom behaviours moderately frequently, empathy manifestations were somewhat less consistent.

Associations Between Maternal Employment Variables and Child Outcomes

Table 5

T-test

Independent Samples t-Test: Child Outcomes by Maternal Employment Sector

Outcome Variable	Public Sector (M, SD)	Private Sector (M, SD)	t-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Social Behaviours	2.24 (0.19)	2.15 (0.21)	1.87	0.06	0.45
Classroom Interactions	2.25 (0.26)	2.21 (0.28)	1.18	0.24	–
Empathy	2.12 (0.23)	2.09 (0.27)	0.95	0.34	–

Note: M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation. A dash (–) indicates that the effect size (Cohen's d) was not reported for that variable

Employment Sector: Independent samples t-tests compared children's outcomes by maternal employment sector (private vs. public). Children whose mothers worked in public sector ($M=2.24$, $SD=0.19$) demonstrated slightly higher social behaviours scores than children of private sector mothers ($M=2.15$, $SD=0.21$), though this difference was not statistically significant ($t=1.87$, $p=.06$, $d=0.45$). Classroom interactions scores were comparable between public sector ($M=2.25$, $SD=0.26$) and private sector ($M=2.21$, $SD=0.28$) mothers' children ($t=1.18$, $p=.24$). Empathy scores showed minimal sector differences (public $M=2.12$, $SD=0.23$ vs. private $M=2.09$, $SD=0.27$, $t=0.95$, $p=.34$).

Table 6

One-Way ANOVA of Child Outcomes by Maternal Work Hours

Outcome Variable	Work Hour Category (M, SD)	F-value	p-value	η^2 (Eta Squared)			
6 hours	8 hours	10 hours	>10 hours				
Social Behaviours	2.21 (0.18)	-	-	2.08 (0.25)	3.42	.019*	0.05
Classroom	2.27 (0.25)	-	-	2.16 (0.31)	2.87	.038*	0.04



Outcome Variable	Work Hour Category (M, SD)	F-value	p-value	η^2 (Eta Squared)
Interactions				
Empathy	-	-	-	-
		2.31	0.078	0.03

Note: M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation. The table highlights the specific group comparisons (6 hours vs. >10 hours) mentioned in the results. Means for other categories (8 hours, 10 hours) were not provided in the text.

** indicates statistical significance ($p < .05$).*

Work Hours: ANOVA was used to test the differences in different work hour categories (6 hours, 8 hours, 10 hours, >10 hours). Work hours showed a high level of variation in social behaviours ($F=3.42$, $p=.019$, $\eta^2=.05$). The children whose mothers worked 6-hours per day ($M=2.21$, $SD=0.18$) had more social behaviours compared to those whose mothers worked over 10-hours per day ($M=2.08$, $SD=0.25$). Work hours ($F=2.87$, $p=.038$, 0.04) were also significant in classroom interactions with 6-hour work days recording higher scores ($M=2.27$, $SD=0.25$) than longer hours ($M=2.16$, $SD=0.31$). There were also similar trends in empathy scores, though they were very close to the threshold of significance ($F=2.31$, $p=.078$, $\eta^2=.03$).

Table 7

One-Way ANOVA of Child Outcomes by Maternal Professional Field

Outcome Variable	Professional Field (M, SD)	F-value	p-value	η^2 (Eta Squared)
Education	Medical	Other Fields		
Social Behaviours	2.22 (0.19)	2.14 (0.22)	2.12 (0.23)	4.56 .001** 0.08
Classroom Interactions	2.27 (0.25)	-	-	3.12 .018* 0.06
Empathy	-	-	-	1.88 0.134 -

Note: M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation. The table includes the specific group comparisons mentioned in the results. Where specific means for other fields were not detailed for a variable, a dash (—) is used.

** indicates $p < .05$, ** indicates $p < .01$ *

Professional Field: One-way ANOVA revealed significant differences in social behaviours by professional field ($F=4.56$, $p=.001$, $\eta^2=.08$). Mothers in education fields reported higher children's social behaviours ($M=2.22$, $SD=0.19$) compared to medical ($M=2.14$, $SD=0.22$) and other fields ($M=2.12$, $SD=0.23$). Classroom interactions also differed significantly ($F=3.12$, $p=.018$, $\eta^2=.06$), with education professionals' children showing higher scores ($M=2.27$, $SD=0.25$). Empathy scores did not significantly differ by professional field ($F=1.88$, $p=.134$).

Discussion

This paper has studied the relationship between maternal employment traits and social-emotional outcomes of children in South Punjab. Findings indicated moderate prevalence of prosocial behaviours, classroom social interactions, and empathy manifestations, and significant variation was also observed to be related to certain maternal employment variables.

Work Hours and Child Social-Emotional Development

The strong correlation between working hours and the social behaviour of the children is in line with the past literature that has focused on the employment hours as a resultant factor in family operations. The frequency of social behaviour among children whose mothers worked 6 hours per day was greater compared to those of mothers working over 10 hours per day (Bono et al., 2016). This observation confirms the hypothesis that extremely long working hours decrease parental availability and quality time of interaction, as well as the amount of time that children have to watch their parents model social skills, to be coached



emotionally, and to rehearse social skills in secure relationships.

Nevertheless, the effect sizes ($\eta^2 = 0.04-0.05$) indicate that work hours have rather small explanatory power (4-5%), even though statistically significant, on social-emotional outcomes of children. This implies that maternal employment time is not a sole determinant of the social development of children as other factors play significant roles. The quality of family relationships, maternal psychological wellbeing, quality of alternative childcare, and socioeconomic resources are likely to mediate the effects of work hours, which is in line with ecological theories of development (Waldfoegel et al., 2002).

Employment Sector and Family Stability

Employment in the public sector was marginally associated with social behaviours of children than the employment in the private sector, but the differences were not statistically relevant. Such a trend can be indicative of increased job security, regular work hours, and perks that are common in jobs in the Pakistani public sector. Public sector mothers can also have reduced occupational stress and have increased flexibility in their schedules, which is reflected in more regular parental engagement. On the other hand, employment in the private sector, which is generally less predictable in terms of hours and more demanding in terms of performance, could also decrease parental availability as well as maternal stress.

These results are also echoed by the research of Johnson and colleagues (Johnson et al., 2012) who showed that employment stability and predictability are the factors that forecast positive child outcomes in comparison with irregular or unstable employment. The small impacts of the present study on sector could be due to the fact that in this well-educated and professional sample, even mothers in the private sector have enough economic means and educational abilities to develop children. Sector effects may be stronger in samples of lower-income with less job security.

Professional Field and Parenting Contexts

The children of education professionals showed a little better social behaviours and interactions in the classroom than children of medical and other professionals. This trend could be attributed to a number of mechanisms. To begin with, teachers can have specialized knowledge in the area of child development and education, which might be transferred to home parenting. Second, the employment in the education sector can be more consistent with the school schedules of children allowing parents to be involved in school affairs. Third, educational settings can help interpersonal and communication skills related to parenting to be developed.

Alternatively, selection effects could also play a role: mothers who opt to pursue education career may value family involvement and child development not as equally as mothers who opt to pursue other careers. The longitudinal or experimental designs are not available, thus; it is hard to see the difference between these mechanistic possibilities. However, the result indicates that professional context is more than working hours, it includes occupational knowledge, working culture and flexibility of schedules, as a factor affecting parenting quality and child development.

Moderate Social-Emotional Competence Levels

The overall social-emotional outcome means ($M = 2.10-2.23$ on 3-point scales) are moderate and not always high or low frequencies of prosocial behaviours and empathy manifestations. This average trend is similar to those of various cultural settings, indicating that social-emotional growth in the middle childhood is usually slow but inconsistent (Hay et al., 2021).

It is remarkable that the relative rank ordering of outcome domains is as follows: classroom interactions ($M=2.23$) > social behaviours ($M=2.17$) > empathy ($M=2.10$). This trend indicates that the children in this sample were somewhat more regularly involved in social interactions in a classroom compared to social behaviours observed at home and that the manifestations of empathy were the most variable in terms of frequency. This hierarchy could be associated with developmental changes where behavioural competence (adhering to classroom regulations, doing homework) would be slightly ahead of more advanced empathic comprehension and prosocial reaction.

Implications of Findings

These findings indicate that maternal work in itself does not always have a detrimental effect on the



social-emotional development of children. Rather, job features or the number of hours of work, job security, and professional situation mediate the associations between employment of mothers and child outcomes. This result is consistent with the new literature which focuses on quality of employment rather than binary employment status (Baranov et al., 2020).

In the case of South Punjab, in particular, these findings could indicate that the policies that encourage moderate working hours and job security could have a more positive impact on the families than the policies that do not encourage maternal employment at all. The family-friendly policies could be the expansion of public sector employment or job security policies, rather than policies that are encouraging mothers to stay at home. Professional and educational support of mothers may be focused on the choice of a career according to the schedule and the applicability of knowledge in child development.

Limitations

There are a number of restrictions on interpretation and generalization. To start with, cross-sectional design does not allow causal inference; the observed associations may be due to unmeasured confounding or reverse causal. Mothers whose children exhibit high social-emotional competence may choose into employment and those with behaviourally challenged children may alter employment. Second, the use of maternal report creates bias in responding to questions; mothers may over-report positive prosocial behaviours in children or underreport problems. Findings would be strengthened by teacher reports or observer reports. Third, the sample (educated, urban professionals) does not allow generalizing to rural or low-income mothers. Fourth, other childcare quality, maternal stress, and family economic resources which are likely to be mediators were not evaluated in the study. Fifth, there was no control group of non-employed mothers, which restricted the possibility to study the impact of employment status. Lastly, the sample of working mothers included housewives hence conceptual ambiguity on effects of employment status.

Future Research Directions

The longitudinal designs that allow the causal inference and investigation of developmental trajectories should be used in the future. Multi-informant measures (maternal, paternal, teacher, and child reports) would decrease the bias in the responses. Mediating mechanism- Mediating mechanisms, such as maternal stress, parent-child interaction quality, and alternative childcare quality, would clarify how the characteristics of employment affect child development. Comparative designs that use non-employed mothers would shed light on the differences between employment status and employment characteristics. Generalizability would be facilitated by the inclusion of various socioeconomic groups. The qualitative studies that examine the lived experiences of mothers and children would inform a contextual insight that would be used to supplement the quantitative results.

Conclusion

This research analysed the effects of maternal employment on the social-emotional development of children in South Punjab which showed intricate relationships between the nature of employment and child outcomes. Although the work hours, employment sector, and professional field revealed statistically significant relatedness with certain outcome measures, the effect sizes were relatively small, indicating that employment characteristics are one of the many factors that affect children in terms of their social-emotional competence.

The fact that the 6-hour workdays was related to better social behaviours of children than very long working hours indicates that moderate working hours can be the best since they are just enough and offer economic benefits to the parent. The slightly higher child outcomes linkages of public sector employment might be related to employment security and predictability of schedules. Even better results were demonstrated by children of education professionals, which may be explained by specialized knowledge of child development or benefits of schedule-family fit.

In general, these findings undermine naive arguments according to which maternal work is always detrimental to child development. Rather, the results indicate that the quality of employment, in terms of moderate working hours, work schedule predictability, and work-related conditions that allow the involvement of parents, can be compatible with the positive social-emotional development of children. These findings will have an evidence-based support to the working mothers in South Punjab in the pursuit of employment with a



clearly minded consideration of work-life balance, parental care in social development of children and quality of family relationships.

Further studies that will explore mediating effects, use longitudinal designs and a variety of socioeconomic populations will further clarify the effects of maternal employment on the development of children in different settings. In the meantime, policymakers ought to put into account the quality of employment and family support systems as major determinants of the effects of maternal employment on the developmental outcomes of children.

Recommendations

1. Establish Work-Hour Standards for Parents

Establish policies that restrict working hours of parents with school-going children (8 hours in a day) with flexible working schedules that would improve parental participation and help decrease stress.

Responsible Agencies: Ministry of Labour, Provincial Labour Departments

2. Expand Public Sector Employment for Educated Women

Create more employment opportunities in the government, particularly in the education and health sectors to offer women employment security and predictable working hours and better remunerations that ensure family stability.

Responsible Agencies: Federal and Provincial Services Commissions

3. Implement Family-Supportive Employment Legislation

Pass laws that require flexibility in work schedules, leave of absence, and childcare facilities at the workplace to encourage the society to have a balance between work and life.

Responsible Agencies: Ministry of Labour and Manpower, Ministry of Human Rights

4. Develop Comprehensive Work-Life Balance Policies

Promote flexible working schedules, remote working, and childcare services to employers to increase retention and social-emotional growth of children.

Responsible Agencies: Employers, Ministry of Labour

5. Establish Parenting Support Programs for Working Mothers

Establish community based initiatives that give working mothers parenting advice, emotional support and stress management resources to enhance child development.

Responsible Agencies: NGOs, Community Organizations

6. Develop Quality Childcare Standards and Monitoring

Establish national standards of quality in childcare and systems of monitoring to provide high-quality care that promotes emotional and social development in children.

Responsible Agencies: Ministry of Human Development, Provincial Social Welfare Departments

7. Integrate Social-Emotional Learning into School Curricula

Social-emotional learning (SEL) should be integrated into the curriculum of schools and training of teachers should be offered to help children develop their empathy, prosocial behaviour, and emotional regulation.

Responsible Agencies: Ministries of Education, Schools

8. Implement School-Family Partnership Programs

Schools ought to come up with communication and involvement opportunities that are flexible to working parents so that they are actively involved in the development of their children.

Responsible Agencies: Schools, Parent-Teacher Associations

9. Encourage Intentional Parenting Practices Supporting Emotional Development

Observing quality time, emotional coaching, and peer interaction should be considered as some of the deliberate parenting strategies that working moms should adopt in order to promote the social-emotional competence of children.

Responsible Agencies: Parents directly, supported by community programs

10. Conduct Longitudinal Research on Employment Effects

Longitudinal studies to investigate the effects of maternal employment on the long-term social-emotional development of children should be done in research institutions to determine the critical factors to



be used in interventions.

Responsible Agencies: Universities, Research Institutes

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The corresponding author can provide the data used in this study upon request.

Conflict of Interest

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