

Women's Employment in Private Sector in Iran

Khadijeh Safiri

Department of Sociology, Al-Zahra University, Tehran, Iran

Abstract: This study is based on a research done on women's employment in private sector to study the relationship between factors affecting women in work environment and their occupational assessment. The low percentage of women's employment in public sector (12%), their concentration in medical and teaching professions and their disproportionate presence in managerial and decision-making positions within the wider societal context have offered them an opportunity to seek employment in private sector. The private sector in Iran, is not so much constrained as compared to state employment, thus it has encouraged the presence of women holding higher specializations. Data gathering was done through survey method and the sample consisted of 400 women employed by the private sector at different occupational levels in Tehran (Iran). Results show that women, although face intense competition in labor market and notice gendered discrimination, evaluate their jobs and colleagues favorably and experience participatory management to some extent.

Key words: Inter-organizational factors, job evaluation, private sector, women's employment

INTRODUCTION

Work is an important aspect of people's lives and most people spend a large part of their working lives at work. An understanding of the factors involved in job satisfaction is relevant to improving the well being of a significant number of people. While, the pursuit of the improvement of satisfaction is of humanitarian value, Smith *et al.* (1969) stated that trite as it may seem, satisfaction is a legitimate goal in itself. The definition of satisfaction by Locke (1976) is a pleasurable or positive emotional state, resulting from the appraisal of one's job experiences.

Women's employment is an important and pressing issue in the world today, simply because they comprise half of the globe's population. Therefore, the characteristic features of women's employment should be studied, although women's active role in everyday life and their vital function in running the home and raising children, remains an unquestionable fact. Nonetheless, women's sensitive role is still obscure in our society in relation to production and socio-economic, as well as cultural development. A comparison of statistics on occupational, educational and managerial activities of women and men reveals a considerable inequality between them. The low percentage of women's employment, compared to that of men, women's absence in total varieties of economic activity, their concentration in teaching and medical services and their non-appearance in high management positions, are all a testimony to the existence of inequality

considering that the percentage of women holding higher educational degrees is similar to that of men (Safiri, 1998).

The significance of women's employment in private sector is further enhanced through the expansion of the private economic sector in programs introduced by the Islamic Republic Government. Moreover, women's increasing tendency to research outside home and seek higher education can be directed toward private sector's activation (Azadeh, 2002). Therefore, a deeper understanding of the situation and features by which, the private sector may be characterized and should be included in the planning agenda for the future. Thus, armed with such knowledge, we may further move to remove obstacles on the way of the expansion of this sector.

Most previous studies have attempted to explain a worker's job satisfaction as function of the individual's personal characteristics and the characteristics of the job itself. Variables such as age, gender, education, marital status, hours of work and earnings figure prominently in these previous studies.

One of the main findings is that women are more satisfied with their jobs than men, even after taking into account many observed characteristics and sample selectivity (Clark, 1996, 1997; Groot and Brink, 1999; Galdeano, 2001; Blanchflower and Oswald, 1999). They explained the existence of a positive relationship between being a female and job satisfaction as reflecting women's lower expectations from their job, which arise from the poor position in the labor market that women have traditionally held (Clark, 1997).

The observed relationship between job satisfaction and age suggests the existence of a U shaped relationship, which is captured by a quadratic term in age in the regression equation (Clork *et al.*, 1996; Blanchflower and Oswald, 1999).

Previous researches suggest that higher levels of education are associated with lower levels of job satisfaction (Clark, 1996, 1997; Clork *et al.*, 1996; Sloane and William, 1996). Individuals with a higher level of education consequently, tend to be less satisfied with their job because they have higher expectations than those with lower levels of education.

Several researchers have examined the relationship between job satisfaction and gender for example (Mottaz, 1986; Goh *et al.*, 1991; Mason, 1995). However, the results of many studies concerning the relationship between job satisfaction and the sex of the employees have been contradictory.

One common explanation for the different level of work satisfaction sometimes reported for men and women have different expectations of their work (Campbell *et al.*, 1976). Some of Researchers have suggested that men and women may use qualitatively different criteria in their assessment of work from this perspective, job satisfaction is seen to be an emotional response resulting from the interaction of work rewards and work values. The greater the perceived congruence between rewards and values, the greater the job satisfaction; the greater the perceived discrepancy and the less the satisfaction (Oshagbemi, 2000).

The results obtained from Spanish workers show that job satisfaction is an element susceptible to improvement. Moreover, it is observed that the level of job satisfaction is determined by four factors. Economic aspects, interpersonal relation, working conditions and personal fulfillment. A subsequent analysis according to workers gender shows that although men and women take into account the same dimensions, the degree to which each dimension has an impact is different for each sub-sample (Garcia-Bernal *et al.*, 2005).

In >4 decades since 1964, workforce participation and incomes of American women have increased considerably. For example, in 1964, only 39% of women worked outside of home and sex discrimination (including widespread, publicly sanctioned sex segregation by employers), discrimination and sex-based wage disparities were common. By 2006, 60% of all women participated in the workforce, compared to 74% of all men (Cocchiara and Bell, 2006). Although, women have made significant gains in workforce participation, women's share of leadership position, with the associated benefits in salary and status has remained relatively low (Catalyst, 2004).

Some findings of the satisfaction of women in USA show that it is less sensitive to their income in comparison with that of men's. In addition, young males in the USA emerge with a positive partial correlation between job satisfaction and their hours of work, while young females confirm the general result of a negative partial correlation (Donohue and Heywood, 2004). These are research questions:

- What is the situation of women's employment in Iranian private sector?
- How do women evaluate their occupational situation?
- How do women evaluate their occupational organization?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In an operational definition of the private sector, we took any wage earner who receives salary from a private entrepreneur, as the one who enjoys having a work place and who is able to insure his workers, whose numbers should not fall under five. We then selected our samples accordingly. Our sample included 400 persons residing in Tehran. Data were then extracted from this sample through survey method (these workshops or work places, observed regulations and thus, were covered by the labor law and their list was obtained from the Ministry of Labor). Our sample, excluding skilled agricultural workers, encompassed all major occupational groupings.

The majority of the individuals in the sample were covered by social security insurance. In terms of personnel category, 54.7% were contractual, 34.3% formal and the rest enjoyed different personnel categories.

Initially, we began by considering how women themselves evaluated their occupational situation and hence, our measurement indices. The main indices dependent variable included: job symmetry (or suitability), job dependence and job satisfaction.

Effective factors on women's satisfaction are (as independent variables): Management style (mode) in their work organization, Communications with colleagues, Recognition of discrimination between males and females and Job stability. In the follow-up, we considered studying the relationship that might exist between these organizational factors and the cluster providing how women evaluated their occupational situation. The emerging model explains the relationship between these 2 factors (Fig. 1).

In the first section, women's employment situation in private sector is studied. The section's data is extracted from statistics provided by Iran Census Bureau (2003). The statistics are indicative of women's lower share of employment in both private and public sectors and thus, witness an overall lower percentage of women's employment (Fig. 2).

Similarly, the 12% rate of women's employment concentrated in some of the major occupational groupings, initially seems to have included, more than other groupings, clerical office workers. Yet, as Fig. 3 illustrates, private sector's growth is accompanied by growth of the industrial sector and in 2000 nearly 50% of women belonged to the manufacture grouping and its related occupations, but in subsequent years this rate declined to 33%, whereas, the same percentage in other groupings increased. In 2000, for instance, almost 32% of women were in skilled agricultural and forestry grouping, the rate grew to 40% in 2003.

This table indicates that there exists a relative increase in all groupings within 2000-03 and it is only in manufacturing and its related occupations that a decline has occurred. Generally, speaking, women are located in 2 major occupational groupings of skilled agricultural and manufacturing, that is between 73-81% of women, in these years, have been in these 2 major groupings.

The statistics show that since 2000 until 2003 women's employment rate has decreased from 14-12%, disregarding a little rise in specialists group, it seems probable that we would be entering a crisis period if private sector would not create enough job opportunities for specialist women. In the context of studying, causes of women's employment rate decline and the respective obstacles in private sector, we attempted to better understand women's situation this sector by conducting a survey that would also undertake the task of reflecting women's own evaluation regarding their professions.

The results of examining women's evaluation by three indexes of: job symmetry, job dependency and job satisfaction, are as follows:

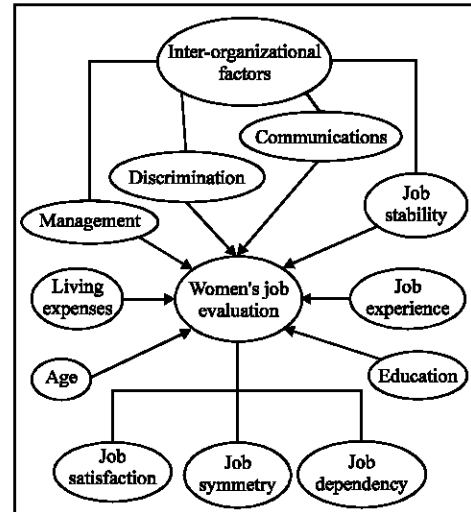


Fig. 1: Causal model of factors influencing women's job evaluation

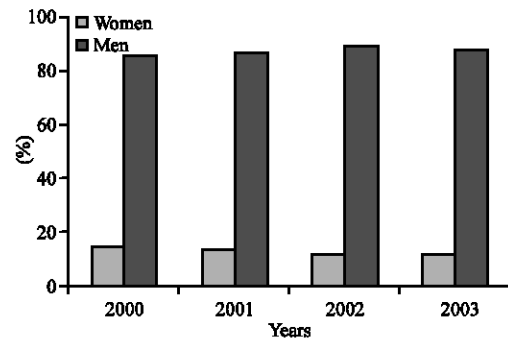


Fig. 2: Ratio distribution of employment in private sector by gender, period of 2000-03

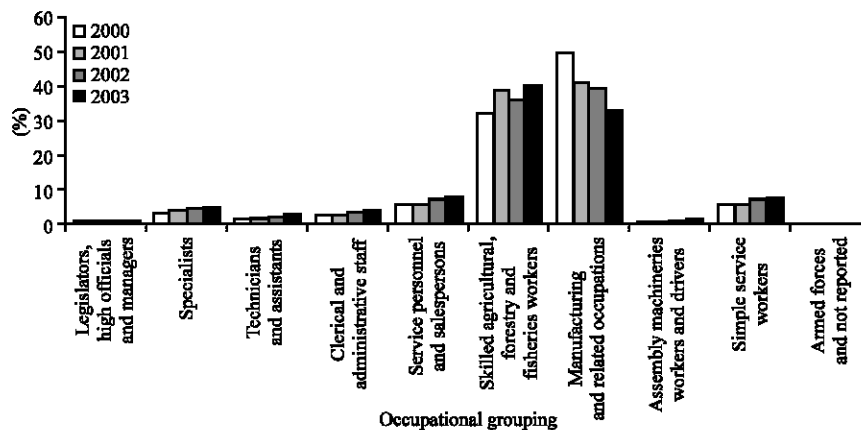


Fig. 3: Ratio distribution of women's employment in private sector by major occupational grouping, period of 2000-2003

Job symmetry: This index was examined on 2 dimensions: education and ability. By ability we mean skills, experience, training and education in terms of suitability of the certificate one holds to his/her job requirements.

The results indicate that the private sector, having faced fewer constraints for employing the desired individuals, has utilized the criteria of proper educational background along with the respective abilities, in order to select the applicants, so that they would meet the specific job requirements.

Job dependency: In studying this index, different expressions were adopted to measure women's dependency on their jobs. The results show that 51.1% on the scale of average, 26.7% on the scales of much and very much, are dependent and interest on their jobs.

Job satisfaction: Satisfaction is indicative of the extent of inclination and delights one takes toward work and its environment and results from reward and the internal and external security work provides. Job satisfaction includes dimensions such as gratification one receives from the wage earnings. It also, encompasses security, status and equality at work environment, which combined together, constitutes job satisfaction. Table 1 indicates the extent of women's job satisfaction in private sector.

As the Table 1 shows, nearly 26.1% of the respondents were satisfied little and very little with the job, while, 48.8% were satisfied on the average and 25.3%, on the scales of much and very much, felt job satisfaction.

Earlier, we pointed to discrimination, when examining organizational factors. Discrimination in the organization was measured by barriers women face to get managerial positions, promotions, educational up grading, enjoyment of emergency loans and recreations. The results on various areas of inequality show that:

- Reaching high echelon management positions has a high average and women consider this barrier as the most important case of inequality
- Job promotion has an upward average, showing that women do not get promoted easily
- Supplementary educational has a downward average indicating that educational promotion is possible for women
- Access to loans and recreational travels scores a high average indicating that facilities are more often used by men while women's use of these facilities is very little

Table 1: Distribution of respondents for dependent variable

Scales	Job symmetry index (%)	Job satisfaction (%)
Very little	1.29	7.75
Little	7.46	18.25
Average	38.56	48.75
Much	38.05	21.50
Very much	14.65	3.75
Total	100.00	100.00

Table 2: Distribution of respondents for independent variables

Scales	Existence of inequality (%)	Job security (%)	Communications in organization (%)
Very little	5.86	6.25	1.89
Little	16.02	20.00	8.11
Average	34.77	44.25	41.62
Much	35.16	22.50	35.95
Very much	8.20	7.00	12.43
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

- Wages: Women felt less unequal where wages were concerned. This is due to the fact that basic official wage (base pay), in Iran, is identical for men and women of the same occupation and it is due to heading the households and guardianship of children that men's wages seem somewhat higher
- The average pertaining to men's material and immaterial advantages is high indicating that women's recognition of inequality is high in this area
- As to the expression used to gauge women's exploitation, the average shows that women do not accept the expression as true, which is the indication for the absence of exploitation

Table 2 states that inequality is one of the issues that should be set 4th on this score. One may notice that inequality between women and men, which exists in the community at large, is extended to private sector and thus, discrimination as such, ranks high as a phenomenon within private organizations.

Management change is one important factor of the organization. With regard to management style, which was supposed to be either participatory or arbitrary, expressions were prepared, which designated the extent of participation individuals enjoyed in connection with decision making and policies adopted. The results indicated that management in private organizations was on the scale of average and higher, responsive to workers opinions of how to run the organization, thus 89% of the respondents considered themselves as participating in decision-making processes and believed that the management was of the participatory type. One of the strongest points of this sector considered workers' judgments in running the unit or in removing the difficulties very important.

The next variable is job security and stability. Although, in examination of this index we introduced a personnel category, that of being a contractual or a formal employee, most respondents were of the contractual type, meaning 54.7% were contractual and 34.3% were formal employees; yet, they did not feel insecure within the job, or in connection with getting arbitrarily fired. Thus, they did not feel insecure as far as their future was concerned.

The next index examined communication between the woman and her colleagues. Cooperation with others in getting things done, remedying the problems developed and supporting each other, were among the questions in the questionnaire. The results illustrated that on the scale of very much, women seemed content with colleagues and that friendship and sincerity, were among points of strength in private sector.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In examining bi-variable relationships, Table 3 indicates Pearson's Coefficient ratios between dependent and independent variables.

Coefficient ratios are indicative of the fact that the more participatory the management, the more satisfaction workers gain through their jobs and workers in democratically run institutions, evaluate their jobs more positively. The reverse is also true, that is the more inequality in private sector in terms of wages, promotion, access to opportunities and resources, the more negative workers perceptions of their jobs would be. The existing discrimination between men and women in the society, when reflected at workplace, makes people not to positively assess their jobs, although this matter was less strongly felt in relation to complementary education; yet with regard to promoting to higher managerial positions, welfare and recreation resources and enjoyment of some work advantages, the inequality between women and men seemed greater.

Coefficient ratio between organizational communications and job evaluation is positive, significant and strong. It shows that the more powerful and sincere the inter-organizational communications amongst colleagues, the more positive their evaluation concerning their jobs. Coefficient ratio between job security and stability and job evaluation is also positive, significant and strong, showing that when security and stability of job is high, workers present a more positive assessment of their jobs.

The background variables such as prior work experience, education, age and living expenses were also related to job evaluation. That is, individuals with longer prior experience, more outstanding education, older and more living expenses, meaning higher income, exhibited a more positive assessment toward their jobs.

Our statistical society consisted of individuals holding various occupations: from top managers to lower echelon (service) workers, thus enabling us to obtain the relationship between occupation type and job evaluation.

Table 4 shows a significant difference between respondents' occupation type variable and the variable of job situation evaluation. The related average of job evaluation was the lowest with secretaries, followed by workers, proficient clerks, clerks and nurses. The highest average belonged to physicians followed by principals. The continuity rate was 24% and significance level was 0.0063, which shows that the lower echelon workers exhibit lower job evaluation. The degree of Eta Square is 2% which, denotes that 2% of changes in dependent variable is determined by occupation type.

Inter-organizational factors and job evaluation situation:

The main hypothesis of the research stating a relationship between inter-organizational factors and women's job situation evaluation is shown in Table 5.

Table 3: Pearson's coefficient ratio between dependent and independent variables

Independent/dependent variable	Job security and stability	Communications in organization	Inequality	Management style
Employment situation evaluation	R = 0.4508 (400) p = 0.000	R = 0.4767 (400) p = 0.000	R = 0.1788 (400) p = 0.000	R = 0.5471 (400) p = 0.000

Table 4: Variance analysis between occupation type and women's job evaluation variable

Classes	No	Average	Eta	f	Significance level STG
Workers	43	183.15	0.2406	2.8782	0.0063
Secretary	120	181.02			
Physician	8	194.06			
Proficient clerk	59	184.83			
Clerk	72	184.89			
High school teacher	18	199.75			
Manager	6	202.42			
Nurse	10	185.40			

Dependent variable: Evaluation of job situation, Independent variable: Occupation type

Table 5: Relationship between inter-organizational factors and job evaluation

Independent/dependent variable	Inter-organizational factors
Job situation evaluation	R = 0.6305 (400) p = 0.000

Table 6: Respondents suggestions to women's problems in private sector

Suggestions	Yes		No	
	No	(%)	No	(%)
Protection of women by state and law	84	21.00	316	79.00
Creating job security, more stability, higher wages and the like	84	21.00	316	79.00
Raising people's culture, increasing work motivation	69	17.25	331	82.75

Table 7: Problems faced by women employed in the private sector

What do you see as problems faced by women employed by the private sector	Yes		No	
	No	(%)	No	(%)
Lack of job security, lack of job stability, lack of promotion opportunity	139	34.75	261	65.25
Lack of social security (psychological), lack of social protection, discrimination, disrespectfulness	50	12.50	350	87.50
Women's exploitation, long working hours, low wage, lack of state benefits, lack of legal protection, lack of officials' attention	118	29.50	282	70.50
Problems of welfare facilities (kindergarten, transportation, considering work experience)	95	23.75	305	76.25
Lack of work motivation, not to at the right job, lack of proper planning	54	13.50	346	86.50
Society's poverty of culture, making distinctions between men women, viewing the private sector negatively and instrumentally	11	2.75	389	97.25

It shows that inter-organizational factors are correlated to job situation evaluation in a positive, strong and significant relationship, by a correlation ratio of $r = 0.6305$. That is, the more secure and stable the job is, the more participatory the management, the stronger inter-organizational communication, the less inequality between men and women, the more positive the evaluation of the job.

Women's problems in private sector: The private sector, despite its positive scores, suffers from some problems. Examining these problems, the research focused on three factors: Overall structural problems of the society, Work organization's problems and Women's own problems.

These problems and women workers responses in private sector, along with their suggestions as to how to remedy the hard issues, are outlined in Table 6.

From glancing at Table 7, the most important case women face in the private sector, is a lack of job security and stability, although 65.5% of women do not see it as a problem.

Yet among other issues, this particular one has been introduced more often. Next in line are long working hours, little salary and absence of government sector advantages. Other issues such as welfare and the like are included in the problem areas of this sector. The least amount is introduced concerning cultural poverty, which is an indication that women consider that as least bothering and it is perhaps a sign that the overall society is gradually accepting women in this sector. Table 7 presents respondents' suggestions regarding reducing the problems of women working in this private sector. It indicates that $\frac{1}{4}$ of women have set forth problems in the private sector and the remaining has not spoken out. Yet among the problems stated and ways to cope, some have suggested increased government support, while others consider the private sector's own problem removal.

CONCLUSION

Women's employment is considered to be one of the world's most important issues of the day. Half of the globe's populations are women, whose work is implicitly or explicitly considered part of the national income. In Iran, women's employment rate is 12%, which includes government, private and cooperative sectors.

In recent years, since 2000 until 2003, women's employment rate within the private sector has decreased. In addition, the concentration of employment in private sector has been grouped into manufacturing, skilled agricultural and forestry workers. Recent years have witnessed a decrease in women's employment in manufacturing and a rise in skilled agricultural workers (Safiri, 2002).

In an attempt to examine women's employment in private sector, a survey research of workshops and private centers was conducted and the respective statistics were obtained from the Ministry of Labor to identify the wage earners. A sample of 400 individuals was taken. What was in the mind of the researcher was to obtain an evaluation reflecting women's views of their job situation. Later inter-organizational factors were identified and their relationships with women's job evaluation were examined. Finally, women's problems, in private sector and suggestions to their removal were considered. The results indicated that women's evaluation of their job situation rested on the scales of much and average. The indices of job symmetry, job dependence and job satisfaction were measured pointing to remarks just made. Therefore, women evaluated their jobs in private sector as average and high.

Examining the inter-organizational factors, which were determined by indices of participatory management,

occurrence of discrimination, inter-organizational communications and job stability, the results indicated that the majority of women emphasized the existence of inequality, compared to men, in promotion opportunities, reaching high management positions and accessing welfare and recreational facilities. With regard to participatory management, the majority of women expressed their management's concerns over women's inclusion in decision-making and policy formulation and in addressing women's wishes. This particular point is indicative of the fact that the private sector utilizes participatory management experience, which in turn has increased women's job dependency (a finding of the present research).

The index of inter-organizational communication was taken to mean cooperation among workers, problem remedying and support given to one another. This was evaluated as average and high and the majority pronounced their access to such a quality. The next index was that of job stability. Although, most of the workers in this sector are employed on a contractual basis, which is unstable and renewed annually, 30% assessed their job stability high, while 44% considered it average, which indicates that confidence exists as to the future research situation among women workers of private sector.

Coefficient ratio of the indices job evaluation was strong and significant. The occupation type had a significant relationship with job evaluation. Manual worker and secretariat capacities did not show a high evaluation regarding their jobs. This is perhaps due to the fact that inequality was more pronounced in these capacities. Moreover, less promotion opportunities, less participatory management experience and less access to managerial levels, lower job satisfaction in these occupations. Those occupations such as manager, director general, physician, engineer, high school teacher and the like, expressed more positive and higher evaluation regarding their job, for having more access to promotional opportunities, to higher managerial echelons and for having participatory management experience.

Background variables such as longer work experience, more outstanding education, being older and having more living expenses (to measure higher income) had somewhat higher job evaluation.

In exposing problems facing the private sector, ¼ of the women introduced items which were classified in three major classes of: Societal structural, Organizational, Women's own. The problems set forth by 25% of women are lack of: job stability, social support, legal support, welfare facilities and the related advantages. The majority of women did not see the existence of problems as such, maybe because the private sector has had a good

performance rating and when women get a job, they consider it good, overlooking its weaknesses and don't expect much out of their jobs.

REFERENCES

- Azadeh, M.A., 2002. An Investigation into Objective and Subjective Conditions of Labor and its relation to Job Satisfaction. Tehran: Center for Women's Participation Affairs.
- Blanchflower, D. and A. Oswald, 1999. Well-being, Insecurity and the Decline of American Job Satisfaction. USA: Mimeo Dartmouth Collage USA.
- Campbell, A., P. Converse and W. Roger, 1976. The Quality of American Life. New York, NY: Russel Sage.
- Catalyst, 2004. Facts about working women. www.catalyst.org/files/tidbits04.pdf.
- Clark, A.E., 1996. Job satisfaction in Britain. *J. Ind. Relations*, 32 (4): 189-217.
- Clark, A.E., 1997. Job satisfaction and gender. Why are women so happy at work? *Labour Econ.*, 4: 341-372.
- Clark, A., A. Oswald and P. Warr, 1996. Is job satisfaction U-shaped in age? *J. Occup. Organisational Psychol.*, 69: 57-81.
- Cocchiara, F. and M. Bell, 2006. Latinas and black women: Key factors for a growing proportion of the US workforce. *J. Equal Opportunities Int.*, 25 (4): 272-284.
- Donohue, S. and J. Heywood, 2004. Job satisfaction and gender: An expanded specification from the NLSY. *Int. J. Manpower*, 25 (2): 211-238.
- Galdeano, A., 2001. Gender differences in job satisfaction and Labour market participation: UK evidence from propensity score. Mimeo, EUI.
- Garcia-Bernal, J. and A. Gargallo-Castel, 2005. Job satisfaction: Empirical evidence of gender differences. *J. Women Manag. Review*, 20 (4): 279-288.
- Goh, C.T., H.C. Koh and C.K. Low, 1991. Gender effects on the job satisfaction of accountants in Singapore. *Work and Stress*, 5 (4): 341-348.
- Groot, W. and H. Van den Brink, 1999. Job satisfaction and preference drift. *Econ. Lett.*, 63: 363-367.
- Iran Census Bureau, 2003. Extraction of Employment Data.
- Locke, E.A., 1976. The Nature and Causes of Job Satisfaction. In: Dunnette, M.D. (Ed.), *Handbook of Industrial and Organisational Psychol.*, pp: 1297-1343. Chicago: Rand Mc.
- Mason, S.E., 1995. Gender differences in job satisfaction. *J. Soc. Psychol.*, 153 (2): 143-151.
- Mottaz, C., 1986. Gender differences in work satisfaction, work-related rewards and values and the determinants of work satisfaction. *Human Relations*, 39: 359-378.

- Oshagbemi, T., 2000. Correlates of pay satisfaction in higher education. *Int. J. Edu. Manage.*, 14 (1): 9-31.
- Safiri, K., 1998. *Sociology of Women's Employment*. Tehran: Tebyan Publication.
- Safiri, K., 2002. *Examining Inter-Organizational Factors and women's own job Evaluation*. Tehran: Center for women's participation Affairs.
- Sloane, P. and H. William, 1996. Are overpaid workers really unhappy? A test of the theory of cognitive dissonance. *Labour*, 10 (1): 3-15.
- Smith, P.C., L.M. Kendall and C.L. Hulin, 1969. *The Measurement of Satisfaction in Work and Retirement: A Strategy for the Study of Attitudes*. Chicago: Rand McNally.