

## Working Women in Healthcare Services: between Wage Work and Domestic Work.

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## **Abstract**

Morocco's efforts to promote women's rights have succeeded in recent years to introduce important legislative reforms that serve the interests of women through increasing their socioeconomic status. Moroccan Constitution of 2011 enshrines the total equality of rights between men and women, including political and economic rights, in accordance with the international agreements to which Morocco has voluntarily approved. The perception of equality between all citizens is the main foundation of any true democratic and equal society. However, economic change through privatization of public sectors has had undesirable outcomes on working-class and lower middle-class women. Structural adjustments and economic liberalization were not followed by official assessments to evaluate its direct impact on female emancipation and gender equality. Contrarily, capitalism stressed gender inequality through covering women's exploitation with libertarian features. The findings of this study confirmed that social roles are still distributed on gender basis. Although Moroccan women participate fully in the national economy, they still perform domestic chores in the same way and with the same intensity. Moroccan male mentality still considers domestic chores as women's duty. As a result, the heavy burden of double task becomes the main cause of conflicts coming from private spheres. Unfortunately, the majority of participants revealed that they have a difficult and unstable life because of the limited support they receive at home.

**Keywords:** Working Women, Domestic Work, Moroccan Feminism, Marxist Feminism.

## Introduction

The cultural reforms that feminist thought encourage has raised many controversial dialogues between conservatives and pioneer feminists in the Arab World. However, Moroccans tend to be more flexible and tolerable to set socioeconomic reforms to improve the representation of women in all fields. Previously, non-governmental organizations took the initiative to encourage women to participate fully in development and to take part in modern change, regarding the unemployment rate of women, which was much higher than that of men and continued to increase during the 1990s. On the other hand, despite the negative attitudes of Islamists toward working women, women remain attached to the job market especially in the last decade. Although they usually work for a low wage, they are aware of their social responsibilities toward their family. Official surveys showed that couples prefer two salaries to face the hardship of modern life. Ennaji (2008) evaluated the general economic situation of women through his condensed article: *Steps to the Integration of Moroccan Women in Development*. Ennaji considered that the economic liberalization and free trade that Morocco has noticed since Mohamed VI took the throne. He asserted that these strategies to privatize the national economy have reduced the feminist concerns of the state. Thus, the partial withdrawal of the state from the national economy has devalued its commitment to gender equality (p.340-341).

I hold strong assumption that the economic structural adjustments through privatization had undesirable outcomes, especially on working-class and lower middle-class women. Structural adjustments and economic liberalization were not followed by official assessments to evaluate its direct impact on gender equality. Contrarily, capitalism stressed gender inequality through covering women's exploitation with libertarian features. This weak position maintains women's dependence on state interference to protect their rights and enhance their general status. Despite the modernists' aspects that Moroccan family has adopted, there are still obstacles that limit their appearance economically and politically.

In this study, working women in healthcare services were given chance to voice their attitudes and assess the impact of domestic work on wage work from their personal experiences. This study investigated how working women manage to balance between domestic responsibilities and professional ones. Women contribute vastly to the world's unpaid domestic and care work; taking into consideration the hours they spend in professional careers, they are working longer hours in comparison with men.

The rationale behind the choice of this topic is that the integration of women in development is relatively a continuous topic of research in Feminist Thought. Besides, the question of ‘woman’ is barely studied in Morocco in particular and in the developing countries in general. The current study strives to contribute to the ongoing research about Moroccan feminism. It is also a modest enrichment of the locally brief literature on women’s rights in relation to job market. Another reason for conducting this research is to reflect on and react to the adopted procedural reforms by Moroccan governments of the last decades. The primary purpose behind undertaking this research project is to assess the status of working women in health sector, and probe the influence of *feminist consciousness*, *working conditions*, *gender equality* and *domestic support* on the socioeconomic status of working women.

Generally, the results suggest a significant interrelationship between a woman’s wage work and her domestic zone. Participants think that Equality between the two sexes would not abolish women’s oppression, unless reconsidering the fundamental relationship between domestic work and wage work. The heavy burden of double task obstructs the professional and social well-being of working women in healthcare services. This research project discusses the possibilities to recognize, redistribute and reduce domestic work hours in order to ease this heavy burden on working women’s shoulders.

Benston (1969) claimed that integrating women into the production structures without socializing the domestic obligations would oppress women more. The distribution of labor on gender basis constitutes a fundamental obstacle to women’s emancipation. Benston (1969) paved the way for more authors, such as Maria Dalla Costa and Selma James, who also argued that domestic work is productive through producing surplus value (labor force). In 1972 Dalla Costa and James published their booklet “Women and the Subversion of the Community” arguing that housewives take part in the capitalist mode of production indirectly without any kind of social or financial recognition. Their theoretical analysis was based on the premise that domestic work generates surplus value. This value is produced through upraising future workers. The ordinary domestic activities like clothing, feeding, cleaning, cooking and emotional care are necessary conditions for the accumulation of wealth. Therefore, employers should pay housewives for their contribution in the capitalist mode of production.

## 1. Review of literature

This study opted for Marxist Feminism as a theoretical basis to discuss the results. The choice of Marxist terminology can be explained through the following justifications:

- 1) Since this research deals with the socioeconomic status of working women and since Marxism tends to understand the links between women's economic status and women's oppression, I believe that Marxist feminism serves the aims of the study.
- 2) Marxist feminism is endowed with several terms and perspectives that allow the explanation of any feminist issue at the workplace. Marxist feminists have paid big attention to the changing identities of working women in both public and private spheres. Marxists feminists have raised several issues that still effect the general discussion about women's rights such as: the conspiracy between Patriarchy and Capitalism, Surplus value, Historical Materialism as a long path to women's oppression, Wage for Housework and so on. This terminological package is sufficient background to discuss the current status of working women in healthcare services.

Marxism holds the premise that the capitalist exploitation of workers is laid under the misappreciation of the 'surplus value', which is created by the unpaid work. Capitalism urges the employers to pay workers only for their ability to produce (labor power). It neglects the workers' brain-power that they invested in the process of production. The capitalist and the worker as possessors of commodities appear in the market formally free and equal in rights. However, this appearance of legal equality between the owner of the capital and the owner of the labor power hides the monstrous inequality that exists between the exploiter and the exploited. The worker is only free to choose which of the exploiters he/she will sell his/her labor power. With the development of capitalism and the constant increase of the immense army of the unemployed, the worker is no longer free even to choose his oppressor. The few capitalists dominate the wealth, which leaves no chance for workers to negotiate for their basic rights and demand a fair payment for their "labor power". Marx called for a social revolution against the oligopoly of the wealth by capitalists and replacing it with a collective socialist system (Barret, 1980, p. 163-164), (McMahon, 2016, p. 4-5) and (Thong, 2009, p. 98-99). Marxism considers women's oppression as an outcome of capitalism, generated from the consequences of exploitation.

To liberate women, Engels stressed the necessity to reintroduce of the entire female sex into public industry. Transforming the means of production to common property is the precondition

for solving the problems facing women in society. Capitalism, with the structural changes it introduced, increased the rate of women's participation in industry. However, women's oppression persisted in different forms because of the exploitative nature of the capitalist system. In any given capitalist society, the burden doubled on working women as they found themselves obliged to work outside home carry out unpaid household activities. To end this injustice, Engels suggested "*The socialization of housework and child-rearing*" where the care and the education of the children becomes a public matter. In a socialist society, personal relationships would be free from the economic and social constraints because the state takes charge of common concerns like securing food and educating children (Thong, 2009, p. 106).

Margaret Benston (1969) pointed out that domestic work contributes socially and economically in the sustenance of capitalism: it produces something as indispensable to capitalism, namely, the labor force (the workers). She stated that women are that group of people who are responsible for the production of simple-use values in those activities associated with home and family (p. 16). To emancipate themselves from subordination, women should abolish this rigid class through the socialization of domestic work (Ibid, p. 21).

Integrating women into the production structures without socializing the domestic obligations would oppress women more, Benston (1969) claimed. The reconsideration of labor division on gender basis constitutes a fundamental obstacle to women's emancipation. Benston (1969) paved the way for more authors, such as Maria Dalla Costa and Selma James, who also argued that domestic work is productive through producing surplus value (labor force). In 1972, Dalla Costa and James published their booklet "*Women and the Subversion of the Community*". They argued that housewives indirectly take part in the capitalist mode of production without any kind of social or financial recognition. Their theoretical analysis is based on the premise that domestic work generates surplus value through upraising future workers. The ordinary domestic activities like clothing, feeding, cleaning, cooking and emotional care are necessary conditions for the accumulation of wealth. Therefore, employers should pay housewives for their contribution in the capitalist mode of production, but their ideas seemed against the basic principles of classical Marxism (Costa and James, 1972, p.13). Capitalism, by creating family structures, freed man from reproducing labor power. Besides, for Dalla costa and James, capitalism and patriarchy conspired together to subordinate and suppress women for the benefit of the two sides (Ibid, p.13).

In modern societies, patriarchy found its resort in capitalism to increase the intensity of women's oppression in both public and private spaces. To end this dilemma, Juliet Mitchell (1966) suggested deconstructing women's life into four separate structures: production, reproduction, socialization and sexuality. However, the four structures together manage to produce the working elements of women's oppression. Under production, the reference is made to activities outside the household, precisely, women's participation in capitalist structures of production. The other three elements are implicitly united in the institution of the family, which constrain the existence of women in the public scene. Whereas production, reproduction and socialization are marked by slow transformation, sexuality is marked by intensive and anxious change. Sexuality thus is the weakest structure that could be transformed easily in comparison with the other three rigid structures (Vogel, 1995, p. 52).

The discussion continued until 1981, when Heidi Hartmann published her long article "*The unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism*" condemning Marxism as a "*gender blind*": (p. 1). Hartmann presented patriarchy as a male system through which men could dominate and benefit from women socially, economically and sexually as well. Thus, patriarchy as a social system is constructed in a complex manner that allows men from different classes, races or ethnic groups to cooperate for the preservation of males' interests. Considering the power relations between patriarchy and capitalism in the context of "production" in the nineteenth century, the compromise between men and capitalists could be revealed to keep women at home for the benefits of the two sides (ibid). Capitalism serves patriarchy in the sense that it diminishes women's chance to gain financial dependence or to compete with men in the labor market and, in return, patriarchy rewards capitalism by keeping production machines running. However, neither patriarchy depended on social relations nor capitalism relied on the loyalty of patriarchy. This result in a contradictory relationship of mutual legitimization/proscription between capitalism and patriarchy concerning several issues such as: nuclear family, women's autonomy, the sexual division of work and so on (ibid, p. 20). Since capitalists are cautious to lose their interests, capitalism is sufficiently "flexible" to challenge social structures and adapt to the changes that patriarchy is enduring. The complex relationship between capitalism and patriarchy makes it possible to speak about "patriarchal capitalism" or "capitalist patriarchy", since both systems coexist compatibly or inconsistently.

## 2. Methodology

The target population of respondents was defined as the working women in health services in kenitra. Since respondents exercise different professions, which definitely effect respondents' answers and attitudes due to the variances of circumstances, it was worth using Stratified random sampling which refers to the procedure of targeting population which is divided into strata (or subgroups). (Ackoff, 1953) stressed that the use of this type of sampling necessitates that the targeted subgroups should be related under one label (homogeneous subgroups) but usually with a great deal of variation within a population. Generally, the main aim was to ensure that every subgroup is represented while conducting a survey (p. 60). Therefore, a stratified random sample is a representative sample of the population.

To probe the relationship between wage work and domestic work, a semi-structured interview was conducted. The interviews were scheduled through appointments at different times depending on the availability of the interviewees. The interview duration diverges between 25 and 35 minutes long. Respondents were interviewed at hospitals' cafeterias or even inside hospitals depending on the participants' category (medical staff or administrative staff) and on the nature of their work. The interview was conducted whenever respondents ended their shifts or during their pauses for coffee or lunch. It was up to respondents to fix the date and time for the interview due to their condensed work schedule.

Being a member of administrative staff in Kenitra was of so much importance to the extent that certain level of confidence and trust was established with interviewees. My personal experience in health sector as a provincial administrator allowed inquiring participants' attitudes easily.

This advantage encouraged participants to speak freely about their professional and personal experiences in health services, expressing even the slightest details of their experiences. The interview questions were organized from general to particular to follow the progressive course of the participants' experiences in their workplace along with that possible impact on their personal lives. The questions were tape-recorded and classified in the interview file for a later analysis. The file also includes a profile for each interviewee. These individual profiles contain general information about their professional experiences, backgrounds, profession, and sometimes characteristics of personality, gathered all together to formulate a general image of each participant. This procedure serves to introduce the participant and eases the formulation of an individual description of each participant.

After the participants' profiles are gathered and documented in a narrative form, I then chose to furnish the profiles of the interviewees by associating each one with an identification

and data retrieved from the interviews to establish working themes. The following step consists of choosing the data to be included, so I looked into the similarities and differences in accordance with the coding of themes. Analyzing qualitative data requires series of techniques contained in the process of selecting, simplifying, extracting themes from the recorded interviews and relating these themes to research purpose. This part of the endeavor requires reading and re-reading the interview transcripts and looking for similarities and differences in themes. Then, codes were assigned to those constructed themes and then organized into categories of related topics. This, in brief, was adopted from the model of qualitative data analysis of Creswell (2003).

### 3. Main Findings

The challenge of balancing between career and family life continues to be an elusory issue for working women. Working women mostly experience unfair struggle to adjust themselves to a career and domestic schedules at the same time. The aim behind this discussion is to inquire if there is an equal distribution of domestic chores between men and women. Besides, domestic violence, threat to divorce, self-esteem and personnel satisfaction were emergent themes. The majority of participants complained about the difficulty to perform double task. **San** described her daily sufferings in the following manner:

*“My wage work necessitates eight hours per day which is very normal. Nonetheless, a married working woman cannot satisfy all the needs of household and wage work with the same breath. The demands of family are enormous and supervisors show no mercy”*

When I asked her to explain how she manages this situation and whether she receives some help from her husband, she answered:

*“My husband rarely helps me in daily domestic chores. He likes to cook, but only when he is in a good mood. I gently ask him for a modest help, sometimes he cooperates and usually refuses. But I cannot oblige him to do so”*

Although Moroccan women participate in the national economy in all fields, they still carry out domestic chores in the same way and with the same intensity. It is worth mentioning that there is no law or religious verses that urge women to serve their husbands.

Beside social norms, **Raj** mentioned a very interesting reason of this males' withdrawal from domestic chores. She said that:

*“Men consider care work as trivial and degrading activities. This devaluation of household activities has kept them away from this kind of duties. Men should bear in mind that the primer rational behind working outside home is to secure the needs of the family. When men do not participate totally in care work this security becomes at risk”*

When I asked her how this non-involvement could lead to the status of insecurity, she elaborated her idea as the following:

*“The heavy burden of double task is one of the most prevailing causes of the conflicts coming from private spheres. Working women cannot stand and tolerate forever their husbands' carelessness. The majority of quarrels between the dual-income couples are automatic consequences of the high level of stress on working wives. This situation may lead to divorce as a final stage. So the stability of a family is conditioned by the mutual assistance in all aspects of marital life, and especially in domestic chores”*

The attempt to reshape social roles is not an easy task as **Raj** explained. This struggle necessitates a brave challenge of the old established life style and with a great degree of cautiousness. Shockingly, **Raj** implied to separation as a last resort if a husband did not appreciate his wife's sacrifices. **Waf**, another governmental doctor, adopts an easy resolution. She explained her personal experience with this issue with the following words:

*“To ease the burden of domestic chores, I usually hire a maid to clean up the house. I cook every evening for my family and leave anything else to the maid. When I am too exhausted to cook, we go to restaurants or just order some fast food to-go”*

**Nad, Mou** and **Wid** shared the same story with a few, but very important details. They confirmed that they hire maids to clean up their houses only in weekends. The purpose is to avoid any problem related to the security of their kids and the confidentiality of their family members in general.

However, the possibility to hire a housemaid depends on the financial ability of each individual to pay the high fees for home care services. It is worth mentioning that those who expressed their ability to hire a housemaid are medical doctors.

As a result, working women are obliged either to surrender for the strength of social norms or undergo a risky attempt to change their husbands' mentality. **Njt** shared her intimate experience in the following manner:

*“Frequently, I suggest to my husband a flexible distribution of domestic chores. This distribution does not include only the two of us, but also the kids as well. My husband admits my right to demand equal sharing of these home activities, but he rarely respects the scheduled chores. I think it demands a thoughtful and considerate persistence to change the old restrictive norms. I hope that my daughter and all young girls will not experience the same dilemma. The heavy burden of domestic chores affects negatively my professional career. I got sick of making excuses to my supervisor for not doing my job efficiently or for being late permanently”*

The relationship between marital life and professional career is clearly marked on all levels. When working women are supported and assisted, they can save a great proportion of their energy for their wage work and vice versa. Unfortunately, the majority of participants revealed that the issue of domestic chores causes them serious problems that may put an end to their marriage or their wage work. **Sih** said that her marriage is unstable because of the permanent quarrels with her husband about domestic chores. She explained her situation as the following:

*“My spouse always makes negative comments on my adopted household management....he is extra critical; he doesn't like to eat congealed food because he considers the food that were prepared hot and saved cold as unhealthy and poisoned...he keeps blaming me for the instability of our marriage as to push me to quit my job.....we still live in an archaic society that sees domestic chores as women's duty. This perception creates a feeling of underestimation among working women. This penetrating insistence on domestic chores turns us into intimate machines to cook, clean up and make love”*

**Sih's** simple words have scrutinized the distribution of social roles on gender basis. According to **Sih**, the social persistence to satisfy the biological needs of her family limits her value to

merely a passionate caregiver. This dual conflict between care-work and wage-work may end in favor of the first. Several participants reported that some of their colleagues either have quit their jobs or use some tricks to justify their constant absence from the workplace. The matter of domesticity is capable to cause psychological violence against working women as for **Bouch**'s case. She unveiled her sad story as the following:

*“My wage work necessitates ten hours a day which is so exhausting.... I am obliged to leave domestic chores until weekends. My spouse exploits this situation to abuse me verbally to the extent that I have become subject to painful remarks about my low domestic skills, according to him. The quarrel turns sometimes into exchanging insults in the presence of our kids. We are on the edge of separation because I can't take it anymore”*

Exchanging criticism is very devastating, destructive and demotivating especially to the listener (wife). It is obvious that this bad habit abolishes gradually the intimate relationship and diminishes the esteem of any wife. We can regard this act as an emotional abuse that can hasten the end of any relationship. Notably, criticism intends to achieve a certain level of perfection through endless corrections. Nevertheless, what the person (husband) neglects is that he is revealing unconsciously his own weakness about what he himself does not do. However, this continuous psychological torture is not enough excuse to demand divorce in the Moroccan context. **Bouch** clarified that:

*“Even if I am thinking daily of divorce, I cannot practically demand it because of the social constraints that undermine divorced women. Demanding divorce because of the lack of familial support in the Moroccan context is a social suicide. It is like admitting that I am a reluctant mother who cannot satisfy the basic needs of her family”*

Social traditions place constraints on women's right to ask for divorce, especially in the Arab countries where traditions and customs are the main governing patterns of daily life.

The complexity of the health sector has identically generated complex working conditions in both sectors. In other words, what is positive for a category is not necessarily true for all workers from the same sector. Therefore, I suggest the following recapitulative table about the working conditions in both sectors that evaluates the status of all professions. The table below is a summary of long interviews in which the estimation of each working condition is based on the

general evaluation of the participants. I am aware that this kind of generalization bends a huge risk, but the main aim is to simplify the complexity of the subject based on the interviews' results:

	Profession	Working hours	Remuneration	Promotion	Recruitment	Sufficiency of equipment	Sexual safety	Safety and security	Comfort	right to Vacation
Public sector	Doctors	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	+
	Nurses	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	+
	Adm staff	+	+	+	-	-	+	-	-	+
Private sector	Doctors	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Nurses	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	-	-
	Adm staff	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	-	-

a tentative summary of the interview data

LEGENDS: (+) = positive status                      (-) = negative status

#### 4. Marxist Feminist Analysis

The results of the present study yielded that participants think that *Equality* between the two sexes would not abolish women's oppression, unless reconsidering the fundamental relationship between domestic work and wage work. Equality stimulates social justice only when individuals have the same needs and live the same experiences. Analysis of data indicates that working women in health services are oppressed by the double pressure of public and private spheres. Marxist feminists have the intellectual precedence of identifying the structural

relations between capitalism and patriarchy as working elements that oppress women. Benston (1969) explained the convergence between production and reproduction labors. Benston's analysis presented a new theoretical framework that allows us to situate women's oppression in relation with the capitalist mode of production. This analysis led to the reconceptualization of "women" as independent class (p.16).

The non-involvement of men in household obligations, in addition to the negative stand of the state toward this controversial issue, make working women's mission to satisfy the needs of household and wage work an impossible one. According to Dalla Costa and James(1972), capitalism had freed man from reproducing labor power through making a compromise with patriarchy. This agreement subordinates and suppresses women for the benefit of the two sides. This conspiracy between capitalism and patriarchy has succeeded to marginalize the private sphere in order to undervalue domestic chores. Some participants mentioned this theoretical explanation indirectly. They stated that their husbands consider care work as trivial and degrading activities. This negative evaluation of household activities has kept them away from domesticity. Marxists feminists conceive that women's oppression within public industry is laid under the miss-appreciation of the *Surplus Value* created by the unpaid work. Participants agreed that their socioeconomic status would not improve without reconsidering their unpaid domestic work. The survey urged participants to react to Marxist feminists 'campaign to gain wages for domestic work. The results show that participants agreed that domestic chores should be recognized as a wage labor that necessitates a fixed salary. Domestic work consumes women's strength physically and emotionally. This big investment should not be done for free. At the final stage, it is the whole society, including public industry, which benefits from the long journey of upraising future doctors, teachers, engineers and active workers in general. Thus, participants demanded from the state to compensate them for performing domestic work through which they supply private and public sectors with labor force.

Mitchel Juliet (1966) emphasized the need to evaluate how oppression is constructed in the social subconscious. According to Mitchel, women can achieve full liberation after the analysis of their economic, social, sexual and political circumstances at the same time. If these structures are analyzed at the same time, their emancipation from exploitation and oppression would be achieved. Besides, Mitchel was the first feminist to include psychoanalysis into the Marxist feminism through focusing on the psychological consequences and effects of housework. In the current study, most of the participants agreed that Moroccan society adopt prejudicial attitude toward women. According to respondents, the collective Moroccan

subconscious still connect women with family and marital life and men with the professional career. Mitchell explained how such cultural evaluations had constructed the social role of women to extent that this kind of verdicts appeared to be viewed natural and biological. This social deformation of women's image was accomplished through a historical reinforcement of patriarchal perceptions. In capitalist societies, patriarchy found its resort in capitalism, which has increased the intensity of women's oppression in both public and private spaces.

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## Conclusion

The accomplishment of greater equality between women and men demands changes at many levels, including changes in attitudes and daily practices, changes in political and legislative frameworks and changes in economic institutions. The findings of this scientific endeavor prove that the current socioeconomic status of working women is dissatisfying in relation to the issue of 'gender equality'. Thus, the level of equality at workplace is not sufficient to guarantee social wellbeing for women. The commitment to the basic essence of 'Gender Equality' will not generate equal society if private spheres maintain its patriarchal features.

The research findings demonstrate and stress the relationship between 'reproductive' work and the 'productive' work. All productive activities are dependent on the creation of a healthy labor force through reproductive work. Vice versa, reproductive work affects the existence of women in economy because of its daily consequences on working women's lives. Women take care of the responsibilities and tasks related to the care and nurturing of the family (including childcare, food preparation, and laundry). These tasks add to women's workload and are often an obstacle to compete equally for job opportunities. Women's integration into job market has oppressed women more because patriarchy still controls the private life, while individuals (men and women) appear liberal and equal in public life.

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