

Breastfeeding Rights at Workplace & Female Labour Force Participation: A Nexus

Nearly 170 countries of the world are celebrating this week (01-07 August) as the World Breastfeeding Week. This year's theme, "Breastfeeding and work. Let's make it work!" is important not just for breastfeeding mothers, but also for those who can make a difference in the lives of working mothers, i.e., Government, employers and labour unions. The National ILS Unit, work-

ing under the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, has worked on this brief to highlight the importance of breastfeeding for infants and its impact on the labour force participation of women.

Importance of Breastfeeding

WHO recommends exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of an infant's life. Breastfeeding has implications for children's health decades later. Children who are breastfed for at least three to six months tend to have significantly lower risk developing of developing various diseases, allergies and infections. In addition, breast milk adapts to meet babies' needs by changing volume and composition according to the time of day, nursing frequency, and age. Breast milk also remarkably improves nutritional status in infants. Since malnutrition contributes to half of all infant deaths, breastfeeding helps to reduce infant mortality. Research has indicated that a child's intellectual development is influenced by both genetic inheritance and environmental experiences and breastfeeding is one of the earliest such postnatal experiences. Research has shown that breastfed children attain higher IQ scores than children who are not breastfed. Similarly, a Lancet study indicated that infants who were breastfed for at least one year have longer years of schooling, score higher on intelligence tests, and earn more as adults than those who were breastfed for only a month.

Research study conducted by Institute of Social & Economic Research in the UK indicates that presence of

breastfeeding facilities the workplace benefits the mother, child and the employer as well. There is a direct correlation between breastfeeding at the workplace and increased productivity of women. The study showed when there are breastfeeding facilities available at work, there was an increase in probability of women returning to work after 4 and 6 months of giving birth respectively.

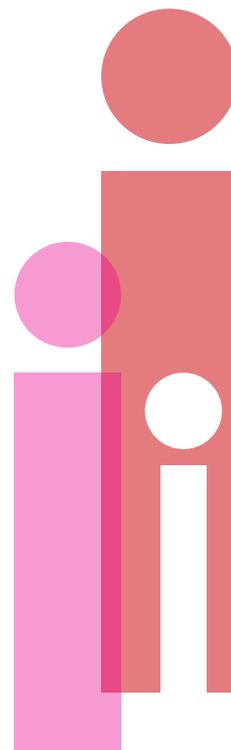
Barriers at the workplace or non-availability of breastfeeding facilities contribute to many women's decision to stop breastfeeding long before the minimum period recommended (3-6 months). This may have detrimental effects for the child, the mother, and the employer too. Non-breastfeeding mothers may be more often absent from work than breastfeeding mothers because their babies suffer from more illnesses. By promoting breastfeeding at work, employers might be more successful in increasing the productivity of their female workers, retaining these employees and in shortening periods of leave required to take care of their sick children.

Breastfeeding & Women's Labour Force Participation

Pakistan is the 6th most populous country with the 10th largest workforce in the world (60 million). Women constitute only 24% of the total labour force (14.45 million) and their participation rate is 22.2, the lowest in the region. With increased literacy and gender equity improving day by day, employment opportunities for women are also increasing. Keeping in view the total fertility rate of 3.8% in Pakistan, what affects most the women in Pakistan and especially the careers of working women are employment breaks that happen because of child bearing and rearing. However, because of lack of supportive environment and other issues, preliminary findings of the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS) 2012-13 indicate that only 38% of the children in Pakistan are exclusively breastfed during the first six months of their lives, which not only endangers their future cognitive development

but also their physical growth. Although every parent wants the very best for their child's health, unfortunately women here do not always get the right information, nor the support they need to start or continue to breastfeed.

An analysis of 2013-14 Labour Force Survey data by the ILS Unit indicates that in the reference period of last one week, a total of 9,116 persons were on maternity or parental leave (with all persons geographically limited to the province of Punjab). It is an increase of 48% when compared with last year's results where data indicated that in the reference period of last one week, a total of 6,163 persons were on maternity or parental leave (geographically limited to the provinces of Punjab-56% and Sindh-44%).



A Save the Children report shows that despite the increase in female labor force participation, little attention is being paid to workplace nursing support programmes for working mothers who breastfeed. Working mothers find it difficult to continue their breastfeeding, due to the lack of supportive measures at workplaces, non-availability of space to express breast milk or nurse infants, lack of breastfeeding breaks, lack of flexibility in duty hours and employers' support towards breastfeeding. This ultimately leads to discontinuation of breastfeeding among working mothers. The legally mandated duration of maternity leave in Pakistan is 12 weeks, with six-week pre-natal and six-week post-natal leave. Since a woman worker has to report back to work on completion of six weeks after delivery and there is no supportive legislation/institutional

framework for nursing mothers, women substitute bottled milk for breast milk much earlier than WHO advised limit of 6 months.

The Innocenti Declaration of 1990, signed by the WHO/UNICEF policymakers' meeting on "Breastfeeding in the 1990s: A Global Initiative" with representation from Pakistan, asked among other things for "enactment of imaginative legislation protecting the breastfeeding rights of working women and establish means for its enforcement". However, even after 25 years, no legislation has been adopted to protect the nursing rights of working mothers and they are made to choose between employment and a child with lower intellectual growth & higher chances of under-five mortality.

“ There is no finer investment for any community than putting (mothers') milk into babies. ”

~ *Winston Churchill*

Relevant Legislative Provisions

- Factories Act, 1934
- Punjab Shops & Establishments Ordinance, 1969
- Punjab Protection and Promotion of Breast-Feeding and Child Nutrition Act, 2014
- Sindh Protection and Promotion of Breast-Feeding and Child Nutrition Act, 2013
- Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Protection and Promotion of Breast-Feeding and Child Nutrition Act, 2014
- Balochistan Protection and Promotion of Breast-Feeding and Child Nutrition Act, 2014

Although all the Provincial Acts on Protection and Promotion of Breastfeeding and Child Nutrition talk about protection and promotion of breastfeeding among infants and young children, no concrete steps have been taken by any of the Provincial Governments to promote breastfeeding among working mothers. It is ironical that, on the one hand, we want to increase female labour force participation, while on the other hand, the supportive environment which can enable working mothers to maintain their employment is lacking. Paid breastfeeding/nursing breaks are imperative not only for child's health and development, as it reduces child mortality rate, but also needed for improving the employment and retention rates for employed women.

Breastfeeding is the basic right of every child and is guaranteed under the Islamic law as well as above mentioned breastfeeding and child nutrition laws. However, the sup-

portive legal regime requiring employer to provide breastfeeding/nursing breaks to new mothers as well as the institutional mechanism is lacking. The Factories Act allows the Provincial Governments to make rules for establishing day care rooms for workers' children (under the age of six years) in a factory employing fifty or more workers. Similar provisions on establishment of day care centers for workers' children are found in Punjab Shops & Establishments Ordinance, 1969 which requires every establishment employing at least twenty five women workers to "reserve a suitable daycare room for under-six years' old children of the women". Although both the above labour laws provide for making of rules on establishment of day care centers, however no rules have been made in this regard. Moreover, the current labour laws don't talk about the number and duration of breastfeeding breaks. As indicated in the comparative table on South Asia, only Sri Lanka has enacted the supportive legislation in this regard.

Breastfeeding Provisions in South Asia

Country	Maternity Leave (Duration)	Number and Duration of break (minutes)	Duration of entitlement to Breastfeeding breaks (Age)
Bangladesh	16 weeks	Not Available	Not Available
India	12 weeks	Not Clearly Mentioned	15 months
Pakistan	12 weeks	Not Available	Not Available
Sri Lanka	12 weeks	60 minutes	12 months

Needed Interventions

1. Amend or formulate rules regarding breastfeeding/nursing breaks under the Factories Act/Shops & Establishments Act/Ordinance or through amendment in the Protection and Promotion of Breast-Feeding and Child Nutrition Acts at the Provincial level.
2. Ensure a minimum of 14 weeks maternity leave (raising the current maternity leave by two weeks) and ensure its implementation.
3. The employer should provide six months of partially paid parental leave financed by the social security institution (amendment in Factories Act/Shops & Establishments Act/Ordinance required).
4. Formulation of rules requiring employers to provide reasonable places for workers' children as day care centres and ensure privacy during nursing breaks.
5. Ensure flexibility in working hours for nursing mothers.

Let's work for incorporation of breastfeeding provisions in our labour laws (and make this finest investment on our children) and formulate such policies which help workers to easily reconcile work and family commitments so that they don't have to see these two as undesirable alternatives.



Breastfeeding and work. Let's make it work!

Disclaimer: The responsibility for opinions expressed in this policy brief rests solely with the authors (International Labour Standards Unit), and publication does not constitute an endorsement by the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development of the opinions expressed in it.