

Women's Descriptions of Good Life

Salma Amin Rattani

*General Nursing Diploma Programme,
School of Nursing, Aga Khan University, Karachi -748 001, Pakistan
Email: salma.rattani@aku.edu*

(Received on 10 December 2011 and accepted on 10 February 2012)

Abstract - This study employed descriptive exploratory research design and through critical case sampling, thirty five women, representing three socio-economic scale; low, middle and upper strata, were enrolled in the study. Data was collected through interview guide and was analyzed through descriptive statistics. Results revealed that women defined characteristics of good life. Out of the twenty one characteristics, having basic needs (bread, safety, security and goal attainment) and not being worried was reported by all the participants (n = 35). Whereas, being treated fairly, being able to save for money the rainy days and both the sexes; male and female, being treated equally was reported by <10% of the participants. In conclusion, this study provides women's perspective of indicators for good life. Thus it may guide directions to enhance their quality of life.

Keywords: Quality of Life, Gender Role, Mutually Satisfying Sexual Relationships, Personal Autonomy, Family Harmony

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Quality describes certain level of excellence which is measured against indicators identified for phenomenon under consideration. In regard to quality of life (QoL) numerous studies and working papers have been published and there have been many attempts to define what constitutes QoL but there is a widely accepted problem concerning the lack of 'gold standard', because there is no external criterion of the QoL against which measures could be tested (Heinonen, 2005). However, Packer, Husted, Cohen, and Tomlinson (1997), have reported that QoL is the difference between a person's expectations and the actual experience. Thus this study is an attempt to share women's descriptions of good life. The study was Masters of Sciences (Nursing, 2006) thesis titled 'A tool to assess the quality of life of working and non-working women in Karachi, Pakistan'.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Study Design and Setting

Descriptive exploratory research design was used for this study. Three communities differentiated by their socio-economic standing were selected in Karachi, Pakistan. These communities, representing the low, middle and upper socio-economic strata, were selected based on the combined family income. The minimum wage as prescribed by the government

was used to categorize the social strata. In Pakistan minimum wage was introduced in 1992 and was set at PKR 1,500 (~US\$ 24.60) per month (From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia).

The communities selected were: an upscale community situated in a residential section in the Southern part of Karachi, a middle class community in central Karachi and squatter settlement in a suburb in Karachi.

Women living in three selected community settings were included in the study population and sampling was done till saturation of the data was achieved. Saturation occurred when no new information or concepts were emerging from the data. A total of thirty-five interviews were done. There were seven participants from the upscale community, eleven from the middle class community and seventeen from the squatter settlement. The sample size was related to the population of each community with the squatter settlement having the most number of people.

B. Sampling

Critical case sampling was employed. It is a strategy for selecting purposeful samples for critical cases. Critical cases are those that can make a point quite dramatically or are, for some reasons, particularly important in the scheme of things (Patton, 1990). It permits logical generalization and maximum application of information to other cases, because if it's true of this one case, it's likely to be true of all other cases (Patton, 2002). Key persons residing in the areas selected were contacted to help the researcher get in touch with prospective respondents. These key persons are the ones who know the people in the community by virtue of their long period of residence as well as by the social respect they have gained from the community's population. Those women who were ready to provide maximum information were asked to participate in the study. Sampling was terminated once saturation was achieved.

C. Data Collection and Analysis

The in-depth interviews were conducted by using the interview guide. The interview guide was subjected to validity. This was done at different levels: the tool was prepared in English, translated in Urdu than it was back translated in English. The questions in the interview guide were shown to three professionals who are expert in the field of Psychology, Research, and Nursing and their feedback was taken into the consideration. Data collection tool was also pilot tested based on which modifications were done. Based on the pilot test, interviews lasted from thirty to ninety minutes which was the acceptable length of interview time. As the participants were from the diverse group and all of them could not speak/understand either Urdu, the national language or English the international language. Thus the interviews were conducted and tape recorded in different languages i.e., Urdu, English, Kachi and Gujratee as the researcher have

proficiency in these languages. Few of the participants recorded their responses in bilingual; Urdu and English. During research process one of the women wanted to participate in the study but as she spoke only Balochi Language which I cannot speak, the candidate was not interviewed.

Data was analyzed and based on the examination of the interview data. The responses which were similar were grouped together to form categories. Frequencies and percentages were used to tally the number of responses related to each category.

D. Ethical Consideration

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee of Aga Khan University. Informed consent was signed or thumb printed by the study participants. This form was used to communicate objectives and intention of the study. There were no potential harms to the study participants. Opportunities were provided to the participants to

TABLE I CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD LIFE AS IDENTIFIED BY THE PARTICIPANTS.

S.No.	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
1	Having basic needs (bread, safety, security and goal attainment).	35	100
2	Not being worried	35	100
3	Understanding relationships between husband and wife	22	62.85
4	Husband earning enough so women don't have to work.	22	62.85
5	Having family harmony	13	37.14
6	Children are progressing well	12	34.28
7	Being autonomous (freedom for decision making)	12	34.28
8	Being educated	12	34.28
9	Having time for	11	31.42
	10.1 Self		
	10.2 Children		
	10.3 Husband		
	10.4 Family		
10	Having good children	10	28.57
11	Being able to fulfill social responsibilities	10	28.57
12	Husband is earning enough regardless of whether the wife is working or not working.	9	25.71
13	Having "normal/healthy" members in the family	9	25.71
14	Being happy and content	8	22.85
15	Freedom to express and practice religion	6	17.14
16	Having affordable means of recreation	5	14.28
17	Having a mutually satisfying sexual relationships with husband	4	11.42
18	Having children (having male child)	4	11.42
19	Being treated fairly	3	08.57
20	Being able to save for money the rainy days	2	05.71
21	Both the sexes; male and female, being treated equally	1	02.85

clarify their queries. They were permitted to choose to participate or not to participate. Participants were free to leave the study at any time and were not forced to answer any questions if they felt uncomfortable. Participants' confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning the codes at the time of data analysis. Their interviews which were tape recorded and saved by the researcher, were not accessible to any personnel other than the thesis supervisor and the thesis committee.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Women's definition of the characteristic of a good life a number of characteristics were identified to define a good life. These are tabulated in Table I.

The characteristics of a good life are supported with the participants' narrations in the discussions below.

All the participants identified the possession of basic needs as an important element in a good life. These elements included food, clothing, housing, health, education, electricity, transportation, potable water, safety, and security. The participants felt that these needs should be fulfilled without being worried about them. Whereas, in reality, many of the respondents said that they had to strive for the fulfillment of these needs. Besides the fulfillment of these needs the participants also talked about their quality.

One of the respondents from the high socio economical stratum said that “---food and water quality is not good”. She said “these are life saving essentials, although I can afford to buy drinking water, but I still need water for shower, this is how it affects me”. Talking about electricity she said “There are electricity failures. Though we have a generator but we have to go through the noise and other hassles”.

With regard to the quality of education, a participant from the low socio economical stratum said that she worked so hard to admit her son in school. She felt that no learning occurred; he never developed any interest and in the end, after 5th grade, he quit school. She shared that she felt upset as she could not enforce her child to continue his education. She also had a feeling of inferiority when she compared herself to the family she was working for, where the children were learning more because they were going to good schools.

Going to the best school, or getting quality education, is expensive, as identified by one of the participants from the high socio-economical stratum. She said that though we are very rich even then we find that the education of our children is expensive. Their monthly expenditure on education was more than one Lakh rupees (Rs 100,000) for all the three children who have not yet entered in higher education.

It can be seen from the narratives that those who belonged to the low income group had no choice but to send their children to the government run schools, because it cost less than the private schools. However, the government schools in Pakistan are not operating the way they should, hence, based on the general public perception, it is common knowledge that government schools are the least preferred due to their “low standards of education”. Those who can afford the high cost of education send their children to private schools.

Based on the experience shared by many of the people including those study participants, who had traveled to many countries, it was learnt that basic commodities and utilities are not so expensive in Pakistan as compared to other countries; however, due to low wages, basic necessities are not affordable. The provision of public utilities like potable water, electricity, and telecommunication is not good; people even describe them as “bad”. The cost of these public utilities, however, is beyond the reach of the average wage earner. Thus, affordability is one important factor from the perspective of quality of life of an individual or even for group of individuals.

Pan (2006) identified two levels of basic needs. The first is the basic needs for survival, which is the eradication of absolute poverty and deprivation. The second is the basic need for a decent standard of life, whereby a society's majority can enjoy a life of adequacy, associated with the completion of industrialization of urbanization. Thus, the researcher found that the responses received from the participants were consistent with reports in the literature.

Health as a basic need was defined in two different ways by the participants. First, the participants said that it was important to be healthy. They further said that being healthy was blessing. Secondly, the participants talked about the affordability for health care needs. They said that if required, individuals should be able to get the treatment from health care institutions where quality care is provided.

Safety and security was voiced as a very important component of basic necessities. The participants discussed this issue in various ways. One of the participants from the low socio-economical stratum shared her experience and feelings related to the time when she initially started to work. She said that she had to face a lot of challenges. People used to stare at her, and at times, made undesirable comments, she added that people were teasing “why are you going to work...is your husband not providing you enough?”. Another participant mentioned that as time is changing, it is not safe to leave the daughters unattended. They could be sexually harassed. These participants did not feel safe to leave their girls alone without a mother figure. Some of them even said that it may not even be

safe to leave a young girl (daughter) with male members of the family because of the fear of incest.

Talking on the same lines, one of the participants from the middle socio-economical stratum said that it is said that one should take care of her daughters even more than she would take care of her jewelry (“chaukaryoon no to sona they bheey wadharay khayal karkwo khapay chay”). She said that it was essential that one should take extra care of the daughters. These participants were afraid of sexual harassment of young women. It is very disturbing that in a civil society people do not have controls over their sexual desires, hence, those parents who have daughters feel insecure. Therefore, they see that getting them married is a way to secure them. As one of the participants said that till a girl is married, people keep pointing fingers at her (“oos par oongleey otha tay hayn”) and look at her with an evil eye (“booreey nazar say daykhtay hayn”). People talk about single girls; they talk about their character and behavior, or simply why she has not yet been married off. Ironically, once she is married then nobody can point a finger at her. People believe that the girls are now under the protection of a husband. However, few participants eluded sexual harassment by in-laws family members.

Having family harmony was reported to be one of the important characteristics of a good life. One of the unmarried participants from Lyari area felt that if there was harmony, then the challenges of life could be faced by the families. A married participant from the Garden area said that in marriage good understanding between husband and wife is important. Similar response was received from a participant from Defence area; she said that the most important person is the husband. If the husband can give even 50% support then the matters of mother in-law and father in-law could be tackled. Another participant from the same area and living in a joint family system said that there should be understanding between husband and wife. If there is a dispute in the home then he (the husband) should listen to both the parties meaning his wife and his mother. Before taking any decision he should consider both his wife's and his mother's view point; he should not take one sided decision. In a typical Pakistan family situation, the husband is torn between his wife and his mother. Mothers usually are possessive of their sons so, once a son is married off the mother in-law always competes with the daughter in-law for attention and power.

Those women whose children were not progressing well shared feelings of distress. One of the participants from the low socio-economical stratum (Pointing at her daughter, who was married, was pregnant and was holding a 14 months old child) said that her daughter got married at very young age.

Talking about the health of her daughter, the participant said that before marriage she (her daughter) was healthy but since her marriage she has been under stress, and developed T.B. (“shadi say pahlay yehy bhauhat mota tha, jab say shadi hua hai pareshan ho ghaya hay, bimar ho ghaya hay. T.B parashani say hota hay”). The participant said that she got her daughter treated at Lyari General Hospital. Continuing her talk the participant said that she was highly distressed (“ham buahat garib hay, ham buahat parashan hay”). She said that if her children would have been happy then she would have been happy, but none of her child was happy (“hamarah aek bacha bhi khush nahi hay”), therefore, “I am constantly upset”. One of the unmarried participant from high socio economic stratum said that as a mother is recognized by her children's status. Thus if the children are progressing well then mothers feels happy.

On examining the narratives, it appears like mothers want their daughters to be married for security reasons; however, once they are married, the mothers realize that more problems come up. It is heart breaking that this cycle keeps on repeating because traditions have always been used as an excuse for not breaking the cycle. People usually do not think outside of the traditions, whether these traditions are good or bad. People tend to perpetuate their practices even if they have to pay dearly for them.

Freedom to make decisions was one of the identified needs of a good life. Speaking on behalf of other women, one participant said that even today girls are forced to marry mainly to save the land or other property. A number of women who were married and were working shared that they were not autonomous to use their own earning the way they liked. Women, especially from the low socio-economical stratum, said that by force their husbands snatched their money. As expressed by one of the participants, “married women should have some autonomy and support, otherwise there would be a lot of dissatisfaction in marriage and family would fall apart”. She felt that husband was a very important person in supporting women's autonomy. Regrettably, this is not the case for many. Husbands and mother-in-laws control the working women's income, thereby making these women dependent on their husbands and in-laws. What is more regrettable it that these women are helpless due to obedience to the prevailing culture of obedience.

Regardless of the economical strata, many women who were either uneducated or were less educated expressed their wish to be more educated. In the low socio-economical stratum, one of the participants who could sign her name felt good as a lot of other women in her area could not do so.

Various responses surfaced with regard to time as a factor in a good life. One of the participants, who was unmarried and was the eldest daughter of a working woman, shared her thoughts that most of the time, working women cannot give time to their children. Their children get very much affected. She further said that - while her mother was on her way to work, one of her younger siblings usually cried. The participant narrated that she could see that her mother felt so much pain at that time. The participant thought that nobody could understand the pain that her mother went through at that time. Her mother felt very much hopeless. Being a woman the participant believed that it was blessing that her mother had children but she being a mother could not enjoy their caring and rearing. Thus she felt that her mother went through feelings of guilt and helplessness that she cannot give more time for her children. The participant felt that her mother herself went through a lot of hardship.

Some participants felt that children need their mothers more especially their time, but working mothers do not have time for their children. Thus they cannot enjoy their life. Elaborating the effects on children, the respondents said that, gradually the children would start taking their own decisions. They would start taking their own responsibilities. This would result in a gap between parents and children. They will not spend time with each other. One of the participants from the low socio-economical stratum said that while she was working she was always worried about her kids who were at home. She worried about them being hungry, being left alone at home, without any supervision, because they were young and could not take care of themselves. She said that she was all the time in a hurry to reach home. At work even if she was given something to eat, she never felt like eating, to save time because her kids were hungry at home, they were waiting for her. Therefore, she wanted to reach home as early as possible.

One of the working women from the high socio-economical stratum had a different view point about time. She said that a woman's working affected her more than anybody else in the family. She would not be able to give time to herself. Women tend to get things done. They would look after their children, husband and the house but would have no time for themselves. Talking about the need for working, the respondent said that financial need was not the only reason for her working. Women needed to get out of the house. They needed the time to contribute at a higher level. She further said that women were in every field, they could be seen all around and it was good to work. The respondent had a Graduate Degree in Psychology and she is a mother of a young son.

The concept of time is viewed differently by different women. While some feel that working takes away the time

meant for their children, others say that the time spent in working is worthwhile because it gives more room for financial and individual growth. However, the working woman still had to tackle her roles in the household. This resulted in a lot of strain in a working woman's life, such that "time" has been identified as a factor in a good life.

Those women who had family members with special needs expressed the importance of having normal and healthy family members. One of the participants with a special child said that she was facing lot of stress in her life because she had a special child. Explaining about the nature and reason for the abnormality the participant said that her son had fell down from the stairs and has not been well since then (At the time of interview the young boy was sitting besides his mother. Researcher observed that the boy had developed some neurological disorder and his physical growth was stunted). Another participant whose brother was a special child talked about the challenges that her family was facing. Thus, having a special child or a family member affects the quality life of other family members.

Respondents living with elderly members of their families, either in-laws or parents found it difficult to cope because caring for very old people at home (or even if the elderly are living in houses nearby) demanded time and attention. This added more duties for the woman, whether she was working or not or at whatever socio-economic strata she was at. Talking about nursing homes for the elderly, one of the participants said that, due to traditions; generally the elderly people are not brought to these homes. Some respondents felt that those who bring their old people in these homes are just trying to get rid of their responsibilities.

A non-working woman from a middle income group said that: "The characteristics of a good life are that basic needs are minimally fulfilled and there is peace in the home. Bungalows, car, huge bank accounts and good business are not the characteristics of a good life. Good life is that when you wake up in the morning, you should feel fresh. A woman should be a happy person, her husband and her children should be with her. With very limited income they are very happy. If they are happy then they have a good life. No matter how sophisticated the facilities are but if they are not happy, and then these facilities are useless. In the most modern cars, I have seen people in it are looking unhappy and upset. For myself, even with very limited facilities, I have been feeling very happy. It is important to feel contented. My kids are intelligent, they are complete, they do not have any defect, and God has made them complete."

("Complete" in this context means having all parts of the body complete and with no physical deformity). My children are cooperative, my husband is cooperative, and there are no disputes among us. No matter what the food is everybody sits together and eats. There is interaction and lively talk between all the family members.

A working woman from the high income group also shared that it was important to have peace in life. She felt that health, happiness, peace, and contentment were important for a good life.

It appears that happiness cannot be measured with the amount of money or luxury that one has. Happiness, for the participants was related mostly to a good, peaceful and harmonious family life.

A number of participants talked about religion in different aspects. One of the followers of the Hindu religion talked about bearing expenses, to continue the religious practices. She said that many Hindu practices would need money for the practice to be celebrated. The participant also said that these practices include their many rituals and festivities. However, same is true for other religions too.

One of the Muslim women, while discussing the uncertainty of life, said that nobody knows whatever could happen tomorrow ("kal keya ho pata naheen"). She further said that one cannot predict what s/he would have to face; happiness or sorrow ("khusheey bhi aa sakteey hay, gam bheey aa sakta hay"). Continuing her talk the participant said that anything could go wrong ("kuch bheey ho sakta hay"), an accident could occur ("accident bhee ho sakta hay"). The respondent further said that one should pray to God, one should have good intentions in life; one should refrain from committing any sin ("koeey gunha na karayn"). One should refrain from getting engaged in wrong deeds ("buraeey kam say bachayn"). One should be conscious about the future. We should divert our efforts in that direction. Continuing her talk the participant said that one who does not think in those directions is not a human being ("woh insan naheen hay"). One should think ("fikaar"), one should look towards God ("Allah ki taraf ruju karay"), and nobody else can be of any help ("aur koeey kam naheen aay ga"), none of your relatives would be of any help.

In Muslims there are a number of sects and it is preferred that life partners should be selected from the same sect, yet there are individuals who get married in another sect. One of the participant's sister in-law married a person from another sect. The women in the sect she originally belonged to, go to their religious institutions to offer their prayers. Now, when

she visits her maternal home, her kids inquire about the differences in religious practices between two families it makes her feel bad. Thus, she wants that in the presence of her kids her maternal family should refrain from following their religious practices. The study participants felt it was not justified on her (the participant's) part. Her (sister in-law) own family gave her the freedom to move to another Muslim sect and she got married; however now she wants to jeopardize her maternal family's religious practices. These kinds of conflict happen in other families as well.

One of the participants sharing her views in terms of freedom of practicing the religion said that she performed her spiritual prayers. She said; "if I am allowed to do so, I feel happy, but if I am not allowed to do then there are troubles". The participant further said that "you do not have to please others only; you take care of yourself also. Take some time out for yourself also".

Five of the participants mentioned recreation as a part of a good life. Of those who spoke about it, one of them said that her family made it a point to go for outings within the city once or twice in six months. As they did not own a car they usually take a taxi to travel. Those from the high income group made plans to travel outside Karachi and outside Pakistan. Families consider dining in restaurants that they could afford, especially in the evenings, as a form of recreation. Most dining places, both expensive and inexpensive, are full, especially on weekends and holidays.

Sexual relationship was discussed by a number of participants. Different views were shared by the participants. One of them said that sexuality/sexual desire is also an important component of life for both males and females, but everything should be at its own time ("magar har cheez time par howay"). Those who mistreat their wives for the fulfillment of their sexual desire bring distress to the wife. A respondent reported that she was too stressed. She shared that due to sexual arousal her husband used to follow her to her work place as he just assumed her to be a sexual object and nothing else ("kam par bheey peechay peechay ata hay, is nay muj may sift yaheey daykha aur kuch naheeyn daykha").

The responses varied in middle and higher income groups. In the middle income group, one of the participants said that when the wife gets older, or she has some disability (she meant that the wife can longer meet her husband's sexual desire) then the husband marries another woman, usually a younger one. They (men) take their wives' signatures (permission to marry to another lady) and get married. The participant added that in their late age the wives are tired ("biwi to baycahry bayzar hoteey hay") but the husbands need their sexual desires to be

fulfilled (“*admi ko to moj masttey chaheey hotee hay*”). The participant further added that men use their right to marry another woman. The participant felt that a woman cannot take away this right of her husband (“*hum aurtain to un say yeh hak naheeh lay saktay*”), participant further added that the right to get married for four times is given to Muslim men (“*mazhab nay admee ko char shadi ki ijazat dee hay*”).

A participant from the high income group said that the man (husband) always gets the woman (wife) to agree to fulfill his sexual desire whereas, it is not acceptable for a wife to get her sexual desire fulfilled. The participant eluded that on the other hand even if the wife resists her husband from sexual activity he will overcome the resistant to satisfy his sexual needs. If the wife does not oblige as per husband's sexual desires then he tends to express his anger on minute things (“*har cheez mayn gusa hota hay*”). The participant elaborated that in addition to facing the challenge of her husband expressing the anger, she was also afraid that if she would not meet her husband's sexual needs than there were chances that he would go to somebody else. Therefore, she wants or she does not want she has to comply by her husband's sexual desire.

A young unmarried woman who owns a beauty salon in an upscale area said that she meets all types of women in her line of work. All of them have different problems. Majority of them find that they are not having a good life. One of the reasons is that they are afraid that their husbands may go to other women. She means the “prostitutes”, who she thought are increasing day-by-day in the Pakistani society. The respondent talked in favor of the prostitutes following is exactly her own words:

“They (prostitutes) are facing the challenges of their lives. Such women are being blamed that they are taking other's husbands away from their wives. Why should the women be blamed? It is the men who are going to them. Therefore, it is required that, the men should be held back by their wives. It is the man who should be blamed and not the women for being prostitutes. These women are facing lots of problems. They are also facing the challenges of life, though their challenges are different from those of the majority of the women. Instead of criticizing and blaming them we should be thankful to God that we are out of such difficulties. We cannot even imagine the pain that they are going through. There are a number of them who do not want to stay in that environment but they cannot get married because the family looks at the individual girls and their family profile, and as these women are not acceptable they cannot go out of the society which was not their choice to start with. I feel that the biggest problem is that

a woman is weak; she does not have the power. I feel that the woman is hidden somewhere she is trying to search herself. As she is a woman there is nobody to listen to her troubles/problems. As you are doing this research I want you to let the people in the world listen to her voice. We, as women should get together and should discuss our problems with each others. We should support each other; we should provide psychological support to each other”.

According to the participants, men and women in Pakistan do not have equal rights. Men have more freedom while women have less. The society portrays women as weak therefore, needing the protection of a man, be it her husband or father or brother. The woman should conform to what the society expects her to do. This includes her actions, behavior, roles, and even her thought processes. She is expected to make her husband happy, including sexual satisfaction. Men, also women, contend that if husband and wife live together without sex, then there is no difference between a brother and a sister staying together. Failure to conform to these expectations means ostracism, even by the women.

Based on the participants' responses, it appears that men have less control over their sexual drives so this forces women to give in to the man's sexual urges because they were made to believe that this was their obligation as a wife. It is also true that women have their own sexual drives but expressing this drive is objectionable to many, including some women.

Heller and Moshabi (1993 p. 76) cited by Amber (2005), point out a significant inconsistency that underlines Muslim sexual morals: on the one hand the institutions of polygamy and concubinage, that grant men the right to have several sexual partners at the same time, are justified by his allegedly stronger sexual drive. On the other hand, it is particularly the supposedly insatiable sexual desires of women, her uncontrollable libido, which builds the foundation of Islamic understanding of female sexuality and which is believed to be controllable only through this institution of *pardha*. *Purdah*, which literally means “curtain” in Urdu, commonly refers to the practice of gender segregation and seclusion of women and girls, as well as their veiling in public.

The subject of men's and women's sexual urges remains to be a controversial issue among people, and even in the literature. What is consistent is that women are seen as the weaker sex (gender), who is vulnerable to abuse; therefore, often have to accept sexual advance without willingness. This affects their quality of life because their willingness is not considered important.

Women felt that it was important that once they were married they should have children. Those who did not have

children felt depressed. One of the participants who did not conceive for the initial period of her marriage shared her feelings of distress. She said that she did not conceive for 3 ½ years since her husband was not in Pakistan (he was in Saudi Arabia). He was regularly returning to Pakistan for his visits, however, those visits did not bring about conception. Though she was living in a joint family, the caring that she received from the other family members did not reduce her feelings of depression. When she finally had children she felt good and felt complete. It is not only the woman who desires to have a child. The husband too wants to have a child because the males believe that since they are married, definitely they should have children. Many a time's not having a child is considered a woman's fault and it may end up with her husband marrying another woman.

Cases of infertility in Pakistan usually look at the woman as the source of the problem. The women are ready to get examined (by a female doctor) and treated for infertility while the men find it difficult to subject themselves to infertility testing. For them, it diminishes their manhood (*"mardangheey"*). Men are not seen as the source of problems regarding infertility. This puts a lot of pressure on the woman since infertile women are not highly regarded in the society.

Having a child is not enough; it is having a male child that counts. Desire to have a male child was expressed by some of the participants; a few continued to conceive till they had a male child. One of the participants said that she had three daughters as she did not have a son she wanted to continue conceiving. Once she had the son she stopped having kids (she had the tubal ligation done). This participant further said that if she had the son earlier then she would have stopped conceiving. There are families who planned to have two children but if both of them were female child then these families would attempt for 3rd child with hope to have a baby boy. Sons are considered as a pride for the family. They are thought to be a source of continuation of their familial lineage and somebody who does not have a son feels bad and those who have more sons feel proud of themselves. Male children are the preference of families in South Asian countries, including India and Pakistan (Abeykoon, 1995). This preference brings about problems for women who cannot bear a male child. In the long run, women's quality of life is affected either by bearing too many children till they give birth to a male child or by becoming depressed all her life due to the inability to have a male child.

Being treated fairly was identified as important to have a good life. Talking about it one of the participants said that once she completed her matriculation she got married. After marriage, she thought there was a possibility that she would be

able to continue her education but it did not happen. The participant thought that she was not treated fairly, like her sister-in-law. Explaining it further, the participant said that if she was treated fairly then she also would have been educated more than just being a matriculate. She added that her father-in-law, who was the decision making authority in the home would not bear her educational expenses and did not allow her to continue education. She also expressed that once a woman is married and joins the family of her husband, family's all the responsibilities are dumped on her saying that she is the daughter-in-law and she is responsible to do everything (*"bahu ki zmadari hay"*). On the other hand if she has a sister-in-law (husband's sister), no responsibility will be assigned to her because she is a daughter of the family. Thus the participant felt that if it was matter of sharing the work load the daughter (husband's sister) will be relived but if it is the matter of sharing the facilities then the daughter will be given the priority over the daughter-in-law. The participant named it "double standard".

With regards to the need of fair treatment at national level one of the participants said that "all the people should be treated fairly, regardless of their caste and creed. Instead of differentiating ourselves by means of religion and ethnicity, we should think that we are Pakistani as one nation and should act like that. This will change our lives in a positive direction".

Sharing her feelings one of the participants said that both men and women should be given equal status. Responding to a query on who can give the equal status, the participant responded that a woman's husband can give the equal status. The participant further said that pre-marriage, parents should give the equal status to their sons and daughters. She emphasized that the parents should give importance to their daughters. The respondent admitted that it is the women who give less attention to the daughters (*"choukayoon nay ocheey tawaja dhayayn chayan"*); she honestly said that like the way she is doing (*"jaym hoon karoon choon"*), continuing her talk the participant said that her daughters are too good (*"mareey deeykaryoo bawaj sareeyoon chay"*). She said yet, she was not giving them the attention, she was giving attention to her son.

Gender bias was also voiced out by an unmarried participant who said that both of my parents were uneducated but her mother got the children educated. She said that her mother got her (the participant's) brothers educated through English medium schools, but she (the respondent) got educated in an Urdu medium school. The respondent felt that if her parents wanted then she could have got her (the participant) educated in the English medium. The respondent felt that she was not treated the way her brothers were being treated. She also expressed that if her mother would have

educated her in English medium then there were more benefit (she meant better job opportunities and higher education) because, compared to her brothers she (the participant) was more serious towards her studies.

Explaining about the reasons for her being treated differently than her brothers, the respondent said the society in which we are living in, these differences are common. The participant felt they are mainly due to lack of education but on the other hand, as she said those who are educated they also are not broad minded (“*oonkay bheey zahain khulay naheeyn hayn*”). The respondent added that yet, she would say that gender bias which is common in our society is mainly due to lack of education. The participant firmly believed that if proper education is accessible to a common man than there is chances that the society would grow and would progress well.

Another participant, who had a post graduate education, shared her views by saying that if one sees the overall situation in the society then she/he will find that women are neglected. The participant said that women do not get those facilities which men in our society get, such as provision of education. Including herself the respondent said that we also do the same because this is how our minds are set. Providing her own example the participant said that she also kept a difference between her sons and her daughter. She further said that she wanted her sons to get better schooling than her daughter. Mentioning about the reason the participant said that this is how the whole society behaves like, and this is the set up of her society. Thus she was following her societal norms.

Based on the analysis of the data it was found that it was not only mothers who discriminated between their male and female child but fathers did the same. One of the participants, whose education level was matriculation and who was from the high income group, said that it was also important that a mother should intervene if the father treats sons and daughters differently. Sharing her views the participant said that most of the time it happens that the parents do not give attention towards their daughters' education whereas for sons, whether they study or they do not, parents spend more money. Giving another example of discrimination by father between male and female child the participant said that as soon as the daughter gets to the age of eighteen years the family start thinking to get her married, the participant felt this is not fair with the female child. She should not be considered as a burden (“*bhoj*”). Bringing another dimension in her talk the participant said that the father should be fair while dealing with his daughter. She said that if he (the father) is giving the liberty to his son then he should give the same liberty to his daughter. Explaining it further the respondent said if the son falls in love with a girl then being father, he feels proud

whereas, if his daughter talks to somebody (a male) he gets angry at her, the respondent felt it was not a fair attitude. Thus, she emphasized that these attitudes need to be changed. She stressed that rules should be same for all the children regardless of their gender.

Consideration of male child as a financial investment that will provide long term benefits still prevails in many societies including the one in which the present study was conducted. Additionally, male are thought to be a source for continuing the generation. On the other hand, girls are considered as a financial burden that eventually "belong to" other families. Therefore, both the genders are treated differently. Such findings are reported in literature as one of the study which assessed the size of the gender gap in fifty eight countries. These nations were ranked according to the level of advancement of their female population, and identified successes and failures, based on the economic, political, educational and health-based criteria. Based on these variables, the overall score was calculated on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 representing maximum gender equality and 1 representing minimum gender equality. Out of fifty eight countries, Pakistan was found to be the third to the last by having 2.90 as the overall score (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi 2005). Thus, besides education and awareness, individuals' readiness to change the present trends regarding gender discrimination are also important.

Having enough money as needed for use in an emergency was stressed by the participants, especially, those from the high income group. One of the participants said that it was important that an individual should be able to save money for the rainy days. Many of those who were barely meeting the challenges of every day expenses did not talk about saving any money.

IV. RECOMMENDATION

Men and women both are important members of the society. Therefore, understanding the perspectives of both the gender is important. Hence, through systematic approach, men's perspective of good life should also be explored.

V. CONCLUSION

It is important to have a good quality of life. However, its indicators, may vary based on an individual's background and expectations most of which are driven from the society they live in. Therefore, it is important to understand individual's perspective to enhance the prevailing practice in society which is viewed supportive to achieve better quality of life. Simultaneously, practices and systems which are depressing and have negative impact on quality of life should be voiced. This gradually will bring change in the society and may improve the system.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to acknowledge Aga Khan University School of Nursing for providing me the sponsorship for Master of Sciences (Nursing) programme.

I would also like to acknowledge my thesis committee; supervisor, Dr. Ma. Irma Bustamante-Gavino, Associate Professor, Aga Khan University School of Nursing, members Ms. Kausar Saeed Khan, Associate Professor, Department of Community Health Sciences, Dr. Rafat Jan, Associate Professor, Aga Khan University School of Nursing and Dr. Waris Qidwai, Professor, Department of Family Medicine.

REFERENCES

- [1] A.T.P.L, Abeykoon, "Sex Preference in South Asia: Sri Lanka an Outlier State intervention in providing quality primary education and health care would enable parents to attach a higher value to the education and health of their children irrespective of sex", *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, Vol.10, No.3, pp.5-16, 1995.
- [2] F.Amber, "Social Status of Rural and Urban Working Women in Pakistan- A Comparative Study Dissertation", 2005. http://elib.ub.uni-osnabrueck.de/publications/diss/E-Diss561_thesis.pdf
- [3] H.Heinonen, Quality of Life and its Determinants Among Allogeneic Haematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation Patients and the Finnish Population Publications of the National Public Health Institute, Finland and Helsinki University Central Hospital Department of Medicine and Department of Social psychology University of Helsinki, 2005.
- [4] The Labour Force Survey (LFS) for the year, 2001-2002: <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/APCITY/UNPAN015309.pdf>. Retrieved on July 25, 06
- [5] Library of Congress - Country Studies Guide (1994), Pakistan (<http://reference.allrefer.com/country-guide-study/pakistan/pakistan45.html>)
- [6] A.Lopez-Claros and S.Zahidi, "Women's Empowerment: Measuring the Global Gender Gap, 2005", *World Economic Forum*. www.weforum.org/pdf/Global_Competitiveness_Reports/Reports/gender_gap.pdf
- [7] K.Morecraft, International Child Slave Labor, http://ihscslnews.org/view_article.php?id=98 retrieved on July 25, 06. October 2002.
- [8] S.Packer, J.Husted, S. Cohen and G.Tomlinson, "Psychopathology and quality of life in schizophrenia", *J Psychiatry Neurosci*, Vol.22, No.4, pp.231-234, 1997.
- [9] J.Pan, "Basic Needs Satisfaction as the Basis for Global Climate Regime Building: rational, methodology and case calculation for China", China - US Climate Change Forum Berkeley (<http://chinausclimate.org/downloads/presentations/panjiahua.pdf>). Retrieved on June 01, 2006.
- [10] M.Q.Patton, *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*, Publications: Newbury Park London New Delhi. Sage, 1990.
- [11] M.Q.Patton, *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*,. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002.
- [12] R.Renwick, and I.Brown, "The Centre for Health Promotion's conceptual approach to quality of life: being, belonging, becoming", In R. Renwick, I. Brown, & M. Nagler (Eds.), *Quality of life in health promotion and rehabilitation*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.pp.75-86, 1996
- [13] The World Factbook Pakistan, estimated <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/pk.html> retrieved on July, 28, 2006.
- [14] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minimum_wage_law Retrieved on November 30, 2011