

Women's Employment, Labor and Housework

Marneuli Municipality

Family Income and Employment of Women

Out of all the women surveyed in the Marneuli Municipality, 7 were homemakers and they were also engaged in agricultural activities. One of the women was a cleaner and she was a day laborer, while three of them were teachers, two were full-time employees at various companies and organizations, one was a student and not yet employed, and the final one of them had just graduated from the university and was not yet employed full-time, but she was involved in various paid and unpaid projects.

The vast majority of the homemakers and the unemployed women said that they wanted to get a job but could not do so due to external factors. They said that there were not nearly enough jobs, especially in the villages and regions, and finding a job was also difficult due to their housework. They did not have time for anything else, or they were unable to leave their children alone, and they also thought that they could not get employment due to their lack of education and inability to speak Georgian. The women with secondary or incomplete secondary education believed that if they spoke Georgian and had higher education (had a profession), they would have been able to find employment more easily. However, the women who had studied accounting (in a vocational school or a university) said that the main obstacles had been their inability to speak the Georgian language and their lack of computer skills. Some women even said that their employment was hindered by their family members like their husband, or mother-in-law, or both.

According to all the respondents, it was much more difficult for women to find employment than men. They believed that there were more opportunities for men who had no prior knowledge and experience to find various jobs, while women rarely had the opportunity to do so. In addition, women faced the obstacle of not being able to leave their children because children were cared for mostly by women, and in many villages, there was no kindergarten or extended lessons at the school where women could leave their children for at least a few hours. One respondent stated: *"There are more jobs for men than women. A man can work everywhere, but a woman can not. It is said that men and women are equal, but that is just a talk. The reality is completely different. Men are preferred for most jobs more than women ... But despite all this, women work more than men in our village ... Women are busy taking care of their families, and they are involved in agricultural work all day."*

In general, it should be noted that the respondents wanted employment for two main reasons - the first being that their families were not financially secure and they wanted to generate more income. Women said that this was one of their primary reasons for wanting jobs. The second reason that was mentioned by women was their desire to gain a certain amount of independence. According to some respondents, they would gain more autonomy and more control over their own lives if they had jobs of their own.

Among the families of the respondents, the monthly expenditure mainly ranged from 300 to 800 GEL. In some large families (8-9 people) and in families where women were employed, the expenditure went up to 1000 GEL or more. However, one single mother said that her income was only 110 GEL per month, that too from the social assistance, and this money was clearly not enough for even the most basic needs.

Two single mothers had the lowest income and expenditure among the respondents in the form of 110 and 300 GEL respectively. Neither of them received alimony because one of them said that her ex-husband had died, while the other said that her ex-husband was himself a pensioner with health problems and he could not afford to pay her the alimony. Both the women received social assistance amounting to 110 GEL per child.

From the survey, it was obvious that the single mothers had much lower income than the rest. The feminization of poverty is apparent in this case, which means that women are more on the edge of poverty and those families that are headed by a woman tend to be much poorer. Additionally, only two of the women surveyed in the Marneuli Municipality had private property of their own: one had a car, while the other had a house. Other women had no property of their own. This can be explained by the fact that it is rare in Georgia for parents to transfer their property to their daughters and divide the property equally between the girls and the boys. Since boys usually stay at home after starting a family, while girls generally have to leave their home, the property tends to belong to the men after the death of their parents.

Moreover, since the house does not belong to the man until his parents have passed away, this further complicates the imposition of alimony obligations on the man as a part of the divorce proceedings because often no property may be registered in his name.

Because women's education and Georgian language comprehension play a vital role for them to find paid employment, divorced housemakers are often left with no income at all and are forced to exist on social assistance and parental pensions. Single mothers did not have opportunities or had minimal opportunities to engage in economic activities. They survived on minimal social aid that did not offer a vision for long-term support, and instead, was a form of charity that kept people in poverty.

Therefore, single mothers were forced to engage in precarious labor and work on a low income under challenging conditions..¹

The monthly expenses of many families with 4 or more family members ranged from 300 to 600 GEL. Additionally, these families often sustained themselves through the family agriculture which allowed them to consume various goods without purchasing them. Nevertheless, women emphasized that their monthly funds were barely enough for basic necessities, and their income could not cover any additional costs, including medical expenses. Women who were not employed said that their families earned most of their income from agriculture, remittances from migrants, construction jobs (that mainly employed men) or other forms of daywork. The number of women engaged in agricultural activities was very high. Agriculture was mostly built on the hard labor of women.

Most of the respondents said that their families had different types of debt. The respondents named agricultural and daily household expenses as some of their most common reasons for borrowing money. They said that since life in the village was difficult, the future was unpredictable, and agriculture required constant attention, it was, therefore, difficult to determine whether the expenditure allocated to agriculture would generate sufficient yields and income. Other major reasons for their debt were the need to pay for medical treatment and the visit to a doctor, loan for a house or an apartment, and the tuition fees and living expenses for students in Tbilisi. In general, medical expenses were a hefty burden on the low-income families. One of the respondents said: *“I have a loan, I have not been able to repay it for 5 years. Our child was sick, we took out a loan, then we could not pay it back on time and the interest was gradually increased.”*

Only 2 individuals among the respondents had any kind of savings. Others said that it was impossible to retain any savings from their meagre family income. Debts and other financial obligations made it impossible for the families to break free from the vicious cycles of poverty and hardship.

The women who worked in schools or in various organizations said that one of their main motivations for working was to acquire financial benefits, and the desire to empower themselves and put their knowledge to good use. Those who were employed precariously and in daywork said that they worked because of their needs. They did not have any other options. One of the respondents, who was a cleaner and also operated as a day worker, noted that the pandemic had a terrible effect on her income. This was not because the demand for cleaners suddenly ended; rather, the disappearance of all the

¹ Social Justice Center, [2019](#)

means of public transportation drastically worsened the already scarce employment opportunities of daywork. She could no longer be mobile and go to the places of her employment.

Teachers also voiced several problems that they faced. The certification and examination processes in Azerbaijani-language schools had resulted in many ambiguities, constant changes in plans, and adaptations that did not address the needs of the teachers in such schools. Many teachers had to remain contented with a meagre income. For example, one of the teachers said that her salary was only 400 GEL, even though she regularly taught for about 4 to 5 hours a day. Another teacher voiced the concern of those teachers who were not officially members of the staff. She said that such teachers who were employed in the schools through different programs only got a one-year contract and did not know whether they would have a job the following year. Since they taught in the schools under the confines of particular programs, they did not receive a salary for 3 months of the holidays every year. According to the respondent, she had been working as an assistant teacher at the same school for more than 5 years, and she still did not have a permanent contract. This problem concerned other assistant teachers as well since it was difficult to obtain the status of a permanent teacher, and if their program was canceled, they would be left without a job.

Teachers said they were often overwhelmed. Given the scarcity of resources, the education system put the onus on the teachers to compensate the negligence that existed in the system. As a result, the teachers had many responsibilities apart from teaching, and this part of their work often remained hidden and was not reflected in their salary. This issue was especially exacerbated during the pandemic because the teachers had to put in far more effort to deliver good quality lessons.

Adjara

Family Income and Women's employment

In Adjara, most of the respondents were either employed or self-employed, although students and homemakers who were currently unemployed were also included in the survey.

The vast majority of the women lived in families of 4 or more people. Unlike the Marneuli Municipality, many respondents in Adjara did not want to disclose their monthly expenses. However, the ones who did disclose their expenses generally mentioned a monthly amount that ranged from 500 to 3000 GEL. The expenses dramatically increased if there were university students in the family. In Adjara, unlike in the Marneuli municipality, all of the women said they have had at least some work experience. Some of the respondents had worked for at least 6 months in unstable jobs such as sewing,

in theaters, etc. This type of employment was often driven by the need for instant cash for reasons such as raising funds for students, buying children's clothes, funding tutors, and so on. Some women had to temporarily relocate from their villages to a different village or a town for several months to raise money for their necessities.

The other half of the respondents had stable jobs or have had them in the past. Among such interviewees, there were teachers of various subjects (including a teacher of religion), nurses, bank staff, and women who had their own business or were part of the family business. Almost all the women with stable jobs said that they had to work overtime that was not compensated. Overtime work included taking extra time for one's own work, helping others, and taking on additional workload even when the employee was not formally responsible for doing so. Moreover, it was evident from their responses that the respondents put a lot of emotional labor into their jobs. They often considered it their duty to help others despite their place of employment not accounting for it in any way or form.

One single mother who was interviewed had received alimony. However, it took her a lot of struggle along with the involvement of law enforcement and the court to do so. Despite the alimony, she had to work two jobs to pay for even the bare minimum expenses of her family. Another single mother did not receive alimony. She said that her former husband and she had never officially signed the marriage certificate and she did not receive any money from him, nor did she ask for alimony from her child's father.

Many respondents said that their families were engaged in agriculture and substituted their lack of income with their own produce. The families that were entirely or predominantly dependent on agriculture said that it required a lot of hard work. Some of them said that despite working a lot, they only ever had just enough products to use in their household or they received very little income from their agricultural products: "*When April comes, I am in the field all the time, I produce herbs ... You bring it to the market and you see that our produce is devalued, the produce of a farmer is undervalued somehow.*"

Almost none of the households to which the respondents belonged had even minimal savings. One elderly woman summed up her life in the following way: "*I have never had [savings]. I've gotten old and I have no savings and I do not think I will ever have them, my assets are my children.*"

The family of almost every respondent owed money, and the amounts and types of their debts varied quite a bit. For example, women often mentioned that they had bought their phones via deferred payments to give their children access to education during the pandemic. Their reasons for taking debt also included mortgages for houses from banks, loans for family hotels, renovations or small businesses, loans for household and daily expenses, as well as various health-related needs.

The respondents owed money to banks, credit companies, pawnshops and other individuals, as well as regular shops and pharmacies. Respondents felt that most of the people around them lived in debt. They also mentioned that private lenders often took advantage of overdue days and charged a high interest rate for such days. The abundance of small loan companies and pawnshops was especially noticeable in Batumi and Khulo. According to the respondents, many people in Batumi regularly placed bets in different casinos, and their gambling addiction had also aggravated the situation.

Several respondents who were employed said that their labor was not adequately compensated, and even those who said that their labor was adequately compensated argued that the wages in their regions were generally low. When they said their wages were not low, they were usually comparing them with other people's wages. However, they confirmed that their salaries and even their total family income only covered basic necessities. A few of the respondents who thought that their family income could cover more than their basic necessities also said that the additional costs could be covered only once or twice a year, and they could not provide the finances for their additional needs all the time. One respondent said: *"In a family, children, me or an elderly person may need something. But you can not spend it when you do not have it [money]. For example, till the end of this month we need 1000 GEL to handle all the costs, but when you do not have it you have to be satisfied with 100 GEL. You have to buy whatever is necessary and crucial and you put aside everything else. Kids may also need something that ... well, now, for example, it is essential to have clothing, you can not go out naked, of course, and I try to dress them according to my capacities. You may want more and you struggle, but we buy the essentials. We can not buy whatever we want. However much the income is, the expenses will be according to that. You can not spend what you do not have."*

Women with secondary or incomplete secondary education unanimously said that it was more challenging for them to find a job compared to men. Men who had the same level of education could work in construction or be day laborers, but similar opportunities were almost non-existent for the women. One of the respondents said: *"Of course, I want a job according to my capability, that will allow me to work and have my salary and be independent, I want to buy something without asking anyone, even my husband, to have the opportunity to answer my needs. We live in a village. I really want to work and have my salary, but I cannot do that because of external factors. For example, there are no jobs. There is not a factory nor a company that could employ women. If there is something available, I am sure many women will be willing and able to work ... Take, for example, me, I am not educated but I want to be independent and have money so that my children lack nothing ... My husband works here and there; there will be construction or something like that. Of course, women cannot do that and that is why I do not work."* Moreover, women also found it challenging

to leave their household chores and children behind and look for jobs instead, and this further prevented them from working.

Women with higher education said that they worked at places where promotions did not exist for objective reasons because every employee had just one employer or a single supervisor. The only woman who worked in a bank also turned out to be the only person to raise the issue of how women faced more obstacles in their professional advancement than men: *"Men have more advantages here than women ... Even the supervisors think that it is better to be a man. They had questions about my employment, whether a girl would be able to pull through."*

Religious Discrimination at Places of Employment

In Adjara, respondents recalled religious discrimination cases at places of employment experienced by themselves or their relatives. Women say that the problem of discrimination is less common in Khulo and surrounding villages, with more cases of discrimination affecting areas where the Muslim majority does not live. For example, one interviewee recalls a case in which her sister was refused a job at school because of her religious belonging: *"My sister graduated from university with honors. She is a very good teacher and has innovative approaches. One of the lecturers offered her a job at a school, and the head of the school is a Christian. When she submitted the documents, the answer was that their school definitely needed a Christian teacher. Her religion prevented her from being employed because she was a "Tatar". The lecturer told her that only Christian students study in their school and that a Muslim teacher could not enter the elementary level classes because the teacher had to teach the students the love towards Christianity."*

Another woman who wears a hijab says: *"I had a case. There are more places where I can work easily now, but when I had my first child I wanted to work ... I called, they told me to come in ... When I arrived, they saw that I had a headscarf, they thought maybe I could not do it. They did not call me again ... I personally have had many friends [in such a situation]."*

Housework

Experiences from Adjara and Marneuli Municipality

In both Marneuli Municipality and Adjara, similar trends were observed in terms of housework. In particular, women who were homemakers and did not split the domestic labor with other family members had to perform both household chores as well as engage in agricultural activities for about 8

to 14 hours per day. The respondents said that as soon as they woke up, they started doing household chores, rarely took breaks, if ever, and they could only rest while sleeping. Most of these women were the only ones in their families doing all the household chores. On the other hand, women who had mothers, mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, daughters-in-law, or in rare cases, daughters at home, said that they did housework for about 5 to 9 hours per day. For these women, the redistribution of labor among multiple individuals did reduce their workload. However, for others, especially those who had large families or whose families were involved in agricultural activities, domestic work still took about 8 to 9 hours a day. Employed women who were not married were the least busy with housework. The same could be said about the university students, although they all did some types of housework. These women said that they spent more time performing household chores during the weekends or they spent 1 or 2 hours a day during the weekdays.

We should also speak about single mothers and women employed in precarious labor. Both of these groups often had to work full time at their jobs, in some cases 10 to 12 hours per day, and at home, they often did most of the housework as well. Employed and married women said that they still had to do the housework themselves. Some of them had to do housework alone and they did everything around the house all by themselves. Based on the experience of the respondents, it was also apparent that in the case of absence of other women in families, or in some families where the mother had to work, the burden usually fell on older girls, and they had to do a lot of housework. Some respondents argued that this badly affected their school attendance and their free time, while for other respondents, the workload was not heavy.

Most of the interviewees said that they only rested when they went to sleep at night, or even if they did get some rest during their waking hours, it was never more than 1 to 2 hours per day. One of the Adjarian women said: *"I do not think there is such a thing in the village to decide and deliberately devote time to rest. Sometimes we will drink coffee and sit down for a bit; but it is impossible to set aside an hour for [resting]."* Another respondent said: *"In my opinion, labor never ends for a woman. If you dedicate the whole day to housework, you still can not finish all of it; it still takes a long time to have everything in order. If you do not choose to sit down and allow yourself to rest, you might never finish the work around the house because your work might just go on indefinitely."* Some women said that they only rested while playing with their children. The respondents who rested for about 1 to 2 hours a day said that they mostly relaxed while drinking tea or coffee, watching TV, or having the neighbors over as guests. Women who worked and were not married said that they rarely had the time to rest. Students, however, managed to relax more often. They said that they could relax for about 4 to 5 hours per day by having fun with their friends, or reading, or watching a movie.

Women spent most of their time caring for children, teaching them, cleaning the house, farming, cooking and washing. Some of the women said that they also had to emotionally support their family members, children and spouse, and thereby engage in emotional labor. One of the respondents summed up this type of labor in the following way: *"[Children] are little and then they will grow up, you can call them little, but the fact is you have a relationship with five different individuals and everyone needs a different approach. It takes so much work, so much energy, you have to understand their psychology. One child requires a different approach, another one – a completely different approach."* Despite their hard work, many women said that this work was of great value to them.

In both Adjara and Marneuli, most women said that their workload and its difficulty were either equal to that of men, or were higher. One respondent in the Marneuli Municipality said: *"I think women's work is more difficult than men's. A woman does all the work at home."* According to a woman from Adjara: *"My grandmother used to say, housework is invisible ... You work so much, you work all the time, but somehow it is not visible."* Another respondent believed: *"I get less tired at my job than while I do housework. It is invisible but also very time-consuming. The work done by women in villages is so much more than the work done by a man; although the work that men usually do requires more strength and is physically demanding, the work that women do is more tiring and it takes more time."* Yet another woman described the invisibility and difficulty of women's labor: *"[Women's labor] is so much more difficult but it is hidden, that's the thing. A woman's labor is invisible because what she does is not considered to be valuable by men. For example, a man cuts up one, two, three pieces of firewood and it can be seen. When you go and do this and that, even if you cook food, it gets eaten and it is gone. The work is invisible but it takes more time, at least that is what I think."* Most of the women had similar feelings about housework. They said that even if they did something all day long and the work was quite hard, it often remained unseen.

In both Marneuli municipality and Adjara, some of the respondents thought that it was unfair their domestic labor remained unpaid. According to one of the respondents who lived in one of the Marneuli villages, the state should recognize the importance of women's domestic labor and pay housewives at least a minimum wage: *"I think the state should provide social assistance to housewives, even it is 100 GEL. Since we do not have a job, how can we survive? We want to work, but we cannot do it because we take care of our family members, we take care of our children, we take care of our families."* Every respondent thought that most of the economic activities in society in general could not be carried out without being supported by women's labor at home.

Half of the women who were surveyed said that they were the ones who decided how to spend money in their family. Others said that their husbands, mothers, or other family members made all the

financial decisions. Women mostly said that they made their own financial decisions when it came to their children's expenses and when they needed to buy household items. Certain women would themselves make decisions regarding what produce to purchase, while others deliberated with their husbands and other family members.

Mostly unmarried, employed women were the ones who said that they had their own money that they could spend on themselves. Some of them got to spend the entire amount solely on themselves as per their own discretion. On the other hand, due to the economic situation, the money generated by married, employed women was mainly spent on the needs of the whole family and their children. As mentioned before, the income of such women often covered only their basic necessities, or sometimes not even that.