Under Curfew: 12

Women Home Based Businesses... Before and After the Corona Crisis
Introduction:

Attitudes and motivations for engaging in Home Based Businesses (HBBs) differ from one woman to another. Some of these women resort to such projects to provide another source of income to them and their families, while others have the desire to engage in tasks that achieve social and economic benefits. Others began working from home after a long journey of looking for jobs and not finding an appropriate opportunity that is compatible with their surrounding circumstances. These women thus find that engaging in HBBs is a chance for them to pursue their passion, or as a motivation for them to utilize the skills and knowledge that they acquired from their education. Throughout Tamkeen’s field work, it was clear that the majority of women work in either: food production, home schooling, tutoring, handicrafts, home marketing, hair salon and barbershop, sewing, as well as graphic design and translation in very limited cases.

The report fleshes out the labor and economic realities that female workers face in various sectors, whether those that are run from their own homes or those that required working remotely as an approach to sustain the workflow during the COVID-19 Crisis, so that they could maintain their position in the labor market and not to lose the only available opportunity, especially in light of the current circumstances where institutions, even big ones, are struggling to remain afloat. Home Based Businesses are not just restricted to preparing dishes, it extends to any craft that women can perform, such as e-marketing or individual marketing, sewing and clothing repair, handicraft manufacturing, etc.
In many cases, Home Based Businesses is considered as a way to create working conditions that are in line with their needs, as usually they can work for flexible hours which would enable women to achieve a balance between social, domestic, economic and practical requirements. However, the spread of COVID-19 resulted in another pattern of HBBs as this sector witnessed a complete shutdown due to the imposition of a complete curfew on March 21st following the activation of the Defense Law Number 13 of 1992, which lasted till some sectors began gradually resume working.

This report highlights the working conditions in this sector and the impact of the Corona Crisis on its workers, especially during the month of Ramadan. The report targeted 73 Jordanian and Syrian women working from home in different sectors. The women were Jordanians and Syrians and were living in the following Central and the Northern governorates:
Salt: 9; Zarqa (Azraq and Dleil): 22; Mafraq: 6; Jerash: 11; Amman: 23; and Irbid: 2. 59% of these women were Jordanians and 41% of them were Syrians

As of the end of April 22, Home Based Businesses targeted in this report were completely closed. As for the 35 women who were targeted after this period, especially during the month of Ramadan, they were self-employed, 27 of them were Jordanians and 8 Syrians. These women worked in the following sectors:
First: Food Production
The nature of the virus’ transmission has caused consumers to be cautious in their demand of home-made products in the beginning of the crisis. The situation was further complicated by the stoppage of delivery companies as a result of the governmental measures that were taken to prevent the spread of the virus and the recording of the first case in Jordan.

On April 10th, taxi and delivery companies were allowed to work within restricted procedures, women who were targeted in the report in the areas of: Irbid, Jerash, Mafraq, Azraq, Dleil, and Amman; noted that the purchasing pattern for consumers is not the same as before. Women attributed this to several reasons beyond the fear of consumers. These reasons include the curfew itself that was imposed; the inability of female employees to reach their workplaces which led to a shift in their priorities as they became able to cook on a daily basis; given that they did not have any other options before them like ordering from restaurants or other places. Therefore, these women had extra time to fulfill their household chores.

Governmental measures prevented gatherings including birthdays, wakes or other types of events; as well as restaurants orders to occur even in the month of Ramadan. A group of women considered that the partial or complete closure of some sectors negatively impacted a large group of worker, which in turn changed their priorities as they focused on providing their main necessities, while some even lost even the ability to do that. Therefore, these workers will not resort to making orders, and instead will utilize the curfew to prepare the food themselves which they used to buy from external resources.
"I am a specialist in making Kobeh and Ouzi for the past 30 years. I am the breadwinner in my family following my separation from my husband. Before, I never stopped working throughout the year and especially during the month of Ramadan. The situation in Ramadan this year was painful. People did make deliveries but very few of them."

"4 women and I have a productive kitchen. Usually, we have a lot of work, especially in Ramadan and its large gatherings. During the last 10 days of Ramadan, we also begin receiving orders for the Eid cookies which are non-stop, that we cannot even cook inside our homes. This year though, the workload was extremely light even though last year we developed the kitchen."

Tamkeen targeted 35 women who had stopped their home business
From April 22 to May 26
The needs of women working in HBBs are not just limited in providing their requirements of food, but also extends to their education, health and rent expenses. Often times, the income these women receive from their businesses constitute their main resource of income. These women were left confused on how they will be able to convince their landlord to defer their rent for the months of March, April and May, and their urgent need to keep a roof over their heads.

“My salary goes directly to pay my rent and my debts. My work in the kitchen is the income that helps us secure our needs.”

Ala’ is a cook in a productive kitchen in Dleil who supports her husband through this work. Regarding the Corona Crisis, she said:

“Oh God, I am so frustrated. Every Eid, I would save money and buy my children new clothes for Eid and then go visit my family in Palestine. This year, I was deprived of seeing the joy of my children and from seeing my family.”

Often, non-Jordanian women resort to working in food production to avoid legal accountability since they usually work without having a work permit, especially since the majority of these projects are not investigated by the official entities.
In terms of yoghurt, cheese and pickle production, there were various experiences faced by women working in both Mafraq and Irbid. Many of these women found it difficult to market and deliver their products due to the poor transportation network and high delivery prices, and especially after the adoption of the odd and even number system until May 12, when the system was cancelled for the usage of public transport. Moreover, consumers began buying their needs of yoghurt, cheese and pickle products from supermarkets in Irbid and Mafraq. A woman who produce diary products in her house in Irbid was not affected by the Corona Crisis due to the regional proximity of her customers to her home; and their reliance on her products for years.

In the Northern Badia in Mafraq, one of the women used to produce and sell milk and cheese to many areas of Mafraq. The dairy season is usually extremely active in Spring and especially from the beginning of March. However, the fear of disease and the interruption of transportation networks between her and her customers led her to destroy large quantities of milk.

After bakeries, restaurants, and desert stores resumed working, there is a large group of customers who express fear towards buying home-products, according to remarks by several women who were interviewed during the development of this report. One of these women made the following comment in an attempt to analyze the reasons for the decline in demand for home-products:

“People buy from bakeries and restaurants because these places are known to follow regular health regulations; unlike home-based kitchens. People are still scared because these places are not regularized by the Ministry of Health or any other entity.”

During the Eid season, these workers suffered great losses as the order rates dropped during Eid Al Fitr for ma’moul, cakes and other types of sweets. Some women found challenges in maintaining the prices at which they used to buy their essential products, which led them to either being forced to sell their products at a lower price, despite the financial loss they would incur or to cancel the orders; and in other cases orders were cancelled because customers were unable to pay.

“I buy spice plants and then grind in my house and package it so I could sell it to my acquaintances and neighbours. I have been managing for the last 2 years but then the crisis occurred and the delivery companies were not allowed to work. I found that things that used to be sold for 2 JODs are now sold for 8 JODs. There is also the expense to deliver these products to Jerash. Usually during Ramadan is the season where I sell the most but this year, the sales were below expectations. People are now afraid to buy my products because I prepare the spices with my own hands.

Female Syrian Workers who prepares and sells spices- Jerash

Female Syrian Workers who prepares and sells spices- Jerash
Second: Sewing and Clothes repair

Women usually resort to women working as home sewers who are known in their neighborhoods and suburbs, as they consider them to be trustworthy and their knowledge of her work. These women would sometimes even have social relationships with these women which would enable them to host social gatherings when they go seeking her service, as well as being provided with a lower price compared to formal sewing workshops.

Like other formal or informal sectors, women working as home sewers were impacted by the curfew and the inability of people to buy clothes, whether from shops or online. Consequently, none of the customers needed any clothing repair services. In the midst of all of this is also the fear of customers from the virus through clothes which resulted in them not buying any new pieces, altering their own clothes or asking sewers for specific pieces either, whether these pieces were clothes or other types of garment like tablecloths, covers, bedspreads, etc.

Usually, the demands for clothes’ repair increases during the month of Ramadan. Unfortunately, expectations were not met this year because of the Corona Crisis as women were unable to design or repair any pieces or even buy any raw materials. Some of these women even had to borrow some material to be able to meet consumers’ demands.

As for price hikes, this is another story as women could not tell their customers that the prices of the material increased for fear that they would lose their source of income. Instead, women in Amman and Zarqa faced an increase in prices for raw materials like fabric, threads and beads in comparison to their previous prices before the crisis. Eid Al Fitr had a different impact on these women. For example, a woman in Azraq works on a sewing machine in Azraq said that while she had a somewhat rebound in her business, but she was faced with unprecedented increase in the prices of fabric, in addition to requests from customers to postpone their payments.
**Third: Home-made crafts**

According to field observations, home-made crafts are some of the hardest hit sectors among women workers. This group of women think that the purchasing ability is limited to only the basic necessities. Thus, their products are not popular among consumers in the midst of the great challenges facing the market due to the current crisis. In Ramadan, workers also noted that there was a scarcity of demand from customers, and even in some cases no orders at all.

The situation is extremely different now, and especially during Ramadan. Every year in Jordan we used to have so many orders of people asking for decorations. But because of the crisis this year, everything turned upside down. I have not worked for the past two months and I am sure I will not be getting any orders after Ramadan because people are afraid. Even though it is a small virus, yet it controlled the whole world. My only dream is that life returns to normal and I can resume working because my whole life is dependent on it. I have not paid my rent for the past two months and we are living only on bread and water.

Female Syrian Worker- Production of Soaps and Candles- Ashrafiye, Amman

**Fourth: Hair Salons and Make Up**

The cosmetic sector, whether inside salons or in home-based businesses, was first faced with a complete closure of business, followed by fear among customers of contact and physical proximity, which are required by the work nature in the sector. After the sector resumed working, women working in HBBs find it very difficult to receive customers, as the majority now prefer to go to registered salons, since they are required to abide by public safety standards and precautions.

Usually, women working in the sector begin the month of Ramadan with advanced reservations, and crowded schedules, especially when the Eid Al Fitr nears and in the period between the two eids as this period is filled with engagement and wedding parties.

Like other household occupations, this profession was affected after such gatherings were banned and people made no reservations at their businesses. These women were thus forced to offer promotions that sometimes slashed their prices by half to attract customers, even though these women have been complaining about the high prices of cosmetics such as hair protein and dyes.

Cosmetics is my passion. I studied it and I love working it. Unfortunately, I could not afford to open a register a salon so I started working from home. I did well and customers began coming. Then this virus came and look what it did to us. Maybe I should start thinking of a job that is more secure and will not be affected by such circumstances. In Ramadan, I announced many campaigns so that women would agree to come back to my business but none of them worked.

Female Syrian Worker- Production of Soaps and Candles- Ashrafiye, Amman
Fifth: Marketing

In Deir Alla, some women work in marketing cleaning products. These women were negatively affected by the crisis as customers stopped buying their products and instead relied on products sold at supermarkets. They did so due to their conviction that buying such products including detergent that are sold from homes and not factory-produced is not safe at this time.

“Before the Corona Crisis, I used to provide for myself and my home from this work. My income used to be sufficient for my needs and my family. Home Based Businesses will be destroyed because of the Corona Crisis.”

Jordanian who works in marketing cleaning products- Deir Alla
In Jordan, these workers are known as private tutors who provide extra lessons for school students in primary, middle or high schools. Since these students receive these lessons at home, these women can manage their own working hours, and saves them from the expenses of moving from one place to another or using public transportation. Usually, students attend these classes in the evening after they finish school and rest. Therefore, women working in this sector have flexible working hours that enables them to achieve the desired balance between their work and private lives. These women can also easily contact students’ parents and ask for the tuition fees, in case there were delays in its payment. Some women resort to such work after they were unable to find jobs in the Education sector, or to provide extra income for themselves and their families.

On the other hand, parents of students prefer to send their children to tutors who live in the same neighborhood as they do not want their children to use public transportation or because they cannot enroll their kids in private centers due to their expensive prices; especially among families who have more than one child in need of extra lessons. Parents also believe that issues related to installments are much easier to negotiate with these teachers due to the social relationships they have with them.

Usually, students resort to tutors throughout the semester but especially near the monthly, mid-semester and final exam periods. Due to the Corona Crisis, this year was completely different. The academic year was already filled with surprises following the Public Schools Teachers’ Strike at the beginning of the first semester, which started on September 5th, and was ongoing for almost a month. Then, the teachers were again surprised at the beginning of the second semester when the Ministry of Education decided to adopt Online Education. As for parents, their fear of having their children infected with the virus constituted a bigger concern than the academic progress of their children.

Arwa is a Jordanian tutor in Al Baida, Amman. Teaching from home constituted a good job for her with a stable income that also aligns with her university degree. She was completely satisfied with the conditions related to working from home and her monthly wage but then she noted after the crisis that parents are hesitant from sending their children to have their usual lessons, even after the curfew was lifted due to their far that they might get infected. Even though Arwa disinfected her house, but parents still refused to send their children. Arwa started panicking when parents began calling her to make sure that their children answered their exam questions correctly, in what she described as a non-paid service.

Jordanian tutor, Istiqlal Avenue, Amman
A different experience was the one told to us by a tutor in Irbid, who only stopped working during the first phase of the curfew. She then resumed giving her classes, using the Zoom application. In other times, she gave her classes to children at their homes after walking to their houses in the surrounding neighborhoods. The usage of Zoom enabled her to maintain her only source of income. However, she does not believe that this application is successful because online teaching requires more efforts compared to standard teaching. Also, standard teaching allows teachers to set their own working hours, unlike online teaching, where parents think that they can communicate with the teachers in all hours of the day and even at night. Such a system means that teachers are unable to take care of their own lives, and the only reason she does not put a stop it is to keep her students and her income during this crisis.

As for non-Jordanian teachers, they are considered as informal tutors since teaching, whether in the public or private sector is a closed profession for them, except in certain special cases approved by the Civil Service Bureau and the Minister of Labour. These tutors were similarly affected by the crisis, like their Jordanian counterparts, which placed them in dire issues and facing growing needs.

When the curfew is over, the school semester would be over, which means no private lessons. We missed the most important month in the year. Whoever has money in their pockets is seeking to put food on the table to feed their children, not send them to take private lessons.

Syrian Tutor- Istiklal Avenue, Amman

Recommendations

1. Deferment of all small and micro loans.

2. Designing awareness raising programs about the importance of registering Home Based Businesses

3. Inclusion of self-employed women in HBBs under the umbrella of Social Security regardless of their nationality. Also, facilitate the payment of installments related to the Optional Subscription in Social Security
Women's work
The Impact of the Corona Virus on Women Home Based Businesses...
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