






Invisible Walls: Employment Struggles of Women with Limited Education in Albania

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ABSTRACT

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The current study explores the employment struggles of women with limited education in Albania. They face challenges that affect their access to the labor market, considering how their employment opportunities are influenced by social, economic, and cultural factors. Key barriers included, but were not limited to, a scarcity of jobs, strong societal norms, financial constraints, and skills-labor market demand mismatch. The latter are confined to low-paid, insecure jobs without benefits or career development opportunities. This study also describes the important additional constraints placed by the patriarchal culture, responsibilities for care, and discrimination in reducing these women's possibilities for meaningful labor market participation. This is a qualitative research study, with interviews from diverse women, as the researchers provide a rich view of the struggle and resilience of the participants. These personal testimonies demonstrate how their challenges are a result of precariousness at work and financial difficulty to lack of access to career enhancement and support systems. The interviews reveal both similarities and differences of Albanian women as they experience employment challenges such as job insecurity and financial insecurity, educational limitations, societal norms and family responsibilities, limited access to professional development and support networks, unique experiences of discrimination and self-doubt. The findings suggest that is essential the need for targeted interventions in terms of expanding vocational training, flexible work arrangements, support for entrepreneurship, and inclusive employment policies. Such systemic barriers, identified in this paper, require deep changes in policies that transform women's economic functions, challenging broader social norms to greater equity and inclusion in the workforce in Albania.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women with low to medium education levels in many countries struggle with similar job problems. They face few work options social pressures, and income limits. About a quarter of women around the world make unpaid family work, which means they get no direct pay for their efforts. This stops them from having their own money and keeps them from getting the good advantages that come with paid work [1].

In Southeast Europe, including Albania, the gap between men and women in employment is high for less-educated women. These women often can't find regular jobs and end up in low-paying and informal work. In these jobs, "women are stuck in areas with low pay long hours, and informal work setups," which limits their chances to advance and feel secure [1, 2]. Many women end up in low-paying, off-the-books jobs and find it hard to break into better-paying fields. In Albania, women struggle to make more money because they don't have the right connections or chances to learn new skills [2].

Studies indicate that Albanian women those with low or medium education encounter major obstacles in finding jobs. In Albania less educated women often deal with a gender-based split in work duties and cultural expectations push women into unpaid family work instead of regular jobs, which

limits their financial freedom and holds back their careers. Social norms have a significant influence on this situation, as traditional views often pressure women to give priority to family and home duties over work aspirations. In the rural parts where work opportunities for women are restricted to informal and mostly unpaid activities in agriculture, these expectations are particularly high [3]. Moreover, there is a distinct divide between rural and metropolis employment opportunities. Those women, especially the less educated, have limited choices and frequently work in informal positions that provide little security or benefits. In comparison, the cities have more opportunities, yet challenges related to women and men's position in the labor divide are countrywide [2].

The problem is exacerbated by gaps in access to education and in skills. Although more Albanian women are now pursuing education, those who graduated from basic or secondary school struggle to find formal jobs. According to employers, skills women possess often do not correspond to those needed by the labor market, and as a result, many women end up underprepared for competitive positions [4].

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the World Bank and other organizations have started to address those challenges. Another EBRD program, Women in Business (WiB) initiative, provides financial support and

training to women entrepreneurs in Albania. The aim is to reduce skill gaps and gender imbalance in the labor market [2]. Targeted actions can help make employment more open to everyone [5]. Policies to provide the following services are needed: job training, job matching, and flexible work options [6]. These measures are intended to help increase job prospects for women who are less educated.

This paper investigates the employment issues that are specifically faced by Albanian women, especially those with low or medium education. It more specifically centers on the individual obstacles these women confront, including lack of jobs, cultural expectations, and economic barriers. In Albania, women with low to medium level of education have great difficulties finding a job and they face significant employment challenges. These barriers confine many women to low-wage or informal roles, hindering their potential for career advancement and economic stability.

The research question is: What are the key employment challenges faced by Albanian women with low to medium levels of education, and how do social, cultural, and economic factors influence their access to stable and secure employment? This study aims to highlight the need for targeted support and policy measures to improve their employment prospects and economic independence, by examining how these factors combine to limit their access to stable and secure employment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review addresses the many challenges that Albanian women with lower levels of education face in their search for stable and fulfilling work. From limited access to quality job opportunities to cultural expectations, skill gaps, and economic barriers, these issues reveal complex realities that many women face—realities that have only become tougher with global events like the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.1 Educational and skill limitations

As Neimanis [7] pointed out, education level can say a lot about a woman's opportunities and standing in society. In Albania's increasingly competitive job market, the need for specialized skills is growing, which makes it difficult for women with limited education to find stable, well-paying jobs. Many urban roles require qualifications that aren't attainable for women who lack access to higher education. This leaves them with limited choices, often pushing them into low-paying jobs with little chance for advancement. Kossek and Ozeki [8] found that women with less education are especially vulnerable, often locked out of positions that offer flexibility or room for growth. In Albania, access to vocational training is opaque, further complicating the picture. For instance, female residents of a region might find it challenging to develop skills within sectors that are calling for high employment. And even when career programs are offered, financial constraints and a lack of awareness prevent many women from participating, making growing even more difficult. To these challenges, socially constructed roles of women as caregivers to the family are placed which compel some of the women to opt out of work and focus on family responsibilities. This is the case more for women with less education who have a limited number of jobs to choose from that are family oriented. Eby et al. [9] noted that this issue is more compounded in women who have low educational

attainment as there are lesser opportunities to sustain work family balance.

2.2 High rates of informal and unpaid work

Many women in Albania, especially in rural areas, are confined to unpaid roles in family businesses or low-wage jobs in agriculture. Globally, nearly a quarter of women are involved in unpaid family work, which makes it difficult for them to gain financial independence or access benefits like healthcare and pensions [1, 2]. Women in Albania, and those who have low levels of education in particular, often fail in attempts to obtain formal, more stable, and better-paying job opportunities. This forces them into informal situations of work where protection by the law and job security are minimal. As noted by Topi [3] and International Labour Office [1], most Albanian women end up in either informal or unpaid work with agriculture or family enterprises. Usually, such jobs lack contracts, health insurance, or pension plans, which generally implies that women have very troublesome times achieving financial independence or security. Kalaja and Tahiri [10] stated that even though many women in Albania make a great contribution to ensuring the economic stability of their family, they still remain in a very precarious financial position because of the lack of legal protection and job security in their employment. Women are overrepresented in informal and unpaid family jobs—a section that diminishes one's chances of finding formal employment and also holds back long-term economic mobility [2].

2.3 Skill mismatch with market needs

Women who lack education often don't have the skills employers want in the Albanian job market. This limits their job choices. They might struggle to find formal work or end up in jobs that don't use all their abilities. By closing this skills gap is key to boost job chances for women [4]. Many women in Albania find that their education failed to meet the requirements or needs of the labor market because they are underemployed. Most women with low and medium education lack technical or professional skills that employers want. They hold them back from qualifying into stable, better-paying jobs; hence, they usually end up in either low-paid jobs, informal work, or part-time status that does not use their full skills in a manner that allows progress in their careers [4]. This shortage is further exacerbated by the general lack of job training programs that can give women the qualification they need to access better jobs. According to an EBRD report [2], without these kinds of programs, the less educated women will continue to be denied their possible relevant work, hence perpetuating the gender divide in labor force inequality in Albania.

2.4 Patriarchal social norms

In rural areas where family responsibilities often take center stage, old-fashioned beliefs about the role of men and women in Albania tend to stifle women's opportunities to be gainfully employed. Social demands could deny a woman the chance for an outright job or even for promotion [2, 3]. The factor of traditional gender roles also influences women in Albania: according to the male-dominated customs, women are supposed to take care of the homestead. This setting gives them little time and leeway to seek employment opportunities.

Furthermore, it is reported that traditions of such kinds reduce female access to jobs, above all by lower-educated persons, because women may lack information about employing rights and existing jobs [3]. In such a setting, the perception is usually built in terms of their family priorities over careers [9]. An outcome or, perhaps more precisely—a result—will be worse achievements of work goals along with an opportunity to obtain flexible jobs.

2.5 Role of family and caregiving responsibilities

A significant problem faced by women is the stress caused by role conflict or the pressure of managing multiple roles. Women typically juggle various responsibilities, including work obligations, family management, and societal commitments [11]. With increased work demands, traditional gender roles and societal expectations, this balancing act also introduces various challenges that can affect their well-being and overall life satisfaction significantly [12]. Women still take most of the housework and childcare with no payment. They may find that these traditional responsibilities limits their career opportunities, that demands of work and family life are often in conflict or that they guilty or dissatisfied if they feel unable to meet either set of expectations [8]. From the countryside, it often places women at an even more restricted chance in seeking job security as homemakers and family caregivers. The effect of that reason often tends to find women mostly into low-paid jobs or any available informal ones, in adaption for the need concerning family rather than economic empowerment opportunities and promotions. These challenges for women — poor parents in particular — are compounded by a shortage of affordable daycare. Although research by Grzywacz and Carlson [13] has found that women commonly experience heightened levels of stress, burnout and diminished well-being as they struggle to balance work and family responsibilities. This challenge mostly hits women with low educational backgrounds, who find it much harder to get into more understanding work environments. Wider societal norms push women into caregiver roles, which makes it hard for them to follow fulfilling careers together with family responsibilities. According to Creed and Hood [12], this can restrict women's advancement and lead to guilt or frustration when managing competing time commitments. When it comes to prioritizing between family and work, Albanian women are often disadvantaged, as traditional gender roles prescribe that family should always come first. Moreover, according to Mittal et al. [11], a lack of family aid obstructs growth of working women. Families do not allow women to quit housework and go to work. Concrete actions should be taken to open more public nurseries, but also within institutions, for the care of children to harmonise professional and personal life since women are reluctant to engage more in their careers due to their obligations to many family members [14].

2.6 Employer inflexibility and lack of support services

Inflexible workplace policies and a lack of support services are major barriers to many women, particularly those with caring responsibilities. Scarce and expensive childcare, along with irregular and unreliable transportation, often complicate attempts to balance work and family life. This is especially the case in rural areas where there are limited transportation options available. According to the World Bank [15], limited

transport choices prevent many women from accessing jobs available outside their immediate communities, which in turn denies them access to a wider job market and limits their economic growth. Besides, a lot of firms do not have flexible conditions of work, hence making life even more complicated for women with family obligations. Higher absenteeism and job insecurity associated with inflexible working arrangements tend to hit women particularly hard in the lowly paid, lower-level positions. Despite calls for flexibility at work, the Women in the Workplace report [16] shows many companies cutting back on such benefits, with women with caring responsibilities being hit hardest.

2.7 Discrimination and gender bias

Gender discrimination influences the ability to recruit, salaries, and promotion of women, especially in men's dominated fields in Albania. This bias often creates fewer job opportunities for women and lower wages [1, 2]. Deep-seated cultural expectations about gender roles mold the work landscape for women in Albania and create various barriers to career advancement and job security. For example, research by the EBRD [2] highlights the societal attitude as one of the critical deterrents to women's inclusion in the economy and hinders them from getting sufficient chances to build a stable, fulfilled career. Albanian women generally receive lower wages than men; this is a problem long in existence that places limitation on their financial independence and career growth [11].

2.8 Limited access to financial resources and networking

Women with lower levels of education often face barriers to accessing networks and mentoring programs that support their career development. Organizations such as GADC emphasize that the Internet is essential to help women integrate into the labor market [10]. In addition, many women, especially those with less education, face economic exclusion. According to EBRD [2], a large part of Albanian women does not have access to formal financial services in a position to enable them to save, invest, or start a business. All these challenges are further compounded by the lack of financial literacy in either accessing loans or opportunities to improve their financial situation. While many initiatives focus on promoting women's entrepreneurship, in INSTAT [17] discovered that complicated application procedures and a lack of awareness often lead to business opportunities being out of reach for less qualified women. It is through streamlining these processes and offering focused support that new avenues toward economic independence and empowerment will become accessible.

2.9 Economic challenges faced by low-education women during the COVID-19 pandemic

The economic setbacks brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have lingered on, especially among women with lower education levels who were involved in informal jobs. The economic shutdowns cost women jobs, cut hours in industries like hospitality and retail that employ large numbers of vulnerable workers, along with those engaged in informal work. Lockdowns and financial instability made a dire situation worse, particularly for women of low-income groups. According to the World Bank [15], these job losses increased

financial fragility, hence a need for targeted support to facilitate women's recovery. The pandemic increased caregiving needs as a result of the closure of schools and childcare facilities. Many women had to face reduced income and increased caregiving burdens—especially household heads and those in rural areas. Some women, out of economic necessity, had to work in unsafe conditions despite their low level of attainment and limited choices.

2.10 Economic barriers

The challenge facing Albanian women with low to medium education is economic inequality. Many are overrepresented in low-wage agriculture, retail, and unskilled-labor sectors, exposing them to job insecurity, limited benefits, and little opportunity for advancement. In 2022, rural women generally lacked legal protection and were not assured job security since they participated more often than others in the informal economy [18]. According to UN Women Albania [18], while informal work may ensure a certain level of income in the short run, it puts women in a vulnerable position—that is, exploited without long-term financial security. This vicious circle of economic dependence hardly allows the targeted women to break loose and free themselves into better-paid jobs with financial independence and opportunities.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology describes a focused qualitative approach to examining the challenges faced by women in employment through personal narratives to offer insights in the matter. This study aims to enhance the understanding of gender, education, and workplace discrimination so that more support systems and less discriminatory policies for women can be advocated. To capture these experiences, the study adopts a qualitative research design centered around interviews. By listening to women's stories, the research seeks to better understand how education levels intersect with personal and professional challenges, including discrimination and job stability.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which allowed us to intentionally choose individuals who could provide rich, relevant, and diverse insights into the study's focus. The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Women aged 18 or older;
- Experience in the labor market (either currently employed, previously employed, or seeking employment);
- Willingness to share their personal and professional experiences;
- The research will include interviews with three women, coming from different backgrounds, representing different levels of education and work experiences:
 - A woman with a limited formal education who has had difficulties in her employment.
 - A head of household with a moderate level of education, facing job instability and financial stress.
 - A woman who is a medium educated and has had been discriminated against in her job.

Participants were identified through community connections, social networks, and referrals from individuals working with vulnerable groups. Data have been collected using semi-structured interviews—a technique that introduces

flexibility but retains a focus on key themes. Interviews will explore the following: background and personal history of participants, work history and current employment status, workplace discrimination or prejudice, the hardships they encounter while finding and maintaining jobs, their usual coping strategies and support systems, hopes and expectations for the future.

Each interview was conducted in an environment that was comfortable for the participants: either in person or via video conferencing. The conversations, which lasted from 45 minutes to an hour, allowed time for sufficient discussions. All participants gave informed consent and confidentiality was assured by anonymizing data.

The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is well-suited for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. The analytical steps were: transcription, familiarization with the transcripts to gain a deep understanding of the content, review and interpretation in the context of the study's aims.

4. INTERVIEWS

4.1 First interview

We had the opportunity to speak with a woman who has a limited education during our first interview. She showed some difficulties, at the beginning, talking about her experiences in the job market. Her story highlights the difficult reality that many women in similar situations face, shedding light on the systemic barriers that continue to restrict their career opportunities. She emphasized right away how difficult it is to find respectable employment without a college degree. She described how many employers give preference to applicants with degrees, saying, "It's like there's an invisible barrier." "I am aware of my abilities and experience, but I frequently feel marginalized simply because I lack documentation to support it." This feeling is quite common among women in similar situations, who frequently sense that potential employers overlook their hands-on experience. One concern she highlighted was job insecurity. She often finds herself in temporary or part-time positions that provide minimal benefits or stability, resulting in a work environment that is both erratic and stressful. "I feel like I can't make any plans for the future since I don't know if I'll have any work next month." This uncertainty makes it really difficult to balance her everyday expenditures and recognize any type of economic stability. Saving for significant goals, such as retirement or purchasing a home, feels like an unattainable dream when she can't rely on a consistent paycheck. The difficulties don't end there; her work life is further complicated by her family obligations. She was honest in her discussion of the conventional expectations that are imposed on women, particularly those who are caregivers. "I frequently feel torn between my family and my work," she remarked. "I'm grappling with the heartbreaking reality that I may have to let go of a wonderful opportunity because my children need me at home. It's tough knowing that the lack of supportive policies or flexible work options at my job makes this choice even harder. I'm torn between my desire to advance my career and my commitment to being there for my family." Not only is this juggling act exhausting, but many women are too familiar with the ongoing emotional strain it causes. She also emphasized the lack of opportunities for professional development as a major obstacle. She expressed

her frustration by saying, “I want to learn and grow, but there just aren’t enough resources available for people like me.” Without access to training programs tailored to people with her background, she felt trapped in low-paying jobs. “How can I break out of this cycle if I can’t improve my skills?” she asked, illustrating a common dilemma faced by many women who want to build a better future. Throughout our conversation, her determination was clear in spite of these challenges. She described excitedly her efforts to find new learning opportunities, often through community projects or web resources. “I’ve learned how important it is to have people around you who lift you up,” she said. It was the encouragement and resources from friends, as well as local organizations and community groups around her, that propelled her to move ahead. “I know I can’t do this alone,” she said, emphasizing the importance of community in her journey. Her story provides a powerful reminder of the urgent need for change in the job market. She thinks that implementing more accessible training programs and inclusive policies could greatly help women like her, allowing them to succeed professionally and enhance their quality of life. She said, “I wish there were more opportunities for people who want to learn and work hard.” Her experiences represent a larger issue that face many women with low to medium levels of education. It is an appeal for us all to support a fairer labor market where everyone has an equal opportunity to thrive. She represents the spirit of all those women that work towards a better future with tenacity and determination. Her story highlights our shared responsibility to foster an atmosphere in which all individuals, regardless of background, can prosper.

4.2 Second interview

We had the opportunity of having a sincere talk with a woman who was the primary provider for her family and was aware of the intricate duties involved in being a devoted mother. Having a medium level of education, she has encountered many obstacles in the workplace and has felt the weight of balancing work and family obligations. From the beginning, she shared her educational background, though it helped her secure basic positions, often feels more like a barrier than a bridge to better opportunities. “It’s frustrating,” she explained. “Even with my experience, I often find myself competing against candidates with higher degrees. It appears that my credentials are insufficient, although I am certain that I am capable of doing the work.” This fact has made looking for a job especially challenging. In an attempt to support her family, she has applied for jobs that don’t fit her goals or skills. She is under a great pressure as the head of the household. She held several part-time jobs, all of which require long hours and left her exhausted at the end of the day. She admitted, that there are days when her energy levels were significantly low, making it difficult to maintain productivity. She confessed, “I get up early to prepare the kids for school, then I head off to work, and when I come home, I start working on homework and dinner right away.” From her voice, it is obvious the tiredness but the love for her children and her commitment to support them fuels her determined effort. Her unstable employment is a major obstacle. She is constantly worried about her financial future because many of the positions she has taken on are temporary or part-time. “There’s this fear of not knowing if I’ll have enough hours next week or if I’ll even have a job,” she shared. She suffers greatly from the uncertainty, which has an impact on her mental and financial

well-being. As an example of the stress that comes with living paycheck to paycheck, she acknowledged, “I lie awake at night, worrying if I’ll be able to pay the bills or if an emergency will throw everything off balance.” Her strength is evident in spite of these challenges. She wants to expand her education in order to increase her chances of finding employment. Lack of reasonably priced training programs hinders her goals. “I want to better myself, but every time I consider returning to school, the expenses and the time it would take away from my children overwhelm me,” she said. She feels trapped in a circle and she does not see an apparent way out. Thus, she finds it tough to strike a balance in her life. Community support plays a significant role in her life. She talked about her friends and family and highlighted that they prop each other up to battle life’s challenges. She fought in her eyes as she made the statement, “From childcare to job leads to only a listening ear when it hurts,” thinking about the thought of her family and friends who support her. Letting her know she isn’t going it alone—struggling—such support does more than lend its usefulness but breeds hope when everything seems lost. At the end her experience illustrates the difficulties encountered by several women in comparable circumstances. She is concerned about giving her kids a better life. She strongly emphasizes for her children the value of having access to opportunities and education that she was denied. She speaks about this, showing her dedication: “I want them to dream big and not feel limited by their circumstances.” Her experiences have highlighted the need for job training and educational resources for women like her: head-of-households with limited educational backgrounds trying to make ends meet. Her life is an example of tenacity and determination, showing the strength so many women have. She is certain that with the right help, she will be able to build a better life for herself and her children.

4.3 Third interview

We had an open discussion with a woman who has experienced severe discrimination in her career, primarily because of her lack of education. As she told her story it became clear how profoundly these experiences have influenced her life and goals. She has faced many challenges that many people might not consider in the modern workforce. She said, draped in the expression that conveys the anger that comes with marginalization, “My education often makes me feel like I am lacking.” She has been in her field for years, but she is often overlooked for senior positions and development opportunities. “Because of their degrees, I have watched colleagues with less experience get promoted. “I just think it’s so unfair,” she said, referring to how this affected her motivation and ambitions. Delving deeper into her past, she told about particular moments that had a profound impact on her self-assurance. “I once applied for a supervisory position for which I was certain of my qualifications. Even though I was qualified and experienced, I was passed over for this position by someone with less practical experience. They told me they simply didn’t think someone with my background could handle it when I asked for feedback. The emotional impact that such rejections have had on her voice was evident from the obvious remorse in her voice. It was a blow to my self-esteem. I’ve worked hard, and to be told I’m not capable because of my education? I was deeply impacted by it. Her self-doubt has persisted as a result of these experiences. With a hint of vulnerability in her voice, she acknowledged, “I often question myself and start to wonder if this is the career path

for me or if I should just take something less.” The constant questioning has taken a toll on her mental health. “Some days, it feels like I am against an invisible wall. It’s fatiguing,” she confided, and she was pointing to the psychological toll that discrimination at work can take on a person. Her difficulties are made worse by her financial instability. Her educational background limits her employment options, which keeps her in low-paying jobs. “I want my children to have better life, but it hard for me, I can hardly live, she said, voice determined but tinged, too, with desperation. I dream of a stable home, of a future when they won’t have to think about money, and yet that feels so far away.” She wants more for her children and that keeps her wanting to better her situation, but it really feels like she is fighting an uphill battle sometimes. Although she struggles with a lack of easily accessible resources, her strong desire for both professional and personal growth is sincere. “For people like me, I wish there were more programs that offered training or skill development,” she said. “I want to learn and grow, but it’s hard to find the right opportunities.” It’s frustrating to see others move ahead and myself still stuck at the same place. The quote reveals that systemic barriers have prevented her from career advancement. Community, however, has become a vital source of support for her. With a smile in her face, she added, “My friends and family have been my lifeline. They push me to keep moving forward even when I feel like I’m losing and remind me that I’m worth it.” This sense of solidarity not only offers helpful advice but also builds resilience, enabling her to overcome the obstacles she encounters on a daily basis. As our conversation drew to a

close, she expressed a heartfelt wish for change—not just for herself, but for all women facing similar hurdles. She fervently stated, “I want to see workplaces where everyone has a fair shot, regardless of their education level.” “Everyone should have the opportunity to prove themselves. We should stop focusing on just the degrees but instead start to see that potential.” In a society where formal qualifications can overshadow talent and hard work, the desire for inclusion and equality creates an emotional connection. Her experience is a powerful reminder of the ongoing obstacles that many low-educated women face in the workplace. It highlights how urgently inclusive laws and support networks are needed in order to remove these barriers and enable people to thrive on the basis of their abilities rather than their academic credentials. Her story is one of perseverance, demonstrating the strength and determination of women who do not allow their education to define them. Through her story, we are inspired to take action in support of a more equal workplace for all.

5. FINDINGS AND COMPARISON ACROSS THE INTERVIEWS

The interviews reveal both similarities and differences in the experiences of Albanian women with low to medium levels of education as they navigate employment challenges covered in detail below. Table 1 summarizes the participant demographics from the three interviews.

Table 1. Summary of the participant demographics from the three interviews

| Participant | Educational Level | Age Range | Family Situation | Employment Status | Key Challenges | Support Systems |
|------------------|-------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| First Interview | Limited Education | 40-50 | Caregiver for children | Temporary/part-time work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Job insecurity ○ Lack of professional development opportunities ○ Difficulty finding stable work responsibilities. ○ Balancing work and family. Financial insecurity | Friends, community groups, local organizations |
| Second Interview | Medium Education | 30-40 | Primary provider for her family | Part-time unstable employment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of affordable training programs ○ Low energy from exhaustion | Family, friends, emotional support from community |
| Third Interview | Limited Education | 30-40 | Mother, primary provider | Low paying discriminatory work environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Discrimination based on education ○ Limited opportunities for career advancement ○ Financial instability | Friends, family, community support |

5.1 Job insecurity and financial insecurity

Each woman expressed concern about job insecurity and the difficulty of managing finances with unreliable income confirming previous research that links informal work to economic vulnerability [18]. The first interviewee explained that she could not plan for her major life goals, such as retirement, since she had to rely on temporary or part-time jobs, which made her insecure about her future employment. The second interviewee, a woman who is the primary

breadwinner in her family, discussed how stressful it is to live from paycheck to paycheck and how anxious it feels to work multiple part-time jobs. Since this participant felt confined to low-paying jobs, which hindered her ability to attain financial security, the third interview also brought attention to financial instability. The women’s testimonies align with existing studies indicating that less-educated women are overrepresented in temporary, part-time, or informal work, often without social protections [19].

5.2 Educational limitations as barriers

All three women believed that their career advancement and employment opportunities were limited by their educational attainment. Previous studies state that education and employment choices of women are robustly linked to their reproductive and care roles [20].

As stressed during the first interview, employers often dismissed her practical life experience because she did not have formal education. Another woman also complained that after receiving vast experience, her qualifications continued being regarded as poor. In the third interview, the participant talked about how she felt frustrated and self-conscious because she was consistently passed over for promotions in favor of people with more degrees.

5.3 Societal norms and family responsibilities

Cultural expectations surrounding women's caregiving roles emerged as a critical obstacle to full labor market participation. Cultural proxies are important determinants, thus, to increase women's employment in Albania it is necessary to gradually change the traditional division of gender roles within the household [20]. This supports previous research documenting how patriarchal norms continue to shape women's labor force involvement in Albania [21]. Although they affected women differently, family obligations and conventional gender roles became common challenges. The first participant reported feeling "torn" between work and family because of caring responsibilities, notably due to a lack of flexible work opportunities. During the second interview, the woman tried to balance her roles of mother and primary breadwinner; she often felt exhausted from managing both roles. Although the third participant experienced these pressures to a slightly lesser degree, her experience at work was still impacted by societal expectations. Women's empowerment process is limited by the maintenance of an unbalanced division of care and domestic duties within families, with gender roles typical of traditional patriarchal societies [22].

5.4 Limited access to professional development and support networks

All interviewees expressed frustration at the lack of accessible opportunities for skills training and career development, echoing previous findings that vocational training programs remain out of reach for many rural or low-income women [23]. The lack of easily accessible opportunities for skill development was a source of frustration for each woman. They all wanted to develop their skills, but financial and programmatic barriers prevented them from doing so. All of them understood the need of support systems. Friends, family, and local community connections provided emotional and practical support that was crucial in helping them cope with the challenges they faced.

5.5 Unique experiences of discrimination and self-doubt

Although the three women all experienced difficulties in the workplace, the third interviewee mentioned her educational background as a strong case of workplace discrimination. She discussed particular cases of exclusion in promotion that made her doubt herself and challenge her skills—less clear in the

other two interviews. Her experience highlights how educational prejudices might exacerbate the psychological load on women aiming for professional development. While previous studies have noted labor market discrimination broadly, this interview underscores how such exclusion can lead to self-doubt and internalized inferiority, compounding the barriers to professional development [24]. These interviews revealed that although Albanian women with low or medium education face many common problems, the impact of these problems varies according to individual circumstances, such as family roles, work patterns, and personal adaptability. The combination of shared struggles and unique experiences points to the need for more inclusive employment policies that address the social and economic barriers of this group.

5.6 Policy and practice implications

The findings call for policy measures to eliminate structural and social barriers. On the one hand, education and vocational training schemes should be made available through subsidization, local outreach, and the installation of childcare facilities. On the other hand, official recognition of informal skills and common sense in recruitment practice could facilitate exclusion based on credentials alone. Thirdly, labor market policies need to guarantee the creation of flexible, secure, and family-friendly employment opportunities that enable women to combine work and childcare.

5.7 Limitations and areas for future research

This study draws on a small qualitative sample and thus may be under representative of the whole range of experience for Albanian women with low to medium education levels. Though the interviews provide rich depth, future studies that employed mixed-methods designs that included larger urban and rural area surveys could measure and generalize from these findings.

6. CONCLUSION

This article supports the argument that low or secondary educated Albanian women face serious obstacles in accessing and advancing in the labor market. As seen from the analysis, job opportunities, social expectations, and financial constraints have placed them in low-paid, part-time or informal positions.

Traditional gender norms play a critical role in shaping these outcomes. Women are frequently confined to caregiving roles and expected to prioritize family responsibilities over professional ambitions. As a result, many are limited to unpaid, informal, or low-wage work. These positions offer little to no income and minimal opportunities for advancement, reinforcing a cycle of economic dependence and insecurity.

The gap is that the required skills by the employers are not met by the qualifications of these women. Most formal sector jobs require such skills which are hard to be acquired without higher education. Yet, vocational training programs—which could help bridge this gap—remain inaccessible to many women, especially due to financial and geographical constraints. Thus, it puts them in a no-win situation where the cycle of limited choices exacerbates economic dependence.

Without policies that would grant flexible working hours or

cheaper child care, this becomes impossible to handle; the outcome is often falling into informal or part-time jobs with very little security. Most of the women employed in low-wage sectors have poor benefits and limited protection such as health insurance and pensions.

Economic fragility further worsens these problems. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted these vulnerabilities, as women in precarious work face a loss of income, exacerbating their financial insecurity and reducing their chances of secure employment.

Future research could expand the understanding of the employment challenges of Albanian women with low to moderate education by expanding the sample size to include more participants from different regions and backgrounds (perhaps through a comprehensive survey). Structural questionnaires can perceive broader experiences and quantitatively identify factors such as stable work, access to training and social expectations for the impact of career development.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Short-term interventions for immediate impact and feasibility:

Flexible work selection: Especially important for women with limited family support. It is imperative that government and private sector organizations institute policies that favor flexible working hours or distant choices, especially in cases where there is limited support from the parents. This flexibility could afford women an opportunity to balance work with care responsibilities and thereby expand their opportunities in the labor market.

Awareness campaigns: The local government, community leaders, and the media should advocate for gender equality in employment through community engagement and campaigns that challenge stereotypes perceived to hinder women's career choices. Reinforcing the practice of equality policies can help in reducing partiality during hiring and make the workplace more inclusive. Those campaigns can be launched quickly and cost-effectively by local governments and NGOs.

Peer Support Groups: Easy to organize and maintain with minimal resources. Support Groups can be so helpful and vital for women who face the balance between working life and life; it secures the sense of society and gives them the opportunity for sharing overcoming strategies. For women with less resources or limited education, peer networks offer practical support and reduces the sensations of isolation, promoting persistence and mutual assistance.

Long-term interventions which consist in systematic change and sustainable outcomes:

Access to vocational skills training: Collaboration between educational institutions, NGOs and government agencies in order to concentrate efforts to improve access to vocational training targeting women with poor education and those living in the rural areas. Programs in IT, nursing and other high shortage areas can solve placement problems by linking with employers [18].

Promote formal employment: Involves legislative or policy changes and employer incentives. Politicians and employers should support measures to achieve formal employment in sectors where women have traditionally been employed. Increasing formal job opportunities would improve job security, benefits and social protection for women, helping to

reduce dependence on informal work.

Support for women entrepreneurs: Requires structural financial reforms and mentoring. Financial institutions, government agencies, and entrepreneurship programs should increase women entrepreneurs' access to financial support and mentoring. For women with limited education, it will be easier to start their own business by simplifying access to loans and grants.

Adventive childcare and family support: Infrastructure and funding takes time to develop. Expansion of access to affordable childcare and family services can help relieve caregiving presidential burdens, thus enabling more women to seek stable employment without compromising family responsibility.

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