

A contested terrain: Re/conceptualising the well-being of homeworkers

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Abstract

Disenchantment with traditional income-based measures of well-being has led to the search for alternative measures. Two major alternative measures of well-being come from subjective well-being research and the objective capability approach. The capability approach has been largely discussed in the context of development studies and economics and is mainly used within quantitative frameworks, but it also raises many questions that are worthy of discussion from a sociological perspective as well. This study opts for a qualitative approach to transpose capability approach in order to assess the well-being of female homeworkers in the football industry of Pakistan. The aim of this empirical research is to focus on the capabilities of homeworkers in accessing economic, individual, social and psychological aspects of well-being.

JEL Codes: Z1

Keywords

Capability approach, decent work, home-based work, informal economy, well-being

Introduction

‘Well-being’ is often used, in ordinary life, to refer to a good or satisfactory condition of existence. Social scientists have long struggled to characterise and measure the most

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significant set of factors leading a good or satisfactory life. However, there is no unanimous definition of well-being and those involved in debates about quality of life hold different intellectual positions. In traditional resource-based economic approaches, well-being is considered analogous with income and consumption levels. Welfarists argue that money and opportunities are not ends in themselves but means, assisting individuals to fulfil their preferences or to achieve various valuable conscious states. Consequently, well-being is conceptualised subjectively (Moss, 2013).

Recent disenchantment with narrow income-based approaches or utility/welfare-based approaches to well-being has led to a search for alternatives. Two such alternatives are subjective well-being research and the capability approach (Binder, 2013). Measures of subjective well-being are multidimensional and count the individual's own aggregate judgement of his or her life situation. By contrast, according to Sen's capability approach, quality of life is best understood in terms of what people can do or be (Qizilbash, 2002). For Sen (1983), freedom and agency to choose have an intrinsic value for a good life. The distinction between the notion of functionings (bare achievements) and capabilities (opportunity or freedom) deserves attention. Therefore, within Sen's framework, any account of human well-being can be seen in the evaluative space of capabilities or functioning (Clark, 2005; Naz, 2016).

Both the subjective well-being and the capability approach have their own strengths and some demerits when considered on their own. Exclusive focus on subjective well-being narrows down the informational space to assess human well-being. The capabilities approach, on the contrary, broadens the information base by focusing not only on outcomes but also on agency and a person's substantive opportunities. However, the underspecified nature of capability (Orton, 2011) has raised some methodological concerns regarding the application of the capabilities approach. Given such a wide range of conceptualisations, any empirical investigation must first develop a set of criteria for making sense of human well-being (McGillivray and Clarke, 2006).

Drawing on field data from the football-manufacturing industry of Sialkot, Pakistan, this study seeks to contribute to the well-being debate by looking more deeply into the living realities of female home-based workers at the lowest end of football supply chains. It contends that an integrated approach informed by Sen's concept of capability may provide a better framework to conceptualise and evaluate well-being than traditional preference-based approaches. The argument is illustrated by empirical data collected through a case study of a football-manufacturing supply chain in Pakistan.

The capability approach has been discussed largely in the context of development studies and economics and is mainly used within quantitative frameworks, but it raises many questions that are worthy of discussions from a sociological perspective as well (Orton, 2011). There is also a tradition of using the capability approach as an analytical method in qualitative research (Zimmermann, 2006), which may add value in a better appreciation of complex social issues by uncovering individual assumptions and expectations (Hollywood et al., 2012). Sen's (1983) focus on individual capabilities brings back the 'whole person' (Carpenter, 2009) as a focal point of empirical investigation, suggesting a greater role for qualitative approaches in order to gain deeper insight into individual motivations and attitudes. This study opts for a qualitative case study methodology, applying the capability approach to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of homeworkers about their work and associated well-being?
2. Does home-based work enhance the well-being of female homeworkers?

The article is organised in six major parts. The second part, following this introduction, elaborates a theoretical framework. The third part is a discussion on the procedural method used to draw up a list of context-specific relevant capabilities used for the empirical investigation. The fourth part comprises major findings and the fifth part is a discussion of the various dimensions of well-being, supported by evidence from the empirical data. The sixth and final section provides a synthesis of conclusions on the well-being of female homeworkers.

Theoretical terrain

Production in 21st century industrial capitalism is not just carried out in large factories, but also in small and informal industrial units, workshops and homes (Freeman, 2004). In this process of decentralisation, home-based work has become the endpoint of many global and local supply chains. One of the most vulnerable and least visible groups in global supply chains is that of female industrial homeworkers in developing countries, as they deal with intermediary sub-contractors rather than their 'real' employers at the top of the global manufacturing chain (Lund-Thomsen et al., 2012).

The term 'homeworking' is a broad term that covers a wide range of economic activities performed in various temporal, occupational and domestic contexts (Wapshott and Mallett, 2012). Traditionally, the term 'homeworker' was used for the category of workers involved in manual tasks such as knitting and sewing. In reality, homework is more heterogeneous in nature and there are some basic differences among the types of occupations and workers falling under the category of homeworkers (Tietze et al., 2009). Different groups of individuals are engaged in different types of homework under diverse employment conditions and a variety of terminologies are used interchangeably in the literature to describe homework, for example, industrial homework, piece rate work, home-based work, homeworking and home production. The research reported here mainly focused on piece rate industrial homeworkers and opted for the following definition of homework in the ILO (1996) convention on homework:

Work carried out by a person in his or her own home or in other premises of his or her own choice, other than the work place of the employer, for remuneration; which results in a product or surveys as specified by the employer, irrespective of who provides the equipment, materials or other inputs used, unless this person has the degree of economic independence necessary to be considered an independent worker under national laws, regulation or court decisions.

Research reported internationally provides ample evidence that women are overrepresented in homework (Barrientos, 2013; Burchielli et al., 2014; Felstead et al., 2000; Freeman, 2004). Many empirical studies have explored the reasons for, and the consequences of, bringing paid work into the typically private realm of the household. According to Rani and Unni (2009), women prefer to perform paid work at home in order to avoid the fixed costs of working on site and to gain flexibility. However, this

notion of flexibility has been strongly contested (e.g. Tietze et al., 2009). It is also suggested that social structures and the contractual underpinning of intra-household decision-making constrain women's entry into the public sphere and limit their occupational choices.

Sullivan and Lewis (2001) argue that women choose to perform homework as a way of combining paid work and family responsibilities. They assert the potential of homeworking to facilitate changes in traditional gendered roles and promote a more equal division of labour in homeworking households. However, it is important to test these claims against evidence, so far relatively under-investigated, concerning the well-being of homeworkers. Relatively little is known about the ways in which homework is experienced and made sense of by homeworkers. This article seeks to contribute to these discussions by conceptualising and evaluating the well-being of homeworkers. This article adopts a nuanced understanding of the concept of well-being by offering an integrated approach to measure well-being that is informed by Sen's capabilities approach.

Capability approach and human well-being: Challenges and prospects

The capabilities approach has brought a paradigm shift within the field of economic development, moving away from economic growth to human well-being as a focal point in development discourse and fully meeting with the claim for interdisciplinary discourse (Bögenhold, 2017). Although Sen (1983, 1990, 1993) has not given a definitive list of capabilities, he has made reference to fundamental capabilities, including basic liberties such as freedom of movement, freedom of association and freedom of occupational choice against a background of diverse opportunities. He has also included positions of responsibility in political and economic institutions, income and wealth and the social basis of self-respect. Seen from Sen's perspective, well-being is about the expansion of capabilities, that is an increase in human well-being by expanding the range of choices about what a person can be and do, such as to be healthy and well-nourished, to be knowledgeable, and participate in community life. Sen's capability approach is a perspective that respects human diversity in the assessment of well-being.

However, this stance by the capability approach on human diversity poses serious challenges in applying the approach in the assessment of well-being. The existence of empirical diversity renders generalisations less obvious, but any selection of capabilities implies making generalisations and comparisons. And yet, one of the most daunting tasks in applying the capabilities approach for empirical analysis is deciding which capabilities are most relevant, as there is a wide range of human capabilities and their relevance or value varies with the social context – from one community or country to another, and from one point of time to another. Despite these methodological issues and concerns, the capability approach has been applied in a number of empirical studies in a variety of disciplines (Biggeri and Ferrannini, 2014; Hollywood et al., 2012; Trani et al., 2013; Zimmermann, 2006).

Major debates in the literature revolve around questions of how to measure capability (Clark, 2005; Robeyns, 2003, 2005) and which capabilities to measure (for a detailed discussion, see Naz, 2016). In order to draw up a capabilities list to assess well-being,

some critical questions need to be asked, for example, who decides on the content of this list, what kind of choice processes are used and how are discordant opinions treated? Unlike other approaches based on subjective welfare, in the capabilities approach, 'each person's own perception of well-being could not be the basis of social choice due to the problem of preference-deformation' (Nussbaum, 2000: 8). Clark (2005) put it concisely when he said that meaningful results are not guaranteed, even through this consultative process. It is argued that poor communities and individuals might be lacking the necessary knowledge and experience to make informed value judgements about alternative lifestyles. Consequently, their preferences adapt to match the circumstances or are distorted through indoctrination.

Although the application of a procedural approach may also eventually lead us to a similar capabilities list to those already provided in the literature, such an approach will nonetheless provide legitimacy to the process of deriving it (Robeyns, 2003, 2005); Therefore, while specifying a list of capabilities, the underlying motivation and social values must be taken into account. For Sen, each list of capabilities must be context-specific and the context is both the geographical locality to which it applies, as well as the type of assessment that is carried out (Robeyns, 2003).

Procedural approach: Context-specific list of relevant capabilities

There is an intense debate in existing literature regarding how the capability approach might apply in empirical research (Robeyns, 2003, 2005); one of the issues is how to measure capabilities in empirical research rather than just looking at functioning, because it is relatively easy to observe the outcome of choices one has made, but it is difficult to observe the options and freedom one has to make these choices (Hollywood et al., 2012). Consequently, the fundamental question is how to evaluate freedom and opportunity for choice. This is because, in order to measure capabilities, we have to look at the opportunity to achieve something (such as work or education) rather than the actual outcome of that choice (e.g. a job or a qualification). The second important concern is the selection of relevant capabilities.

Whether to employ a subjective or an objective method to determine which capabilities are most valuable in measuring human well-being is a matter of great concern. This research opts for a procedural approach (Robeyns, 2003, 2005), in order to measure the well-being of female homeworkers. Following Robeyns (2003, 2005), a context-specific list of relevant capabilities was drawn up in three stages. First, based on a review of literature, a comparison was drawn between various accounts of well-being (see Table 1) in order to identify some shared bedrock. Four major perspectives were used to identify relevant capabilities, namely, the capabilities list associated with Amartya Sen (1983) and by Martha Nussbaum (2000, 2003), the prudential value list theories associated with James Griffin (1996) and the views involving 'basic goods' associated with John Finnis (1979).

Common ground among various lists of needs, capabilities and prudential values is identified in existing literature (Qizilbash, 2002). All four perspectives are primarily concerned with the quality of life of human beings and they share the belief that, despite

Table 1. Summary table.

S.no.	Finnis' (1980) basic goods	Sen (1983)	Griffin's (1996) prudential values	Martha Nussbaum (2000, 2003)
1	Life	Being able to live long	Accomplishment	Living a long life
2	Play	Entertaining family and friends	Enjoyment	Being able to laugh and play
3	Knowledge	Being able to read, write and communicate	Understanding	Being able to imagine and reason
4	Sociability	Taking part in community life	Deep personal relations	Being able to make an attachment to other persons

differences among cultures and individuals, there is a possibility to find a common ground of human interest. All these intellectual positions endorse a plurality of components of well-being. A comparison of these lists reveals that despite some disagreement about particular items, there are some points of convergence as well. For analytical convenience, a summary table of overlapping areas is drawn from the existing lists (see Table 2). This sort of convergence suggests that although these lists might be operating at different levels of concern with human well-being, there is a possibility of reconciliation because foundational concepts are overlapping. Qizilbash (2002: 474–475) has separated these levels as means for a good life (needs, primary goods and resource), opportunities and abilities for leading a good life (capability), the value types that constitute a good life (prudential values/ basic goods) and valuable functioning constitutive of a good life.

Following Sen's capabilities approach in which he advocated that people should have freedom to formulate their own list of capabilities, a list of capabilities was also drawn up in consultation with football stitchers at various nodes of the football supply chain. This list was compiled based on four focus group discussions conducted in Sialkot and its surrounding villages. Data gathered from focus group discussions were recorded and later on transcribed for the purpose of analysis. Each focus group discussions lasted approximately 60 minutes. After line by line open coding of transcribed data, major capabilities were identified. Eight major indicators of well-being were identified after analysis of data gathered through the focus group discussions: income/living wage, job security, job satisfaction, health, children's education, work life balance, community perceptions and social network/support. For analytical purposes, these eight indicators are grouped into three main categories (Figure 1).

To deal with the issue of paternalism and distorted preferences, the list produced through this consultation process was compared with the list that was compiled from the convergence of existing lists. At the third stage, a new context-sensitive list of capabilities and functioning was developed to assess the well-being of female homeworkers (Table 2). This list was configured according to the research questions and thus the subject of the actual research. The list was also discussed with academic peers, including at an international conference, in order to gather feedback.

Based on a review of existing literature (Mehrotra and Biggeri, 2005) and informal discussions with various groups of football stitchers, both direct and indirect indicators

Table 2. Operationalisation of well-being of female homeworkers.

Well-being	Capabilities	Indicators for direct improvement and indirect improvement
Economic well-being	Income	<i>Increase in income</i> Prospects for increase in income in future
	Labour market participation	<i>Direct access to labour market</i> Possibility for future generations' labour market participation
	Social security	<i>Availability of social protection mechanisms (informal)</i> Improvement for future generations
	Credit	<i>Direct access to credit</i> Indirect access to credit
Individual well-being	Health	<i>Improvement in health</i> Awareness about health issues
	Education	<i>Knowledge has increased (literacy)</i> The possibility of raising this knowledge level for children has increased
	Nutrition	<i>Nutrition improved</i> Increased possibility for better nutrition
	Accommodation	<i>Adequate housing for family needs</i> Increase in income to afford better accommodation
	Domestic and non-market care work	<i>Decrease in care work</i> Prospects of getting access to market care
Social and psychological well-being	Social networks	<i>Increased participation in or creation of some types of social networks</i> Possibility of network creation
	Recreation	<i>Involvement in recreational activity</i> Possibility of future resources for recreation
	Empowerment	<i>Control over income, decision-making and mobility</i> Possibility of increased control in next/future generation(s)

of improvement in capabilities of homeworkers were identified. Direct indicators refer to immediate improvement, whereas indirect indicators mainly refer to the possibility of improvement in the future.

Methodology

There are many formidable difficulties and challenges in conducting research with a hard-to-reach population. This is especially true for female homeworkers, whose contributions are effectively veiled as part of their gender role obligations at the household level. In order to locate homeworkers, this research opted for an exploratory qualitative case study approach (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). This approach is useful to investigate contemporary issues in a real-life context (Yin, 2009). Demarcation of a bounded system

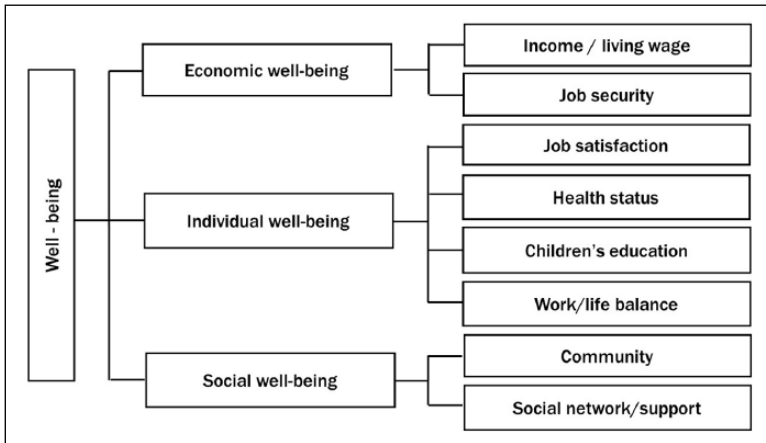


Figure 1. Well-being capabilities identified by female homeworkers.

is an important requirement of the case study approach: such a bounded system is provided by the football industry of Pakistan in this research. In this qualitative study of homework, the researcher assumes a relativist ontology, that realities are multiple and socially constructed. The epistemological stance adopted was that the researcher and participant co-create reality. This stance is built on anti-foundational arguments and connects action with the praxis that encourages multi-voiced texts (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Evidence came from a variety of resources: interviews, focus group discussions and observations. For the purpose of data triangulation, interviews were not limited to homeworkers and data were also collected from different groups of football stitchers. Data were collected in two phases. During the first phase, focus group discussions were conducted with football stitchers in order to draw a context-specific list of well-being capabilities. During the second stage of data collection, five narrative life history interviews were conducted in order to assess the well-being of female homeworkers. All these interviews were conducted at respondents' homes. Although the limited number of interviews limits the possibility of generalisation, narrative life history interviews nevertheless provide room for the exploration of complexity and interrelationships between respondents and the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2013).

Each interview lasted on average 90 minutes. While focusing on individual life stories, the aim of the narrative life history interviews was to consider how individual perspectives, preferences and orientations are influenced, constrained or enabled by the economic, cultural and institutional environment. These interviews provided detailed micro evidence. Interview participants were purposively selected on the basis of their experience, age and marital status. In terms of data analysis, all interviews were transcribed into English from the regional language. NVIVO 11, a qualitative software package, was used to bring together all the data, and for data indexing (Cambra-Fierro and Wilson, 2011). Two types of coding schemes were used. Descriptive coding was used to gather information about gender, exact or approximate age of respondents, and thematic

coding (for themes, see Table 2) was used to elaborate and evaluate the perceptions of homeworkers about their well-being.

Description of the field

The football production industry of Pakistan is an established name in the world of sports goods and is one of the most promising industries of Pakistan. This industry provides a livelihood to millions of people, either directly or indirectly. In Pakistan, there is a long tradition of hand-stitched football production. Football manufacturing in Sialkot dates back to the early 1900s, when Sialkot's leather working caste began to repair and later manufacture footballs for the large British colonial military garrison in Sialkot (Nadvi et al., 2011). Sialkot became a supplier of footballs across British India. Today, approximately 80%–85% of the high-quality hand-stitched inflatable ball production of the world originates from Sialkot. Until 1970, football stitching in Sialkot was mainly performed by male workers in small and medium-sized factories and workshops. Due to the introduction of stricter labour laws in 1972, manufacturers shifted more labour-intensive processes like hand stitching from factories to workers' homes, in order to circumvent the labour legislation.

This strategy led to the beginning of football stitching as a cottage industry in Sialkot. The trend was further facilitated due to the change of the key raw material in football production from natural to synthetic leather, which was easier to stitch. The decentralisation of football stitching resulted in a substantial growth of the industry and facilitated the entry of large numbers of female homeworkers, along with a smaller number of child workers, into ball stitching (Nadvi et al., 2011). Mainstream literature on homework holds strongly to the view that homeworkers are invisible and passive recipients or reactors in the global system of production organisation (Burchielli et al., 2008; Felstead et al., 2000; Freeman, 2004; Mehrotra and Biggeri, 2005). This article features accounts of homeworkers purposely selected to shed light on various factors that affect their sense of well-being. The underlying assumption is that individual life experiences are hard to divorce from the social context in which they are deeply embedded (Hill, 2001).

The narrative accounts of the participating women provided rich data that help understand the tensions and transformations encountered during the process of undertaking homework that falls short on most of the principles of decent work. By looking more deeply into the life world of homeworkers, we can gain a fresh perspective on the way the well-being of female homeworkers is conceptualised at the intersection of international global production and local social regimes.

Conceptualising well-being of homeworkers: Empirical evidence

A capability list drawn up through a procedural method (Table 2) was used as a benchmark and guiding principle to analyse the data gathered through narrative life history interviews. Although data generated by in-depth interviews is noisier and may not lead to generalisation, it nonetheless brings out the tensions and contradictions of real-life situations (Bathmaker and Harnett, 2010). In attempting to evaluate the well-being of

female homeworkers in the football-stitching industry, we look beyond material consumption, to explore the development of basic capabilities along three main but overlapping dimensions – individual, economic and socio-psychological well-being.

Economic well-being

The economic well-being of homeworkers was evaluated against the extracted capabilities list (Table 2). Interview data revealed that in terms of perceptions about economic well-being, the capability of labour market participation loomed larger than other capabilities in the coded contents of interviews. This capability was reflected through ability to participate in the labour market, in terms of not only actual achieved functioning (actual labour market participation) but also other possibilities that participants deemed relevant under the existing opportunity structure. For example, an interview participant narrated that her role as a mother and other gender role obligations were central to her identity, around which she constructed her experiences of labour market participation and thus made sense of her conduct and decisions.

Without education and formal skills training, choices to gain paid work were limited for female homeworkers. Most of the football-stitching homeworkers had been doing either hand embroidery or machine stitching for local community needs: football stitching was a new capability acquired through informal training mechanisms. This valuable acquired capability can also be described in terms of Griffin's prudential value (thing that make a distinctively human life go better) of accomplishment (value type). Homeworkers perceived that their capability in football stitching provided them with an opportunity to earn cash income for their families and gave them a sense of at least making something of their life. Their point of reference was provided by their other available options and past experiences:

It is good. When it's hard to manage (guzara) expenditure, people stitch footballs and this helps them to manage their expenditure. There is no other work in this area except football stitching. (Interview, 2016)

For homeworkers' families, football stitching was a regular source of income. Depending on the number of helping hands in a family, homeworkers were able to earn approximately 10,000–12,000 Pakistani Rupees (PKR) per month.¹ However, they incurred various other expenses that brought down their income, for example, they had to buy needles, wax, a wooden frame used for stitching footballs and a machine that is used for punching holes in football panels. Beside this direct expenditure, they also shared some other production costs by providing the space and energy used in production. As the majority of the respondents were living in a single-room house, space was an important issue for their family. One more factor that brings down their income was regular deductions that are made in terms of MURAMAT (repair money). There was no predefined criterion to check how and why these deductions were made. Homeworkers were told by the sub-contractor that their stitched ball was defective. Therefore, either it was rejected entirely or repair money was deducted from their wages.

Homeworkers interviewed during fieldwork reported that they were in a stable but informal working relationship with their sub-contractors. There are no social security mechanisms for homeworkers. Owing to a lack of alternatives and no fall-back position,

homeworkers were not in a position to bargain with their sub-contractors. Consequently, despite having long-term relations with the employers or sub-contractors, homeworkers at best can be categorised as casual labour. Homeworkers usually worked with the same sub-contractors even without a contract due to the cost associated with finding alternatives. There is an informal control system that governs the stable relationship between homeworkers and the sub-contractor community through ties such as a family's debt bondage (informal access to credit) or the provision of raw material. This stability of relationship is not balanced with good working conditions. Football stitchers have none of the benefits that are associated either with regular or casual labour (Mehrotra and Biggeri, 2005).

Although the piece rate has increased over the years, owing to inflationary pressure, this increase did not represent a real-term increase in family income. The income of young unmarried girls is subsumed under their parents' income and they jointly manage their family expenditure. They are barely able to survive and there is no possibility of saving. As they are not entitled to any formal social protection mechanisms, any emergency expenditure like medical expenditure can pose a serious challenge to the survival of the family. However, under the existing social and economic opportunity structure, football stitching – despite all associated challenges – was considered as the most viable option for respondents to generate income. The need for cash income along with social reproduction needs of the family made it hard for women to make their choices independently. Income generated from football stitching was reported to improve possibilities for comparatively better labour market opportunities for their children by providing them with a better education:

My first priority is to buy groceries, then pay the school fees of my children and then there are other expenditures like to buy stationery for the children etc. with my stitching income. (Interview, 2016)

Individual well-being

Five capabilities and associated functionings were extracted from the interviews to evaluate the individual well-being of female homeworkers: education, health, accommodation, nutrition, care work (domestic and non-market). The interview contents coded at the node of individual well-being show that education was most densely coded. The majority of the respondents strongly held the view that education is very important for individual well-being and a better life. They were passionate about providing education to their younger children to improve their life opportunities. Considering the income at the family's disposal, a major chunk of family income went towards children's education. That was somehow managed by football stitching:

Now I have no other desire but to provide education to my children so they can establish themselves in their lives... I would provide education to my children as much as they want... They will get an education and do some jobs. My children go to government school and somehow their school expenditure is managed from football stitching. (Interview, 2016)

In the absence of communal or market-based facilities for care work, all household care work was reported to be managed by women. In the case of married women,

household responsibilities were shared by other female members of the family. There was insufficient evidence to indicate that homework provides opportunities to change gender roles and relationships. In relation to opportunities for other forms of gainful employment for women, remuneration of homework can individually be seen as beneficial (Baylina and Schier, 2002; Burchielli et al., 2014). In terms of health capabilities, respondents reported health issues due to long hours of both paid and unpaid carework. Their working day is long and most of them complained about problems like obesity, back pain and stomach aches. However, they were constantly struggling to improve conditions for their families.

In evaluating their life, one point of reference for female homeworkers was their own childhood and family situation. Their involvement in paid work seems to have brought some positive changes in their life: for example, several respondents reported that income earned through football stitching had helped them to afford improved accommodation and nutrition. Many studies (Harris, 2003; Naz, 2017; Wapshott and Mallett, 2012) have documented the spatial issues that are caused by the potential overlap of work and non-work space. However, this gap between academic discourse and homeworkers' perceptions about their living conditions can be explained in terms of individual life circumstances.

Social and psychological well-being

To evaluate the social and psychological well-being of respondents, four major capabilities and associated functionings were identified: empowerment, being respected, recreation and social networks. In terms of social and psychological well-being, both positive and negative perceptions about the empowering potential of paid work and associated well-being were reported. Empowerment was operationalised into two overlapping domains, private and public. Participants' perceptions were coded more heavily in the domain of the private sphere, and positive and negative perceptions were tangled. Multiple intervening factors affect individual sense of well-being at various stages of a person's life.

In terms of some indicators of empowerment, like control over income, decision-making, sense of self-worth and mobility, respondents reported a relatively improved sense of self-worth as a result of their involvement in paid work. Although the income earned by football stitching was not by itself sufficient for the family's needs, entire families worked together and pooled their resources to manage the family budget. The female homeworkers' control over their terms and conditions of paid work was also very limited. They had no formal job contract; their bargaining power was limited owing to their dependence on sub-contractors for the provision of work. Their agency was further restricted by lack of marketable skills and the limited labour market opportunities for women in rural areas.

The working day of the homeworkers and the hours spent on homework reveal the error in considering it a flexible form of work. Women's paid productive work cannot be dissociated from their other daily activities. Women's involvement in paid work does not automatically translate into a revision of the gender contract (Sullivan and Smithson, 2007). Consequently, an inherent difficulty, calling for creativity, was involved in

combining paid work with the unpaid reproductive care work that female homeworkers were performing. In principle, it is assumed that homeworkers have more opportunities to organise their work independently, but such decisions are not without repercussions for their income and livelihood security. Homeworkers have limited flexibility in terms of total hours of work, and they cannot decide about the quantity and rhythm of their work without facing serious repercussion on their income and future employment opportunities (Baylina and Schier, 2002).

However, in terms of existing opportunities, female homeworkers perceived that working from home as football stitchers was a much more respected and safe option, compared to factory-based stitching in terms of benefits and associated social costs:

As you know boys go and then girls go there as well, then it's not good. Then you know about the social situation (Mahol)² That is why my family does not like that we go to the factories to work. We have to work at home, no matter whether we get more or less, or even if we die due to starvation. (Interview, 2016)

There are many home-based workers in this stitcher's village, but there was no effective co-ordination among them. They were not part of any formal or informal organisation of female homeworkers and no effective mechanism for collective bargaining existed. Their capability for recreation was limited and highly compromised in this extreme struggle for survival.

Discussion

Many existing studies on the changing nature of employment relations in the globalised world support the view that standard employment relations have largely been replaced by more insecure and flexible work arrangements (Campbell and Price, 2016). Such flexible employment practices hold serious implications for the labour force, with many workers working under precarious conditions. Precarious work exists across both formal and informal employment. However, precariousness and precarious work are most commonly studied in relation to developed economies (Campbell and Price, 2016; Kalleberg, 2011; Standing, 2011; Stewart and Stanford, 2017). The concept of precariousness has rarely been applied to homework (Burchielli et al., 2014) and homework is mainly discussed as informal work in the context of developing countries. It is documented in existing literature on homework that precariousness is one among several aspects of adverse job traits (Lewchuk, 2017). However, it is interesting to note that although industrial homework can be classified as precarious on various parameters (uncertain, unpredictable and risky), it is nonetheless highly valued by female homeworkers within their existing opportunity structure.

This study was designed to decipher this intellectual puzzle by investigating two major questions. First, what are the perceptions of homeworkers about their work and associated well-being? Second, does homework enhance the well-being of female homeworkers? The underlying assumption is that exploring the multiplicity of contexts in which female homework is performed could facilitate a holistic understanding of the uniqueness of women's position in the international division of labour. The study evaluates the well-being of female homeworkers in the informal economy by focusing on

inter-subjective conditions and experiences of work. By adopting a procedural approach, a three-dimensional scale of well-being was developed that was informed by Sen's capabilities approach. Well-being here is understood beyond just material consumption, but rather the well-being of homeworkers is evaluated in terms of the development of basic capabilities along three main but overlapping dimensions, namely, individual, economic and social and psychological well-being.

Empirical data gathered through qualitative interviews reveal that, as opposed to monism of values, the multidimensionality of well-being is a key red thread that runs through the life stories of homeworkers. Careful reading of Table 2 shows that most of the items that are included in the list are not mutually exclusive but are segregated here for analytical purpose. For example, capabilities like income and social security, which are associated with economic well-being, can help to improve individual capabilities like education or nutrition. It is evident from the analysis of the narrative data that the economic well-being of homeworkers has been enhanced through their involvement in paid work. No matter how low that income is, it has provided them with the means to cover some of their basic expenditures. Considering the context of Pakistan, where women lack marketable skills, the newly acquired capability to earn cash income is perceived as an achievement by respondents.

Data reveal that industrial homework has a double role in the lives of female homeworkers, involving frequent trade-offs between various capabilities. The response of female homeworkers on the three-dimensional scale (Table 2) of well-being supports the notion that homework enhances women's capabilities to earn cash income that in turn is not only a source of their self-worth and satisfaction but is a source of their enhanced well-being. In the context of their life world, income earning opportunities are reported to command more respect from their family members in general.

However, this subjective view of homeworkers should not be used to mask some clear disadvantages and a critical reduction in some basic capabilities faced by female homeworkers in the system of global production organisation. In line with the findings reported by Sullivan and Smithson (2007), the general notion of flexibility that provides space to workers to alter the timing, location or amount of paid work according to their personal preferences was challenged by the ways in which homeworkers experienced their paid activities at the interface of work and gender role obligations. Critical reductions in capabilities of health, recreation and social protection were also reported by the respondents. It is evident from the statements of respondents that in complex socially, economically and spatially embedded life stories of female homeworkers, their individual perception of well-being was highly tangled and multidimensional.

As opposed to the commonly held assumption of well-being that either focuses on the material aspect of well-being or subjective experiences of individuals, this study encompasses a broader definition of well-being informed by existing academic debates and inter-subjective experiences of work and well-being by giving voice to the concerns and experiences of homeworkers. The sense of well-being and the choices made by homeworkers are relational and not necessarily individualistic in the context of industrial home-based work performed by women in rural areas of Pakistan. Although income earned through homework is low, with many deficits of labour and human rights, from the workers' perspective this is still considered an improvement under their existing opportunity structure.

Concluding thoughts

Drawing in homeworkers' experiences, this article has argued for a more careful conceptualisation of well-being. It offers an integrated approach to measuring well-being that is informed by Sen's (1983, 1990, 1993) capabilities perspective. Qualitative and socio-logically informed analysis of data supports the notion that female labour is nested in a complex gendered social matrix in the global production organisation (Wilson, 2003). At first glance, it might seem odd that women's sense of well-being is enhanced by their involvement in a kind of work that at best could be described as precarious (Kalleberg, 2011) along various dimensions, including lack of job contract, low pay, absence of social security and no guarantee of work. However, the sense of well-being and the choices made by homeworkers are relational and not necessarily individualistic in the context of industrial home-based work performed by women in rural areas of Pakistan. While industrial homework is not negative per se, a lack of collective action and of support through public intervention is the major hurdle to realising its the full potential to contribute to well-being.

Considering the industrial organisation of the football industry, where homeworkers are mostly clustered in a specific geographical location, the possibilities of fostering human development are comparatively higher with the right institutional support, because this natural clustering reduces the transaction costs for any development initiative. The contribution of this research is to develop a context-specific capability list through a rigorous method that can be used in a variety of similar contexts to gather quantitative data as well. This research will hopefully initiate a critical re/examination of policies towards informal home-based work in various cross-cultural contexts and especially in the context of Pakistan and other developing countries.

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Notes

1. The minimum wage in Pakistan was 15,000. Factory stitchers are also paid per piece.
2. 'Mahol' is a local term used for the overall socio-cultural environment.

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