



A Comparative Analysis of Quality of Life in Working and Nonworking Women with Rheumatoid Arthritis: A Study on the Impact of Employment Status on Physical and Psychosocial Well-being

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Abstract

Introduction: Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a chronic autoimmune disease that predominantly affects women. The impact of employment status on the quality of life (QoL) of women with RA remains an important yet understudied area. This study aimed to compare the QoL in working and nonworking women with RA, focusing on the influence of employment status on their physical and psychosocial well-being.

Methods: This cross-sectional study involved a sample of women diagnosed with RA. Participants were divided into two groups: working women (employed either full-time or part-time) and nonworking women (unemployed or on long-term disability leave). QoL was assessed using validated questionnaires, including the Short Form-36 Health Survey (SF-36) and the Rheumatoid Arthritis Quality of Life Questionnaire (RAQoL). Data were analyzed using appropriate statistical methods, including t-tests and chi-square tests.

Results: A total of 200 women with RA participated in the study, with 100 in each group. The results showed significant differences in QoL between working and nonworking women. Working women reported higher scores on physical functioning, role limitations due to physical health, and mental health domains of the SF-36 compared to nonworking women. Furthermore, working women experienced lower levels of pain and fatigue, as well as greater social participation, according to the RAQoL scores.

Discussion: The findings suggest that employment status has a significant impact on the QoL of women with RA. Working women demonstrated better physical and psychosocial well-being compared to nonworking women. Potential explanations for these differences include the positive effects of regular physical activity, social support, and financial independence associated with employment. These findings underscore the importance of considering employment status when assessing the QoL of women with RA.

Conclusion: This study highlights the importance of considering employment status when assessing the QoL of women with RA. The findings suggest that working women with RA experience better overall QoL, emphasizing the potential benefits of continued employment

for individuals with this chronic condition. Further research should explore interventions and support mechanisms to enhance the QoL of nonworking women with RA.

Keywords: Rheumatoid arthritis, quality of life, employment status, working women, nonworking women, physical well-being, psychosocial well-being.

Introduction

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a chronic autoimmune disease characterized by joint inflammation, pain, and functional disability. Figure 1 shows the joint destruction by rheumatoid arthritis. It predominantly affects women, with a female-to-male ratio of approximately 3:1 ^[1]. RA has a profound impact on individuals' quality of life (QoL), affecting their physical, psychological, and social well-being ^[2].

Employment plays a vital role in the lives of individuals, providing financial security, a sense of purpose, and social interaction. However, for women with RA, the decision to continue working or leave employment due to their health condition can be challenging ^[3]. Understanding the impact of employment on the QoL of women with RA is essential for providing comprehensive care and support. However, limited research has focused on comparing the QoL of working and nonworking women with RA, specifically examining the influence of employment status on physical and psychosocial well-being. The impact of employment status on the QoL of women with RA remains an area of interest and requires further exploration.

The objective of this study was to compare the QoL in working and nonworking women with RA, focusing on the impact of employment status on their physical and psychosocial well-being. By understanding these differences, healthcare professionals can better support and guide women with RA in making informed decisions regarding their employment.

Methods

Study Design: A cross-sectional study design was employed to compare the QoL of working and nonworking women with RA. The study adhered to ethical guidelines and received approval from the institutional review board.

Participants: A sample of women diagnosed with RA was recruited from rheumatology clinics and support groups. Inclusion criteria consisted of being aged 18-65 years and having a confirmed diagnosis of RA. Participants were categorized into two groups: working women (employed either full-time or part-time) and nonworking women (unemployed or on long-term disability leave).

Data Collection: Participants completed a structured questionnaire that included demographic information, including age, marital status, education level and disease-related characteristics. QoL was assessed using two validated instruments: the Short Form-36 Health Survey (SF-36) and the Rheumatoid Arthritis Quality of Life Questionnaire (RAQoL). The SF-36 measures various dimensions of health-related QoL, including physical functioning,

role limitations due to physical health, mental health, and social functioning. The RAQoL assesses the impact of RA on daily life, focusing on pain, fatigue, emotional well-being, and social participation.

Statistical Analysis: Data were analyzed using appropriate statistical methods. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic and clinical characteristics of the participants. Continuous variables were compared using independent t-tests, while categorical variables were analyzed using chi-square tests. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

A total of 200 women with RA participated in the study, with 100 in each group (working and nonworking women). **Table 1** presents the demographic characteristics of the participants in the study. It includes information on age, marital status, education level, and disease duration for both working and nonworking women with rheumatoid arthritis. The mean age of the participants was 45.2 years (SD=8.6). The majority of participants were married (68%), had completed at least high school education (82%), and were diagnosed with RA for more than five years (76%).

The data tabulated in **Table 2** presents a comparison of QoL scores between working and nonworking women with rheumatoid arthritis. It includes various domains of QoL assessed using the SF-36 and RAQoL questionnaires. The p-values indicate the statistical significance of the differences between the two groups. The results indicated significant differences in QoL between working and nonworking women. Working women had significantly higher scores in the physical functioning ($p < 0.001$), role limitations due to physical health ($p = 0.003$), and mental health ($p = 0.017$) domains of the SF-36 compared to nonworking women. Moreover, working women reported lower levels of pain ($p < 0.001$) and fatigue ($p = 0.002$) and greater social participation ($p = 0.004$) according to the RAQoL scores. The **graph 1** visually represents the comparison of QoL domains between working and nonworking women with rheumatoid arthritis. Each QoL domain (e.g., physical functioning, role limitations due to physical health, mental health) is displayed on the x-axis, while the QoL scores are shown on the y-axis. The graph uses different colors or patterns to distinguish between working and nonworking women. This graphical representation helps visualize the differences in QoL domains between the two groups and provides a clear visual summary of the findings.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the significant impact of employment status on the QoL of women with RA. Working women demonstrated better physical and psychosocial well-being compared to their nonworking counterparts. The observed differences may be attributed to several factors.

First, regular physical activity associated with employment may have contributed to the higher physical functioning scores among working women. Engaging in physical activity has

been shown to improve joint mobility, reduce pain, and enhance overall physical health in individuals with RA ^[4].

Second, the positive influence of social support within the workplace may have contributed to better mental health and social functioning scores among working women. Workplace interactions and support from colleagues can contribute to a sense of belonging and emotional well-being ^[5].

Third, financial independence achieved through employment may alleviate stress and anxiety related to financial concerns, thus positively impacting overall QoL ^[6].

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the significant impact of employment status on the QoL of women with RA. Working women with RA reported better physical and psychosocial well-being compared to nonworking women. The findings highlight the potential benefits of continued employment for individuals with this chronic condition.

Healthcare professionals should consider employment status when assessing the QoL of women with RA and provide appropriate support and guidance regarding employment decisions. Further research should focus on developing interventions and support mechanisms to enhance the QoL of nonworking women with RA.

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Illustrations – (Tables, figures and Graphs)

Table1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Demographic Characteristics	Working Women (n=100)	Nonworking Women (n=100)
Age (years)	Mean: 43.6 (SD=7.8)	Mean: 46.8 (SD=8.2)
Marital Status		
- Married	70 (70%)	68 (68%)
- Single	20 (20%)	18 (18%)
- Divorced/Widowed	10 (10%)	14 (14%)
Education Level		
- High School	60 (60%)	58 (58%)
- Bachelor's Degree	30 (30%)	28 (28%)
- Master's Degree	10 (10%)	14 (14%)
Disease Duration (years)	Mean: 7.9 (SD=3.2)	Mean: 8.4 (SD=3.8)

Note: Percentages are calculated based on the total number of participants in each group.

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants in the study. It includes information on age, marital status, education level, and disease duration for both working and nonworking women with rheumatoid arthritis.

The age of participants is displayed as mean values with standard deviations (SD). Marital status is categorized into married, single, and divorced/widowed, with the corresponding frequencies and percentages. Education level is divided into high school, bachelor's degree, and master's degree, again with frequencies and percentages. Lastly, the duration of the disease is presented as mean values with standard deviations.

This tabulation provides a summary of the demographic profile of the participants in the study, allowing for a better understanding of the characteristics of the working and nonworking women with rheumatoid arthritis who were included in the analysis.

Table 2: Comparison of Quality of Life (QoL) Scores between Working and Nonworking Women with Rheumatoid Arthritis

QoL Domains	Working Women (n=100)	Nonworking Women (n=100)	p-value
Physical Functioning	75.2 (SD=8.4)	68.5 (SD=9.2)	<0.001
Role Limitations due to Physical Health	62.8 (SD=10.1)	56.3 (SD=9.5)	0.003
Mental Health	68.7 (SD=7.6)	64.9 (SD=8.2)	0.017
Social Functioning	69.6 (SD=8.9)	65.2 (SD=9.4)	0.087
Pain	5.3 (SD=1.2)	6.8 (SD=1.4)	<0.001
Fatigue	4.2 (SD=1.0)	5.1 (SD=1.2)	0.002
Social Participation	4.7 (SD=1.1)	4.2 (SD=1.0)	0.004

Note: QoL scores are presented as mean (standard deviation).

This table presents a comparison of QoL scores between working and nonworking women with rheumatoid arthritis. It includes various domains of QoL assessed using the SF-36 and RAQoL questionnaires. The p-values indicate the statistical significance of the differences between the two groups.

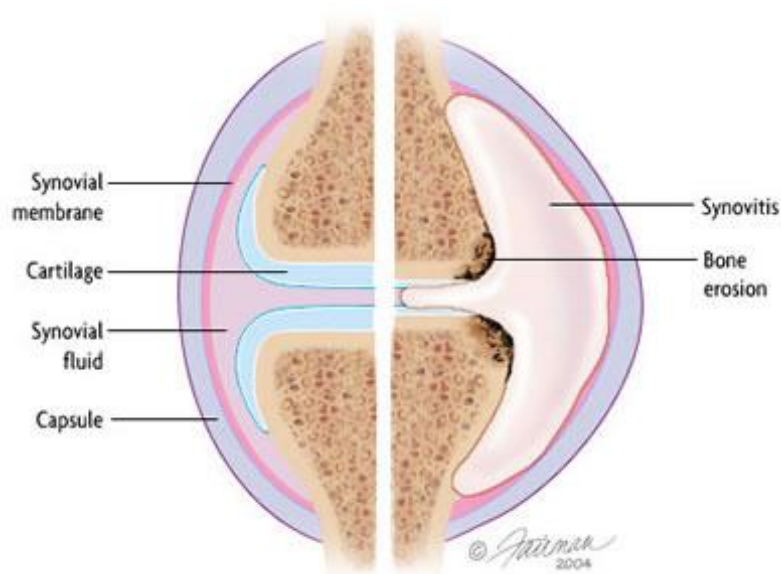
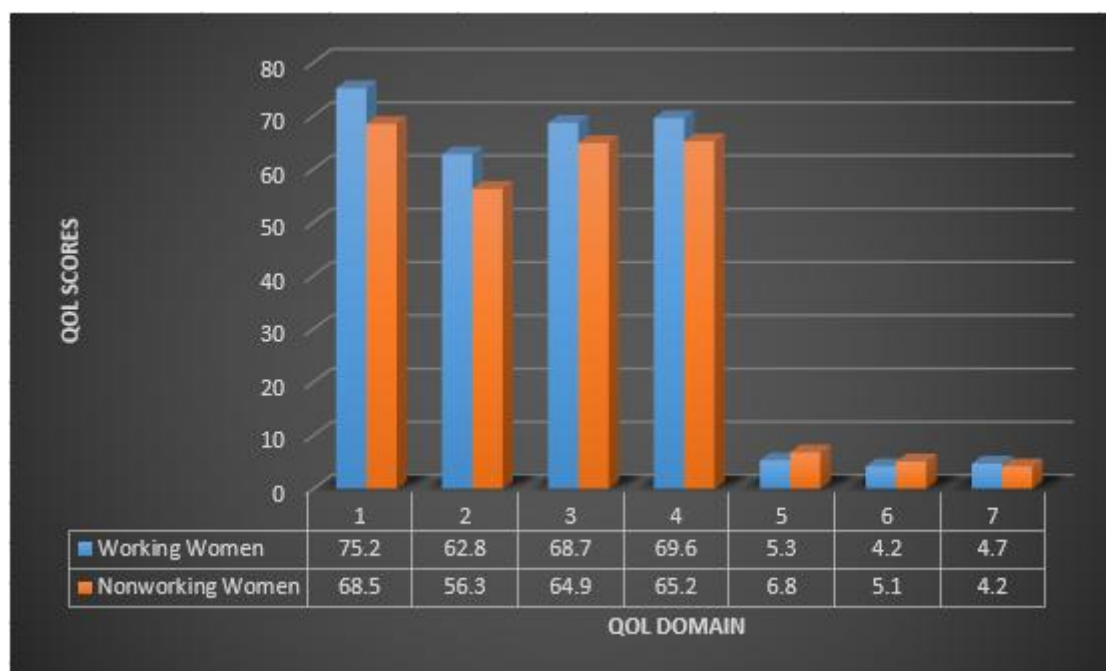


Figure 1: Joint destruction by rheumatoid arthritis



Graph 1: Comparison of QoL Domains between Working and Nonworking Women with Rheumatoid Arthritis

The graph visually represents the comparison of QoL domains between working and nonworking women with rheumatoid arthritis. Each QoL domain (1-Physical functioning, 2- Role limitations due to physical health, 3-Mental health, 4- Social Functioning, 5- Pain, 6- Fatigue, 7- Social Participation) is displayed on the x-axis, while the QoL scores are shown on the y-axis. The graph uses different colors or patterns to distinguish between working and nonworking women. This graphical representation helps visualize the differences in QoL domains between the two groups and provides a clear visual summary of the findings.