



Research Article

MULTIPLE ROLES OF WOMEN: THE REALITY CHECK

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ABSTRACT

Many people continue to hold beliefs about the impacts of mothers working outside the house. It is said that it affects women as well as their marriages and children. Despite numerous studies showing that employment actually has beneficial effects, it is commonly assumed that being a wife and a mother comes naturally and effortlessly compared to the perceived challenging nature of being an employee. These convictions raise worries amongst health experts about women's ability to manage roles without significant and adverse health issues affecting them. Therefore, it is crucial to assess these convictions based on informed research findings. At this moment, it is also important to assess the situation as there is a rise in the number of working mothers and an increasing importance towards paid jobs amongst contemporary women. There is a drastic shift away from the conventional idea of a family in our society which is heading towards continuous progress. The importance of this research lies in the emphasis of the existing atmosphere that attributes women's role as a contributing factor to various societal challenges like school dropout rates, substance abuse issues among youth, juvenile delinquency and marital separations.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite research done in the field of women's health, there are still some health professionals who express worries about women managing multiple roles without suffering from significant negative health impacts. (Barnett, Rosalind, 2004). The main concern revolves around the stress that may befall on women with children when they enter the workforce as paid employees. (Waldron I, Weiss CC, Hughes ME, 1998). There is an assumption that being a wife and a mother are roles that do not cause too much stress when undertaken simultaneously. Being an employee is often viewed as something that goes against the causal order and consequently involves a high level of demand. However, due to shifts towards positive aspects like women education, changing attitude towards gender roles, participation in paid work and family planning, it's unlikely that society will revert back to the traditional model of one breadwinner and a stay-at-home mother. There is a lot of talk suggesting that mothers working outside the home are responsible for various societal problems like school dropouts, drug abuse, juvenile violence and divorce.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This article addresses a variety of shifts that indicate that many women are likely to juggle between multiple responsibilities in the coming years. Next, the research studies highlight the impact of these changes on the well-being of women on their children. This research focuses on the significance of employment of women in the present environment where they play varied roles. Lastly, the research outlines the implications from the research results for practical application.

CURRENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Labor Force Participation

The latest Report of Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2021-22 states clearly that there is increased Female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in India. Though it is lower than the male, but female LFPR has been manifesting over the years and at present, around one third of women have joined the labour force. As per the latest PLFS report, around 32.8% female of working age (15 years and above) were in labour force in 2021-22 which was just 23.3% in 2017-18, registered a surge of 9.5% points during these years. The major push came from the rural sector than the urban sector, where it increased by 12.0 and 3.4 percentage points, respectively. In rural areas, female LFPR has increased to 36.6% during 2021-22 as compared to 24.6% in 2017-18, showed an increase of 12.0% points. On the other side, female participation in urban

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areas was significantly lower than the rural areas. Female LFPR was 23.8% in 2021-22 as compared to 20.4% in 2017-18 in urban areas, showed an increase of just 3.4% points. The female participation in labour force has increased by 9.5% points in 2021-22 over the year 2017-18, this upward trend in female LFPR is the result of various influential factors. (https://dge.gov.in/dge/sites/default/files/2023-05/Female_Labour_Utilization_in_India_April_2023_final__1_-pages-1-2-merged__1_.pdf)

If females participate in the labour force, it is a pointer of their personal development, their upliftment and their financial development. (Gupta P, Kothe Satyanarayan, 2024)

Periodic Labour Force Survey Report 2022-23 released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation on 9th October 2023 shows that the Female Labour Force Participation Rate in the country went on a rise by 4.2 percentage points to 37.0% in 2023.

This hike is the result of government's agenda to put forth women welfare on priority. The Indian government has made policies towards empowerment of women so that they could become economically and politically empowered. The government is making policies for skill enhancement of girl child, their education, loan for women entrepreneurship and many more. (<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1967291>)

There has been a rise in the number of women with young children entering the workforce in recent years. This shift has led to an increase in dual income families which is now becoming a norm in the common households. According to data, from 25 years the percentage of employees living in dual income households has grown from 66% to 78%. This trend is expected to continue in future. More and more women are joining the workforce and also working full time throughout the year. Women's involvement in the workforce is becoming more similar to men's participation nowadays. An interesting point to note is that a growing number of women in college education are earning equal salaries compared to their husbands. In 1998, statistics showed that 40 percent of women with college education fell into this category. A recent study conducted among working women in dual income households revealed that 42 percent of women irrespective of their background or ethnicity.

Educational attainment

In 2021, the female literacy rate in India was 91.95%. From 2010-2021, the female literacy rate in India saw a jump by 14.4%. (<https://www.globaldata.com/data-insights/macro-economic/female-literacy-rate-in-india/>)

As per the 2011 Census, the total literacy rate in India stands at 74.00 per cent and the rate of literacy among women is 65.46 per cent. The female literacy percentage in India was 54.16% in 2001. The literacy rate in the country has increased from 18.33 per cent in 1951 to 74.00 per cent as per 2011 census. The female literacy rate has also increased from 8.86 per cent in 1951 to 65.46 per cent in 2011. Female literacy rate from 1991-2001 was increased by 14.87 per cent whereas male literacy rate rose by 11.72 per cent. The hike in female literacy rate was 3.15 per cent as compared to males. (https://loksabhadocs.nic.in/Refinput/New_Reference_Notes/English/Girls%20Education%20in%20India.pdf)

Caldwell (1984) stated that if women get more educated, their income increases and the unpaid work they do at home decreases.

As per the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2020-21, higher education enrolment has leaped to around 4.14 crore in 2020-21 from 3.85 crore in 2019-20. The Female enrolment has increased to 2.01 crore from 1.88 crore in 2019-20. Female enrolment if compared total enrolment has taken a leap from 45% in 2014-15 to around 49% in 2020-21. India registered improvement in the Gender Parity Index (GPI), the ratio of female Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) to male GER, has increased from 1 in 2017-18 to 1.05 in 2020-21. Female GER has overtaken Male GER since 2017-18. As per AISHE 2020-21, GER for male population at all India level is 26.7 and GER for female population at All India level is 27.9. (https://dge.gov.in/dge/sites/default/files/2023-05/Female_Labour_Utilization_in_India_April_2023_final__1_-pages-1-2-merged__1_.pdf)

As more and more women establish distinguished careers, they are confronted with a relatively understudied, but persistent variant of the myths surrounding women and their multiple roles; namely the high-level professional women (in contrast to high-level professional men) are incapable of combining their careers with marriage and children without doing irreparable harm to their careers. 5.6 Not surprisingly, far fewer top-level women than men are married and have children.

Fertility

Despite a decline in fertility, FLPR has lowered in India since the 1990s. In 2021-22, 35.6% of women aged 15-59 were in the labor force, up from 25.3% in 2017-18. As per the fifth round of National Family Health Survey NFHS conducted by MoHFW during the year 2019-21, the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has come down to 2.0 children per woman from 2.2 children per woman as per the fourth round of NFHS conducted in the year 2015-16, resulting in the achievement of the replacement level of fertility, which is 2.1 children per woman. (<https://pib.gov.in/>)

Childbearing in India is concentrated in the age group 15-29, which contributes more than three-fourths of total fertility. Current fertility is characterized by a substantial amount of early childbearing: 17 percent of total fertility is accounted for by births to women aged 15-19. The fertility level declines sharply beyond age 30 and childbearing is negligible for women in their forties.

The NFHS rural TFR (3.7 children per woman) is 36% more than the urban TFR (2.7 children per woman). Stating otherwise, the present schedule of fertility states that the women living in rural areas will have on an average, one child more in their reproductive years than urban women. Women, who have completed their high-school have a TFR of 2.2 children per woman (which is almost as low as the replacement level), whereas illiterate women have a TFR of 4.0, which is 87 percent higher. (<https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/SR162/SR162.pdf>)

Delayed Age at Marriage and Childbearing

In addition to the widespread availability of contraceptives, another reason for women's decreased fertility is that they

are marrying at a later age. The NFHS-I survey found out that the women's whose age reaches to 30 years till the birth of their last child is around 35%, during NFHS-V, this proportion became more than half, which means 64.3% among 40–49 years old women. Within three decades (1992–2021) there has been a decline of 15.8% in median age at last birth among women aged 40–49 years. Additionally, the highest percentage decline in predicted mean age at last birth was noted among individuals from rural area (10.7%, 3.3 years), Hindu religion (10.8%, 3.3 years), poor wealth quintile (12.5%, 4.0 years) and those with mass media exposure (10.6%, 3.2 years) from NFHS-I (1992–1993) to NFHS-V (2019–2021). There are healthcare issues for both, who are delaying child birth and who are delaying the last age of their last child's birth. (Singh, M., Shekhar, C. & Shri, N., 2023).

Lengthening Life Span

The lifespan of all humans is lengthening whether male or female due to modern health facilities. The trends mentioned should be considered in light of the fact that people have a longer lifespan now than before. Life expectancy at birth in India was reported at 69.38 years in 2022, according to the World Bank collection of development indicators. In light of that, this increased life span for women, the time spent on raising children will make up a remarkable portion of their lifespan. After spending a number of years focusing on child care responsibilities, women will have ample time to pursue career opportunities during the years following maternity leave. The case is not the same always, as after this crucial time of raising children, few females prefer not to take up jobs because of the meagre jobs they are offered citing their lag in career.

Gender-Role Attitudes

Over the years, from school to adulthood there has been a surge in the number of males supporting women working outside the home and contributing to family income instead of staying at home. (Siddiqi, Nasrina, 2021). While women typically embrace gender roles more than men do, they too have shown a trend towards being more open to nontraditional roles in recent years. We have seen that there are changes in women's roles from only home makers to multitaskers. They have taken up jobs outside the preview of their homes. They are in every field now. We can see them as auto rickshaw drivers to pilots and the tendency of the society has also changed towards this phenomenon. Now no one sees the women who are doing non-traditional jobs as aliens as it used to happen. The families have also started supporting women in their decision to work outside and they have started taking some part of the work burden on themselves.

Household chores and Child-Care Tasks

Men are also altering their actions in the household alongside adjusting their perceptions of gender roles.

In dual income households, today's women often shoulder the majority of household and childcare duties compared to their husbands; nevertheless, men are gradually contributing time to chores. In a study, representing the population where both partners work, shows increased amount of time spent on household tasks which is from 1 hour and 18 minutes, to 2 hours a day between the years 1977 and 2002. On one hand, in the

contemporary times, ladies in dual income families decreased their daily chore time from 3 hours and 42 minutes, to 3 hours each day (both changes were proven to have importance). Due to these conflicting patterns in behaviour changes over time between genders regarding household tasks on weekdays decreased from 2 hours and 24 minutes in 1977 to 1 hour per day in 2002.

There are women who live alone, they tend to spend less time on any kind of unpaid work at home (217 minutes/day) while those residing in nuclear have an increased ratio on that (336 minutes/day). (Ali, Balhasan & Prasad, Aditi & Dhillon, Preeti & Abdul, Shaban, (2024). During the span of 25 years, from 1977 to 2002 there was a shift in time that fathers devoted to their children each day. Increasing from 1 hours to 2 hours per day. On the other hand, mothers' time remained relatively consistent at around 3 hours per day throughout that period. In words these adjustments lead to time, kids spend with their parents (an average of 5.1 hours, per workday in 1977 versus 6.1 hours per workday in 200z) and also narrowed the gap between genders how they spend their time with the children (from a difference of 1.5 hours per workday in to go to just odd hours per workday, in t o).

EMPIRICAL DATA

Based on what we see in the newspapers and magazines these days, the modern trend of lifestyles among women seems to be creating chaos for themselves, their families, parents and children. There are headlines talking about how people are struggling with time constraints and stress. It is also common to read about the so-called decline of Indian families in the media. Married working women who have children are often depicted as stressed and unhappy in words and content with certain levels of psychological distress. It has been cautioned that men may feel challenged when their wives achieve success (meaning their sense of identity could be challenged). Additionally, there's a belief that children raised by working mothers tend to face issues, like insecure attachment and inappropriate behavior as they're often not under their mothers' care during the crucial early years of development. We need to see what do the actual facts suggest about this topic of women and work? There are women who keep their work as their priority, they tend to give less importance to their families because that hinders their professional achievement. But according to the study, women take their families on priority over their profession. But study reveals that in India women employees still consider and take their family obligations quite seriously as compared to their professional responsibilities and while doing that they overestimate their calibre of playing all the roles efficiently which leads to high levels of work-family conflict. (Somashekher C, 2018)

There is a lot of research looking into how a mother's job impacts various negative consequences like depression and anxiety or stress related issues. At first glance, they examined the direct impact of working on health and the findings actually went against the idea that women are handling multiple roles at a time as an employee and a spouse and a mother. The theory that working women experience more stress compared to those with fewer roles was not backed up by the studies conducted. On the contrary, it turned out that women who juggled roles tended to enjoy improved mental and physical well-being

showing lower levels of depression and anxiety compared to those with fewer responsibilities. Women have been involved in all kinds of employment but the domestic work is still lying on their part, leading to their extra effort towards playing their professional part with efficiency and personal part without conflicts. Establishing this balance leads to over pressure on the part of their women. (Komarraju, 1997; Rajadhyaksha & Bhatnagar, 2000; Sekharan, 1992).

This discovery was supported by different types of studies over time that considered the healthy workers' effect factor that suggests that positive health outcomes may not directly be caused by women having to play varied roles but rather it could be a result of these roles being taken up by some healthy women who are able to handle them effectively.

One longitudinal study examined changes in labor force participation over time in relation to psychological distress in a sample of women. The researchers establish that women who have increased their workforce participation from homemaker (not employed or employed less than 10 hours per week) to part-time worker (employed 10-34 hours per week) or to full-time worker (employed 35 or more hours per week) showed lower levels of depression over the three-year period of the study. And over the same period of time, employed women who decreased their hours of paid employment from full time to part time (i.e., employed 10-19 hours per week) or to homemakers reported an increase in symptoms of depression.

Research also looks into quality of roles and their impact on women alongside the quantity of roles she has in relation to her health and well-being rather than just focusing on the number of roles a woman holds in society and its direct correlation to health outcomes. Different roles can have varying impacts depending on how fulfilling or challenging they are perceived to be by individuals involved in them. It is suggested that delving into the subjective quality of roles and its connection to health outcomes would provide more insightful results compared to solely looking at the quantitative aspects alone when we talk about role quality, like being a partner or a parent or an employee. It's all about the good parts and the not so good parts that come up with them. This concept breaks down into two diverse parts, the positives and the negative issues that come up. The quality of a role is determined by taking the score of strain from the average score of rewards to specific strains to that role. Subjective elements should be distinguished from what could be termed as "work conditions" encompassing factors, like salary level and perks offered by a job and the actual working hours along with having a supportive manager in place. Subjective elements gauge how satisfying or challenging these conditions are perceived to be when they're present or absent in a work setting.

The theory that the quality of one's role has an impact on health outcomes compared to the quantity of roles or the time spent in a role has gained edge in various studies. (Kumagai N) For instance; simply being in a work role does not necessarily lead to well-being when the job lacks satisfaction or where discrimination and harassment are present. Likewise, individuals may put in hours at work; however, if they find fulfilment in their task, they can experience positive psychological effects. In a study analyzing job responsibilities in the 1990s by Perry Jenkins (data not available, until 2000)

it was noted that researchers are placing greater emphasis nowadays on the quality of roles rather than just the number of roles overtaken.

In studies that look across sections of the workforce show that married women who work and tend to feel just as satisfied with their jobs as their working husbands do. In the partnerships, how fulfilling or challenging a job is, can have an impact on the well-being of both spouses. Across time in relationships, where both partners work outside the home, changes in job satisfaction can lead to changes in stress levels for both women and men. If the job gets fulfilling or challenging it can lead to a decrease or increase in stress levels respectively. In this scenario results depict that men and women, both experienced distress due to time pressures and skills' underutilization in their jobs.

The significance of women's relationships such as being a wife and a mother has been widely discussed in relation to their well-being, in psychological practice; however, empirical evidence suggests a different perspective than commonly believed norms. In particular, a woman's job satisfaction and the rewards she receives from work play a significant role in her well-being, possibly even more than her relationships with her partner and children according to some studies. Women generally express high levels of job satisfaction and gain various psychological and financial benefits from being employed. However, many conversations in the mental health sector concerning women and work, tend to concentrate on the potential downsides without acknowledging the positive impacts that employment can have on women. Mental health experts have not fully recognized the positive impact that paid work can have on women's well-being as well as their overall satisfaction in life. Such advantages include earning a salary for their efforts and skills used in tasks at work. Additionally, contributing to their well-being are the access to health benefits and social support provided in the workplace. While not all jobs offer these perks equally to every employee, it is by being employed that one can potentially experience and benefit from these rewards. Furthermore, besides the benefits of having a job for women's health, there are also significant indirect effects to be considered. A fulfilling career lessens the negative impact on women's well-being caused by challenging relationships with their spouse or children at home. The management in the professional arena must try to understand what the women professionals need and accordingly try to manage them so that the workplace can be made conducive for the women employees. (Dhavamary Antony D, 2018)

Having fulfilling relationships with loved ones can help lessen the impact on mental well-being from a difficult job. By being involved in various aspects of life, women can strengthen their ability to cope with challenges in both personal and professional relationships. It seems that when a woman has sources of support, she tends to fare better overall.

The Mother-Child Relationship

The significance of the employees' role has not received attention in mental health studies compared to the emphasis placed on the maternal role in the theories established regarding women's identity development. Despite the importance attributed to motherhood in different scenarios, this perspective does not align with the findings from research literature. Some

researchers argue that overall motherhood may adversely impact women's health to some extent while others believe that it holds no more significance than the roles women play in their lives. It is crucial to differentiate between the concept of motherhood itself and the nature of the relationship between a mother and her child when considering health related implications. While it might be argued that becoming a mother does not directly correlate with wellness, the same cannot be said for the quality of interaction in the parent child dynamics. The evidence suggests a link between the mother child bond and mental well-being outcomes for mothers and their children alike. Mothers who express satisfaction with their relationships with their children, typically experience decreased levels of distress. When mothers have positive connections with their children, even while balancing work responsibilities, the negative impact of jobs is lessened. However, in contrast mothers facing challenges in their relationships with their children are more likely to experience heightened distress, when coupled with unsatisfying job conditions.

Is it possible that the advantages of motherhood, for working women, may not be evident while their children are young but become apparent as the mothers grow older. Putting up differently, women without children struggle with feelings of sadness as they age compared to women who have raised children. Considering the literature on this subject matter, one would naturally assume that the answer is yes. However, to our surprise this is not the case.

Childless married women experience higher levels of depression compared to older married women who have children – a surprising discovery that prompts speculation about its underlying causes. There could be a possibility that women find fulfillment and satisfaction in their careers than in motherhood overtime which may serve as a protective factor for employed childless women against the challenges of aging.

Despite not being the focus of this article, it is worth mentioning that numerous studies have found no distinction between children raised by working mothers and those raised by mothers. There is no evidence to suggest that they're securely attached, exhibit cognitive or social deficiencies or feel neglected, deserted or unloved. It is advisable to not give weight to media reports suggesting otherwise.

The Marital Relationship

Marriage itself has an impact on distress compared to the quality of marital roles in any relationship. Single men and women tend to show lower levels of depression; married women exhibit higher levels of depression compared to married men. Despite these considerations mentioned earlier on this topic of discussion there are people who advocate marriage as an institution in our society that brings various benefits to everyone involved and divorce is viewed as having adverse effects on women and particularly on children. Giving attention to such constraints, government funding has been allocated towards initiatives, aimed at promoting and sustaining marriages. Many evidences prove the impacts of marriage on couples and their children tends to equate a marriage with overall marital well-being. In terms and viewpoints of researchers, a successful marriage is advantageous for everyone involved. It is often debated whether continuing in a marriage is more beneficial for all parties involved than ending the marriage.

In terms of the roles that lay an impact on the well-being, is notable for both genders according to a study's finding 30 though alterations in marital quality over time were linked to changes in distress solely, for women. (Sumra MK, Schillaci MA, 2015). When it comes to health markers (those related to heart health), women who felt very content in their marriages demonstrated better health outcomes over time than those who were less contented with their marriages. Single women in various studies have also hinted at the significant impact of marital quality on their overall well-being.

For instance, the strength of marriage may influence how the amount of childcare provided by the wife compared to her husband affects her well-being. Though having a family multiplies the roles but their emotional support helps to deal with the burden faced by women due to their multiple roles. The family can also help a woman by distributing the household chores. (Walsh, 1996). In couples, where both partners work, if the woman takes on childcare duties more than her husband then her level of distress becomes minimal, it leads to a decline in her dissatisfaction with the marriage resulting in a positive impact on her overall mental health. If the husband is not that involved in childcare duties, the level of women's distress increases.

On one hand, a husband's assessment of the value of his marriage is not influenced by how he is involved in caring for the children. What happens to the internal relations in a marriage when a woman earns money? Despite what many people believe, past records show that when both partners earn in a relationship, it does not necessarily mean that the marriage would neither be benefitted nor lead to gains. Research supporting this perspective indicates that couples where the wife had no earnings experienced the rate of dissolution as compared to others, with different earning dynamics. The findings challenge media portrayals of husbands whose wives have higher income than them and often depicted as inadequate or unsuccessful in fulfilling their household role. In such relationships, over time, the difference in earnings between a wife and husband doesn't seem to impact how wives perceive the quality of their marriage but for husbands it's a bit more complex. Most husbands don't base their marriage satisfaction on the wage gap or its changes over time like their wives do. In a group of men who highly value the rewards of their work – such as earning equal to or more than others in their profession or the total amount they earn, they tend to view their marriage less favorably when their wife's income is more when compared with them. When a wife finds satisfaction, in her work schedule and job role. It tends to reduce her husband's worries. Quite a few working women probably have hard times over the effect of their career on their spouses and marriages if they continue to work in the job market, if these women truly value their professions and derive happiness from them. Deciding to quit, might lead to increased stress for themselves and their husbands.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CLINICAL PRACTICE

The discoveries indicate shifts in health care that could help patients in need of support. Initially and often unintentionally, well-meant mental health professionals are the reinforcement of a working woman's perception towards her job and not her marriage or children are what causes her distress. Encouraging

a patient to evaluate both the benefits and drawbacks of their job, before they decide that reducing stress involves scaling or leaving the workforce, can be beneficial and essential because patients frequently share the issues, they are dealing with without knowing them beforehand. There are certain gender stereotypes also prevailing in the society where certain professions are meant to be assigned for women and some are assigned for men. They say that the professions meant to be taken up by women, must not be carried over by men. The same happens with the household work. (Zeynep Dilşah Karaçam Yılmaz, Tülay Yılmaz, Eda Tokman, 2023)

The research shows that every social role has its ups and downs. Even employment comes with its set of rewards and challenges alike. Jumping to conclusions hastily about the health benefits of work wouldn't be wise at all. In a sense, though we've got to debunk the idea that having to play varied roles is solely detrimental for women, it can be just a misconception after all.

Mental health experts and their patients should be aware of how media depicts working women as overwhelmed and their families teetering towards chaos in narratives that often lack diverse perspectives and are not reflective of real-life situations for making significant life choices. Balancing responsibilities can indeed lead to challenges, however, it seems that these challenges are not as serious and can be easily managed compared to the issues stemming from having lesser duties.

It's important to mention that if juggling responsibilities becomes challenging for individuals and affects them many ways, it's not just limited to women to bear this burden on their shoulders alone all the time. One research establishes that married men also experience levels of work life balance issues as their spouses do. Particularly those who are part of dual income families, with kids involved.

Many research studies suggest that there is a similarity between men and women when it comes to their level of satisfaction they express in their roles and the impact of role quality on mental stress levels. Despite beliefs and theories suggesting gender disparities in the importance of social roles, it's time to reconsider these notions based on findings from research literature that indicate both men and women hail from the Earth even if they are claimed to have different levels of physical or mental stresses.

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