International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

A Study on Parenting and Work-Life Balance among Mothers: Finding Harmony in Daily Life

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DOI : https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.6.0425.1404

ABSTRACT

This study explores the challenges and experiences of working mothers in balancing their professional responsibilities and family duties, particularly those with children aged 0-6 years. Through qualitative research and in-depth case studies, the study investigates how mothers navigate their dual roles, manage time, cope with stress, and receive support from their families, workplaces, and communities. The findings highlight the significant impact of traditional gender roles, societal expectations, and inadequate workplace policies on the well-being of working mothers.

Key themes that emerged from the research include time management struggles, unequal distribution of household responsibilities, emotional stress, and limited workplace flexibility. Many mothers reported waking up early to complete household chores before their workday, often sacrificing personal time and self-care. While some received support from their spouses and extended family, others faced challenges due to the lack of shared domestic responsibilities. Additionally, unsupportive workplace environments further exacerbated their stress, forcing mothers to make difficult choices between career growth and family obligations.

The study also identifies the coping mechanisms adopted by mothers, such as seeking support from peers, practicing time management strategies, and engaging in occasional self-care activities. However, these measures often provide temporary relief rather than addressing the root causes of their stress. Based on these insights, the study offers practical suggestions for improving the work-life balance of working mothers, including implementing family-friendly workplace policies, promoting paternity leave, and fostering gender-equitable household practices.

Furthermore, the research emphasizes the need for government intervention to provide accessible childcare services, financial support, and policy incentives for organizations that prioritize employee well-being. By addressing these structural challenges, society can create a more supportive environment where working mothers can thrive both professionally and personally. This study contributes to the growing discourse on gender equality, work-life integration, and parental well-being, advocating for collective efforts to empower working mothers and promote equitable family dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The challenges faced by working mothers in India are multifaceted, shaped by societal expectations, workplace limitations, emotional labor, and childcare responsibilities. Despite the increasing participation of women in the workforce, traditional gender roles and inadequate institutional support systems make it difficult for mothers to balance professional and personal lives. Societal pressures to excel both at work and home, limited access to family-friendly workplace policies, and the burden of managing caregiving responsibilities significantly impact the well-being of working mothers.

This study focuses on the experiences of working mothers with children under the age of 10 in Vadodara, Gujarat. The research will explore how local societal expectations shape the roles and responsibilities of mothers, the availability and effectiveness of family-friendly workplace policies, and the role of childcare options and extended family support. Additionally, the study will examine the emotional labor involved in balancing professional and personal responsibilities and its impact on maternal mental health, including stress, anxiety, and guilt.

Workplace policies for women in India have evolved to promote gender equality and provide support to female employees. The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 ensures equal pay for equal work, while the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017 grants 26 weeks of paid maternity leave and mandates crèche facilities for establishments with 50 or more employees. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013 mandates the establishment of Internal Complaints Committees to address workplace harassment. Additionally, the Factories Act, 1948 and the Code on Social Security, 2020 ensure maternity benefits, safe working conditions, and provisions for the welfare of women workers. However, effective enforcement and implementation remain challenges in certain sectors.

Key concepts in this study include work-life balance, which refers to the ability to manage professional and personal responsibilities without undue stress. Parenting, particularly in nuclear or joint family systems, plays a significant role in the lives of working mothers. Different parenting styles, including authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful, influence the well-being of both mothers and children.

By examining the challenges faced by working mothers in Vadodara, this study aims to provide insights into the specific barriers they encounter and identify policy recommendations to better support their work-life balance. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of the struggles faced by working mothers in non-metropolitan areas and offer practical solutions for enhancing their overall well-being.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. **Bhatia, Yogeeta.,**(2016) Work Life Balance among Women Professionals = emphasizes the significance of work-life balance and highlights the perception of imbalance among women professionals across corporate, healthcare, and academic sectors. Respondents reported experiencing conflict between work and family, particularly due to time pressures. A key mitigating factor identified was instrumental support from family members, especially spouses, in managing household responsibilities. This support is particularly crucial for women with children, as it reduces conflict and enhances flexibility within the family domain.

2. **Sharma, Verma.,** (2020) Work Life Balance of Working Women a Comparative Study on Higher Education and IT Sector by Sharma Narotam, This study explores work-life balance among women in higher education and the IT sector, highlighting significant conflicts between personal and professional responsibilities. Extended working hours, heavy workloads, and demanding job roles contribute to stress, anxiety, and neglect of personal health. Women in higher education face challenges from teaching, administrative tasks, and time pressures, while those in IT struggle with shift work and staying updated with technological changes. The research underscores the importance of achieving work-life balance to resolve psychological distress and manage dual career and home demands, particularly for married working women. (http://hdl.handle.net/10603/334628)

3. **Anitha N.,** (2020) A study on work life balance among women information technology professionals with special reference to tamilnadu This study examines the work-life balance of women IT professionals in Tamil Nadu, focusing on organizational, personal, and family factors such as flexible work policies, stress management, and workplace support. It highlights the importance of employer-employee collaboration in maintaining balance. The objectives include analyzing demographic influences, identifying key challenges, assessing stress and health issues, evaluating company initiatives, and providing suggestions to improve work-life balance for women in IT. (Anitha N.,2020)

4. **Vincent**., (2017) Enhancing the Work-Life Balance Among Married Women Working in Corporate through Social Work intervention Social Group Work The study on enhancing work-life balance among married working women in the corporate sector through Social Group Work intervention reveals that most respondents experienced work-life balance challenges. Using the Fisher-McAuley scale, all three dimensions of work-life balance scored moderate. The intervention involved professionally trained social workers using a psycho-educational approach, helping individuals in group settings to develop self-awareness, coping skills, and emotional well-being. The study found that Social Group Work was effective in addressing needs such as coping with life transitions, improving social relationships, and managing stress. The t-Test confirmed a significant improvement in work-life balance after the intervention, concluding that Social Group Work is an effective method for enhancing work-life balance among married women in the corporate sector. The study found that Social Group Work was effective for purposes such as corrective treatment, prevention, social growth, personal enhancement, and citizenship development. It addressed common needs like coping with life transitions, improving social relationships, managing illness, and handling feelings of loss or loneliness. The t-Test carried out showed that the work-life balance improved significantly after the intervention. In the end, the study concluded that Social Group Work had already proven to be an effective method to enhance work-life balance among married women working in the corporate sector. (Vincent.,2017) (http://hdl.handle.net/10603/298764).

5. **Gomez, Josephine D.,** (2012) A study of parenting styles and their influence on values among junior college students in Mumbai by The study aimed to assess the influence of different parenting styles (Authoritative, Permissive, and Authoritarian) on values among junior college students in Mumbai. Surveying 1,068 students aged 16 to 18, the study used two tools: the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) and the Value Rating Scale (VRS). The findings indicated that authoritative parenting fostered higher social, religious, and moral values. Females displayed significantly higher moral values, and religious values increased as parenting styles shifted from permissive to authoritative. Students from nuclear families with fathers having up to a high school education showed higher religious values. The study concluded that authoritative parenting had a positive impact on students' acquisition of social, religious, and moral values (Gomez, Josephine D.,2012). (http://hdl.handle.net/10603/517547)

6. **Lakshmi.,** (2018) "A study on work-life balance in working women" explores how working women face many challenges in attaining a work-life balance nowadays because of increasing social and economic pressures that now demand that women undertake an equally successful career alongside mothering responsibilities. Increased demands of work, however, alongside ceaseless connectivity provided by communication technology, have blurred the lines between work and personal life and, ultimately, create stress. In the work-life balance manual authored by Daniels and McCarraher, women of Visakhapatnam had faced serious problems of balancing between work and family, which can sway their lifestyle and general wellness. Findings convey the various aspects of a work-life balance that will help women provide for an unburdened life. (Lakshmi.,2018). (https://doi.org/10.31426/ijamsr.2018.1.7.718)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

OBJECTIVES:

- To examine the factors influencing work-life balance among working women, including organizational policies, family responsibilities, and personal coping mechanisms.

- To analyze the impact of work-life balance on women's physical and mental well-being, identifying common stressors and coping strategies.

- To assess the role of social support systems (such as family, friends, and colleagues) in enhancing work-life balance for working women.

- To explore the challenges faced by working women in managing their dual responsibilities at home and in the workplace.

UNIVERSE:

The study will focus on female workers from Indutch Composites Pvt Ltd specifically those with children under 10 years of age. These mothers represent working professionals in the corporate and academic sectors.

SAMPLE SIZE:

The study includes a sample size is 15.

METHODS FOR DATA COLLECTION:

Primary Data Collection:

- Semi-Structured Interviews: In-depth, semi-structured interviews will be conducted as the primary method of data collection. This approach allows for flexibility in asking open-ended questions while ensuring that all key themes are covered.

FINDINGS

1. **Time Management:**

Working mothers face significant challenges in managing their time due to the dual responsibilities of work and family. Most mothers start their day early, typically between 4:00 AM and 6:00 AM, preparing meals, completing household chores, and getting their children ready for school before heading to work. While some follow structured routines to manage their time effectively, others face difficulties when unexpected situations arise, such as a child falling sick or sudden work deadlines. Lack of personal time often results in chronic stress, fatigue, and burnout. However, in families where spouses and extended family members share responsibilities, mothers experience less stress and better time management.

2. **Shared Household Responsibilities:**

Traditional gender roles often place the primary responsibility for household chores on mothers, even when they are employed. While some husbands contribute to minor tasks, such as helping children get ready or performing occasional chores, many families still adhere to traditional beliefs that limit male participation in household duties. In contrast, progressive families with supportive husbands and extended family members share responsibilities more equitably, reducing the stress on mothers. Open communication between spouses helps in distributing household tasks, but in traditional households, resistance from family members often hinders such cooperation.

3. **Parenting Approaches:**

Despite their busy schedules, working mothers prioritize spending quality time with their children. Activities like bedtime conversations, weekend outings, and participating in school events are common strategies to strengthen the parent-child bond. Parenting styles vary, with some mothers adopting strict disciplinary methods while others follow a more nurturing and communicative approach. Feelings of guilt are prevalent, as mothers often worry that they are not spending enough time with their children. However, in families where fathers and other relatives provide childcare support, mothers feel reassured and can balance their responsibilities more effectively.

4. **Coping Mechanisms for Stress:**

To manage stress and exhaustion, many mothers adopt coping mechanisms such as taking short breaks, watching television, listening to music, or engaging in hobbies. Emotional support from spouses through open conversations also helps alleviate stress. Some mothers successfully create boundaries between work and home life, preventing professional stress from affecting family time. However, lack of external support, absence of family assistance, and financial constraints often exacerbate stress. In cases where partners or family members fail to provide support, mothers experience higher levels of burnout and emotional exhaustion.

5. **Workplace Challenges:**

Rigid workplace policies pose a significant challenge for working mothers, particularly in balancing their professional and family responsibilities. Many mothers are forced to take unpaid leave for family emergencies, adding financial strain. In contrast, workplaces that offer flexible hours, remote work options, and parental leave significantly reduce stress and enhance work-life balance. Supportive employers foster a positive environment for mothers, while companies with unsupportive policies worsen their struggle to manage both work and family responsibilities.

6. **Emotional Well-Being and Mental Health:**

The mental health of working mothers is often compromised due to the overwhelming burden of managing multiple responsibilities. Anxiety, stress, and exhaustion are common, particularly when mothers feel unappreciated or unsupported by their families. Feelings of self-doubt and guilt are also prevalent, with mothers questioning their effectiveness in both their professional and parenting roles. Access to mental health support through counseling services, workplace wellness programs, and emotional support from spouses and family members can significantly improve their well-being.

7. **Traditional vs. Modern Beliefs in Family Roles:**

Traditional gender norms remain a significant barrier to achieving work-life balance for many working mothers. In conventional households, mothers are often expected to prioritize family duties, leading to guilt and stress when work demands more of their time. In contrast, families embracing modern values tend to share responsibilities, with husbands actively participating in household chores and childcare. While some mothers receive support and encouragement from their families, others face criticism from older family members who hold traditional beliefs. Navigating these conflicting expectations often adds to the emotional strain faced by working mothers.

8. **Cross-Case Patterns:**

Across the case studies, several recurring themes emerged. Most mothers display exceptional time management skills, balancing work and family responsibilities with resilience. Open communication with spouses is a key factor in managing household tasks effectively. Additionally, mothers rely on small moments of relaxation, such as engaging in hobbies or spending quality time with their children, to cope with stress. However, variations in spousal support, parenting approaches, and workplace experiences significantly influence a mother's ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Families that embrace gender equality and supportive workplace policies enable mothers to manage their responsibilities more effectively, whereas traditional beliefs and unsupportive environments exacerbate their challenges.

CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by working mothers in balancing their professional and family responsibilities. It highlights how traditional gender norms, inadequate workplace support, and unequal household responsibilities contribute to their difficulties. Despite these challenges, working mothers exhibit resilience and dedication, often sacrificing personal well-being to meet both career and family demands.

The findings emphasize the need for systemic changes to support mothers effectively. Family-friendly workplace policies, such as flexible working hours, remote work options, and on-site childcare facilities, can significantly alleviate their burdens. Additionally, promoting shared household responsibilities and encouraging fathers to take active roles in caregiving are essential steps toward gender equality at home.

Community and government interventions, including affordable childcare services and parental support programs, can further ease the pressures on working mothers. Creating an inclusive environment where both parents are supported in balancing their responsibilities will lead to healthier family dynamics and increased workplace productivity.

Ultimately, achieving a sustainable work-life balance for working mothers requires collaborative efforts from policymakers, employers, families, and society. By fostering supportive environments and challenging traditional expectations, mothers can thrive both professionally and personally, contributing positively to their families, workplaces, and communities.

SUGGESTION

To enhance the work-life balance of working mothers, workplaces should implement supportive policies that offer flexibility in working hours, remote work options, and extended maternity and paternity leave. Providing on-site childcare facilities or partnering with childcare centers can further ease the burden on mothers. Additionally, creating an inclusive work culture where employees feel comfortable discussing their family responsibilities without fear of judgment or career setbacks is essential.

Promoting gender equality at home is equally important. Awareness campaigns and educational programs can encourage men to participate actively in household chores and child-rearing responsibilities. Normalizing paternity leave and shared caregiving duties can reduce the disproportionate burden on mothers. Establishing community support networks can also provide mothers with a platform to share experiences, exchange parenting strategies, and receive emotional support.

Governments and policymakers should play a proactive role in supporting working mothers by ensuring access to affordable childcare services, offering subsidies, and encouraging companies to adopt family-friendly policies through incentives. Public awareness initiatives can help break down societal stereotypes, promoting a cultural shift toward shared parenting responsibilities. Ultimately, by creating an environment where both workplaces and families offer equitable support, working mothers can achieve a healthier work-life balance, benefiting society as a whole.

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