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## WOMEN, WORK AND THE FAMILY

SUSHMA RAI

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**Abstract:** The women in any society have long faced the challenge of balancing their role between the family and work-place, this is now receiving renewed public attention. Though there have been various attempts to bring about gender equality in the workplace in the recent decades, women continue to bear a heavier burden when it comes to balancing work and family. One reason women are more likely than men to say it is harder to get ahead in the workplace may be that women are much more likely than men to experience a variety of family-related career interruptions. The women's role as a wife, mother, daughter-in-law and a bread earner is the primary reason more women do not hold important positions as an employee. Women often find it difficult to balance aggressive career with the demands of nurturing kids. This paper tries to look into the important issues of role conflict faced by the working- women who try to balance their home as well as their career.

**Keywords:** Role Conflict, Working Women, Mother, Role Expectation

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**Introduction:** Women play an important role in the economic and social life of any family. A woman of the house has the soul responsibility to build a house and hold the family together. In the context of child development, a mother happens to be the central figure in maintaining the child's home environment. She plays a variety of roles at home. For married working women, the public sphere of work, private sphere of home and family seldom exist as separate and distinct as they are for men. While women and men both have responsibilities in both the spheres, men can usually divide their time and commitment, dividing the weekdays to their work and evenings and weekends to their families. In contrast, for women, the areas of expectations and responsibility greatly overlap and can hardly be categorized especially when there are children in the family.

In the recent years we have seen that there has been a vast change in the norms and cultural values, socio-economic and demographic conditions of our country which in turn has created opportunities for women to acquire quality education and choose suitable employment for themselves. The jobs or careers they choose have opened up new avenues to express and assert their individual potentialities and capacities. The scenario has changed more owing to the empowerment of women in different field and the newly granted politico-legal rights which has brought about a situation where women nowadays are trying to balance their work with the family responsibilities rather than give up one for the sake of the other. Also the increase in the household expenditure obliges the women of the house to extend a helping hand to her spouse by taking up jobs in public as well as the private sectors. It is in this context that Krishna Chakraborty states that "The very idea that women are naturally domestic-minded and unsuitable for outside work; while men are naturally ambitious, competitive and fit for everything intellectual is too

superficial and simplistic to be tenable in today's society"(Krishna Chakraborty 1978).

In the forty-eighth session of the International Labour Conference (1963) it has been recognised that women play an important role in the economic and social life. In the world as a whole 27 out of every 100 women are economically active and about a third of the world's labour force is made up of women. An important characteristic of recent trends in the employment pattern of women has been the very substantial increase in the employment of married women on both a full-time and part-time basis. An earning woman now has become the trend of modern society.

But in the patriarchal societies where the man is the soul bread earner and the woman of the house balances his earnings, the idea of working woman in the family is not accepted. The role of a woman becomes more demanding after her marriage and after she becomes a mother. Being subjected to the dual demands of home and work, which are often antagonistic in nature the working mother is susceptible to experience role conflict. Thus, the pressure is felt more in case of a change-resistant organisations. David. A. Gershaw writes that even if we don't believe the stereotype that "a woman's place is in the home", women still have the conflict of being two places at once - with their children and at work.

Added conflict occurs when the woman earns more than her husband does, especially if the husband believes that his traditional role of "breadwinner" is being threatened. With all these conflicts these women feel more burdened and being dragged in different directions with the role of mother than they do with their role in paid work. Unlike the role of a mother a women's job finishes as soon as her working hours are over.

In the changed situation, a working woman has to face a crisis of adjustment as she is torn between the

dual commitments of home and work. A woman who chooses or is compelled to work is nonetheless expected to run the household and bear the principal responsibility for child-rearing and other functions appointed to her by nature. Again, under the existing cultural norms and values, she must make an adjustment with her husband who is not expected to make any such adjustment. She is confronted at the same time with the responsibilities and duties connected with her employment.

The commitments to workplace are multifaceted. A working woman has to perform a specific set of duties there and to bear the responsibilities associated with that (Krishna Chakraborty 1978). She further tells that here some doubt may arise as to whether it is possible for a single person to do justice to all these duties at a time. Employed housewives all over the world have to face this problem of adjustment among their varied role expectations. They are required by their position to play a dual set of roles – one as homemakers, wives and mothers and the other as employees. Being simultaneously confronted with the dual demands of home and work, they are liable to face the problem of adjustment. No matter whether out of their own choice or out of economic necessity, they have taken up the dual roles, balance between them (role obligations) is not an easy task. According to Krishna Chakraborty (1978) it requires not only ability and goodwill but physical endurance and psychological acceptance also. Hence a kind of conflict arising from a lack of adjustment between two competing roles is likely to be faced by those persons who have to comply with dual role obligations at a time. Thus, the dual responsibilities of home and work are likely to create some difficulties for the incumbents in fulfilling the dual obligations and expectations with equal competence and satisfaction and working mothers, therefore, are liable to experience a sort of exhaustion and conflict between dual obligations seemingly incompatible. (Krishna Chakraborty 1978).

Viola Klien wrote in her “Feminine Character” (1971) that the role conflict of working women is a product of a “cultural lag” or a discrepancy or contrast between values and material conditions. In her survey regarding the conflicts of housebound mothers, Gavron (1966) observed that motherhood was a role that all wished (indeed possibly felt it their duty) to enjoy and perform well. But few saw this as bringing their working life to a complete end. ‘In fact the majority of wives, both working class and middle class, appear from the discussion of their own views on home and work to be essentially on the horns of a dilemma. They want to work, and feel curiously functionless when not working, but at the same time they sense their great responsibility towards the children’. Bernerd (1971) noted that there are conflicts

among women themselves over whether and how they should perform different roles.

Chakraborty (1978) further points out that here tension is felt mainly because they feel torn between two contradictory loyalties – loyalty towards their profession and loyalty towards their home. And they want to be true to both and in trying to be so, they find themselves reft and exhausted. Since the woman who works must deal with the two conflicting priority systems, she may often find herself under the strain to perform both roles adequately. So we see that the psychological conflict is more serious and more difficult to fight. Ultimately, the role conflict of working mothers is more striking and more enduring in intellectual and professionally trained families of the upper-class than in working-class families.

The research conducted by the author Dr. Morty Kurvillia (2005) summarizes “The impact of the working mothers make children self reliant”. According to Hoffman (1989), ‘The impact of well-being for children of employed mothers show that satisfaction with their combined role has a positive effect not only on mother’s relationship with their children but on the children’s adjustment and abilities as well’.

Thus the position of working mothers in the present situation contains all the conditions liable to create difficulty in making adjustment: the two roles of working mothers seem to be contradictory and incompatible; there is a lot of ambiguity regarding what should be their proper roles. Mathur (2001) points out that the employment of women outside the home has become a fact of modern life. Moreover there is growing acceptance of the view that a woman can handle diverse roles and responsibilities of a working woman and mother simultaneously.

Several studies have been conducted to study the relationship between maternal employment and development of children’s personality. It has been observed that full time mothering is not always beneficial for the personality development of the children. Full time mother care during pre-school years may enhance intelligence in children but such children were also found fearful, conforming and inhibited in their adolescence (Moore 1975). Mother’s working status presents the child with a special situation which makes the child more competent and sensitive to mother’s working (Owen and Landsdale, 1978).

The substantial increase in women’s labour force participation over the past few decades is now a familiar social phenomenon. The most dramatic change in women’s labour force activity has occurred among married woman with children at their homes. Research findings indicate that maternal employment per se has little effect in child’s growth and development. However, maternal employment has

obvious repercussions on socialisation and rearing of children. Many feel that in the midst of busy work schedules, conscientious working mothers skilfully do manage to give children love, care and nurturance needed for their growth and development of personality and realization of potentials (Hoffman 1989).

Whether a mother's job has benign or harmful influence on child's socialisation depends on the interaction of several factors, such as the nature of substitute or supplementary child care available, social class, nature of mother's work (i.e. sporadically or steadily working), mother's feeling about her job and father's involvement with children. The attitude of both parents towards dual work status and mother's satisfaction with her work modifies the effects of maternal employment on their children. If a working mother is satisfied with her job or if she does not experience excessive guilt about being away from her children and if she has adequate household arrangements to prevent her from being stressed by the dual role demands, she is likely to perform similar to or better than the non-working mother. It is agreed that the influence of father, his role, mother's satisfaction, the nature and quality of social support system, parent-child interaction, features of the employment situation are but, a few variables mediating the influence of maternal employment on children's development (Mathur 2001). Review of studies shows that the interaction between the child and parents affects and shapes the growth of personality of children in important ways. It is believed that when mother works because she enjoys her occupation in order to help out the family finances, there is less familial disruption.

**Conclusion:** During the past few decades the proportion of women in the labour force has increased dramatically in all industrialised societies, women form a considerable part of the working population. Most women also establish relationships and become mothers. Combining work and family

has created considerable problems for women – problems that are not typically experienced by man. Domestic circumstances and the main responsibility for housework and the care of the children still affect women; they enter the labour market with one hand tied behind their backs.

Maternal employment is increasing day-by-day. Women's presence at work place and absence from home has implications for adjustments and arrangements so that the stresses emanating from women's work outside the home may be adequately coped. This is important for personal as well as societal growth and development of the child. It is no more a personal or individual problem but it can be seen as a social issue and solutions should be worked at the level of society. This means that organizations employing women have to accommodate this fact as part of reality and make necessary provisions for effective utilization of this important human resource. This will demand certain degree of restructuring and development of a new mind set that will allow women as equal partners.

Maternal employment may often foster rather than impede children's development, as long as working mothers are committed to parenting and have the support they need to be affective parents. Many findings have contributed to the fact that women can contribute fruitfully and more effectively at home and at workplace if their household and childrearing responsibilities are shared and supported by their spouse, older children and other family members. They need sensitivity on the part of their family members especially husband, employers and colleagues. This in turn is very essential if a woman wishes to capitalize on the gains for the family.

For the working mother, her work expands her horizons and gives better prospects no matter where she goes. Through her job she can expand her social circle which will give her more satisfaction with her life.

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Sushma Rai/ Phd Reasearch Scholar/ Jawaharlal Nehru University/ New Delhi/