

FROM HOME TO WORKPLACE: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL COST OF FAMILY ROLE PRESSURES ON WORKING WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

The conflict between family obligations and job requirements frequently leads to psychological stress for working women. Family role pressures, including caregiving, home expectations, marital obligations, and traditional gender norms, often contribute to emotional and mental challenges that impact women's overall well-being and professional functioning. The present study explores the psychological costs of family role pressures on working women and their influence on the personal and professional experiences of women. The study used a qualitative research design to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences. Data had been collected through in-depth interviews with working women, purposively sampled to ensure relevant and information-rich perspectives. The collected data was examined using thematic analysis to identify key themes as well as frequent patterns related to the psychological impacts of balancing family and work responsibilities. The results showed that the pressures of the family role cause psychological distress such as stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, guilt, frustration and less satisfaction with work-life balance. By increasing understanding of the psychological impact of family role pressures, this study provides meaningful insights for developing supportive policies, improving workplace and family support systems, and guiding future research on the challenges faced by working women in balancing professional and family responsibilities.

Keywords: Working women, family role pressures, psychological costs, work-family balance, qualitative research, thematic analysis, in-depth interviews, mental well-being, gender roles.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid transformation of global labor markets over recent decades has led to a significant increase in women's participation in paid employment, fundamentally reshaping traditional gender roles and family structures. While this shift has expanded opportunities for economic independence and social mobility, it has simultaneously intensified the complexity of role expectations placed upon working women. In many societies particularly those characterized by persistent patriarchal norms women are expected to perform dual or even multiple roles as

employees, mothers, spouses, and caregivers. This convergence of professional and domestic responsibilities has given rise to what scholars conceptualize as *work-family conflict* (WFC), a multidimensional construct referring to the incompatibility between work and family demands (Bayrakçı et al., 2026).

The psychological costs associated with these intersecting role pressures are substantial and multifaceted. Studies indicate that the simultaneous management of occupational and familial roles generates chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and role strain among

working women (Ahmadifaraz et al., 2013). For working women, the continuous allocation of limited resources across competing domains often results in diminished well-being, increased fatigue, and reduced life satisfaction.

The connection of work and family roles also has significant implications for psychological well-being at the household level. Research suggests that the allocation of women's time and energy between professional and domestic spheres affects not only individual mental health but also family cohesion, emotional climate, and overall life satisfaction (Chu, & Zhang, 2024). When work demands influence upon family life or vice versa the resulting imbalance can disrupt interpersonal relationships and diminish the quality of both domains. Contrariwise, achieving a sustainable balance between work and family roles has been associated with improved emotional well-being, reduced fatigue, and enhanced vitality (Olivieri et al., 2024).

Literature Review

The intricate interplay between family roles and work-family conflict presents a significant challenge for individuals striving to balance their professional and personal responsibilities. As individuals navigate their roles as parents, partners, and caregivers alongside their work responsibilities, tensions can arise due to time constraints and conflicting priorities. Achieving equilibrium between these roles can be particularly challenging for women, who historically bear a larger share of caregiving responsibilities. The resulting stress and strain can impact overall well-being and contribute to challenges such as career progression, mental health, and quality of life (Byron, 2005).

Family is a primary concern for both man and woman. Respect is earned by sticking to family norms in patriarchal cultures such as Pakistan, particularly in Baluchistan. family roles are defined by gender. Households in Pakistan are often hierarchical, with labor divided according to age, gender, and relationship. A daughter-in-law, for example, is expected to work more than other family members (Fafchamps & Quisumbing, 2003).

Primarily women acquire respect by being obedient and focused on improving the lives of others around them, especially their husbands and children. Women's tasks, such as housework and child care, are viewed as vital to family life. Household tasks often require more working hours. A woman's role as a wife or mother always takes preference over her own accomplishments. A woman may engage in paid labor, but this does not certainly raise her status or relieve her from housework and/or care responsibilities. Because women acquire respect by giving preference to her family over anything, many women find it difficult to give up these responsibilities for personal achievements (Veen & Shakeel, 2019).

Pakistani women usually suffer intra-role conflict since they play several roles as family members, including not only mother and wife, but also daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, and sister, among others (Faiz, 2015). Household responsibilities are one of the major causes of WFC as managing house and work at a same time so demanding (Ahmad, 2008).

Traditional gender norms require a woman to care for the home and family, while men are expected to work. As a result, when women enter the workforce, they will bring troubles to her (Umer & Rehman, 2013); issues arise when she is required to handle both domains, as approval for the working out side is often granted to women who manage both domains independently and without any relaxation of household chores (Couzy, 2012). Working women must juggle work and home domains in order to achieve work-life balance (Saher et al., 2013).

The rearing and caring for children serve as a significant contributor to work-family conflict. The demands associated with childcare, encompassing emotional support, supervision, and guidance, often clash with the requirements of a demanding work schedule (Eby et al., 2005).

The interplay between these roles can lead to a challenging dynamic where individuals are torn between dedicating time and energy to family duties and fulfilling the demands of their jobs. This can lead to emotional exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction, and an overall diminished well-being (Shockley et al., 2017).

Moreover, societal gender norms, which traditionally allocate a disproportionate share of childcare responsibilities to women, further intensify the challenges of work-family conflict, as women often bear a heavier burden in navigating these intricate responsibilities. As a result of this significant societal trend, the family becomes an organizational stakeholder, and the work/life balance paradigm shift begins (Denise, 2007).

Navigating work-family conflict poses significant challenges to maintaining healthy family relationships as individuals strive to balance their professional commitments with their roles within the family. The demands of work and family often intertwine, potentially leading to tension, time constraints, and emotional exhaustion, which can subsequently impact family dynamics (Duxbury & Higgins, 2012).

The juggling act of fulfilling job-related responsibilities while being present and engaged in family life can result in reduced quality time and strained interactions with family members.

It is an inevitable reality that working women encounter difficulties just by virtue of their gender. Women have progressed from being skilled housewives to being on par with their male counterparts in terms of skills and talents. This is a new generation of women that desire to follow their ideal job. However, not everyone's life is a bed of roses. With the working women, there is much more tension. One must first meet the needs of one's job, followed by the expectations of one's family (Gupta et al., 2018).

Research Methodology

The present study examines the psychological costs associated with family role pressures on working women, with a particular focus on how these pressures are experienced and internalized within the work family interface. In many socio-cultural contexts, women are expected to simultaneously fulfill demanding professional responsibilities while adhering to deeply rooted familial roles and expectations. This dual burden often creates role conflict, which can significantly impact psychological well-being. Accordingly, this study explores how such pressures manifest in the form of stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and

overall mental strain, while also considering their implications for women's job performance, career progression, and work satisfaction.

The study adopts a qualitative research design to capture the depth and complexity of participants' lived experiences. A total of 15 in-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide, allowing flexibility to probe individual experiences while maintaining consistency across key themes. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that those included had direct and relevant experience of managing both professional and familial responsibilities. The sample comprised working women employed in universities, banks, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), thereby representing a range of institutional environments with varying job demands, organizational cultures, and expectations.

Data was analyzed using thematic analysis, which provided a systematic yet flexible approach to identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within the data. This method enabled the researcher to move beyond surface-level descriptions and engage in a deeper exploration of recurring themes, such as role conflict, psychological impacts, emotional labor, and perceived societal expectations. Through iterative coding and theme development, the analysis illuminated the complex ways in which family role pressures intersect with professional responsibilities to produce psychological strain.

Findings

Family role pressures affect each participant in distinct ways, reflecting variations in personal circumstances, social contexts, and mental health. The respondents highlighted the multidimensional challenges faced by working women as they play multiple and often competing roles, including professional responsibilities, household duties, and caregiving obligations. These expectations frequently place women in a position where they must bring together modern career goals with deeply rooted gender roles. As a result, many participants reported experiencing tension between their professional identities and familial responsibilities. Overall, the findings

suggest that the challenge of balancing career ambitions with family obligations is not merely a matter of time management, but is deeply embedded in broader socio-cultural expectations, which can significantly contribute to psychological strain and emotional distress among working women.

4.3 Family Roles

Respondents were agreed that working women have many responsibilities, such as performing many household tasks, raising and caring for children, and maintaining family relationships. Working women frequently struggle to balance their career goals with family responsibilities, and they may face criticism or judgement from others for not conforming to traditional gender roles.

Household Activities

A woman is responsible for carrying out a variety of household chores, including cooking, cleaning, dishwashing, weekly grocery shopping, and managing household finances. Interviewees said that women must balance these tasks, as well as managing their office work, which puts a great deal of mental and physical strain on them. Stress, fatigue, and even burnout may result from this. In addition, women frequently bear an unfair burden to perform these tasks due to societal expectations and gender roles, which can increase feelings of inequality and frustration.

A Respondent expressed that

"As a working mother, I feel like I'm constantly juggling multiple roles and responsibilities. I have to be a parent, a wife, a daughter, a sister, and a professional all at once. It's hard to find time for everything, and I often feel like I'm falling short in one area or another. It's a constant battle to prioritize and balance everything, and it can be incredibly stressful." [INT University Employee]

Another one said that

"I feel like my extended family doesn't always understand the demands of my job and the pressure I'm under. There are times when they expect me to drop everything and attend to their needs, even when I'm working. It can be incredibly frustrating and exhausting, and it's hard to get them to understand the amount of work I have to do

both at home and at work. I feel like I'm constantly pulled in multiple directions, and it's affecting my ability to function. In result I constantly feel stressed and tensed from the demands of work and personal responsibilities. It seems like there is never enough time in the day to accomplish everything that needs to be done." [INT Ngo Employee]

One of the respondent expressed about these traditional gender roles which are putting more mental pressure on women that

"Societal expectations of gender roles can create tension within our family. My partner and I both work full-time, but there are still expectations that I should be the primary caregiver and housekeeper. This can lead to feelings of resentment and frustration, as well as a lack of support for me in my professional endeavors. It's important for us to challenge these expectations and work towards a more equal division of labor and responsibilities." [INT Bank Employee]

Some of the respondents share that their husbands are not willing to help them with household activities. Help from husbands in household activities has become increasingly important in modern times. With both partners often working full-time jobs, sharing the responsibilities of cooking, cleaning, and childcare can help reduce stress and improve the overall quality of life.

4. Child Rearing and Caring Responsibility

All the respondents were agreed on the fact that children are the first priority and responsibility of working women. Whatever they are earning is to provide a better life, education, health, and other facilities to their children, but unfortunately, working women have to face issues in their child care too because it is only their responsibility to look after their children, and no one in their home, not even their husband, is ready to share this responsibility with them. This not only adds to their workload but also creates a sense of guilt and stress, which can negatively impact their mental health. Moreover, a lack of affordable and quality child care options in many areas further exacerbates the problem, making it difficult for working mothers to balance their professional and personal lives.

A respondent shared that

"Everything I am doing is to give a better life to my children. As a result of this high inflation, it is difficult for my husband to afford a quality education for our children. But many times I have to ignore their little personal needs due to the workload both in the office and at home. This brings a feeling of guilt to me because I am not proving myself as a good mother. And this guilt brings a lot of stress with it, which affects my mental and emotional well-being. I try to manage my time better and seek help from family, but sometimes it still feels overwhelming. Nonetheless, I remind myself that I am doing the best I can and that my children will understand one day that I did everything in my power to provide for them." [INT Ngo Employee]

Another one shared that

"After the morning prayers, I get to work. I prepare their school lunches, take care of their bags and water bottles, wake them up, and get them ready for school. It's difficult to feed them breakfast as well. Mostly, on arriving home, I head straight for the kitchen because everyone, including my kids, is waiting for lunch. Taking time away from other household duties in the evening to teach my kids and assist them with their homework is another challenging task. Then, while I was teaching them, dinner preparations began. Due to this constant fatigue, I am exhausted and drained after feeding them until they fall asleep and doing other household tasks." [INT University Teacher]

Another one shared her single parenting experience and said that

"My husband died few years back and as a single parent, I have to take on all of the responsibilities of raising my child on my own. This can be incredibly challenging, both financially and emotionally. I have to balance work and caregiving responsibilities without any additional support, and there are times when it feels like I'm barely keeping my head above water. It's important to have a support system in place and to be willing to ask for help when needed." [INT Bank Employee]

Another single mother said

"Being a single mother and working woman, there is always financial pressure to provide for my family. I have to pay bills, rent, food, and other expenses on my own, which can be overwhelming at times. This financial burden creates stress and anxiety, as I am constantly worried about making ends meet. Sometimes, I have to work extra hours or take on additional work to make enough money to support my family, which can be

exhausting and leave me with very little time for myself." [INT Bank Employee]

The feeling of guilt over bad parenting is a great stressor for working women who are also mothers. Balancing the demands of work and family can be challenging, and when mothers feel like they are falling short in their parenting responsibilities, it can lead to feelings of guilt and anxiety. This can have negative effects on their mental health and overall well-being, as well as their relationships with their children and husbands.

Maintaining Family Relationships

Working women said that every day, they juggle their multiple responsibilities as mothers, wives, daughters, and professional women. Because each role depends on the agreement and cooperation of those around them, they are interdependent. They can play the roles more easily if others allow or collaborate with them. Their upbringing and family life styles, behaviors, and cultures have a big impact on how they play out their roles and how they react to situations. Working women were at the agreement that cooperation of family members make it easier for them to maintain good family relationships.

One of them said that

"Maintaining good relations with family while working demands too much from you. Because when you come home exhausted, you want some rest, but you have to sacrifice that and work for your family so you can provide them with food or other services that they need. This can lead to feelings of resentment and burnout, which can ultimately strain your relationships with your loved ones." [INT University Employee]

Another one said

"Sometime it feels that doing a job after marriage is a wrong decision. Because maintaining both is becoming difficult day by day. The guilt I carry is burdening me too much. I feel I am not able to perform well either on job or at home. Mismanagement in home leads to every day conflict with husband or in laws. Stress levels are so high that sometimes I need relaxants to sleep. No one tries to understand the dual burden I have. This is disappointing and depressing." [INT Ngo Employee]

Lack of understanding with husband and lack of cooperation from husbands is making the life of working women very difficult. It is battle of

survival they had to fight every single day of their lives. Keeping in strain leads to serious psychological consequences.

Discussion

Women encounter a plethora of challenges when it comes to juggling work and family duties, including gender-based bias and an uneven distribution of domestic chores. The challenges faced by working women at home with family roles are numerous and ongoing, and finding a work-life balance is a continuous effort. Gender discrimination and stereotyping still exist. Balancing work and family life is still a significant challenge for many women. It requires prioritizing self-care, effective communication, and maintaining a positive mindset. Effective communication is critical to managing work and family responsibilities. Women should communicate clearly with family members about the demands of work and the time and energy it requires. This can help to reduce conflicts and ensure that everyone is on the same page. Self-care is essential to maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Women should prioritize taking breaks throughout the day, whether it's going for a walk or just taking a few deep breaths. Setting boundaries with work and home life can also help reduce stress and promote self-care. It's important for women to have time for themselves and their own well-being. It is also important to maintain a positive mindset when faced with challenges. Finally, seeking support from friends, family, and mental health professionals is crucial in managing stress and achieving personal and professional goals.

Conclusion

This study revealed that working women in Pakistan, specifically Baluchistan encounter varying levels of challenges. This research contributes to the literature by shedding light on the challenges of working women in the Pakistani context. The study found that working women face challenges at all levels in both work and family capacities, and that the socio-cultural values have a significant impact on both personal and organizational aspects of their lives. Patriarchal

norms also play a role in these challenges and put more pressure to perform family roles. The societal expectations and cultural norms often place a heavy burden on women to manage both their work and family roles, which can lead to high levels of stress, burnout, and psychological distress. The limited access to childcare facilities, lack of flexible working arrangements, and discriminatory workplace policies and non-cooperative behavior of family can worsen these challenges. Women often face a "double burden" of having to work outside the home while also taking on the majority of household and caregiving responsibilities. In conclusion, the research highlights the challenges faced by working women as a home maker and emphasize the socio-cultural impact on their personal and professional lives. It identifies issues such as limited childcare access, lack of family support, burden of family chores, and discriminatory policies, all intensified by patriarchal norms. Women experience a "double burden," balancing work and family roles, which results in high stress and psychological distress.

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