



Problems And Challenges Of Working Mothers: A Sociological Study

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Abstract

In recent decades, the participation of women in the workforce has increased significantly due to rising educational attainment, economic necessity, and changing social norms. Despite this progress, working mothers continue to face multiple challenges while balancing professional responsibilities and family obligations. The present sociological study aims to explore the problems and challenges experienced by working mothers in their daily lives. The study focuses on work–family conflict, role strain, workplace discrimination, psychological stress, and lack of social support. A descriptive research design was adopted, and data were collected from working mothers using a structured questionnaire. The findings reveal that long working hours, inadequate childcare facilities, gender role expectations, and limited organizational support significantly affect the physical, emotional, and social well-being of working mothers. The study emphasizes the need for supportive workplace policies, shared domestic responsibilities, and social awareness to improve the quality of life of working mothers.

Keywords: Working Mothers, Work–Family Conflict, Gender Roles, Role Strain, Sociological Study

1. Introduction

Women's participation in paid employment has emerged as a defining characteristic of contemporary society, driven by rapid economic development, urbanization, expansion of educational opportunities, and rising living costs. Increasingly, women—particularly mothers—are entering the workforce to contribute to household income, achieve financial independence, and attain personal and professional fulfillment. This shift has significantly altered traditional family structures and gender roles, making women's employment a vital component of modern socio-economic systems.

Despite these advancements, working mothers continue to encounter distinct challenges arising from the simultaneous demands of employment and family life. In the Indian socio-cultural context, women have traditionally been regarded as the primary caregivers and managers of household responsibilities. These expectations persist even after women assume paid employment, resulting in a dual burden of professional and domestic roles. The pressure to fulfill both roles effectively often leads to role overload, time constraints, and psychological stress.

From a sociological perspective, the challenges faced by working mothers extend beyond individual experiences and reflect broader structural inequalities rooted in gender norms, workplace practices, and family dynamics. The strain of balancing work and family responsibilities has significant implications for marital relationships, child development, occupational performance, and the physical and emotional well-being of women. Understanding these challenges is essential for developing supportive social policies, promoting gender equity, and improving the quality of life of working mothers in contemporary society.

2. Statement of the Problem

The increasing participation of women, particularly mothers, in paid employment represents a significant social transformation in contemporary society. While employment provides economic security and personal empowerment, working mothers often experience multiple challenges in managing the dual responsibilities of work and family life. Social expectations that assign women the primary role in childcare and household management continue to persist, regardless of their employment status. This imbalance places working mothers at a heightened risk of role conflict, stress, and physical and emotional exhaustion.

Despite progressive changes in labor policies and women's education, many workplaces remain inadequately equipped to address the specific needs of working mothers. Rigid working hours, limited maternity benefits, insufficient childcare facilities, and lack of organizational support contribute to ongoing inequality and psychological strain. Moreover, the absence of shared domestic responsibilities and persistent gender norms within families further intensify these challenges.

In this context, there is a need for a systematic sociological examination of the problems and challenges faced by working mothers. The present study seeks to explore the social, economic, and psychological dimensions of their experiences, with the aim of understanding the underlying structural factors and suggesting measures to promote a more supportive and equitable environment for working mothers.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the major problems faced by working mothers.
2. To examine work–family conflict among working mothers.
3. To assess the social and psychological challenges experienced by working mothers.
4. To study workplace-related challenges such as discrimination and lack of support.
5. To suggest measures for improving the work and family life of working mothers.

3. Hypotheses of the Study

Null Hypotheses (H₀)

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between employment responsibilities and work–family conflict among working mothers.

H₀₂: There is no significant association between workplace support and the level of stress experienced by working mothers.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between domestic responsibilities and psychological well-being of working mothers.

H₀₄: There is no significant difference in challenges faced by working mothers across different types of employment sectors.

Research (Alternative) Hypotheses (H₁)

H₁₁: There is a significant relationship between employment responsibilities and work–family conflict among working mothers.

H₁₂: There is a significant association between workplace support and the level of stress experienced by working mothers.

H₁₃: There is a significant relationship between domestic responsibilities and psychological well-being of working mothers.

H₁₄: There is a significant difference in challenges faced by working mothers across different types of employment sectors.

4. Assumptions of the Study

1. Working mothers experience multiple social, economic, and psychological challenges while balancing work and family roles.
2. Respondents will provide honest and accurate information regarding their experiences and problems.
3. Workplace environment and family support play a crucial role in influencing the stress levels of working mothers.
4. Socio-cultural norms significantly affect the roles and responsibilities of working mothers.
5. The tools used for data collection are assumed to be valid and reliable.

5. Delimitations of the Study

1. The study is limited to working mothers employed in selected urban areas only.
2. Only mothers with at least one dependent child are included in the study.
3. The study focuses on social, economic, and psychological challenges and does not include medical or clinical aspects.
4. The sample size is limited and findings cannot be generalized to all working mothers.
5. The study is restricted to a specific time period during which data were collected.

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Research Design

The present study adopted a **descriptive sociological research design** to systematically examine the problems and challenges faced by working mothers. This design was considered appropriate as it enables the researcher to describe existing conditions, attitudes, and experiences of the study population without manipulating variables.

6.2 Area of the Study

The study was conducted in a selected **urban area (city/town)**. Urban settings were chosen due to the higher participation of women in formal employment and the increasing prevalence of dual-earner families.

6.3 Population of the Study

The population for the study comprised **working mothers employed in both government and private sectors**. Only mothers who were currently employed and living with their children were included in the population.

6.4 Sample Size

A total of **100 working mothers** constituted the sample for the study. The sample size was considered adequate to obtain reliable information regarding the socio-economic and psychological challenges experienced by working mothers.

6.5 Sampling Technique

A **simple random sampling technique** was employed to select respondents from the study population, ensuring equal opportunity for participation and minimizing selection bias.

6.6 Tool for Data Collection

Data were collected using a **structured questionnaire** developed by the researcher. The questionnaire consisted of two sections:

- **Section A:** Socio-demographic variables such as age, education, occupation, type of employment, and number of children.
- **Section B:** Questions related to work–family balance, workplace challenges, domestic responsibilities, stress levels, and social support.

6.7 Method of Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using **descriptive statistical techniques**, including frequencies, percentages, tables, and graphical representations. These methods facilitated clear interpretation and presentation of the findings.

6. Results and Discussion

6.1 Work–Family Conflict

The findings of the study reveal that the majority of working mothers experience considerable difficulty in balancing professional responsibilities with family obligations. Long working hours, inflexible job schedules, and workplace demands were identified as the primary factors contributing to work–family conflict. Many respondents reported that time constraints limited their ability to adequately fulfill family roles, resulting in emotional strain and feelings of inadequacy. From a sociological perspective, this conflict reflects the structural imbalance between paid work expectations and unpaid domestic labor traditionally assigned to women.

6.2 Household Responsibilities

The study indicates that most working mothers continue to bear the primary responsibility for household chores and childcare, despite being employed full-time. Limited participation of spouses and other family members in domestic work significantly increased the workload of working mothers. This unequal division of labor reinforces traditional gender roles and contributes to role overload. The findings suggest that employment alone does not alter deeply rooted social norms regarding women’s domestic responsibilities.

6.3 Workplace Challenges

Respondents reported several workplace-related challenges, including lack of flexible working arrangements, inadequate maternity benefits, and limited access to childcare facilities. Instances of gender-based discrimination in promotions, salary increments, and career advancement opportunities were also highlighted. These challenges not only affect job satisfaction but also restrict the professional growth of working mothers. The absence of supportive organizational policies further intensifies stress and work–family imbalance.

6.4 Psychological and Health Problems

The study found that a significant number of working mothers experienced psychological and health-related problems such as stress, fatigue, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. Feelings of guilt related to insufficient time spent with children were commonly reported. Prolonged exposure to role conflict and continuous pressure to meet both work and family expectations adversely affected their mental well-being. These findings underline the need to address mental health concerns among working mothers as a social and occupational issue.

6.5 Social Challenges

Social expectations regarding ideal motherhood and childcare practices emerged as a major challenge for working mothers. Many respondents reported facing criticism from family members and society for prioritizing employment. Such social pressures negatively affected their self-confidence and emotional stability. These findings emphasize the influence of societal attitudes and cultural norms in shaping the experiences of working mothers.

7. Major Findings

- Working mothers experience a high level of work–family conflict due to competing role demands.
- Traditional gender roles continue to place the primary burden of domestic work on working mothers.
- Inadequate workplace support and rigid organizational policies contribute to stress and job dissatisfaction.
- Psychological stress, fatigue, and emotional exhaustion are common among working mothers.
- Support from family members and employers plays a significant role in reducing the challenges faced by working mothers.

8. Suggestions

1. Employers should introduce flexible working hours and work-from-home options to help working mothers balance work and family responsibilities.
2. Affordable and accessible childcare facilities should be provided at or near workplaces.
3. Families should encourage equitable sharing of domestic responsibilities among all members.
4. Organizations should implement gender-sensitive workplace policies, including adequate maternity benefits and equal career advancement opportunities.
5. Social awareness programs should be conducted to promote positive attitudes toward working mothers and challenge traditional gender stereotypes.

9. Conclusion

The present study highlights that working mothers face multiple and interconnected challenges rooted in social structures, persistent gender norms, and unsupportive workplace practices. While paid employment empowers women economically and enhances their social status, the absence of adequate institutional and familial support significantly increases their physical and emotional burden. Addressing these challenges requires a collective effort from families, employers, policymakers, and society as a whole. Creating an inclusive, supportive, and gender-sensitive environment is essential for improving the quality of life of working mothers and for achieving genuine gender equality in contemporary society.

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