

# Navigating Work-Life Balance: The Influence of Spousal Support on Working Mothers' Professional and Personal Well-Being

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## ABSTRACT

Working mothers face persistent challenges in balancing their professional and personal lives, often resulting in work-life conflicts that affect their overall well-being. This study examines the role of spousal support in navigating these challenges. This study employs a qualitative, interpretive phenomenological approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 full-time working mothers, each employed for at least six hours daily. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The key findings of the study identified six key types of spousal support. Instrumental support involved assistance with household chores, childcare, and daily responsibilities, reducing stress and easing the dual burden of work and family life. Parenting support ensured equitable childcare responsibilities, fostering healthier family dynamics and reducing parental exhaustion. Financial support alleviated economic pressures, offering career flexibility and minimizing work-related stress. Emotional support, including encouragement, reassurance, and empathy, helped mothers cope with psychological challenges and maintain motivation in both their professional and personal roles. Esteem support validated their professional identity, boosting confidence, job satisfaction, and career aspirations. Critical support aided in dealing with high-stress situations such as health emergencies, career changes, unexpected workload increases, or urgent family concerns. Unlike daily help, essential support necessitates rapid intervention and proactive involvement from a spouse to avoid mental or physical depletion. These findings emphasize the essential role of spousal involvement and the need for supportive workplace policies to enhance the well-being and productivity of working mothers, ultimately fostering a more balanced and fulfilling professional and personal life.

**Keywords:** Working mothers, Spousal Support, Work-life balance, Work-life conflict, Household responsibilities, Childcare, Career, Mental well-being, Productivity

## 1. Introduction

In contemporary society, women are making significant strides in the workforce, contributing to economic growth, innovation, and societal development. Despite these advancements, working mothers continue to face persistent challenges in balancing their careers with personal and family responsibilities. The stereotypical notion of women should primarily manage household duties and serve as primary caregivers remains deeply ingrained in many cultures, regardless of their professional obligations. These societal

norms create substantial pressure on working mothers, often leading to work-life conflicts that affect their mental and physical well-being, job performance, and family relationships. The severity of the struggle is demonstrated by recent data. Nearly half of working women report feeling stressed "a lot of the day," compared to roughly four out of ten males, according to a 2024 Gallup poll. Furthermore, compared to just 11% of males, 17% of women say they manage personal or family obligations at work on a daily basis shedding light on the continuous strain that working mothers face.[13]

### **1.1 Work-life Balance**

Work-life balance is a significant aspect of progressive professional life, particularly for working mothers who juggle the demands of career and family. The ability to manage professional responsibilities while maintaining personal well-being is essential for productivity, job satisfaction, and overall quality of life. However, achieving this balance remains subtle for many working mothers due to structural workplace barriers, rigid gender norms, and inadequate family support systems. Work-life imbalance can lead to increased stress, burnout, and diminished career progression, particularly in women-dominated professions [6]. Moreover, long working hours, job insecurity, and lack of workplace flexibility often compel mothers to make career compromises, impacting their long-term professional aspirations [15]. Corporate policies mitigate work-life conflicts, with organizations that offer flexible work arrangements, parental leave, and on-site childcare showing improved employee retention and job satisfaction [14]. Despite their advancing participation in the workforce, societal norms continue to place disparate caregiving and household responsibilities on women, leading to stress, exhaustion, and work-family conflict [10]. Inadequate workplace policies, lack of flexibility, and insufficient employer support contribute to career stagnation among working mothers, often forcing them to prioritize familial obligations over professional growth [12]. Hence workplace flexibility and employer assistance are crucial in mitigating these challenges [15;14]. However, even with institutional support, the personal domain, particularly spousal involvement, remains a crucial determinant of work-life balance and overall well-being [7].

### **1.2 Spousal Support**

As Michelle Obama eloquently said "True partnership is not about division of labour, but about supporting each other in every aspect of life,". When spousal support is provided thoroughly, it can lower stress, avoid burnout, and improve job satisfaction, allowing working mothers to succeed in their personal and professional lives. Spousal support for working mothers is not merely a practical necessity but a reflection of deeper understanding of the importance of equality, partnership, and shared responsibility. In a world where work and family life are often seen as competing duress, true harmony arises when both partners recognize that caregiving and professional obligations are not gendered roles but shared marital responsibilities. Spousal support is essential for maintaining a positive work-life balance, as it provides emotional stability, practical assistance, and financial security. A supportive spouse plays a pivotal role in reducing the stress associated with juggling professional and personal responsibilities. Emotional support, such as encouragement and active listening, enhances resilience and helps working mothers manage workplace pressures [3]. Instrumental support, which includes sharing household chores and childcare duties, directly reduces the burden on mothers and enables them to focus on their careers without compromising family responsibilities [6]. Financial support from a spouse can ease economic pressures, allowing mothers to pursue career advancements or invest in self-care, further contributing to their well-being [9]. Additionally, social and parental support ensure a more equitable distribution of family duties, fostering a collaborative and stress-free household environment. Spousal involvement in child-rearing is

directly linked to marital satisfaction and subjective well-being among mothers, reinforcing the idea that shared responsibilities create a more harmonious work-life integration [7]. Conversely, the absence of spousal support has significant negative consequences. Without adequate emotional and practical assistance, working mothers experience heightened stress, fatigue, and feelings of isolation, which can lead to burnout and decreased job performance [11]. In extreme cases, prolonged work-family conflict can contribute to strained marital relationships and declining mental health.

The significance of the study is to provide insights into the lived experiences of working mothers examining how spousal support or lack of it affects their ability to balance work and family responsibilities. The results of this study will add to the current conversation about gender roles, family dynamics, and work-life integration by highlighting the vital role that spousal support plays in creating a work-life balance, the significance of sturdy marital bonds, and workplace policies that acknowledge and take into account the difficulties faced by working mothers. Additionally, this study promotes a more inclusive approach to work-life balance in which working mothers' success and well-being are actively supported by both professional associations and family ties. This research will help organizations, legislators, mental health providers, and spouses by determining the best ways to support their partners.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Statement of the Problem**

Working women often face strife in balancing their professional and personal responsibilities, leading to increased stress and a deterioration in overall well-being. While spousal support is a widely acknowledged factor that mitigates work-life conflicts, there is limited research on how specific forms of spousal support impact well-being and job satisfaction. This study explores the influence of various types of marital support on work-life balance and overall well-being among working mothers.

### **2.2 Research Design**

This study adopts a qualitative research design using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to examine how working mothers perceive spousal support and its role in their daily lives. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the complexities of work-life integration and provides rich insights into the lived experiences of participants.

### **2.3 Sampling**

The study sample consists of 12 full-time working mothers, selected through purposive sampling. Participants were drawn from diverse professional backgrounds to ensure diverse perspectives.

### **2.4 Inclusion Criteria**

Participants were eligible for the study if :

- Married
- Employed full-time
- Have at least one child under the age of 18
- Below the age of 45
- A minimum of six months of experience managing both work and family responsibilities

### **2.5 Exclusion Criteria**

Participants were excluded from the study if they:

- Were single mothers
- Were stay-at-home mothers
- Lived in joint or extended families

- Employed household help for childcare or domestic responsibilities

## 2.6 Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, conducted both online and offline. These interviews utilized open-ended questions to encourage participants to share their experiences freely. When necessary, follow-up and probing questions were asked to gain deeper insights. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and verified for accuracy.

## 2.7 Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), ensuring that themes and subthemes emerged directly from participant narratives. This structured approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the impact of spousal support on work-life balance and overall well-being.

## 2.8 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood the study's purpose and their right to withdraw anytime. Confidentiality was maintained by using participant codes instead of names. Data was securely stored, and interviews were conducted with sensitivity to avoid distress. The study followed ethical guidelines to protect participants' rights and well-being.

## 3. Results

**Table 1 Showing the preliminary details of the participants**

Participant Code	Age	Profession	Children
P1	40	Teacher	2
P2	43	Teacher	3
P3	38	Senior Finance Analyst	2
P4	41	Finance Manager	2
P5	36	Engineer	1
P6	39	Professor	2
P7	33	Dentist	1
P8	35	Professional HairDresser	2
P9	37	Nurse	2
P10	38	HR Manager	2
P11	40	Teacher	2
P12	34	Nurse	2

This study aimed to explore different types of spousal support that working mothers receive and how it influences their work-life balance and well-being. Thematic analysis was conducted using the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), through which, six major themes of support experienced by working mothers were identified (a) Instrumental Support, (b) Parenting Support, (c) Financial Support, (d) Emotional Support, (e) Esteem Support, and (f) Critical Support. Each theme represents a key area where working mothers receive assistance from their spouses.

### 3.1 Instrumental Support

Instrumental support incorporates tangible aid with domestic duties, including cooking, cleaning, and running errands. Numerous participants stated that having a spouse who actively engages in these tasks

greatly reduces their stress and which contributes in balancing their professional and personal obligations. *"When I have extra schoolwork, such as planning activities or marking books, he steps in to help with household chores, like warming up food or doing the dishes. This allows me to finish my work without staying up too late."* (P2)

However, some participants reported fickle or trivial involvement, reinforcing traditional gender norms where household duties still fall extremely on women.

*"My husband was working abroad, so I had to handle everything alone. However, now he has returned and is working here. Whenever he is around, he helps with small household tasks, like doing the dishes or cleaning."* (P3)

### 3.2 Parenting Support

Parenting support involves the collaborative duties involved in raising children, including assisting in duties like homework, participating in parent-teacher conferences, and overseeing bedtime routines. Several participants noted that their partners played an active role in parenting, which alleviated their responsibilities.

*"My husband takes care of our son's homework, so I can focus on preparing for the next workday without feeling guilty."* (P1)

However, for others, parenting duties were largely managed by the mothers, with spouses contributing only insignificantly.

*"Even though he's home, I'm the one who gets up at night when the baby cries. He assumes I'm better at handling these things."* (P3)

### 3.3 Financial Support

Financial support had a multidimensional impact. Some participants profited from shared financial responsibilities, reducing financial stress.

*"Because we both contribute equally to household expenses, I don't feel pressured to overwork myself just to make ends meet."* (P11)

However, financial strain was evident in cases where spouses had unreliable earnings, obliging women to compensate for financial shortfalls.

*"During the COVID-19 pandemic, my husband's business suffered a major loss, and for a year, I was the sole financial provider for our family. It was a tough period—I had to work overtime, manage expenses, and still take care of my family."* (P4)

### 3.4 Emotional Support

Emotional support played a crucial role in alleviating stress and enhancing job satisfaction. Those participants who experienced emotional validation and reassurance from their spouses indicated higher levels of resilience and mental well-being.

*"When I come home and share my achievements from work, he listens and appreciates me. That encouragement motivates me."* (P2)

On the contrary, a lack of emotional connection contributed to feelings of stress and isolation.

*"Not really. Since he is often away, we don't get much time to discuss work stress. I usually talk to a friend or take some time for myself instead."* (P1)

### 3.5 Esteem Support

Esteem includes providing encouragement and motivation through verbal acknowledgment of career progress. Partners who regularly recognized and appreciated their spouse's professional contributions played a significant role in enhancing their confidence and overall job satisfaction.



*"He constantly encourages me to take on leadership roles at work. It pushes me to aim higher."* (P3)

Whereas, the absence of esteem support caused certain participants to reevaluate their career decisions and sense of self-worth.

*"I don't think my husband really believes in my career goals. It makes me question myself too."* (P1)

### **3.6 Critical Support**

Critical support involves the engagement of a spouse during periods of significant stress, including medical emergencies, work deadlines, or various crises. Those who experienced prompt and proactive assistance from their partners indicated improved stress management and a decrease in burnout levels.

*"During my pregnancy, my husband took on all household duties. It was the biggest support I could ask for."* (P9)

However, some women lacked critical support during crucial times, increasing their stress levels.

*"When I was unwell, I still had to cook and take care of the kids. I just wished he had stepped in more."* (P11)

These findings align with previous studies that emphasize the importance of spousal involvement during crisis periods, highlighting how timely support can significantly prevent burnout.

## **4. Discussion**

This study aimed to explore the various forms of spousal support available to working mothers and to determine the impact of this support on their overall well-being and work-life balance. The research identified six key themes: Financial Support, Emotional Support, Esteem Support, Parenting Support, Instrumental Support, and Critical Support. These themes provide insight into how different types of spousal involvement can help achieve work-life balance.

The results of our research indicate that both parenting and instrumental support play a crucial role in mitigating the dual pressures experienced by working women. This finding is consistent with earlier studies that demonstrate that the equitable distribution of childcare and household responsibilities can significantly lower stress levels and improve women's effectiveness both at work and in domestic settings [7]. Nevertheless, discrepancies in the provision of instrumental support reveal that conventional gender roles still influence the allocation of household tasks, resulting in many women shouldering the bulk of home management duties, despite some contributions from their partners. This underscores the necessity for a fairer distribution of parenting and household responsibilities. The influence of financial support was multifaceted and diverse. Some individuals encountered financial challenges stemming from their partners' irregular income, while others experienced advantages from shared financial obligations. These findings are consistent with earlier research indicating a strong correlation between financial stress and heightened work-life conflict, especially among mothers who are the main earners [12]. To alleviate the negative consequences of financial pressure, it is crucial to prioritize financial planning and cooperative decision-making within families as vital approaches to achieving a sustainable work-life balance. Emotional and esteem support were found to have a significant impact on both professional satisfaction and psychological well-being. Participants who experienced validation, reassurance, and emotional backing from their spouses reported reduced stress levels and increased job satisfaction. These results align with previous studies highlighting the role of emotional support as a protective factor for mental health and career fulfilment [11]. In contrast, the absence of consistent emotional support intensified feelings of stress and loneliness, corroborating earlier research that links emotional disconnection to burnout [8]. This research also highlights the significance of critical support which is often sought during

high-stress scenarios, like medical emergencies and demanding work obligations. Participants who obtained prompt and proactive assistance from their partners were more adept at handling stress while maintaining their well-being. These findings are consistent with studies indicating that timely, situation-specific support greatly alleviates burnout and emotional fatigue.[2] Although certain studies contend that spousal support is not always necessary, our research presents compelling evidence that it is a vital element in alleviating work-family conflict and enhancing psychological well-being. Some scholars propose that factors such as workplace flexibility, employer assistance, and social networks could be more significant indicators of work-life balance than spousal engagement [14] & [15]. Conversely, our findings suggest that spousal support does not substitute for these external support systems instead, it serves to enhance them. This reinforces the notion that both workplace policies and family support are critical for achieving a comprehensive approach to work-life balance. Instead of opposing differing viewpoints, our research reconciles them by illustrating that while spousal support is important, it is not solely adequate. When combined with workplace policies, social networks, and individual coping strategies, it greatly improves work-life balance and overall well-being.

#### **4.1 Implications**

- Policymakers and organizations should acknowledge the importance of spousal support in promoting work-life balance and think about implementing family-friendly regulations like on-site childcare, parental leave, and flexible work schedules. These actions can encourage greater gender parity in the workplace and lessen the strain on working mothers.
- The necessity for improved crisis management techniques at the home and professional levels is indicated by the significance of spouse support in high-stress circumstances. Companies can implement emergency leave regulations, and families can create backup plans to help them deal with unforeseen difficulties more easily.
- The study emphasizes the necessity of a societal change toward shared parenting and household duties. Campaigns for awareness and educational initiatives can support debate of gender norms and promote fair participation in household chores with the help of social workers and NGOs

#### **4.2 Limitations**

- Since the results are based on self-reported experiences, they could be skewed by societal appeal or perception bias. In light of their own opinions or social expectations, participants may have overemphasized or underreported some facets of marital support.
- The study offers a glimpse in time of the experiences of the participants. Deeper understanding of how spousal assistance changes over time and its long-term impacts on wellbeing and work-life balance may be possible with a longitudinal approach.
- The study fails to factor into consideration the perspectives of their spouses, instead concentrating on the experiences of working mothers. Future studies that include both partners may offer a more thorough knowledge of how spousal support is seen and implemented in families.
- This study mostly depends on subjective evaluations of work-life balance because it is qualitative in nature. The results could be strengthened by using objective factors like work hours, stress levels, or employer feedback.

#### **4.3 Conclusion**

This study highlights how important spousal support is in determining working mothers' work-life balance and overall well-being. The results suggest that while parenting, financial support, emotional support, esteem, instrumental support, and critical support all contribute to lessen stress and work-family conflict,

irregularities in spouse involvement still present difficulties. A multifaceted strategy, involving enhanced emotional communication, financial stability, and a more equitable division of household duties, is needed to address these disparities. Workplace regulations and cultural changes toward shared caring responsibilities can also improve the support networks accessible to working women. A more balanced and encouraging atmosphere for working women can be attained by raising awareness and motivating proactive engagement from spouses.

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