

A Sociological Study on Role Expectations on Married Working Women

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Abstract:

In the book 'The feminine mystique' by Betty Friedan has argued, women are socialized to believe that their primary role in life was to be a wife, mother and homemaker. The traditional belief that women should take on family caregiving, childcare, and domestic work adds pressure, while societal stigma around men's involvement in household tasks complicates matters further. This study describes the socio-economic and demographic profile of working women in Chennai. The study explored the perception of women as primary care-givers and impact on women's careers due to gendered role expectations. The data were collected from 50 respondents with the structured questionnaire. A non-probability sampling technique was used. The findings of the study indicated that women were still perceived as the caregivers in their families, with these roles being reinforced through socialization processes. Caregiving responsibilities that are imposed on women remain largely unrecognized and undervalued. There exists significant challenges in managing the dual pressures of family care and professional responsibilities. The study underlined the need for more recognition and support to alleviate the pressures they face in balancing family care and career. The study suggested that caregiving responsibilities should be taught to both genders as a vital life skill, rather than emphasizing these duties solely for women. Awareness programs on this topic should be introduced in schools and colleges to promote gender equality and shared responsibility in caregiving.

Introduction:

As stated by the United Nations, Women in all parts of the society suffer from violence and discrimination. Gender equality is a basic human right, but achieving it is an enormous socio-economic ramification. Women are often denied access to basic education and health care and they are required to seek permission from their families to work. While some women receive this permission, others are denied due to the prevailing mindset within their families. One of the primary reasons behind such discrimination is the existing role expectations placed on women. In the book 'The feminine mystique' by Betty Friedan has argued, women are socialized to believe that their primary role in life was to be a wife, mother and homemaker. These role expectations on women have limited their potentials and opportunities. There are many invisible challenges faced by women stemming from the ingrained notion that caregiving and household responsibilities are solely a woman's duty. From a young age, girls are socialized to learn cooking, housekeeping, and caregiving. The uneven involvement of men and women in household chores leads to different ways of work-family interaction (Cerrato, 2018). While these are valuable skills that both genders should learn, the problem arises when these responsibilities are expected to fall exclusively on women.

In many families, girls and boys are still assigned different roles within the household. Elder daughters inherently possess nurturing qualities, often involved in taking care of younger siblings (Hans, 2024). After overcoming numerous familial and societal challenges, women still continue to struggle when they enter the workforce, finding it difficult to balance work and family responsibilities. Work-life balance is defined as an overall level of contentment resulting from an assessment of one's degree of success at meeting work and family role demands. (Valcour, 2020). The traditional belief that women should take on family caregiving, childcare, and domestic work adds pressure, while societal stigma around men's involvement in household tasks complicates matters further.

Many women are well aware of the challenges of balancing both roles. Although caregiving should be a shared responsibility between partners, women often feel guilty if they endure a failure in either their professional or domestic roles, especially when a child or elderly family member falls sick. This guilt can sometimes lead women to opt for jobs with fewer responsibilities, ultimately limiting their career growth. Addressing these issues calls for a shift in societal norms and a more equitable division of household labor

Review of literature:

Indra (2014), in her study on 'The role of family support in balancing the personal and work lives of women employees' highlighted that work-life balance is not only about balancing work and career but also friends, community, and one's self. This literature uncovered that women face difficulties in child care and elderly care and also often feel burned out, which affects their health, level of concentration, and alertness. The imbalance in work and family further creates attitudinal change in family members, friends, and spouses.

Parker (2015), in a report on 'Women adjust their careers more than men for family life'. The research found that the public holds different standards of opinions for young mothers and fathers. According to the study 33 % said young mothers not working would be the ideal situation. Whereas for young fathers only 4 % reported that not working at all would be the perfect situation for childcare. Further, it is noted that women are more likely to take breaks due to childcare or to take care of other family members than men taking breaks in career. Additionally, the study revealed that women spend more time in child care and household work than men

Sinha (2016), in her comparative study between married and unmarried working women in relation to family conflict in Pune found that married working women families experience more conflict due to household chore responsibilities, whereas unmarried working women tend to encounter fewer conflicts in this regard as observed through the survey conducted. Family grievances are more in married working women compared with unmarried working women. An expectation from husband, children and other relatives which is there on married women but unmet due to scarcity of time is found to be the cause of family conflicts in married working women families.

Pradan (2016), in the study on 'Work life balance among women from diverse cultural backgrounds' demonstrates that women in different geographical regions deal with work and family concerns in a similar way. It emphasizes regardless of women's employment status, the primary responsibility is still to take care of the family. A difference of opinions is noted from working women on the perception of traditional roles of women, roles of women before and after marriage and work life balance. Most women choose a career that is flexible to balance both family and career.

Ahmad and Khan (2018), in their 'Study on quality of life between married working women and housewives'. The study found there are no differences in physical health of married working women and

housewives. However, it indicated there are differences in psychological, social and environmental domains of married working women and housewives. According to the study, the psychological health of housewives was better than working women. However, the environmental and social domain of working women is better as they are exposed to professional interpersonal relationships.

Desai (2019), in her study on 'Work-life balance and career breaks of working women' made an attempt to study the reasons for break in career it was revealed that marriage, child bearing, relocation after marriage were the ground causes for career breaks. The study indicated that women have selected less demanding jobs which have less working hours and responsibilities which eventually benefit them to balance work and family. The finding shows the women in the nuclear families opt for outsourcing for the child care and household chores than joint families as nuclear families lack support of other family members

Saulat et.al (2019), in their exploratory study of married working women, work-life balance; problems and solutions conducted in Pakistan, indicated that it was difficult to have satisfactory balance between job and family responsibilities. The study gathered opinions of women working in corporate and non-corporate sectors. It shows that women don't have many career options in Pakistan so many opt to teach. The results showed that women select a job which has flexible working hours and it pointed out, women lagged support from the husband in family care responsibilities.

Narayanan and Barnabas (2020), in their study on 'Work family conflict and family work conflict of women entrepreneurs in the informal sector in India'. The study revealed that major challenges faced by the women entrepreneurs were lack of support from spouse, gender discrimination and family support. It examined the work-family conflict with various variables such as family related factors, gender related factors, technical and economic factors. From these factors family related and gender related factors found to be the primary impacting factor. Further lack of recognition from the society was a prominent challenge faced by the women entrepreneur.

Ravindranath et.al (2021), in their study on 'The challenges faced by mothers working in the educational sector' the findings revealed that it is still an ongoing challenge to balance both work and family responsibilities. Women feel it is not fair to neglect either their role as a mother or as an employee in the workplace. The study highlighted that the participants have no free time, often feel tired and exhausted which is also a symptom of stress. Additionally, women feel stressed if there is a sudden change in their schedule. Through this research it was found that the education sectors in Kuala Lumpur lack childcare support and flexible work arrangements.

Navarro (2024), in the study on gendered provision of family and home responsibilities among emerging adults during covid-19 it was found the global pandemic increased the burden of the women and young girls. It revealed that despite the higher burden of family responsibilities found among young women, women have less depression compared with men since they spend more time with family. Spending more quality time with family members is one of the factors behind these factors. It was noted that the family responsibilities between men and women are different. Women were oriented with cooking and person whereas in case of men playing with children is seen as family responsibility. Related with home responsibilities women had higher depression due to unequally distributed gendered expectations in the family system.

Research Methodology:**Statement of the problem:**

In Indian society, there is a role expectation on women as they are the primary caretakers in the family. The family care activities involve household chores, child rearing and elderly care and caring for other family members. Due to the gender role expectations, women usually become responsible for all these tasks. Women are naturally seen as care givers. For a long time, women were denied access to education, which eventually made many unemployed. The lack of education and awareness has led women to internalize the belief that women are solely responsible for family care, while men are expected to earn for the family.

With development in society, the importance of educating girl children increased. Women began to enter into various fields for work. However, the role expectation that women are more associated with family care is still prevalent. Due to the socialization of women into family care activities, men become less involved in these responsibilities. As women manage both career and family care, they face the burden of balancing the two and often struggle to prioritize between them. This situation frequently leaves women feeling exhausted.

Objectives:

1. To study the socio-economic and demographic profile of the working women in the study area.
2. To study whether women are perceived as primarily responsible for family care.
3. To study the impact on women's careers due to gendered role expectations.

Data collection:

The study was conducted in Chennai city, specifically from the places where the working population is significantly higher such as Ambattur, Chepauk, Broadway. This research falls under the category of descriptive research design. It aims to describe the socio-economic profile, dual responsibilities, stress level and caregiving responsibilities of women. A non-probability sampling technique was used. Specifically, the purposive sampling method was adopted to collect data from individuals who were directly involved in both work and family care responsibilities. A total of 50 samples were collected. Primary data were collected through an interview schedule method with a structured questionnaire, which underwent revisions after pre-testing to ensure its reliability and validity. Secondary data were obtained from various sources which includes journals, internet resources, books related with working women.

DATA ANALYSIS:**SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS****Age group of the respondents**

Age category	No. of respondents	Per centage
18-23 year	25	50%
24-29 year	15	30%
30-35 year	10	20%
Total	50	100.00%

The above table represents the age group of the respondents selected for this study. Out of 50 respondents, 25 (50 %) of them belong to the age category of (18-23 years), and 15 (30%) belong to the age category of (24-29 years). 10 (20 %) of the respondents belong to the age category (30-35).

Classification based on education status

Education status	No. of respondents	Per centage
High school	4	8%
Bachelor's degree	17	34%
Master's degree	29	58%
Total	50	100.00%

The table represents the educational classification of respondents. The study reveals a majority, 29 (58 %)), hold a master's degree, indicating a high level of educational attainment within the group. Following this, 17 (34 %) of respondents have completed a bachelor's degree, whereas 4 (8 %) have studied up to high school.

Composition of respondents on religious background

Religious background	No. of respondents	Per centage
Hindu	41	82%
Christian	8	16%
Muslim	1	2%
Total	50	100.00%

The table represents the classification of the respondents based on religion. Among the 50 respondents, 41 (82 %) of respondents belong to Hindu religion, 8 (16 %) of respondents belong to Christianity and 1 (2 %) belong to Muslim religion.

Classification based on type of family

Type of family	No. of respondents	Per centage
Nuclear family	36	72%
Joint family	13	26%
Single parent family	1	2%
Total	50	100.00%

The table indicates the family types of the respondents. Out of 50 respondents, 36 (72 %) respondents belong to the nuclear family, 13 (26 %) respondents belong to joint family and 1 (2 %) respondent is of single parent family.

WOMEN PERCEIVED AS PRIMARILY RESPONSIBLE FOR FAMILY CARE.

Women perceived as responsible for caregiving activities

Women perceived as responsible for caregiving activities	No. of respondents	Percentage
Yes	46	92%
No	4	8%
Total	50	100.00%

The table represents the data of the respondents of women who are perceived as primarily responsible for caregiving activities. Out of 50 respondents, 46 (92 %) respondents have stated that women are perceived as primarily responsible for care related activities. 4 (8 %) respondents have stated

Factors responsible for role expectations on women

Factors responsible for role expectations on women	No. of respondents	Percentage
Traditional gender roles	29	58%
Family upbringing	21	42%
Total	50	100%

The table illustrates factors influencing role expectations on women, based on responses from 50 participants. Traditional gender roles are the most cited factor, with 29 respondents (58%), indicating the strong influence of societal norms. Family upbringing follows, with 21 respondents (42%) highlighting the role of early socialization in shaping these expectations.

Partners participation in household responsibilities

Partners participation in household responsibilities	No. of respondents	Percentage
Yes	31	62%
No	19	38%
Total	50	100.00%

Out of 50 respondents, 32 (62 %) of the respondents have stated that their husbands participate in household responsibilities and 19 (38 %) of the respondents have stated that their husbands do not participate in household responsibilities.

Conflict with family members due to caregiving expectations

Conflict due to caregiving expectation	No. of respondents	Per centage
Very frequently	10	20%
Frequently	14	28%
Occasionally	17	34%
Rarely	6	12%
Never	3	6%
Total	50	100.00%

The above table illustrates the data of respondents regarding conflicts arising due to caregiving expectations. 10 (20 %) of the respondents have stated that they encountered conflict very frequently due to caregiving expectations. 14 (28 %) of the respondents have stated that they face frequent conflict due to caregiving expectations. 17 (34 %) have occasionally encountered conflict due to caregiving expectations. 6 (12 percent) of the respondents have responded rarely if they face conflict due to caregiving expectations and 3 (6 per cent) of the respondents have never encountered conflict due to caregiving expectations.

Women's family care responsibilities are often unrecognized and undervalued.

Women's family care responsibilities are often unrecognized and undervalued.	No. of respondents	Per centage
Yes	45	90%

No	5	10%
Total	50	100%

The table highlights perceptions regarding whether women's family care responsibilities are unrecognized and undervalued. Out of 50 respondents, 45 (90%) agree that these responsibilities are often overlooked and undervalued. Meanwhile, only 5 respondents (10%) disagree with this statement. The data underscores a strong consensus on the lack of recognition and appreciation for the caregiving contributions of women.

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TO STUDY THE IMPACT ON WOMEN'S CAREERS DUE TO GENDERED ROLE EXPECTATIONS

Classification based on time spent in professional duties and household work

Time spent in professional duties and household work	No. of respondents	Per centage
Below 8 hours	1	2%
8-10 hours	12	24%
10-12 hours	8	16%
More than 12 hours	29	58%
Total	50	100.00%

The table illustrates the time spent in both workplace and household responsibilities. A majority of respondents 29 (58 %) work for more than 12 hours. 8 (16 %) of respondents work for 10-12 hours, 12 (24 %) of respondents work for 8-10 hours and 1 (2 %) of respondents work below 8 hours in the workplace and household.

Difficulties to manage the dual responsibilities of family care and career

Difficulty in dual responsibilities	No. of respondents	Per centage
Yes	35	70%
No	3	6%
Sometimes	12	24%
Total	50	100.00%

The table indicates data of the respondents, difficulties to manage the dual responsibilities of family care and career. The study reveals 35 (70 %) respondents find it difficult to manage the dual responsibilities , 3 (6 %) respondents do not find any difficulties in managing the dual responsibilities, and 12 (24 %) respondents sometimes find it difficult to manage their dual responsibilities.

Impact on work efficiency due to family care responsibilities

Impact on work efficiency due to family care responsibilities	No. of respondents	Per centage
Yes	20	40%
No	11	22%
Sometimes	19	38%
Total	50	100.00%

The above table consists of data about the impact on work efficiency due to family care responsibilities. 20 (40 %) of the respondents reported that due to family care responsibilities the work efficiency is affected. 11 (22 %) of the respondents responded that their work efficiency is not affected due to family care responsibilities and 19 (38 %) responded that only sometimes their work efficiency gets affected due to family care responsibilities.

Negative Impact on Career Due to Interference from Family Care Activities during Work

Negatively impact in career	No. of respondents	Per centage
Always	5	10%
Often	13	26%
Sometimes	19	38%
Rarely	7	14%
Never	6	12%
Total	50	100.00%

The above table represents the negative impact in career due to interference of family care activities during work. Among 50 respondents, 5 (10 %) responded that they always have a negative impact on their career due to the interference of family care activities. 13 (26 %) respondents often have a negative impact on their careers. 19 (38 %) respondents reported only sometimes they feel interference brings a negative impact. 7 (14 %) responded that they rarely feel due to family responsibilities they have a negative impact on their careers. 6 (12 %) of the respondents have never felt that there is a negative impact on their career due to family care activities.

Considering to quit job due to inability to balance professional responsibilities and family care duties

Considering to Quit job	No. of respondents	Per centage
Yes	23	46%
No	13	26%
Sometimes	14	28%
Total	50	100.00%

The above table shows the consideration of the respondents to quit job due to inability to balance both career and family care responsibilities, 23 (46 %) of the respondents have stated that they thought to quit job, due to difficulty in balancing career and family. 13 (26 %) have never thought of quitting a job and 14 (28 %) of the respondents have stated sometimes they have thought of quitting their job.

MAJOR FINDINGS:

- 50% of the respondents belong to the age category of 36 and above.
- 42 % of the respondents had two children.
- 72 % of the respondents belong to a nuclear family.
- 82% of the respondents belong to the Hindu religion.

- 92% of the respondents acknowledged that caregiving is often viewed as women's responsibility.
- 58% of the respondents stated traditional gender roles expectations as the primary factor responsible for role expectations on women.
- 90% of the respondents stated that family care responsibilities performed by women are unrecognized and undervalued.
- 32% of the respondents are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their level of satisfaction regarding family care.
- 58% of respondents feel that male members of their families associate caregiving activities exclusively with women
- 56% of the respondents have stated that they experience a high level of stress due to the imbalance in family and career.
- A majority of respondents stated that girls are socialized from a young age to take on caregiving responsibilities within the family to a great extent.
- 58% of the respondents were working more than 12 hours, including both the household chores and professional duties.
- 70% of the respondents find it difficult in managing the dual responsibilities of family care and care.
- 40% of the respondents stated that their work efficiency is affected due to family care responsibilities.
- 46% of the respondents considered quitting their job because they were unable to manage family care responsibilities and career.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION:

The study highlights that traditional role expectations on women persist in contemporary society, particularly concerning caregiving responsibilities. Women continue to be primarily perceived as the caregivers in their families, with these roles being reinforced through socialization processes such as traditional gender norms and family upbringing. According to the respondents, male members of their families commonly believe that caregiving duties should fall to women.

In addition to this, caregiving responsibilities imposed on women remain largely unrecognized and undervalued. Respondents stated facing significant challenges in managing the dual pressures of family care and professional responsibilities. The stress associated with balancing these two roles is notably high, as personal commitments such as family responsibilities, child illnesses, and family gatherings often interfere with work duties. Many respondents noted the lack of flexibility in taking sick leave or time for self-care, leading to feelings of exhaustion and frustration. Despite these challenges, some respondents mentioned that over time, they had become accustomed to the strain. Overall, this study reinforces the ongoing societal expectation that women bear the primary responsibility for caregiving, underlining the need for more recognition and support to alleviate the pressures they face in balancing family care and career.

The study suggests that caregiving responsibilities should be taught to both genders as a vital life skill, rather than emphasizing these duties solely for women. Awareness programs on this topic should be introduced in schools and colleges to promote gender equality and shared responsibility in caregiving.

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