

## Double Burden of Working Mothers in Balancing Family and Workplace: A Qualitative Analysis



**Kamrun Nahar**

Lecturer, Department of Sociology National Institute of Textile Engineering and Research, Dhaka-1350, Bangladesh

**ABSTRACT:** Women's empowerment has attracted the attention of all people worldwide, which is considered to be one of the main parts of development. Independence, financial solvency, and decision-making power trigger women to join the workforce mostly. People often overlook the unsaid struggles and sacrifices associated with women's empowerment. This primary goal of the study is to draw attention to the little-known tales, difficulties, and barriers that working mothers had to deal with on a daily basis. The study was based on qualitative methodology, and primary data were collected from Dhaka with several case studies. The in-depth interview method was applied to conduct the study to have a better understanding. It was found that the increasing number of working mothers joining the workforce had implications for family, children, and the mental and physical health of women. The study also took into account the possible causes of joining the workforce, with an emphasis on familial, household responsibilities, and child management.

**KEYWORDS:** Working Mother, Women Empowerment, Double Burden, Gender Roles, Challenges of Women.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment has become a buzzword across the whole world. It is believed that "empowerment" refers to the user's power (Banu, Dilruba et al: 2001). The word 'empowerment' is closely related with the exercise of power and authority in the context of Bangladesh. It also entails tearing down harmful societal conceptions so that those impacted might believe they are capable of acting and have influence (Rowlands, J:1995). Rao and Kelleher (1995:70) defined women's empowerment as the ability of women to be financially independent and self-sufficient, to have control over choices that impact their lives, and to be free from violence. As empowerment generally comes with decision making power, financial independence and self-dependence; there has always been positive vibes and encouragement for women empowerment in Bangladesh. Generally, economic independence has attracted most of the women to enter the workforce in a larger number than any other factor. On the one hand, entering the workforce increases the number of empowered women, and on the other hand, there arises different types of complications in the family, in the relationship, and in child management.

In Bangladesh, the number of women joining the labor has grown significantly. The abundance of career options has encouraged many women to work outside the home. The scenario of entering the workforce is more or less the same in both rural and urban areas in Bangladesh. Women from rural areas migrate to urban areas to take part in paid work to bring economic solvency to the family and to alleviate poverty. They have also shown much interest in joining the workforce, ranging from agricultural workers to the decision-makers of the country as parliament members. Nowadays, the role of women is not limited to household work, although they are often portrayed as mothers and caregivers. The management of family members, including household tasks such as cooking, washing clothes, and, most importantly, feeding dependent family members, especially children, constitutes the unconditional unpaid labor of women in Bangladesh. Women with preschool children experience a triple burden, since they assume the added responsibility of being the primary educators due to the confinement of teaching and learning to the home setting (Sofeia, N. 2023). Although working women perform multiple roles in the family as care givers, their contributions are hardly acknowledged. Wives predominantly shoulder the household responsibilities, even while balancing career obligations with family duties (Shafer, Emily Fitzgibbons. 2011). Working women who have children face immense difficulties maintaining both family and workplace simultaneously. Research indicates that women and their families continue to struggle with achieving balance due to detrimental gender roles (Shafer, Emily Fitzgibbons. 2011). Individuals who engage in both domestic and professional employment encounter challenging circumstances as they strive to maintain a harmonious equilibrium between their conventional responsibilities as homemakers and the additional demands of being productive workers (Intesar, A. 2021). Thus, the added burden of official work along with familial responsibilities makes the working mother mentally overwhelmed and physically exhausted. Working mothers,

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despite having adequate family support and a pleasant working environment, still encounter psychological stress (Intesar, A. 2021). The sufferings and burdens of women empowerment are often untold and unheard. Women in the workforce frequently express their fatigue from working outside while handling household duties (Shafer, Emily Fitzgibbons. 2011). However, the scenario represents itself with numerous familial, personal, mental, physical complications and challenges for working women especially working mothers due to double burden of work load from official and familial responsibilities.

### 2. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using the qualitative method to have a thorough understanding of the subject. Dhaka district was selected purposively for the convenience of researcher as the study area. Working mothers from different socio-economic and educational backgrounds were selected purposively as respondents. Different types of occupational working mothers were selected to add diversity in the research. Sample size of the respondents was 10.

The case study method was applied for the primary source of data collection to have a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the study. Semi-structured open-ended questions were used, and the in-depth interview method was applied to collect data. Data collection procedure also involved recording system using mobile recorder with the consent of respondents. The goal of the study was explained to the respondents, and their consent was obtained. The secondary sources of data such as journal articles, books, reports and different websites have been used to have the wider view of the study. After collecting primary data, they were compiled and edited carefully. Then collected data were analyzed and interpreted using thematic analyses. Data analysis also involved the researcher's keen observation during the interview session.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Socio-economic condition of the respondents

To have in detailed understanding of the topic under study, 10 working mothers of different socio-economic backgrounds have been selected. The respondent's educational level, occupation, number of children, number of family members, and the occupation of respondent's husband were selected as the socio-economic backgrounds of the respondents.

Serial number	Respondent's Educational level	Occupation	Number of children	Type of family	Occupation of respondent's husband
1.	Post Graduate	University Teacher	1	Nuclear	Private Pharmacist
2.	Post Graduate	Government Employee	1	Nuclear	University Teacher
3.	Post Graduate	University Teacher	1	Nuclear	Fashion Designer
4.	Post Graduate	University Teacher	2	Nuclear	Government Employee
5.	Graduate	Engineer	1	Extended	Government Employee
6.	Graduate	Fashion Designer	1	Extended	Merchandiser
7.	Post Graduate	Private Banker	1	Nuclear	University Teacher
8.	Post Graduate	Engineer	2	Extended	Government Employee
9.	Post Graduate	Private Banker	1	Nuclear	Government Employee
10.	Post Graduate	University Teacher	2	Nuclear	University Teacher

From the above table it was found that among 10 respondents 4 were university teachers, 2 were private bankers, 2 were engineers, 1 was fashion designer and another 1 was government employee. Most of the respondents (8) were post graduates and 2 were graduates. Another variation exists among the respondents regarding number of children and type of family. It was found that among 10 respondents 3 respondents had 2 children and 7 respondents had only 1 child. In addition, 3 respondents had extended family and rest of the respondents (7) had nuclear family.

It was found that the respondents' educational levels had very little effect on the topic under study. Since the study was conducted among educated working mothers (at least graduates to postgraduates), they shared similar experiences. The most significant

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variations in responses were attributed to the number of children and family members. It was observed that as the number of children increases, it becomes more challenging for working mothers to balance both work and family responsibilities. The type of family also influenced the experiences of working mothers in balancing both work and home life. In nuclear families, working mothers had to manage all household responsibilities, whereas in extended families, they received support from family members in caring for children and handling household tasks. The occupation of the respondents' husbands had little impact on the overall responses, as all were supportive in managing children and household responsibilities, regardless of their profession. Another important observation was that all the working mothers had a maximum of two children, indicating their preference to limit family size due to work and familial responsibilities.

### 3.2 Working mother and the workforce

It was found that all the working mothers entered the workforce intentionally for various reasons. Joining the workforce provides economic independence, social status, and, most importantly, a sense of identity. Working women have a greater opportunity to spend their money as they wish, such as supporting their parents or buying items for their children or themselves. Some women enjoy working in the public sector because it offers them a sense of independence. Earning their own money contributes to their sense of fulfillment (Priyono Tri Febrianto et al. 2022). Women are empowered, have more decision-making authority, and feel more confident when they inherit property (Nahar, K et al. 2024).

One respondent explained her position very clearly this way-

*Joining the workforce can be understood as an emotional expectation or a form of self-reward. I faced significant challenges, having married during my first year of honors and given birth during my third year. Despite the demands of caring for my baby and my studies, I managed to secure the top position in both my honors and master's programs. My motivation to study was not solely to achieve first place, but because I had a genuine passion for academia, particularly in the teaching profession.*

It was found that the benefits of joining the workforce encompass economic stability, personal development, and the ability to contribute to the family, all of which foster a sense of fulfillment and provide a welcome escape from recurring familial responsibilities. While economic stability is a primary advantage, many women see work as a way to support their families and improve their quality of life. One respondent shared her thoughts as follows-

*To be very honest, the expenses of living are increasing day by day and it is very difficult to maintain standard of life solely depending on one's income.*

It was found that official workload and environment impact the behavior of working mothers, which is also passed down to family members, especially children. On the one hand, positive environments such as promotion and getting appraisals from colleagues or higher authorities directly influence the working mother and help to foster positive family relationships; on the other hand, excessive work pressure causes working mothers' anger and depression, which led to misbehavior toward children and conflicting relationships among family members. It becomes more challenging to achieve work-family balance when an employee becomes a parent because of the increased demands from the family domain (Wiens, D. at el. 2022).

One of the respondents stated that-

*If I face negative comments in the office or go through challenging situations, I feel very heartbroken inside. Sometimes I express official pressures to my family members, but the children are too young to understand my situation; they keep on insisting on their demands, and I cannot concentrate on giving quality time to them instead I shout at them.*

Most working mothers' opinions and decisions regarding family matters are accepted and valued within their households. Their choices are recognized not only as mothers but also as income earners. The majority of respondents indicated that they did not face criticism for being working mothers; instead, they received support from their family members.

It was also found that all of the respondents lacked the facilities of a daycare center at their office, which made it more challenging to maintain children who are solely dependent upon feeding. Lactating mothers feel more vulnerable mentally and physically leaving behind children at home. One of the respondents stated that-

*I need to go to office leaving my five months old baby at home since there is no daycare center at my office. My baby is too young to be fed solid foods, she depends on me and sometimes formula milk for survival. As a mom, I feel very sorry for not being able to feed her as per her demand. Sometimes I feel like quitting the job to support my baby fulltime.*

### 3.3 Working mother and child management

Managing children during office hours is the most challenging issue for working mothers. Despite nearly two-thirds of women with dependent children working outside the home (Hoffman, 1986; Waldman, 1983), concerns remain about the negative impacts of maternal employment on both mothers' professional and domestic lives (Heins et al. 1983; Martin et al. 1984). It was found that managing children in extended families is somewhat easier than in nuclear families, as working mothers often receive support from family members. However, in many cases, grandparents cannot live with their grandchildren. Currently, grandparents often lack the option to reside with their grandkids, even if they wish to do so (Garcia, 1993). Consequently, working mothers face difficulties in managing childcare during office hours and often have to rely on caregivers. One respondent shared her perspective-

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*As a working mother, I need to prepare meals for my children before going to the office. The caregiver looks after my children in my absence. I provide instructions on when and what to feed them, as well as how to care for and nurture them, but ultimately, it all depends on the caregiver. I have no other option for looking after my children besides relying on this caregiver.*

It was found that most of the working mothers explained that maintaining their baby during office time was the ultimate challenge for them. The tension regarding children's meals, care, and nurture was found common among the working mothers. Maintaining the baby during office time was found to be the most crucial challenge for working mothers, both in nuclear and extended families. One of the respondents stated that-

*If I have to attend a meeting, I often send my daughter with my husband to his office since there is none to look after my child at home. When I return home from the office sometimes, I find that his father could not feed her any proper meal just passed the day eating chips, chocolate, or any packaged drinks, which is not healthy food at all. Sometimes I feel guilty for not being able to maintain my baby's nutritional balance.*

Another respondent stated the scenario in the following way-

*I have to leave my two daughters at home under the supervision of a caregiver. Most of the time I have to leave home secretly since my daughter starts crying seeing my departure. I cannot but depend on the caregiver regarding my children's care. Sometimes the children take proper meals, but most of the time they don't. As a working mother, I feel guilty for not being able to feed my children proper meals.*

It was found that most working mothers strive to devote their full attention to their children outside of office hours. After returning home from a hectic day at work, they engage with their children without taking any rest. It was also observed that in the absence of working mothers, children often develop issues such as irritability, excessive crying, and stubbornness. One respondent stated that-  
*Whenever I get so much busy with official works, it becomes very difficult to balance time for my two children. Often, I feel angry if my children act stubborn and don't listen to me. Sometimes I cannot control my anger and shout at my children. At night, when my children fall asleep, I feel so guilty for being rude to my children.*

Another important issue was found among the working mothers about children maintenance. Most of the respondents stated that their children must watch cartoon at mobile or TV during eating meal and it is impossible to feed the children except screen time. Being addicted to screen time has become common phenomenon in recent times. Since parents are very busy with their office, children are bound to pass time watching TV or mobile. In urban areas, children often lack sufficient open space for outdoor activities which also exacerbate the problem of screen addiction. In addition, working mothers are always in hurry to arrange household chores within limited time, sometimes they offer children to be engaged in TV or mobile. The problematic smartphone use (PSU) has been becoming a challenging health issue for preschoolers aged 3–5 years as it has severe adverse effect on their psychological, physical, and cognitive development (Abdullah, F et al, 2023). Prolonged and early exposure to violent content is also associated with a lower prosocial behavior and an increased chance of antisocial behavior (Lissak, G. 2018).

One respondent stated the scenario in the following way-

*I used to feed my baby while watching cartoons on my mobile, as she completed eating this way in a short time. I saved time for household chores and tried to attend office on time. Now my daughter is four years old, and still, she cannot start eating without watching cartoons. I have tried to feed her except mobile cartoon but she has become addicted to the system and cannot leave it.*

### 3.4 Working mother and household responsibilities

Working mothers generally face double burden to maintain household responsibilities and official responsibilities simultaneously. When working women encounter significant pressure in the workplace, it may adversely affect children and other family members. Conversely, when employed women find satisfaction in their workplace, they experience greater delight with their children and family (Colangelo, N. et al. 1984).

It was found that most of the respondents had been supported by husbands and family members in doing household responsibilities and maintaining children. In a nuclear family, generally there had been a caregiver to assist in household responsibilities and maintaining children. In extended family, household responsibilities are maintained by the support and help of all family members. Although there had been support in household responsibilities either by caregivers or family members, working mothers had to take the main responsibilities, and tensions fell upon their shoulders. Oshio, Nozaki, and Kobayashi (2012) discovered that marital satisfaction may be impacted by an uneven distribution of household chores. When faced with a mountain of household duties, working women frequently lament their fatigue from the outdoors. Additionally, husbands and kids hardly ever assist with household tasks, citing misconceptions such as the idea that women should handle these tasks. Nilsen et al. (2017) pointed out that because most women devote more time to taking care of their family than men do, there is a gender gap inherent in the double burden. The woman is still responsible for taking care of the husband and kids even when both parents work, a practice that is prevalent in most of Indonesian society as it relates to Indonesian cultural values and traditions.

It was found that preparing dishes for children, cooking for family members, making breakfast for husbands, organizing the home, especially personal room, and providing baby care are the main household responsibilities working mothers need to do daily. One respondent stated that-



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*I need to cook for the family, especially children, wash baby clothes, make my bed, and care for my baby as daily activities that I cannot avoid. I try to save time for my baby by putting some work to be done on off days. I try to spend time with my baby as much possible as I can by skipping household work.*

### 3.5 Working mother and their physical and mental health

It was found that whenever asked about 'me time' most of the respondents laughed. 'Me time' had been found as the most crucial issue that all working women aspire for and feel its absence so deeply. One respondent stated about 'me time' this way-

*To be very honest, I don't get the chance of 'me time' in the general sense. I manage 'me time' whenever my baby and husband fall asleep at night. At that time, instead of sleeping, I pass one hour either on social media, watching TV, or reading books. On Friday, I somehow manage some time to recite from the holy Quran. Except for these, I don't have 'me time'.*

Another respondent stated the scenario in the following way-

*After giving birth to my child, 'me time' has vanished from my life. I need to be engaged in household work and child management and bound to look for 'me time' in these activities.*

There had been a close relationship between the mental and physical health of a working mother and good behavior with family members. It was found that most of the working mothers are supported by husbands and family members in household responsibilities, but still there is a lack of sufficient mental support. Due to the lack of sufficient mental support and the double burden of household and official responsibilities, working mothers often experience anxiety, anger, and depression that they cannot express. It was also found that the double burden of working mothers along with mental stress often led to misbehavior with family members, especially children. According to information from the organizational literature, stress-related unpleasant emotions lead to less altruistic and more aggressive conduct (Motowidlo et al. 1986).

One respondent stated her experience in the following way-

*My husband bears patriarchal values and is very strict about children's care and household work. Since I am a working mother, sometimes I cannot maintain everything perfectly. In that case, my husband misbehaves with me and scolds me for the mismanagement. I feel very disheartened for not having mental support. My anger and depression due to insufficient mental support are often passed down to my children. At the end of the day, whenever my children fall asleep, I feel very sorry and guilty for being so rude with my children, and for not being able to be a good mom.*

It was also found that maintaining multiple roles as a working mother often causes physical ailments such as headaches, back pain, insufficient sleeping. Among working women, having two or more sons in the home significantly increases the risk of coronary heart disease (CHD), but not daughters (Fabrizio D'Ovidio et al. 2015). It has also been suggested that women's health may be impacted by the dual strain of job and household responsibilities (Waldron et al., 1998). Backpain was found to be the most common physical ailment among the working mothers who went through c-sections during child birth. In addition, headaches and inadequate sleeping were also found among the working mothers. One of the respondents stated that-

*Since I went through C-sections two times, I had to endure back pain. Whenever I am burdened with heavy pressure in household responsibilities such as washing heavy clothes, cleaning the floor, or sitting for a long time to do household chores, I feel back pain. Since I have to sleep with my two daughters and need to feed the little one whenever she wakes up at night, I don't have the chance for a sound sleep.*

Working outside the home can lower women's satisfaction since they don't spend as much time with their families, even while the extra household income is used to improve the family's financial situation (Mencarini and Sironi, 2010). It was found that working mothers often think to quit the job for not being able to care for children and maintain babies properly. However, the reality of acknowledging financial power and self-independence often bounds a working mother to cope with the challenges of dual burden and proceed further.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The study focuses on the double burden of working mothers, which results from familial responsibilities and official duties. With the increasing number of working mothers joining the workforce, the roles and responsibilities associated with it have also been changed. A new era of social change has been involved with women's empowerment, which impacts the family, relationships, children, mental and physical health of women, and society as a whole. Although working mothers reinforce economic solvency and independence in their personal lives, their sacrifices and unexpressed struggles are often unnoticed in the greater society. The most obvious challenges for working mothers have been centered on their children's management, along with other difficulties. Lack of sufficient mental support and absence of 'me time' make the condition of working mothers vulnerable mostly. On the one hand, supportive family members, especially husband's role, have been found to be very crucial that paved the way for betterment and developed relationships and appraisal for working mothers; on the other hand, unsupportive family members, especially husband's role, have been linked to domination, ignorance, and criticism towards women, which is found to be associated with patriarchal values. However, maintaining both familial responsibilities and official duties creates more challenges for working mothers than those of men. Since working mothers contribute to family emotionally, financially, and physically, their dedication

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and efforts need to be addressed wholeheartedly. A supportive environment in both family and workplace can contribute to much more positive output in wider society.

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