

Women's Issues

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Working Mothers: How Much Working, How Much Mothers, and Where Is the Womanhood?

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ABSTRACT

Motherhood confers upon a woman the responsibility of raising a child. This process also changes the way in which she is perceived in society and at her workplace. It can necessitate her to take more than available leave options, and job security can be at risk. Significant social and personal adjustments are necessary to cope with such a situation. A working mother, especially one who has the good fortune to be able to balance her home and work, enjoys the stimulation that a job or career provides. She develops the ability of raising a useful member of society and at the same time gains financial independence. Along with motherhood, work adds to the completeness of being a woman.

Key Words: *Motherhood; Womanhood; Working mothers*

Introduction

"I am relieved if, rather than sex bias; the reason why more women are not breaking through the glass ceiling of academic medicine is because their children are hanging on the tails of their white coats. Most of us are happy to have them there, and academic medicine offers a level of professional fulfillment, financial stability, and geographic flexibility that is well worth the juggle" (Laine, 1998).

"First, from the early 1950s, many employed mothers began to challenge, although

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not overturn, the dominant discourse of the ideal mother as exclusively bound to the home. The simple fact that so many women were drawn to work outside the home despite criticism demonstrates the monetary and psychological importance of employment for women" (Wilson, 2006).

Both quotes above reflect the unique life situation of working mothers, who are now a visible part of the workforce in almost all professions. Many working women start their families while they are working, and some others may find the need to return to work sooner than expected in the postpartum period. The working mother is an institution in her own right, one who combines a successful career giving her financial independence, with an effective motherhood raising a child. It is important to understand that both these jobs are extremely demanding, and to do justice to each without neglecting the other is a formidable task.

In this article, we shall try to clarify the difficulties a working mother may have on functioning with such dual responsibility.

Working and Motherhood

One could define a working mother as a woman with the ability to combine a career with the added responsibility of raising a child. Within this broad term may be encompassed two different categories of working women: the stay at home mother who works from home and the woman who works away from home while managing to fulfill her maternal duties.

Material aspirations and the necessities of daily life often compel both parents to work. A qualified woman may insist on working to maintain an effective career and be financially independent. The single working mother is a combination of these entities, working not only to run the family, but also maintaining her position as a financially independent head of the family.

Some of the points we must try to address include the following:

- (a) Does motherhood affect productivity at the workplace?
- (b) Does motherhood incite subconscious gender discrimination at the workplace?
- (c) Does motherhood imply that the employee be given special privileges beyond possible entitlements, say maternity leave?
- (d) Do special policies exist regarding leave benefits and special entitlements that may be needed by working mothers, say sudden sickness of the child?
- (e) Is flexible working desirable? Can it be taken undue advantage of by the employee?

In this context, some of the issues that come into play include the following:

- a) Employer issues—maternity, compensated working hours, childcare facilities

at the workplace, gender discrimination of working parents, especially in the academic field

- b) Employee issues—fatigue, spousal support, parental support system, child care issues, child health issues (e.g., do children of working mothers have more health problems?)

Working and Mothers: Some Common Issues

The Department of Labour of the United States of America, in *The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (1993)*, clearly recognizes the needs of working parents. According to this statute:

“The number of single-parent households and two-parent households in which the single parent or both parents work is increasing significantly. It is important for the development of children and the family unit that fathers and mothers are able to participate in early childrearing. The lack of employment policies to accommodate working parents can force individuals to choose between job security and parenting. Due to the nature of the roles of men and women in our society, the primary responsibility for family caretaking often falls on women, and such responsibility affects the working lives of women more than it affects the working lives of men. Employment standards that apply to one gender only have serious potential for encouraging employers to discriminate against employees and applicants for employment who are of that gender [The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (1993)]”.

Therefore, the need to support a working mother is well recognized. It has also been explicitly mentioned that the dominant role in childcare is recognized and assumed to be that of the mother and that this responsibility affects the working life of women more than that of men.

Certain common problems plague most working women. The *Better Health Channel* on the Web, ratified by the Government of Australia, states some of the common issues that may concern working mothers (Better Health Channel, 2008). Foremost amongst these are income difficulties. If the mother works, childcare support is essential and can be quite expensive. It may actually offset the financial benefits of both the parents working.

In Asian countries, and in many joint family systems, grandparents and other nonworking family members fulfill the need for childcare—they take over the job of childcare when the mother is at work. This very important benefit (of readily available child support from the family members themselves) in joint families not only recognizes that the working mother is an important member of the family, but also provides her the necessary support to be able to perform her dual role efficiently.

Stress loads can be quite high amongst working mothers and these may often reflect in their relationships at home. She is stressed to reach work on time, to send her child to school and to reach all the children's deadlines on time including food and dress, and she is also pressed for time to look after her home simultaneously.

Housework is still considered the woman's domain. Working women shoulder additional responsibility of the work place as well as at their domestic front.

Unexpected sickness of children is a calamity that can be difficult to handle. There often is need to use and avail of unpaid leave and unexpected absences from work. Few employers would consider the needs of sudden leave requirements in women with young children. Even in double-income families, it is still the woman who is expected to take care of a sick child (ibid).

Sexual relationships can also be quite strained in working mothers. Much of it can be attributed to lack of time and to fatigue, especially where both partners have long working hours (ibid).

Nutritional requirements may be neglected in the quest to complete and *meet all* targets at home as well as at work (Finn, 2000). These women, whom Finn calls *Everyday Heroes*, use everything from the dashboard to the desktop as a dining table. The result is an amazing variety of nutritional deficiencies, ranging from iron and vitamins to proteins. Despite confiding in their physicians many just do not get the support they need.

Mothers and Employment

The rush of married women into the workforce runs against traditional thinking that women must choose between family and career. Many observers condemned working mothers as selfish, unnatural and even dangerous to their children and society (Wilson, 2006). It was complained that the rise in juvenile delinquency could also be attributed to women who are working mothers, but needs and requirements of the family unit will always supersede ill-defined logic. Women, motherhood or not, continue to work. The reasons are, more often than not, aspirational. Many of these mothers are young and have spent years developing their careers. When both spouses work it may be necessary for the mother to retain her job if she has insurance benefits, and if she wants to retire with better retirement benefits (Edelman, 2002). Many of these women find the need to maintain a parallel source of income a social security and a sign of independence.

A mother may work out of a financial compulsion, a desire to *fulfill* herself, or

to supplement the family income. In all of these three instances, she is a working mother, but the implications of her situation are different.

As Wilson (2006) says “*many working women said that they worked because they ‘needed’ the money and which they defined as specific material goods – an extra lesson, additional clothes, a vacation, furniture, owning a home, car or even just a television – arguing their work was bringing a rise in the family’s standard of living.*” Both men and women had material and emotional expectations for better standards of living and a working wife could add considerably to achieving those goals (Wilson, 2006).

A financial compulsion could be a less competent spouse with an inadequate income, or a single mother who is dependent on her earnings for survival. A second income from the mother adds to better living conditions and eases the stresses of struggling for a comfortable life. However, when the mother is returning to work purely to maintain and advance a career that satisfies her and keeps her independent, she comes under scrutiny and criticism (Heilman and Okimoto, 2008).

The working mother has to keep the convincing stance that she is working not just for her own sustenance, but also for the betterment of the family. Something like, “a working woman who put herself out for the kid’s sake” (Wilson, 2006). Working women changed the image of a good mother from one who stayed at home to one who also took on extra burden for her family’s benefit. This would however not recognize the working mother as an important member of the workforce and an important worker in her own right! It is possible for a working mother to defend her right to work in a number of ways. A less affluent member of society would simply say it brings in much needed extra money. A woman from a better class of living would say she has more money to spare and is utilizing her talents and skills to the best effect. In either case, the most important aspect is that it shouldn’t affect the health and well being of their children in any way. In any case, “having to work” takes away much of the problems a working mother has to face (Wilson, 2006).

Employer’s Perceptions of Efficiency and Relationships of Motherhood to the Working Environment

A working mother’s ability to deliver is considered with trepidation. Having decided to work, will the working mother be able to deliver efficiently at the work place?

Motherhood leads to a definite bias in employment for women seeking a job in traditionally male settings (Heilman and Okimoto, 2008). In general, for both men and women, parenthood changes the way in which both men

and women are viewed in terms of expected work focus, especially producing expectations of undependability. The authors also add that there are possible heightened associations with gender stereotypes that occur when women are mothers; this may lead to heightened performance expectations that predispose greater negativity to be directed at mothers than at non mothers when career advancement decisions are made (Heilman and Okimoto, 2008). They also noted that employment bias occurred against mothers irrespective of whether they were students or working people, and that women suffer definite disadvantages when at the workplace, a problem that has been called the *Maternal Wall* by Williams (Heilman and Okimoto, 2008; Williams, 2001).

It is well known that employment has positive effects on the mother (Barnett, 2004). There is an underlying assumption that the roles of mother and wife have relatively less stress, as they are natural roles, whereas the role of employee, being unnatural, is therefore highly demanding. This may question the ability of a woman to handle multiple roles without significant ill effects. There is also considerable rhetoric on the relationship of this unnatural employment to many social evils including juvenile delinquency and drug addiction (Barnett, 2004).

Regardless of the reasons, a young mother chooses to work, the workplace and work environment as a whole continue to be hostile. Shouldering dual responsibilities may actually decrease productivity at the work place. Some of the research done has focused on mothers who are working in the academic field, and slower academic progress has been attributed to working mothers in academic medicine (Carr *et al.*, 1998). They attributed a definite relation between family responsibilities and gender to academic productivity. Having identified 1979 full-time academic faculty from 24 medical schools across the country, a 177-point questionnaire was administered with the aim of describing dependent responsibilities by gender and to identify their relation to the aspirations, goals, rate of progress, academic productivity, and career satisfaction of male and female medical school faculty. In this study, the authors noted that women with children published less even after controlling for variables such as years as a faculty member, number of hours worked per week, and hours of dependent responsibilities (as noted from the peer reviewed publications); they had slower self-perceived career progress and were less satisfied with their careers. The difference seen between the genders was less apparent for faculty without children.

Carr *et al.* also noted that women faculty with children had less institutional support than men with children. They specially commented that, "In a group less able to expand working hours because of dependent responsibilities; however, institutional support may be especially critical for maintaining productivity." It was noted here that familial responsibilities with special reference to child bearing disproportionately affected the careers of female faculty. They recommended

special attention by scheduling fewer departmental meetings after working hours and making part-time tenures available for faculty (Carr *et al.*, 1998)

Maternity Leave and Benefits for Working Mothers

Women's recovery from childbirth and their resumption of work and family commitments are likely to be influenced by such personal factors as preexisting health status, parity, breastfeeding, the availability of social support from family and friends and work-related factors, e.g., the timing of return to work, job stress, and workplace support.

Can a working mother do justice to both her work and her motherhood? The answers vary from a firm yes to a vehement no, and, more often than not, the answer lies not in the ability or competence of the woman as much as it does on her support system. The question of a support system is very relevant because traditionally all support systems have revolved around men ever since the times when women were believed to be capable of only "*kuche, kirche und kinder*" [German for kitchen, church, and children]. A woman who was working before marriage will more often than not opt to take a protracted leave of absence to fully immerse herself in her motherhood. Some would even think of giving up their careers for good.

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 states that it is necessary to balance the demands of the workplace with the needs of families, to promote the stability and economic security of families, and to promote national interests in preserving family integrity; to entitle employees to take reasonable leave for medical reasons, for the birth or adoption of a child, and for the care of a child, spouse, or parent who has a serious health condition, and to promote the goal of equal employment opportunity for women and men.

Most of these summarize succinctly the needs of a mother who is working. Working mothers' needs are to be served in the interest of preserving the family unit as a healthy foundation for society. Caring for a child has the fundamental value of a serious health condition and has been valued as such, deserving that the parent be allowed to take time off for caring for the child. This means that caring for a child is an essential duty that the parent has to perform and that cannot be substituted for in any other way. This is especially true in cases where the child is one with special needs (Thyen *et al.*, 1999; Yantzi *et al.*, 2007). Family support is highest among employed mothers and lowest in mothers who were employed neither currently nor before the child's illness, or who had quit employment to care for the child (Thyen *et al.*, 1999). Caring for a child assisted by technology seems to create barriers to maternal employment diminishing family resources at a time when financial needs actually may increase. Lack of family support and child care services increase the likelihood that mothers

of children cared for assisted by technology will stay out of the labour force. Remaining employed buffers the negative effects of care at home on maternal mental health (Yantzi *et al.*, 2007).

Breastfeeding

Maternity leave provisions are essential for a working woman to effectively complete the transition from pregnancy to motherhood. Premature termination or too short a maternity leave may have undesirable consequences. Studies often cite early return to work as one of the reasons for premature termination of breastfeeding. Shorter maternity leaves were associated with less sensitivity in interaction with the infant and more maternal depressive symptoms (Clark *et al.*, 1997; Ryan *et al.*, 2006).

One-third of mothers return to work within 3 months of giving birth, and two-thirds return within 6 months. Mothers who are not employed are more likely to initiate breastfeeding than those who are employed full time. At 6 months after delivery, full-time employment has a significant effect on breastfeeding. Much less of the employed mothers continue breastfeeding as compared to the mothers employed part time or unemployed mothers (Ryan *et al.*, 2006).

In order to comply with workplace requirements, mothers in a study focusing on educated mothers in managerial and/or professional occupations noted that mothers were obliged either to cease breastfeeding or to conceal breastfeeding activities when employed. Breastfeeding duration rates among professionally employed mothers can only be improved if negative attitudes about maternal bodies and employment are challenged and if employers, as well as mothers, are the focus of health initiatives aimed at promoting breastfeeding (Gattrell, 2007).

With the implications that this may have on neonatal well being, it may be necessary to have labour policies, including job-protected leaves from employment after birth, and labour standards that facilitate breastfeeding or the expression of breast milk at work (Baker and Milligan, 2008). The authors noted an increase in maternity leave entitlements in Canada, rising from 6 months in the year 2000 to almost one year for mothers who gave birth after 31 December 2000. This includes job protected leave and entitlement for maternity benefits. This led to a large increase in the amount of time before mothers returned to work post birth. An attempt at systematic review to assess whether interventions at the workplace help breastfeeding elicited no suitable trials (Abdulwadud and Snow, 2007).

A study of 360 mothers (Hansen *et al.*, 1993) analyzed the utilization of maternity leave by parents and mothers' resumption of work after delivery in addition of duration of breastfeeding in correlation to mothers' resumption of

work. Almost all families utilized the maternity leave, with the majority utilizing the full duration of 24 weeks, many electing to prolong the leave with their holiday and often beyond that period. At one year after delivery, significantly more mothers were housewives than before. They recommended that maternity leave be extended. A positive association has been shown between maternal health and duration of breastfeeding with the length of maternity leave (Staehelein *et al.*, 2007). The authors found that longer maternity leaves were associated with lower perinatal, neonatal, and postnatal mortalities.

Thus, maternity and child care leave provisions are essential for every working mother. It enables her to nurture the young child efficiently and thus decreases morbidity. The durations of these absences are variable and can depend on so many factors that it may be difficult to fix a uniform period for maternity leave. It may be a function of social circumstance as much as a regional preference. A working mother from a joint family may need much less leave than a single mother, or a woman from a nuclear family and with no child support systems in the family. Often provisions of child care in the office itself in the form of a nursery helps the mother resume work more seamlessly. Part-time work at the office and working from home may also help ease the stress. Part-time work allows women to cultivate outside interests, earn money, and have a defense from criticism of neglecting her children (Wilson, 2006)

Can Working Mothers Take Undue Advantage of Employer Benefits and Social Sentiments, and are They a Drain on Resources?

A woman may keep a job just to keep the home fires burning, while another may fight against all odds to pursue her career. In the interests of working mothers in both these situations, a solid support system needs to exist, and the prerogative to work or not should lie entirely with the worker, as would be in the case of an ordinary working male. Parties concerned can exploit this situation, that is, a working mother may not be extended an adequate support system, or conversely, she may try to extract special concessions from her employer[s] at the cost of work ethics. Maternity leave, flexible working hours, child-friendly workplace sound extremely good, but what about the flip side? Maternity leave is known to be extended, sometimes indefinitely. Often, the mother quits work altogether. Flexible working hours might adversely affect other employees, and would definitely require their cooperation. As for creating a workplace with childcare facilities, a sufficient number of female employees are desirable. An employer who has a larger number of female employees is likely to be more proactive in providing child care and nursing facilities at the workplace for the working mother. Provisions for part-time employment and work at home opportunities are also easier to provide when the number of female employees, and thus the demand for such a facility, is greater.

The cost-benefit ratio of these privileges needs to be examined. The scale and size of the employer, the health conditions of the mother and child, social support, all play important roles. Definitely, guidelines need to exist and would vary across occupations. A working mother may work for pleasure or compulsion, but work ethics and professionalism must have their place. These in turn will generate more empathy towards working mothers from all quarters -- the employer, the spouse, the family and finally, society. In short, good employees would generate more empathy and better co-operation from their employers. And an understanding and co-operative employer would be able to extract the best from his employee without misuse of the benefits given to them.

Maternal health has been found to be negatively related to employment dissatisfaction. Studies (Romito *et al*, 2007; Glezer 1988) looked at women in employment before the birth of the first child. Three fourth of women were in the workforce and of these a third did not take maternity leave despite being eligible for the same, and about a quarter (24%) were ineligible for maternity leave for various reasons. Public sector employees availed of most of the maternity leave. As much as half of the women who did not take maternity leave in the private sector were actually unaware of these options. Working in the public sector, a strong attachment to the workforce, trade union memberships, and education were some factors that affected leave taking amongst working mothers (Glezer, 1988).

Working Mothers and Child Development

A woman has the privilege to actually choose between work and motherhood. Social conditioning entails that the woman put home before career even though no expense has been spared in her education and upbringing towards being independent. The equation in a household where both partners are employed changes with the arrival of a child. Maternal instinct ensures that in the initial crucial weeks; the baby is mostly, if not entirely, in the mother's care. During this period mother-child bonding becomes very strong and sees many women happily opting out of pursuing a career. Later on, financial implications of living on a single income and economic aspirations compel a majority of women to get back to work. Career ambitions are also a big driving force for a mother choosing to work, especially one who is well qualified. Women who resume work after a few months are torn between career ambitions and natural childrearing instincts. Even in households where grandparents, relatives or babysitters attend to the child, a working mother still feels ridden with guilt. In families where both the mother and father are equally involved in child rearing, the woman is able to experience less guilt and more satisfaction while being a working mother. Mutual understanding between spouses ensures that along with bringing in the income, both parents not only share the responsibilities of childcare and the immense fulfillment that comes with it, but also continue to enjoy each other's company as partners.

These attitudes and values are then propagated through the generations. That is why we do see many families where the working mother is not considered an anomaly but a welcome entity. This means that gender sensitivity must be cultivated at both the individual and social level so that as working parents, each partner has an equal responsibility towards the children, not merely by the ability to earn money but also by the inclination and commitment to be involved in the process of child rearing.

The effects of maternal employment on children are sometimes positive and sometimes negative (Youngblut *et al.*, 1998). Parents in non-employed mother families were more satisfied with their families at 18 months than parents in employed mother families (Youngblut *et al.*, 1994). Curiously it was also found that the infant's motor development was positively correlated with number of hours employed per week and degree of choice for the employed mother families, but negatively correlated with choice for the non-employed mother families. These results suggest that maternal employment may not be detrimental for infants born prior to term. Indeed, it may be beneficial, especially if the mother has a choice in the matter (Youngblut *et al.*, 1991). For preschoolers, neither mothers' employment transitions nor their welfare transitions appear to be problematic or beneficial for cognitive achievement or behaviour problems (Chase-Lansdale *et al.*, 2003). Adolescents whose mothers began working reported statistically significant declines in psychological distress. This pattern was strongest for their symptoms of anxiety.

Employed mothers' positive motivation for working, low role conflicts and gains in self worth were associated with their favourable descriptions of their children (Alvarez, 1985; Chase-Lansdale *et al.*, 2003)

Mothers' employed status benefits children by improving family income, better disciplined work behaviour and better structure of family routines. Studies (Chase-Lansdale *et al.*, 2003; Alvarez, 1985) have noted that maternal higher education was found to be a powerful mitigator of possible negative consequences for children whose mothers were working from financial necessity or were experiencing role conflict. Youngblut *et al.*, (1998) explored differences in parent-child and family relationships for employed and non-employed single mothers of low birth-weight and full-term preschool children. They found that employed mothers had more positive perceptions and provided more enriching home environments for their children. They noted that in single-parent families, employment and consistency are positive influences on the mother-child relationship.

The answer to whether work pays as far as parenting is concerned is believed to be complex (Raver, 2003). Women who held lower rung jobs experience much more negativity in their parenting styles. Considering that income increase

is a really positive factor that leads to better mental health of the family unit in the long term, low wage jobs may not benefit the family unit materially or economically. These factors can have an effect on the parenting style in working mothers (Raver, 2003). The families' emotional climate and mothers' mental health are both important factors that determine the effect of employment of mothers on the family unit.

Preschoolers experience a significant decline in time spent with their mothers when their mothers go to work and total time spent with the child has shown to decrease by as much as 2 hours per day. A trade off is found between time and money, as family income increases whereas mother's time with child decreases. Hence these two may offset each other. Mothers may often compensate for this by decreasing social, educational and personal activities that do not involve the children (Chase-Lansdale *et al.*, 2003).

The incidence of childhood obesity was found to increase with increases in maternal employment as the number of hours spent with the child decrease, thus decreasing access to healthy food and increasing dependence on junk food (Hawkins *et al.*, 2008). The Millennium Cohort Study Child Health Group stated that long hours of maternal employment, rather than lack of money, may impede young children's access to healthy foods and physical activity (*ibid*). Children were more likely to be overweight for every ten hours a mother worked per week and this relationship was significant for children from households with a higher annual income (*ibid*).

In contrast, it was noted that, for pre-adolescent children (Greenberger and O'Neill, 1992), maternal employment (typically, conditioned by mothers' level of education and child gender) was more strongly associated with fathers' and teachers' perceptions of children than with mothers' perceptions, and, in some cases, especially with fathers' and teachers' perceptions of daughters. Fathers perceived their 5-6-year-olds as having more problem behaviours when mothers were currently employed full time. Fathers and teachers viewed children's behaviour as more problematic when less educated mothers had been employed during more years of the child's lifetime.

Mothers' transitions into employment were related to improvements in adolescents' mental health. Adolescents whose mothers began working reported statistically significant declines in psychological distress (Chase-Lansdale *et al.*, 2003). The effect of maternal employment on adolescent daughters was studied by Jensen and Borges and they noted that daughters of non-employed mothers had a closer relationship with their fathers, perceived them as happier and friendlier, and experienced less anger and tension in the home (Jensen and Borges, 1986). With adolescents and teenagers an improvement in their mental health was found in correlation with increased incomes in the family. Depressive and aggressive symptoms increased with mothers' exit from employment. It appears

that when mothers of adolescents entered the labour force, they compensated for time away from their young teenagers by cutting down on time apart when they were not on the job (Chase Lansdale *et al.*, 2003).

Contrary to popular belief, a working mother can have a positive impact on her growing children but many variables need to be considered. The most important is obviously the availability of child-care facilities.

Where Is The Womanhood?

Women's movements have proved that a woman is no less than a man in every sphere of life, and women can take upon themselves to go a step further and prove that what a man can do, a woman can do better. So if a man could work to earn money, a woman could work, earn money and look after the kid[s] as well. Of course, a little help is always welcome, but we see scores of women who juggle all the three beautifully, and still do not complain.

Who does? The husband, the in-laws, some friends, and the conscience of the woman, who still think she is not doing a good-enough job.

Is it a question raised on her womanhood?

In society, womanhood continues to be described from an essentially male viewpoint. This can be especially true of societies in third world countries like India. Adjectives used to describe a woman may vary from feminine to tender, motherly, etc. A woman is all this and more. As a working mother, she is independent and empowered, especially if she is from a low socio-economic background. And that is the essence of her womanhood. Financial independence gives a sense of empowerment, and the additional income that the family gets, improves the family's standard of living and these together constitute a very essential upgrade for families with low socioeconomic background.

While there is no clear-cut relationship of the term manhood to nurturing a child, except for the capacity to procreate, womanhood carries with it the onus of a deep, strong instinct and inclination to nurture. Indeed, a woman feels, or is expected to feel, incomplete without being a mother, either as a biological trait or because of social conditioning. While the professional aspirations of the modern working woman continue to soar, as soon as she becomes a mother her priorities often change. A working woman is expected to be a good wife and mother before anything else, never mind her professional status or skills. Many women themselves put a premium on being a good mother at the cost of their work or career. Society does not look kindly upon a woman who attains great success at work and has little time to devote to her home. It is as though womanhood is at stake if being a wife and mother does not take first place in the

life of a woman, contrary to what it would be in the case of a man.

Stereotypes rule and strong beliefs persist about the negative effects of maternal employment on women, their marriages, and their children, despite systematic evidence to the contrary.

It is also assumed that a mother's being at work leads to social ills like school dropouts, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, and divorce.

The argument that working mothers have little time to spare for their family, does not take into account the hours of unpaid housework and domestic chores of a full-time housewife. Working mothers put aside quality time to spend with their family and can contribute to a more cheerful and positive family environment. By efficient and effective time management, a working mother is able to allocate time to her various roles as well as appreciate her own worth and importance.

Conclusions

In short, it is possible to be a woman, a mother, and an achiever. Many have done it with help from society, and others have battled endless odds to prove the same. In today's world it is both desirable and incumbent upon mothers to be working, like their spouses. We, in the developing world, and still in the throes of a culture and tradition of a male-oriented society, should acknowledge that, contrary to traditional belief that a working mother is not a good mother, a working mother can, in fact, be a better mother.

A working mother, especially the one who has the good fortune to be able to balance her home and work, thanks to all the factors mentioned above, enjoys the stimulation that a job or career provides. She not only feels better about herself but is also forced to take better care of herself in order to make an impression. Along with motherhood, a successful career adds to the completeness of being a woman. The major stresses of being a working mother remain lack of time, and a feeling of guilt, due to perceived neglect of the parenting role. The rewards are many, including personal benefits, financial rewards, and improved family life.

To enable this, considerable adjustments are necessary at the individual level and at the workplace, which help the mother to fulfill the dual responsibilities of career and motherhood.

Take Home Message

The working mother epitomizes modern womanhood. The modern work environment needs to consider the special needs of this working population, changing its orientation from male dominance to gender neutrality and parenting friendly behaviour. The joint family and the nuclear family unit both need to

adjust to the needs of the working mother so as to allow a healthier family to develop.

Conflict of interest

We declare no conflicts of interest, commercial or otherwise, in relation to the matter published in this article. As co-authors we share equal responsibility for the contents and views presented as part of this article

Declaration

This is an original work and has not been submitted to any other journal for publication. It is not under consideration at any other journal.

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Questions That This Paper Raises

- 1) Is the profile of a working woman conducive to raising a healthy child as well as functioning adequately at the place of work?
- 2) Is a working woman a norm and the housewife slowly becoming a rarity?
- 3) Are radical reforms required to help a working woman cope with the dual stresses of motherhood and a career?
- 4) Are more studies required to assess the impact of motherhood on proficiency in careers?

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