

MULTIPLE ROLE INVOLVEMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF MARRIED WOMEN

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Abstract: Since the beginning of humanity, women have been worshipped, adored, cherished, celebrated, imitated, wooed, and admired. Women have also been defamed, castigated, condemned, abused, maligned, raped, and murdered. Besides being a wife, mother and homemaker, when women assume the role of paid worker, it is often loaded with role-conflict, guilt, depression and other hazards that affect the health and happiness of women. Women are lovers, wives, mothers, healers, artists, writers, inventors, queens, princesses, presidents, administrators, corporates, aviators, astronauts, navigators, and soldiers. With such degree of variety in roles that women play in everyday lives, come complexities that challenge their mental and emotional well-being. Besides being a wife, mother and homemaker, when women assume the role of paid worker, it is often loaded with role-conflict, guilt, depression and other hazards that affect the health and happiness of women. My paper aims to examine some of the issues that continue to plague women as they attempt to establish a fine balance between home and work, duties and desires, professional life and personal space. The study will explore and analyze from various perspectives, the obstacles that married women face due to financial challenges, societal pressures or emotional dependency, suggesting lines of inquiry that might be profitable in the future.

Introduction: Women take on multiple roles in today's society. Some roles are by choice and other roles are chosen for women. Besides other roles they play in everyday lives, women's roles often include family obligations, work responsibilities, and caretaking for children and/or elderly parents. Broadly speaking, there are three major roles of women that can impact her health in the long run – employment, marriage and motherhood. As demands increase to fulfill these roles, women can feel overwhelmed with time pressures and unmet obligations. They may feel a sense of failure in not being able to meet expectations for themselves and others. This sense of guilt or dissatisfaction may step from an inherent urge in women to spend more time meeting the needs of others and looking at their lives from others' perspectives rather than nurturing their own needs. If functioning at high stress levels, women may not even recognize what their needs are, and eventually suffer from distress, disappointment or depression.

In a review of the literature on women's social roles, Long and Porter (1984) bring forward the idea that men and women are influenced differently by the responsibility of handling multiple roles. For men, multiple roles have been found to be beneficial while it was noticed that women with multiple roles has adverse effect on their health. Today Indian women work for long hours with tight schedules and professional pressures in competitive environments. Besides this, the parental pressures and home responsibilities leave little space for her to take care of her own requirements. Role overload, role-conflict, guilt, anxiety and other hazards eventually lead to impaired well being of women. If 'health' is defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-

being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, it is important to recognize the fact that many women in India need to pay more attention to their own health, which often holds peripheral importance in society, family, and even their own lives.

It is a general agreement that these roles have both beneficial and adverse effects on women's health, but it is debatable as to what is the overall impact of these diverse roles that a modern woman plays in her everyday life.

The increased opportunities of employability of married women in different industries have led to women taking up multiple roles, one of the sources of stress for women in modern times. Rapoport and Rapoport (1972) have reported that dual career couples tend to reduce the overload effect by cutting back on non-essential leisure and social activities. If we agree that non-work aspects of our life rejuvenate us and help in reducing the building up of stress, then the curtailment of these roles may be seen as further frustrating, adding on to the stress-levels in our lives.

It is certainly plausible that women experience higher levels of stress because of the demands of their social life. Increasingly, women are expected to function as nurturer, homemaker and breadwinner. Given that domestic work is often undervalued, and considering that women tend to be paid less, find it harder to advance in career, have to juggle multiple roles and are bombarded with images of 'superwoman' handling multiple tasks with ease and perfection – it would be surprising if there weren't some emotional or psychological cost attached.

Two theoretical hypotheses are considered regarding the family and work roles of women to explain the

health differences between married women who are employed and those who are homemakers. The Role Accumulation hypothesis proposes that the benefits of multiple roles are much greater than any stress that may be caused due to them. On the contrary, the Role Strain Hypothesis proposes that multiple roles can cause role overload and role conflict which may lead to health concerns in women.

According to the Role Accumulation Hypothesis, multiple roles provide a variety of benefits such as more sources of social support, increased self-esteem and financial advantages. Hence, they are considered to have a positive impact on women's health. Sieber (1974) theorized that an individual with a wide variety of role partners may be able to compensate for relationship failures by falling back on other relationships. Recent reviews indicate that women and men who fulfill multiple roles, report lower levels of mental and physical health problems and greater levels of subjective well being. (Barnett & Hyde, 2001) Many researchers have focused on the impact multiple roles can have on the well-being of women, by boosting their self esteem and job satisfaction. (Pietromonaco et al., 1986).

However, both the hypotheses of role enhancement and scarcity have their limitations as they focus on the number of roles occupied; and fail to examine how the nature of a particular role might contribute to or impair one's well-being. Modern research suggests several important modifications of this simple formulation. One important observation is that not all roles have the same kind of impact on women's mental and physical health. It can be argued that marriage may have particularly beneficial health effects, employment may have intermediate effects, and parental responsibilities may be less beneficial to a woman's health.

We assume that marriage has greater health benefits because it provides increased social and financial support, however, marital conflicts can contribute to harmful effects on health. Similarly, we expect employment to have positive impact on a woman's health due to increased social support and financial rewards, but constant exposure to job stress and occupational hazards can have its own repercussions. Finally, motherhood definitely brings its own challenges in a woman's world. While nurturing children may mean increased financial difficulties, social isolation, emotional stress and constant physical involvement in child care; it can also have its own rewards of more social contacts, family support and greater emotional satisfaction.

The Role Accumulation Hypothesis also observes that the health effects of a role may vary depending on the other roles a woman holds. According to the Role Substitution Hypothesis, when two roles provide similar resources, one role may substitute for the

other, consequently, women who occupy either role may benefit, but there may be little additional health benefit from occupying both roles. For example, employment and marriage may substitute for each other as sources of income, health insurance and social support. However, employment may have a less beneficial impact on the health of married women than for unmarried women, because a married woman has a husband as an alternative source of financial and social support. Similarly, marriage may have less beneficial impact on health of women who are employed.

In Role of Complementation Hypothesis, some pairs of roles may have complementary, synergistic effects so that the benefit of one role may be greater for women who also occupy the other role. For example, the financial and psychological resources provided by a husband may be important for women who have parental responsibilities, so marriage may have greater health benefit for women who have children. Similarly, mothers who are employed may have a less harmful effect on their health as they can take time away from the stresses of child-rearing and provide greater social support and financial resources.

The Role Strain Hypothesis stresses on the negative impact of multiple roles on women's health because they create role-overload and role-conflict, thereby leading to increased stress and exhaustion. An extension of this hypothesis is the Role Combination Strain Hypothesis, which proposes that both parenting and employment absorb considerable time and energy, so employed mothers may experience role overload and role conflict in such instances, resulting in adverse effects on emotional and physical health. Similarly Quantitative Demands Role Strain Hypothesis proposes that long hours of employment may increase stress on working mothers and eventually hamper their health.

The Age-Related Parental Role Strain Hypothesis proposes that the stress on a woman's role depends on the ages of a woman's children or her own age when she became a mother, all these can influence how she can cope up with the parental roles and responsibilities while taking care of her own well being. Health effects are found to be more harmful for mothers with pre-school age children, due to more physical involvement required in taking care of them. Similarly, the mothers of teenage children face more mental stress due to predictable conflicts on various issues. So, taking these arguments together, we recognize that the combination of full-time employment with parental responsibilities of young or many children has harmful effects on a woman's health.

Recognizing priorities can help in organizing activities accordingly and help in achieving both individual and family goals. Setting priorities is

therefore regarded as an important technique in developing time management skills and coping with stress due to multiple role handling. The marriage and home-related activities remain the salient role for women have been confirmed by numerous studies. In an analysis on women's work participation, Blake (1974) observes that women typically participate in economic activity only as a supplement to their primary status inside home. The increase in the percentage of married women and mothers who choose to work outside home reflect the

simultaneous increase in stress of fulfilling multiple roles that they carry on their shoulders, eventually having harmful effects on their health and happiness. The stress of multiple roles may be partially ameliorated through preventive measures and seeking family support and understanding. The inclusion of family members in role awareness, value clarification, and family goal-setting sessions can go a long way in gaining support to balance work and home.

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