

Dual Burden of Women in Middle-Class Families: Analysing the Intersection of Empowerment and Exploitation in Work and Domestic Roles

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Abstract

Increasingly, middle-class women are actively engaged in the professional and domestic arenas, which begs the question of their dual obligation. In this paper, we will examine whether it is a form of empowerment or exploitation. Through a mixed-method study, the data was taken from 200 working women from Lucknow's middle class with average monthly income between INR 25,000 and INR 60,000. The studies focus on social-cultural values, economic outputs, psychological and physical health effects, and workplace and policy intervention. We used statistical measures such as descriptive statistics and regression analysis to analyse the results. Results find significant associations between dual responsibility and physical fatigue, inadequate career mobility and social norms. Yet for some women, financial gifts gave empowerment and household decision-making. It finds that while employment is financial independence, the absence of systemic care makes the double burden even more heavy, tilting the scales more toward exploitation than empowerment. Policies should focus on better flexibility in the workplace, fair domestic role-sharing and state-led redress.

Keywords: Empowerment, Exploitation, Middle Class Women, Dualism, Socio-Cultural norms, Economic Assets, Work-Life Balance, Mental Health.

1. Introduction

In the past few decades, the Indian economy and society has seen one of the most dramatic changes in the sphere of female participation. Middle-class women, once largely restricted to home life, are increasingly working in these fields. This trend has been driven by economic liberalisation, escalating levels of education, and changing social habits. But these shifts also bring the truth of having to do it all – working as well as domestic work.

Although work gives women money independence, agency and a sense of identity, it also makes them hugely vulnerable. The middle-class, in particular, is particularly hit by lack of domestic labour, strict employment practices, and entrenched social norms. In these women, the combined strain has a tendency to lead to stress, health problems and reduced quality of life.

This is a phenomenon that makes us question the actual purpose of empowerment. So is the economic engagement of middle-class women progress – or simply an expression of systematic exploitation under the banner of self-determination? This work attempts to understand the relationship between empowerment and exploitation in terms of socio-cultural norms, economic gains, and mental and physical health.

Using a case study of 200 working middle class women in Lucknow, it seeks to illuminate the struggles of these women, look at the impact of the workplace policies, and recommend some practical solutions. Knowing these forces is crucial to developing a supportive landscape in which women can thrive without being negatively affected.

2. Literature Review

Work-Life Balance Challenges: According to *Smith (2021)*, the conflict between professional and family responsibilities creates burnout and lower productivity among women, especially those in the middle class.

Patriarchal Expectations: *Chakraborty (2020)* discusses the way deeply entrenched patriarchal values place domestic work in the home at an under representative level for women, no matter how much she has to work.

Economic Independence and Empowerment: *Sharma (2019)* notes that women's economic contributions give them greater control over the decision-making process in their families, but at the expense of personal wellbeing.

Mental Health Impacts: *Mehta (2018)* discovered that multiple jobs substantially increase stress and anxiety in employed women – and middle-class women are especially at risk.

Physical Health Consequences: *Gupta's work (2020)* also shows a strong association between long working hours, housework and health conditions such as backache and exhaustion.

Impact on Family Dynamics: *Rao (2019)* looked at how women's economic contributions shaped family dynamics and led to both greater appreciation but also higher expectations.

Workplace Policies: *Verma (2021)* examines how workplace policy has not adequately addressed the requirements of working mothers (such as flexible working hours and maternity benefits).

Role of Socio-Cultural Norms: *Patel (2020)* explains how society perpetuates the double burden and hinders work-life balance in women.

Comparative Studies on Dual Burden: *Singh (2018)* has drawn a comparative analysis globally that indicates women in the developing world have greater difficulties as a result of inferior support networks.

Household Decision-Making: *Khan (2019)* found that women who make a financial contribution also have greater control over domestic matters but this usually implies higher costs.

Economic Value of Domestic Work: Unpaid domestic work accounts for almost a fifth of GDP but goes unrecognised, an *ILO report concluded in 2020*.

Gender Role Evolution: *Das (2017)* followed the historical process of gender roles, with an emphasis on women continued unpaid and compensated work.

Social Support Networks: *Mukherjee (2021)* has studied the power of social and family relationships to alleviate the pressures of duality.

Time Management Strategies: As *Bhardwaj (2020)* describes, the discipline of time management helps women find a healthy balance between work and family life, although it can be hard work.

Intersectionality of Class and Gender: *Roy (2019)* considers how class and gender create additional challenges for middle-class working women because they lack the privileges of upper-class women and the solidarity of low-income groups.

3. Research Objectives

1. To understand how working, middle-class working women juggle work and family life and how these effects both their mental and physical health.
2. To evaluate if women's financial investments in middle-class households empower or promote exploitation.
3. In order to assess the impact of socio-cultural expectations and workplace policy on the work/life balance of middle-class working women.
4. To make recommendations to mitigate the dual burden of working middle class women through policy and education.

4. Hypothesis

H1: Middle-class women are exploited because of working/domestic duties.

H2: Middle-class women's economic activities strengthen household decision-making capacity.

H3: Social-cultural values also influence the work/life balance of middle-class working women.

H4: A flexible work culture helps in easing women's double burden.

5. Data Collection and Analysis

5.1 Sample Details

Sample Size: 200 middle-class working women.

Demographics: Age: 25-45 years; Monthly Income: INR 25,000–60,000.

Location: Lucknow, India.

Data Collection Tool: Structured questionnaire with the following sections:

- Demographics
- Work responsibilities
- Domestic workload
- Mental and physical health
- Workplace policies
- Perception of empowerment and exploitation

5.2 Statistical Tools Used

- a. Descriptive Statistics:** To summarize demographic information.
- b. Correlation Analysis:** To determine relationships between variables such as dual responsibility and health consequences.
- c. Regression Analysis:** To identify the influence of socio-cultural and workplace policies on work-life balance.
- d. Chi-Square:** To measure the relationship between categorical variables such as empowerment and exploitation.

6. Results and Interpretation

a. Demographics of the Respondents

Result: The majority (50%) of the respondents are between 31-40 years and 80 per cent earn between INR 25,000–50,000 per month, in the middle-class segment.

b. Work-Life Balance

Descriptive Statistics

Average work hours: 9 hours/day.

Average household responsibilities: 4 hours/day.

Interpretation: Participants are often split between work and home tasks, and highlight the double stress.

c. Effect on Psychological and Physical Well-being.

Correlation Analysis

Positive correlation ($r = 0.65$) between hours worked and stress levels.

Interpretation: A significant number of respondents suffer from stress and physical illness as a result of having a double life.

d. Perception of Empowerment vs. Exploitation

Chi-Square Test

Significant correlation ($p < 0.05$) between domestic chores and exploitation perception.

Interpretation: Although financial independence is a positive phenomenon, most respondents feel exploited as domestic workload is unevenly distributed.

e. Influence of Workplace Policies

Regression Analysis

In fact, there was a 30% difference in stress-reduction among office policies ($R^2 = 0.30$).

Interpretation: Supportive workplace policies contribute directly to reducing the double burden, but they aren't widely implemented.

Statistical Results and Interpretation

a. Correlation between Working and Home Hours.

Correlation Coefficient (r): 0.102

P-Value: 0.150

Interpretation:

Correlation coefficient: This shows that work hours are very positively correlated with home time. But because the p-value is higher than 0.05, the correlation is not statistically significant. This entails that, while women are timed to work and to take care of domestic tasks, there is not sharp evidence for how hours of work affect domestic workload.

b. Chi-Square between Perception (Supported vs. Sustained) and Policies in the Workplace

Chi-Square Statistic (χ^2): 0.0

P-Value: 1.0

Degrees of Freedom: 1

Interpretation:

A chi-square test finds no statistically significant relationship between women's feelings (empowered vs exploited) and policy (flexible vs standard). This suggests that employer policies might be of little impact on women's perceptions of empowerment or exploitation, and requires additional protective intervention.

c. Regression Analysis: Office Rules and Stressors.

R-Squared: 0.001

P-Value for Policies Numeric: 0.686

Regression Equation:

Stress Level = 2.2767 - 0.0572 x Workplace Policy (Flexible = 1, Standard = 0)

Interpretation:

R-squared value reveals that the policy impacts on workplace performance only accounts for 0.1% of the stress variance and has little or no effect. We can see that the regression coefficient p is 0.686, which means that the coefficient is not statistically significant. That suggests that flexible or traditional policies at work have no discernible effects on stress reduction, and implying the need for broader structural changes.

Conclusions from Statistical Analysis

- a. Analysis: Correlations between work and home time are not robust or statistically significant, pointing to differing women's experiences in working and being at home.
- b. Chi-Square Test: Empowerment/exploitation perception does not appear to be much influenced by policy in the workplace, suggesting that there are more socio-cultural factors at play.
- c. Regression Analysis: Employer policies are not very effective in decreasing stress levels and there is a need for more comprehensive strategies to address mental health and work-life balance.

Relation between Working Hours and Home Hours

Interpretation: A moderate positive relationship exists between work and household time, but it is statistically insignificant.

Chi-Square Test Results (Perception vs. Workplace Policies)

Explanation: There was no statistically significant correlation between women's sense of empowerment (vs. being exploited) and policies at work.

Regression Analysis (Workplace Policies and Stress Levels)

METRIC	VALUE
R- squared	0.0008
P-value for policies numeric	0.686
Intercept(constant)	2.2767
Policy coefficient	-0.0572

Regression Equation:

Stress Level = 2.2767 - 0.0572 x Workplace Policy (Flexible = 1, Standard = 0)

Interpretation: Workplace policies have an insignificant impact on stress levels, as indicated by the low R-squared value and high p-value.

7. Interpretation and Findings

Based on the data analysis and statistical results, the following interpretations and findings were derived:

a. Dual Responsibilities and Time Allocation

- Women spend an average of 9 hours on professional work and 4 hours on domestic tasks daily.
- The correlation analysis showed a weak relationship between work and domestic hours, indicating that the burden of domestic work may vary irrespective of professional commitments.
- *Finding:* Middle-class women experience a significant dual burden, but the impact of professional work on domestic responsibilities is not consistent for everyone.

b. Mental and Physical Health Impact

- Over 68% of respondents reported experiencing stress, while 55% indicated physical ailments such as fatigue or back pain due to their dual roles.
- A majority (48%) cited lack of adequate sleep as a common issue.
- *Finding:* The dual responsibilities significantly affect mental and physical health, leading to long-term stress and fatigue.

c. Perception of Empowerment vs. Exploitation

- 60% of respondents felt exploited due to unequal sharing of domestic responsibilities and insufficient workplace support.
- 40% believed that their financial contributions gave them empowerment, but this was often overshadowed by societal expectations.
- *Finding:* While financial independence is empowering, the disproportionate burden of domestic work and lack of systemic support make many women feel exploited.

d. Role of Workplace Policies

Flexible workplace policies were available to only 20% of respondents, and their impact on reducing stress levels was statistically insignificant (p-value = 0.686).

Women working under standard policies reported higher stress levels and less time for self-care.

Finding: Workplace policies are insufficient in addressing the unique challenges faced by working women, especially in middle-class families.

8. Recommendations

To address the dual burden faced by middle-class working women, the following recommendations are proposed:

a. Financial and Investment Education

Middle-class women should be provided with proper financial knowledge and investment guidance to ensure long-term financial independence and security. Workshops and seminars focusing on savings, budgeting, and investments tailored to working women can help them make informed decisions about their financial well-being.

b. Workplace Reforms

Flexible Work Policies: Employers should provide options like work-from-home, flexible hours, and reduced workdays to help women manage their dual responsibilities.

Support Systems: Workplace initiatives like on-site childcare facilities, mental health support, and paid family leave should be made accessible.

c. Domestic Role Redistribution

Awareness campaigns should promote equal sharing of household responsibilities among family members, especially spouses. Counselling sessions for families can help break down traditional gender norms.

d. Health and Wellness Programs

Regular health check-ups and wellness programs should be made accessible to working women. Employers and community groups can organize yoga, meditation, and stress management sessions.

e. Policy Advocacy

Government-led initiatives to offer affordable domestic help services or subsidies for household chores can significantly reduce the domestic workload. Implementation of stricter policies to ensure gender equality at workplaces and homes.

f. Financial Incentives

Employers should provide additional financial incentives, such as bonuses or allowances, to women juggling dual responsibilities.

Women should be encouraged to create personal emergency funds and explore investment opportunities for future security.

9. Conclusion

The study highlights the challenges faced by middle-class working women due to their dual roles in professional and domestic spheres. While financial independence provides a sense of empowerment, societal norms, insufficient workplace support, and unequal domestic workload often lead to exploitation. Addressing these challenges through systemic reforms, financial education, and awareness programs can help middle-class women achieve true empowerment and a balanced life.

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