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Balancing Home and Work: A Study on the Working Women in Sikkim

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ABSTRACT

According to a report brought out by Centre for Strategic and International Studies and Nathan Associates, Sikkim has been declared as the state with the best working conditions for women. The same report also mentions that the number of women workers in the state is high. Increase in developmental activities mainly in the growth of administrative and commercial activities and the increase in literacy has led to a growth in employment in Sikkim. As a result there also has been an upsurge of women being employed outside their homes. Consequently, the social structures existing in our society such as family, religion, marriage, morality and culture has been affected. This influence has also extended to the role that women play. This paper therefore, attempts to explore the impact of paid employment among the working women in Sikkim.

Key Words : Role conflict, Family, Social change, Working women, Decision making

INTRODUCTION

Home and work are two different worlds for working women and are often in conflict (Gani and Ara, 2010). The work environment imposes a variety of demands on workers. First, because jobs require time, employment poses a sheer time commitment for workers. Second, job requirements place specific demands on workers such as the demands of commuting and the physical and the intellectual demands of performing daily tasks. Additionally, work schedules are often incompatible with the needs of workers because more often than not, the workplace and family systems have competing interests. Employer-demanded worker loyalty constrains a worker's emotional and physical resources leaving little for the family, while family demand of a worker's time and energy infringes upon workplace loyalty and commitment (Kmec, 1999). Therefore, as an individual's situational stressors within a domain increase, conflict results as one domain begins to interfere with the other. It generally originates from two major aspects of work-family interface-factors associated with the time required to perform work and family roles and the psychological carry over of strain from one role domain to the other, which affects the availability and amount of energy for performing the other roles (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Gani and Ara, 2010). This become more acute in instances where children are involved. Because employers typically purchase worker's time and time is finite, paid employment may occur at the expense of family work. (Kmec, 1999).

Moreover, there are contradictory role expectations from working women while she is at work and at home. On the professional front she is expected to be committed, dynamic, competitive, straightforward, non sentimental and act in a "business like" manner and at home she is expected to be sweet, soft, sensitive, adaptable, gentle, unassertive and domesticated (Gani and Ara, 2010). The nature of the roles in both areas are opposite to each other. Yet, a working woman is expected to possess all these characteristics and display them in tune to the demands of the situation. Often, these contradictory expectations cause the most confusion, tension and create many other problems for her. An attempt to play one of

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the roles with perfection leads to inadvertent sacrifice of the other (Ibid).

Vast changes in population increase, changing agricultural system, expansion of government services, growth of private sectors, increasing economic opportunities, globalization of the economy, the communication revolution have taken place. All these in turn have contributed to the alteration of traditional value systems while also making a major impact on the social, cultural, political and economic aspects of the society. One change that is prominent in the urban areas is the increase in the variety of job opportunities that are created. As a result the possibilities of women being employed are also high. Dutta (1999) cites the emergence of middle class housewives as wage earners as one of the more crucial changes taking place in Indian society today. Propelling women into wage earners is the combination of a number of factors such as education, economic necessity, financial independence, the desire to put one's education and skill into something fruitful, status and their own self development.

Moreover, the evolution of mankind has always been marked with some basic idea of division of labour. In the earliest human societies known to mankind it was the men who fought and hunted while women were engaged more in less dangerous and nurturing and rearing activities. This gender division of labour over the years has led to clear cut division of household chores between men and women with women doing work within the house and its related activities while men tend to be associated more with work outside the home. In fact, there are numerous studies (Ahmad, 1984; Behera and Padhi, 1993; Okafor and Amayo, 2006) which shows that this division of labour continues to exist despite the fact that women today have begun to take up responsibilities beyond the private domain. In other words, working women today continue to manage the work expected of them in their homes as well as engage in paid employment. Subsequently, working women or women engaged in paid employment often face challenges in their bid to discharge responsibilities in the workplace and home (Kapur, 1969; Elman and Gilbert, 1984; Desai, 1996). Moreover, housework is not limited to a specific time or place as a result of which it sometime runs in an endless cycle of chores.

Sikkim:

Sikkim, is the 22nd state of the Indian Union and a part of the north eastern region of India. Sharing borders with China, Bhutan, Nepal and West Bengal it remains landlocked. It comprises three major ethnic groups namely the Bhutias, the Lepchas and the Nepalis. These ethnic communities are largely patriarchalin their social customs and traditions. Over the last few years various development programs have given rise to wage employment opportunities thereby giving a new picture to the economy of Sikkim. A large number of people are also entering into government services as well as private establishments (Sikkim HDR, 2014).

However, owing to the patriarchal structure which largely defines the society in Sikkim, household work is seen as the duty and the responsibility of most women in Sikkim, traditionally thrust and embraced by the existing patriarchal system. Therefore, majority of the women are engaged in carrying out work related to family and home care. It should also be mentioned that a large number of these women are simultaneously engaged in income generating activities outside the house (Thapa, 2009). Consequently, the struggle in balancing family and work exists for the working women in Sikkim. Women in Sikkim today make up for 32.60% of the total working population (State Socio-economic Census, 2006). As women elsewhere in the world, the Sikkimese women here too have demanding work as well as family roles and obligations to fulfil.

Table 1 : Percentage distribution of women workers in urban and rural Sikkim

	Total	Rural	Urban
Workers	37	45	25
Main workers	61	57	84
Marginal workers	39	43	16

Source: Census of India 2011

Table 1 shows the distribution of women workers in urban and rural Sikkim. It also shows that in the urban areas the main workers account for 84 % of the total women workers as compared to the 57 % in rural areas and the marginal workers amount to 16 % in urban areas as compared to 43 % in the rural areas. Therefore, the urban workforce accounts for almost double the size of the rural work force. This indicates the large participation of women in the workforce in the urban areas.

Objectives:

With a large number of women participating in paid work in the urban areas while simultaneously being

responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of her home presented the need for an in depth empirical study to understand the influence and the impact of employment on the life of these working women who for years have been subjected to a different lifestyle, mindset and a different set of norms and values. Therefore, the general objective of the study is to study the problems faced by the urban working women. The specific objectives are:

1. To examine the socio demographic characteristics of these working women.

2. Do working women face any role conflict while managing home and work?

3. What are the coping mechanisms that the working women employ to balance home and work ?

Literature review:

Gani and Ara (2010) in their study on the Conflicting Worlds of Working Women: Findings of an Exploratory Study carried out in Kashmir Valley have found out that women face role conflict as a result of many factors. Teachers and office workers face less marital problems than women who are engaged in professions such as health care, banking institutions and the media. This study also reveals that the chances of role conflict are more when the woman has more pre-school going children and does not have satisfactory child-care provision at home during their school hours. Another finding of this study has revealed that working women from nuclear family are better adjusted compared to those living in extended families. This is because in a nuclear family the working wife has to adjust only with her husband and children while in the case of an extended family the working woman has to make adjustments with all the members who may not be cooperative or sympathetic. Another factor looked into was the husband's attitude. Role conflict was found to be high among the respondents whose husbands were of demanding nature. Other factors like distance between workplace and the residence and types of conveyance used by working women to reach their places of work were seen as significant in producing role conflict among working women. If forced to choose women generally opted for their family than their work.

Rao and Rao (1973) based their study in Hyderabad, India to examine the relationship between employment of mothers and role conflict in comparison to the position of non-employed mother. The author's theoretical framework has been heavily drawn from Bales discussion of the terms norm, role, status, position and other derived concepts such as structural distance. The findings of this study revealed that employed mothers outside the house have greater economic independence, are likely to have more decision making power on investment, they spent less time on household chores so as to resolve role conflict and they are likely to have less leisure than non employed mothers.

Kmec (1999) while exploring multiple aspects of work-family conflict has maintained her focus on how incompatible job and family demands make fulfilment of family responsibilities difficult or in her words "job-to-home-spillover".

Houseknecht and Macke (1981) have highlighted the effect of female employment on marital adjustment. They have used role theory to examine the marital adjustment of women with high level graduate degrees. Their study lends support to the argument that it is not simply a matter of whether or not a woman is working outside the home but rather the extent to which that behaviour violates role expectations and creates role conflict. Having a supportive husband, freedom from child rearing responsibilities are some of the variables which are explored for studying the relationship between wife's family role and her career role.

Biswas and Kabir (2004) have identified eleven indicators namely mobility, decision making power, autonomy, ownership of household assets, freedom from domination, awareness, participation in public protests and political campaigns, contribution to family income, reproductive rights, exposure to information and participation in development programmes to measure women's empowerment in Bangladesh.

Ahmad (1984) in her paper examines in brief the occupational profile of educated Indian working women with particular focus on their position in the professions and the various problems faced by women in the professions namely that of discrimination, low professional commitment and role conflict. She argues that the problems of Indian women must be viewed within the specific socio-cultural context of Indian society since the manifestations of these problems are culturally determined.

Looking into the occupational profile of educated women in India she makes a number of observations. Firstly, women tends to be concentrated or segregated in a few select occupations rather than be distributed over several occupations. Secondly, apart from being clustered in low status occupations women also tend to be

concentrated in the lowest rungs of prestigious occupations. Citing the teaching profession, Ahmad points out that the proportion of women at the school level is far greater than at higher levels. The third observation is that women tend to earn less than men even though they possess similar qualifications. Lastly, a substantial proportion of highly educated and professionally trained women continue to remain unemployed.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on primary data as well as secondary data. The primary data was collected through personal interviews based on close ended interview schedule which were conducted with 95 working women engaged in various forms of employment and belonging to the various ethnic communities in Gangtok, Sikkim. The forms of employment varied from private establishments, offices under the state government, business establishments such as retail shops, vegetable vendors, beauty salons, hotels and restaurants. Purposive sampling method as well as snowball sampling method was used to select the respondents. The data collected was statistically analysed and are presented here.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected attempts to draw socio demographic profile of the women respondents in the study. It focused on their age, religion, ethnic community, their educational status and their family type. Apart from the socio demographic profile the study also attempts to see how these working women balance home and work and if they face any form of role conflict. The paper also seeks to find out the various problems faced by these working women at their place of work.

Majority of the respondents belonged to the age group of 35-39 followed by the age group of 40-44. Out of the 95 respondents only 4 belonged to the 55-60 age group category. The respondents in the study belonging to the 25-29 age group belonged more to the unorganised sector. During the course of the interview it was revealed that these respondents from the unorganised sector saw their work as something temporary until something better came along.

Table 2 also shows that the majority of the respondents have studied up to graduation, followed by respondents who were postgraduates. Sikkim Human Development Report 2014 also states that the female literacy rates in both rural and urban areas in Sikkim are higher than the national average. 13 % of the respondents have studied up to the senior secondary level while 17 % of them have studied up to the secondary level. 8 % of them have done some form of diploma or training. The postgraduates and graduates were found mainly in the government services and private firms. Respondents with

Table 2 : Socio Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
25 – 29	10	10.5
30 – 34	15	15.7
35 – 39	32	33.6
40 – 44	19	20.0
45 – 49	10	10.5
50 – 54	5	5.2
55 – 60	4	4.2
Total	95	100.0
Educational qualification		
Primary	8	8.43
Secondary	16	16.84
Sr. Secondary	12	12.63
Graduate	31	32.63
Post graduate	28	29.47
Total	95	100.00
Ethnic community		
Lepcha	10	10.52
Bhutia	19	20.00
Nepali	66	69.47
Total	95	100.00
Marital status		
Married	78	82.10
Separated	08	8.42
Widow	09	9.47
Total	95	100.00
No. of children of the respondents		
None	15	15.78
One	31	32.63
Two	45	47.36
More than two	04	4.21
Total	95	100.00
Type of family		
Nuclear	59	62.10
Joint	28	29.47
Nuclear Extended	08	8.42
Total	95	100.00

Source: Field Survey

secondary and senior secondary level of education were found to be more in the unorganised sector.

The ethnic representation of the respondents shows that the maximum number of urban working women belong to the Nepali community at 69 %. Further, the Nepali community also happens to be the largest community in Sikkim. The Bhutia community had the second highest number of respondents at 20 %. The Lepchas had the least number of respondents engaged in paid employment in urban areas at 11 %. The Lepchas also form the community with the smallest population in Sikkim.

Out of the 95 respondents 78 of them were married while 8 of the respondents had separated and 9 of them were widows. Table 2 also shows that more married working women in the urban areas were opting to have fewer children. 47 % of the respondents had two children while 33 % of them had opted for one child. Levitan and Belous (1981) mentions that the relationship between the expanding female work force and reduced fertility rates appears to be more apparent. Advancement and consent to family planning has alloweda majority of wives to combine motherhood with work. They further state that the entry of women in the work force has led to a lower fertility rate among working wives when other social and economic factors are taken into consideration. In the present study, rising expenses, unavailability of child minders or domestic help, nuclear families were some of the reasons given for opting to have fewer children.

The family is a primary group through which an individual fulfils his socio-psychological and economic needs. In the present study, 62 % of the urban working women live in nuclear families while only 38 % of the respondents live in joint families. This data also indicates that nuclear families are increasingly becoming more common than joint families. Similar findings are also reported by Ramu (1988) in "Marital Roles and Power: Perceptions and reality in the Urban Setting" where 80 % of the respondents in his study indicated a preference for nuclear families in comparison to joint families.

Table 3 reveals that 20% of the respondents in the study spend approximately 6 to 7 hours daily in doing housework. 51.57 % spend 4 to 5 hours approximately in doing household chores followed by 28.42% of the respondents spending approximately 2 to 3 hours every day in housework. Availability of hired help, time saving gadgets like washing machines, rice cookers, and readymade market products were some of the other support systems given by the respondents to help in their housework.

Table 3 : Information on housework

Question	Frequency	Percentage
How much time do you spend on housework?		
Approximately 2 to 3 hours	27	28.42
Approximately 4 to 5 hours	49	51.57
Approximately 6 to 7 hours	19	20.00
Total	95	100.00
Who helps you with housework?		
Husband	19	20.00
Parents or in laws	17	17.89
Hired help	15	15.78
Children	15	15.78
Relatives who live with them	09	9.47
No one	20	21.05
Total	95	100.00

Source: Field survey

We can also see the help and support received by the respondents from family and others in doing housework. 21.5 % of the respondents admitted to doing housework by themselves. Husbands also pitch in with 20% of the respondents getting help from them. Parents and in laws at 17.89 % followed by children at 15.78% are other sources of help. Hired help at 15.78 % and relatives who live with the respondents at 9.47 % also help in doing the housework. This data also reveals that nuclear families tend to compel men to share household duties especially when wives are working thereby indicating that there are changes taking place in the distribution of household responsibilities. This change has also been reflected in the findings of Rout *et al.* (1999) wherein they report that 44 per cent of the women in India stated that domestic work was shared between them and their husbands while 45 per cent said that responsibility for child care was also shared between the spouses. Hired help as a source of support in house work is found more among the higher earning members because they are expensive and difficult to find.

Table 4 shows the satisfaction expressed by the working women with regard to the time spent with their family. 68.42% of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction over the time spent with their family. In Sikkim, working days amount to 6 days a week with only one day off which is usually Sunday. A single day off was considered insufficient as shopping, social visits, cleaning and washing all had to be managed within this day. 52.63% of the respondents expressed guilt when

Table 4: Role conflict while managing home and work

Question	Frequency	Percentage
Are you satisfied with the time spent with your family?		
Yes	30	31.58
No	65	68.42
Total	95	100.00
Do you feel guilty when you choose work over home?		
Yes	50	52.63
No	45	47.36
Total	95	100.00
Have you managed to adjust between work and family demands?		
Fully	19	20.00
Partially	43	45.26
Not at all	23	24.21
Total	95	100.00
Do you face role conflict as a result of having to manage both home and work?		
Yes	29	30.52
No	27	28.42
Sometimes	39	41.05
Total	95	100.00

Source: Field survey.

they prioritised work over home. Guilt of choosing work over family may lead to stress and role conflict. It was also revealed in the present study that these working women were finding it difficult to balance home and work with at least 24.21 % of the respondents saying that they had not managed to balance work and family demands. 45.26 % of the respondents said that they had partially managed to adjust to the demands of home and work. Modifications and arrangements were adapted in house work like simplifying cooking and cleaning, asking help from other family members, cutting on one's own leisure time to fulfil both family and work demands.

Responding to the queries on if they faced role conflict as a result of having to manage both home and work, 41.05 % of the respondents said that they sometimes faced role conflict as a consequence. 30.52% of the sample positively responded to role conflict as a consequence from having to meet with the demands of home and work. On the other hand, 28.42 % of the respondents said that they did not face any role conflict in responding to the demands of home and work.

Table 5 shows the various problems faced by working women in Sikkim. Majority of the respondents cited insufficient leaves granted to them as a result of which balancing work and family becomes a major

Table 5 : Problems faced at work place

Question	Frequency	Percentage
What are the problems faced as a working woman at your workplace?		
Gender Discrimination	44	46.31
Mental Stress	30	31.57
Long working hours	15	15.78
Insufficient leave	48	50.52
Role conflict	31	32.63
Sexual Harassment	05	5.26

Source: Field survey

problem especially with small children who require supervision and sick elderly people in the family. The community spirit is very strong in Sikkim with almost every neighbourhood having an association established to help out each other in lifecycle rituals. Therefore, the social obligations to visit or help out during various functions and occasions sometimes prove to be very taxing for these working women especially with limited sanctioned official leaves. Gender discrimination is another problem highlighted by the respondents. The Sikkimese society is patriarchal in its structure. Therefore, men and women are often surrounded by norms, values and customs dictated by patriarchy. Work areas are no exceptions with distribution of jobs given on the basis of gender or perceptions of what is expected of a woman in her gender role or based on what a woman can do or cannot do. Mental stress followed by sexual harassment were the other problems stated by the respondents in the study.

The respondents on being asked about the solutions that they have adopted to balance home and work came up with varied answers which are presented in Table 6. Distribution of household chores with other members of the family like husband, parents, in laws, children or relatives living with them helped in carrying out household chores. Lippe *et al.* (2006) also mentions that distribution of household tasks among other family members might imply less conflict between home and work pressure. 63.15 % of the respondents in the study adopted this solution in order to balance home and work. 52.63 % of the respondents admitted to cutting down on leisure activities in order to meet the demands of home and work. Use of time saving gadgets like rice cookers , washing machines, mixer grinders etc. were adopted by 48.42 % as a solution to manage home and work. Again, the study showed that acquisition of household gadgets and home help were utilised by respondents as conflict reduction devices. Kapur's (1969) study on nurses, social workers

Table 6 : Solutions adopted to manage the demands of home and work

Question	Frequency	Percentage
What are the solutions adopted to manage the demands of home and work?		
Sharing of household chores with other members of the family	60	63.15
Reducing leisure activities like watching TV, naps etc.	30	52.63
Hire help	25	26.31
Simplify household chores like cooking, cleaning	26	27.36
Send children for tuitions /to hostels	13	13.68
Use time saving gadgets like washing machines, rice cookers etc.	46	48.42

Source: Field survey

and researchers shows that role conflict can be reduced when time saving household gadgets along with hired services were utilised by the employed housewives. Simplifying household chores, hiring help and the use of private tuitions or sending one's child to hostel were other mechanisms stated by the respondents in the study to manage home and work.

Conclusion:

Participation and control over economic activities leads to visibility in the private domain as well as in the public domain. This tends to have a domino effect on other spheres of one's life. Social status, literacy, nutrition, health, self confidence, decision making power, self worth are likely to show a positive trend with economic participation. The increase in the number of working women in Sikkim has taken place due to the upsurge in economic activities in all sectors and the rise in the literacy rate. However, this has led to structural changes within the society which has emancipated women to a threshold of economic independence while at the same time bringing new challenges with these changes, a struggle to balance home and work being one of them.

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