

## “FLEXIBLE WORK OR FRAGILE CAREERS? THE DOUBLE –EDGED SWORD FOR WORKING MOTHERS ”

**Dr. Ritika Khanuja**

(CHB Assistant Professor)

Vasanttrao Naik Government Institute Of  
Arts and Social Sciences Nagpur

---

### Abstract :

*In contemporary India, women’s participation in the workforce has increased significantly due to higher educational attainment, economic necessity, and evolving social norms. However, for working women, the dual responsibility of managing a professional career and motherhood continues to pose complex challenges. This paper examines the socio-cultural, organizational, and personal factors that influence how working women in India manage career and motherhood. It explores key challenges such as work–life imbalance, societal expectations, inadequate institutional support, and mental health concerns. The paper also highlights coping strategies adopted by women, the role of organizations and families, and suggests policy-level and societal interventions to create a more inclusive and supportive ecosystem for working mothers in India.*

**Keywords :** Working women, motherhood, work–life balance, India, gender roles, career development

---

### Introduction :

India has witnessed a steady transformation in women’s roles over the past few decades. From being primarily confined to domestic responsibilities, women are now increasingly visible in professional spaces such as corporate offices, education, healthcare, entrepreneurship, and public administration. Despite this progress, the intersection of career and motherhood remains a critical challenge for Indian women.

A mother, sister, wife and daughter are some of the roles that women are often linked in a society. But working women also play an additional role outside the household; and balancing these roles is what constitutes the challenge to working women. The journey of motherhood is not easy, particularly for working women who face many difficulties while raising their children. Leaving her child in someone else's care is difficult-both emotionally and logistically. This puts a stress on women's minds and a sense of guilt occurs among them as they are not with their child when they need them most.

Motherhood is often viewed as a woman’s primary identity in Indian society, while career ambitions are sometimes perceived as secondary or optional. Working mothers are therefore expected to excel both at home and at work, often without adequate support systems. This dual burden creates physical, emotional, and psychological stress, making the management of career and motherhood a significant area of concern.

This paper aims to analyze how working women in India navigate these dual roles, the challenges they face, and the strategies and support systems that can help achieve sustainable work–life integration.

### **Socio-Cultural Context of Motherhood and Work in India :**

Indian society is deeply rooted in traditional gender roles. Women are culturally expected to be primary caregivers, responsible for childcare, household management, and emotional labor within families. Even in urban and educated households, these expectations persist.

Marriage and motherhood are often considered milestones that define a woman's success, sometimes more than her professional achievements. Working mothers may face social judgment for spending long hours at work, traveling for professional commitments, or prioritizing career growth. Questions such as “Who will take care of the child?” or “Why should women work when the family is financially stable?” this all ingrained societal attitudes reflects working women. In contrast Men's career was given more importance, and given him status that he is the wholesome of family. Every pros and con of family matters were decided by him

### **Motherhood And The Work Life Balance :**

Women also socially learn that a child is her responsibility and adds an extra variable to their work life and family conflict. This cultural imbalance significantly affects women's career development and professional confidence.

### **Challenges Faced by Working Mothers in India**

#### **1. Work–Life Imbalance :**

One of the most prominent challenges is maintaining a balance between professional responsibilities and family life. Long working hours, commuting time in urban cities, and inflexible work schedules often leave working mothers with limited time for family and self care.

Many women experience a “double shift”—a full day at work followed by household and childcare duties at home. This imbalance can lead to chronic fatigue and burnout.

#### **2. Career Interruptions and the Motherhood Penalty :**

Pregnancy, maternity leave, and childcare responsibilities often result in career breaks or slowed career progression. In India, women may face subtle discrimination during hiring, promotions, or performance evaluations due to assumptions about their availability or commitment after becoming mothers.

The “motherhood penalty” refers to reduced wages, fewer leadership opportunities, and limited professional growth faced by working mothers compared to their male counterparts or women without children.

#### **3. Inadequate Workplace Support :**

Although Indian labor laws mandate maternity benefits, many organizations lack supportive policies such as flexible working hours, remote work options, crèche facilities, or smooth re entry programs after maternity leave—especially in the informal sector.

Small organizations and private enterprises may view maternity-related accommodations as a financial burden rather than an investment in human capital.

#### **4. Childcare and Support Infrastructure :**

Access to affordable, quality childcare remains a major concern. Working mothers often rely on grandparents, domestic help, or private daycare facilities, which may not always be reliable or accessible.

In nuclear families, common in urban India, the absence of extended family support further intensifies the pressure on working mothers.

#### **5. Mental Health and Emotional Stress :**

Balancing career and motherhood can lead to guilt, anxiety, and stress. Working mothers may feel guilty for not spending “enough” time with their children, while also feeling inadequate at work due to divided attention. Burden of work, lack of sleep, and emotional exhaustion often remain unaddressed due to stigma around mental health in Indian society.

#### **6. Bias against working mothers :**

There is a very strong bias against working women in India. The bias shows up at home and in the community by shaming women who work. It is assumed that working mothers are bad mothers since they cannot stay home with their children. Such judgement can still be overlooked if one has a supportive partner, however, bias against women at work impacts employee engagement and will eventually lead to them giving up their positions assuming that they are not fit to be part of the workforce. Women are also given fewer responsibilities and ignored in decision-making, assuming that they will not be able to put in the hours required to properly execute the tasks at hand. Over time, work to women begin to get demotivated and believe that staying home would be a better choice for them since they don't do much at work anyway.

#### **7. Running on limited energy :**

You come home from work and are totally exhausted. That's when your children demand attention since they haven't seen you all day. They want to do something constructive with mom , while mom are still thinking about the dinner she has to cook up in a jiffy! Sound familiar? It's an eternal struggle for working moms. Mom still read them a story or play checkers before going to bed, but seriously, who has the energy?

**8. Daycare dilemma :** Leave in a daycare center or get a nanny? Drop-in at grandma's home or enroll in a creche? For a mom with a small child, making the right decision is hard. While a nanny ensures the child is in familiar surroundings, a working mom will always be distracted about how the nanny is looking after her precious one. A creche means worrying about the

quality of care.

### **Strategies Adopted by Working Women :**

Despite these challenges, working women in India demonstrate resilience and adaptability through various coping strategies.

#### **1. Time Management and Prioritization :**

Many working mothers adopt structured routines, prioritize tasks, and set realistic expectations for themselves. Delegation of household chores and professional tasks is increasingly being recognized as essential rather than optional.

#### **2. Leveraging Support Systems :**

Support from spouses, parents, in-laws, and domestic help plays a crucial role in their life. Women with supportive partners who share childcare and household responsibilities experience lower stress and higher job satisfaction.

#### **3. Flexible Career Choices :**

Some women opt for flexible work arrangements, freelancing, part-time roles, or entrepreneurship to gain greater control over their schedules. While this provides autonomy, it may sometimes limit long-term career progress.

#### **4. Building strong support :**

Working women adopt strategies like setting firm boundaries (saying "no," prioritizing), leveraging flexibility (hybrid work), negotiating effectively, building strong support systems (mentors, family help, allies), and focusing on self-care (stress management, hobbies) to balance demanding careers with personal lives, all while owning their presence and advocating for growth.

### **Role of Organizations and Employers :**

Organizations play a pivotal role in enabling working women to manage career and motherhood effectively.

- **Flexible Work Policies :** Remote work, flexible hours, and hybrid models help women balance responsibilities.
- **Maternity and Parental Benefits :** Extended maternity leave, paternity leave, and shared parental leave promote gender equality in caregiving.
- **Return-to-Work Programs :** Skill refreshers, mentoring, and phased return options help women reintegrate into the workforce.
- **Inclusive Workplace Culture :** Sensitization programs can reduce bias and promote acceptance of working mothers in leadership roles.

Organizations that invest in gender-inclusive policies benefit from higher employee retention, diversity, and productivity.

### Policy and Societal Interventions :

To support working mothers in India, multi-level interventions are required:

- **Strengthening Childcare Infrastructure** : Government and private sector collaboration to expand affordable childcare facilities.
- **Encouraging Shared Parenting** : Promoting paternity leave and normalizing men's involvement in caregiving.
- **Awareness and Sensitization** : Challenging stereotypes around working mothers through education and media representation.
- **Support for Informal Sector Workers** : Extending maternity and childcare benefits to women in informal employment.

### Conclusion :

Managing career and motherhood remains a complex and deeply personal journey for working women in India. While societal attitudes and structural barriers continue to pose challenges, gradual shifts in organizational policies, family dynamics, and individual mindsets offer hope for positive change.

Empowering working mothers requires collective responsibility—from families, employers, policymakers, and society at large. When women are supported in both their professional and maternal roles, it not only enhances their well-being but also contributes to economic growth, social development, and gender equality. Creating an ecosystem where women do not have to choose between career and motherhood is essential for building an inclusive and progressive India.

### References :

- Strategies for Women to Overcome Workplace Challenges By TRRAIN - May 9, 2025
- hting the gendered nature of caregiving responsibilities By Guest Writer Oct 17, 2017
- Working moms share 10 real-time eternal struggles and how they try to overcome them By Tasneem Sariya
- The struggles of being a working mother in India By Nursedge published March 29 2023 Ankita Verma
- Doctor of Business Administration
- Assistant Professor at IBS Doctor of Business Administration
- Assistant Professor at IBS