

Parenting and family adjustment: A study among working women with children

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Abstract

With the evolution of modern society, we see radical shifts in the roles and expectations of women. Such role transitions pose challenges, especially for married and working women.

Women experience double burden as they participate in paid employment as well as household work, which lays a lot of stress on them. The current study examines the parenting and family adjustments of married working women with children. The study is quantitative in nature and adopts a descriptive research design. For the study purpose sixty-one working women with children were selected using purposive sampling technique. The Parenting and Family Adjustment Scale was used to collect data, which was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results indicate average level of parental consistency, parent-child relationship, parental adjustment and coercive parenting, and low level of positive encouragement, family relationship and parental teamwork. There existed moderate positive correlation between parental consistency and coercive parenting, parent-child relationship and positive encouragement, parental adjustment and coercive parenting, as well as family relationship and parental adjustment.

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Introduction

Women have progressively becoming part of the workforce. Labour statistics show that the participation of women at work was 36 per cent in 2021 (statista.com, 2022). It is noticed that low-income level of the spouse, and an increase in the children's education expenses puts sufficient pressure on married women to join the workforce to contribute in the family income (Khan & Khan, 2009). The term 'working woman' refers to women, who are mothers, and who work outside the home for income, in addition to the work they perform at home in raising their children. Also referred to as a working mother, a working woman can be defined as a woman who does the balancing act of combining a career with the added responsibility of raising a child.

Although men as a whole appear to have accepted women as an additional earning hand contributing to their family income, their cooperation in supporting their counterparts on the domestic front besides work is still debatable. It indeed becomes a tough challenge for married women to perform their duties well both at home and office. When they become mothers, they have to manage children, manage the housework and also continue on their career path.

This means that working mothers have to fulfil family responsibilities and remain fully involved in their careers (Delina & Raya, 2013). This necessitates them to cope with the competing demands of their multiple roles. It is not easy for women to play the twin roles: a professional and a mother; it adds stress to their mental and physical health (Finn, 2000; Chatterji & Markowitz, 2012; Beuchert et al., 2016). Women work twice as much as men do and bring sensitivity and emotions at the workplace (Ramasudershan, 2011).

Parenting-work-family adjustment requires multiple roles from working mothers. A qualitative study conducted by Misra (1998) found that a woman at the workplace is expected to be committed, dynamic, competitive, straightforward, non-sentimental and a "professional", while at home, she is expected

to be sweet, soft, sensitive, adaptable, gentle, unassertive, and domesticated. As an ideal woman, she has to fulfil the duties of a faithful wife, a sacrificing mother, an obedient and respectful daughter-in-law, besides being an efficient, and highly career-focussed woman. These paradoxical expectations cause confusion and tension and pose many other problems for her. A career-oriented woman finds it difficult to do justice to both roles simultaneously. An attempt to play one of the roles with perfection leads to an inadvertent sacrifice of the other.

Working mothers are so determined to prove themselves at home and at the workplace that they often neglect their health (Poduval&Poduval, 2009). They are juggling, day-on-day, the roles of a mother and an employee, often causing anxiety and stress (Arieti, 1974). Compared to their male counterparts, females report a higher stress level at work and family, as well as gender barriers and obstacles in career development (Rani & Bhuvneshwari, 2014). Faridi, Malik and Basit (2009) identified that education has a positive and significant impact on the women joining the labor force.

The study further indicates that the education level of spouses also influence the woman's empowerment, as an educated husband has a positive and significant impact on wife's employment.

One important aspect of pressure on working mothers is their feeling of maternal guilt due to perceived neglect of their motherly roles (Poduval&Poduval, 2009).

Parenting being a gendered phenomena, women are often criticised for not devoting enough time for childcare, while males get praise even for a small gesture with their children, which causes more guilt in women (Cuddy, 2013). Maternal responsibility and maternal guilt are the two sides of a coin (Priya, 2018) and all working women face it at one or the other time of child-rearing. Therefore, the current study aims to understand the parenting and marital adjustment among working women having at least one child.

Methodology

The study current adopted descriptive research design. Sixty-one married

working women were selected as the participants of the study, using purposive sampling technique. Only married working women with at least one year of work experience, working for a minimum of 5 hours in the weekdays, and having at least one child were considered for the study. The study used demographic questionnaire and the Parenting and Family Adjustment Scale (PAFAS), created by Sanders (2010) was used to collect the data. The PAFAS assess changes in parenting practices and parental adjustment for evaluating public health and individual or group parenting interventions. The parenting scale assesses parenting techniques and the quality of the parentchild interaction, while the Family Adjustment scale assesses parental emotional adjustment as well as partner and family support (Sanders, 2014). The researchers obtained ethical clearance from functional Ethical Committee at Marian College Kuttikkanam Autonomous. The data was collected from 61 married working women having at least one child residing in Kanjirappally panchayat. The collected data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Results

Characteristics of the participants

Table 1

Characteristics of the participants

Demographic

Details	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Age	20 - 25	10	16.3
	26 - 30	14	24.5
	31 - 35	11	18.03
	36 - 40	8	13.1
	41 - 45	10	16.3
	46 - 50	6	9.8
	51 - 55	2	3.2
Occupation	Private	38	62.3
	Government	23	37.7
	1 - 5	34	55.7

	6 -10	13	21.3
	11 - 15	9	14.7
Work experience	16 – 20	5	8.7
	5	2	3.3
	6	8	13.1
Working hour			
per day	7	12	19.7
	8	35	57.4
	9	4	6.6
Area of residence			
Rural		30	49.2
Urban			
	31	50.8	
Joint family		17	24.9
Type of family			
Nuclear family		44	72.1
Number of children	1	28	45.9
	2	31	50.8
	3 or more	2	3.3

The current study results show that all the participants are women aged 23 – 53 years. Among them, 88.2% are from the age group of 20 – 45 year, and 11.8% are from the age group of 46 – 55 years. More than half (62.3%) of the women work in the private sector, whereas the remaining 37.7% work in the government sector. More than half (55.7%) of them have 1- 5 years work experience; 21.3% had 6-10 years; 14.7% had 11–15 years, and 8.7% clocked 16–20 years of work experience. 3.3% of the participants work for 5 hours a day; 13.1% of the participants 6 hours a day; 19.7% work for 7 hours a day; 57.4% worked for 8 hours a day and 6.6% of the participants worked 9 hours a day.

Among the 61 participants, 50.8% of the participants live in an urban area and the remaining 49.2% of respondents live in the rural area.

A majority of 72.1% of the participants come from nuclear families and the remaining 27.9% come from joint families. 50.8% of the participants have 2 kids, and 45.9% have only 1 child. Only 3.3% of the participants have 3 or more children.

Characteristics of study variable

Table 2

Characteristics of study variable

	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Parental consistency	6.7541	7	2.47424
Coercive parenting	6.7213	7	3.21523
Positive Encouragement	6.7213	7	1.98437
Parent-child Relationship	12.5902	15	3.74334
Parental adjustment	10.0656	10	3.74334
Family relationships	6.9016	7	2.42009
Parental teamwork	6.0164	6	1.57577

Scores collected were converted to test scores using scale interpretation. The test score results show that the average level of positive consistency is 6.75 with a median of 7 and a standard deviation of 2.47, which means there is more than an average level of parental consistency.

The average level of coercive parenting is 6.72, with a median value is 7 and a standard deviation of 3.26, which means there is more than an average level of coercive parenting. The average level of positive encouragement is 6.72, with a median value is 7 and a standard deviation of 1.98, which means a lower level of positive encouragement. The average value of the parentchild relationship is 12.59 with a median value is 15 and 3.74 standard deviation which means there is a low level of the parent-child relationship.

The average value of parental adjustment is 10.07, with a median value is 10 and a standard deviation of 3.74. The study result indicated that the level of

parental-child relationships is very low. The average value of family relationships is 6.9016, the median value is 7 and the standard deviation is 2.42009. The average value of parental teamwork is 6.0164, the median value is 6 and the standard deviation is 1.57577, which means there is a low level of parental teamwork.

Association between demographic characteristics with study variables

Table 3

Association between demographic characteristics with study variable.

	PC	CPPE	PCRPA	FR	PT		
Occupation	.051	.319	.617	.187	.394	.657	.844
Work experience	.509	.921	.099	.049	.284	.666	.110
Working Hourper day.	.216	.475	.209	.157	.041	.086	.357
Area of residence	.561	.117	.741	.824	.905	.977	.709
Type of family	.987	.734	.373	.147	101	.916	.986
Number of children	.458	.550	.138	.106	.332	.652	.271

The Kruskal-Wallis Test indicate an association between work-experience of the participants with parent-child relationship (.049). However, no association was found between parental consistency (.509), coercive parenting (.921), positive encouragement (.099), parental adjustment (.284), family relationship (.666) and parental teamwork (.110) with work experience.

There is an association between duration of work (working hours per day) of the participants with parental adjustment of the participants (.041). However, no association was demonstrated between parental consistency (.216), coercive parenting (.475), positive encouragement (.209), parent-child relationship (.157), family relationship (.086) and parental teamwork (.357) and work duration (working hours per day).

Similarly, there was no association between parental consistency (.458), coercive parenting (.550), positive encouragement (.138), parent-child relationship (.106), parental adjustment (.332), family relationship (.652) and parental

teamwork (.271) with respect to number of children.

The Mann - Whitney U Test shows there is no association between occupation with parental consistency (.051), coercive parenting (.319), positive encouragement (.617), parent- child relationship (.187), parental adjustment (.394), family relationship (.657) and parental framework (.844). Besides, no association existed between parental consistency (.561), coercive parenting (.117), positive encouragement (.741), parent- child relationship (.824), parental adjustment (1), family relationship (.977) and parental teamwork (.709), with respect to area of residence.

Moreover, no association between parental consistency (.987), coercive parenting (.734), positive encouragement (.373), parent- child relationship (.147), parental adjustment (.101), family relationship (.916) and parental teamwork (.986).

Relationship between demographic characteristics with study variables.

Table 4

Relationship between demographic characteristics with study variable.

CP	PE	PCR	PA	FR	PT	
PC	.481	-.070	-.162	.282	.286	.185
CP	1	-.013	-.143	.412	.325	.213
PE		1	.546	.228	.166	.220
PCR			1.450	.294	.393	
PA				1	.520	.456
FR					1	.327

Table 4, Spearman's rank correlation results show moderate positive correlation between the parent-child relationship with positive encouragement (.546), parental consistency with coercive parenting (.481), and parental adjustment with coercive parenting (.412). Weak positive correlation existed be-

tween family relationships and coercive parenting (.325), parental adjustment with parental consistency (.282), parental teamwork with coercive parenting (.213), family relationships with parental consistency (.286) and parental teamwork with parental consistency (.185).

A weak negative correlation existed between positive encouragement and parental consistency (-.070), and parent-child relationship and parental consistency (-.162), positive encouragement with coercive parenting (-.013). However, there is a weak positive correlation between parental adjustment and positive encouragement (.228), family relationships with positive encouragement (.166) and parental teamwork with positive encouragement (.220).

Also, there is a positive correlation between parental adjustment with the parent-child relationship (.450), family relationships with parent-child relationships (.294) and parental teamwork with the parent-child relationship (.393). Moreover, there is also a moderate positive correlation between family relationships with parental adjustment (.520), parental teamwork with parental adjustment (.456) and parental teamwork with family relationship (.327)

Discussion

The current study shows that the working women among the families studied in Kanjirapally, were struggling to manage their families. This contradicts the previous studies that show that education improves marital adjustment by enhancing their communication skills, allowing them to talk about their issues of conflict, as well as their thinking capacity and ability to come at logical solutions to conflicts (Singh et al., 2006). Since they are educated enough to get a job, they find a way to live and then they also get to manage their lives even through hardships.

Greenstein (1990) also argued that better or higher education on the part of women reduces the likelihood of marital dissolution. A woman's education reflects skills, including communication, that improve marital relationships. Like education, women's employment status also affects the functioning of the family (Sundaresan, 2014).

With many married women starting work, necessary by economic and psy-

chological factors, the role of women as housewives and wage earners is widely accepted (Välimäki et al., 2009). They can adjust the situation through time management and effective intervention in the family environment (Rehman & Roomi, 2012). This contradiction could be largely attributed to the factors of gendered roles and the influence of patriarchy in families.

Women's indirect contribution to society has been generally underplayed or still worse disregarded. It is a subject that needs to be studied. The effort of women in binding the family for a smooth relationship is a subject that needs to be honoured by the people.

Mental health is one of the areas in which social workers engage to plan interventions. Family counselling can be given by social workers to enhance the situations of troubled married working women.

The social workers may research this topic to explore plausible solutions to tackle this issue and find way for good family life. Social work students from their respective institutions besides planning interactive programs for married working women to know their problems, may also be sensitized and oriented on the need for assertiveness training and hindsight while planning their lives. Parental education, also known as determination therapy, is a growing area of intervention for parents whose children have been diagnosed with positive intellectual and behavioural issues. Growing up in a secure environment and having a good and consistent relationship with one's parents is an important prerequisite for socializing and effective adjustment in work and married life.

Conclusion

Adjustment is not a rapid change; it is rather a process that happens over a period. Even a small adjustment requires integrated efforts with work and family life. pending long activity hours at the workplace may make working women exhausted and make it tiring for her to take care of children along with additional household duties. To balance the work-family life successfully, working women are expected to make several adjustments with their spouses, including house chores sharing, mutual involvement in childcare, joint deci-

sion making, equal financial influence and emotional stress sharing. Future research can be done by adopting mixed methods with more participants in a wide area by including women with diverse employments.

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