



## **CHALLENGES OF FEMALE ACADEMICIANS: SOCIO-CULTURAL APPROACH TO FAMILY AND WORK DYNAMICS.**

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### **Abstract**

*The status of women is undergoing a metamorphic shift in contemporary times. The number of educated women including the number of working women is fast rising whereby many are found in academics. Although teaching as a profession is important for them, their first expected role is in family and then career. These academicians face a lot of hurdles and socio-cultural barriers in their career growth. The work-family balance is the greatest challenge. The dual role conflict continues to impinge upon their achievement motivation and inspiration for a financially independent identity. Taking this into account, the study attempts to highlight the present scenario of working lady careerists in Indian patriarchy. It shows women's position and identity in academia, family-career priority conflict and their work life as careerist. The study is based on secondary data, which is qualitative in nature. The findings suggest greater support and understanding of work-family stress experienced by women in academia are seriously required. Such a step may improve job performance and satisfaction. Therefore, institutional policies that help female faculty deal with professional and home responsibilities will both enhance the quality of the educational environment, making it more attractive to academic women, and help them fulfill professional and personal priorities.*

**Keywords:** *Academicians, Role Conflict, Achievement Motivation.*

### **Introduction**

In recent decades there has been a significant change in the field of higher education in India, whereby an increasing number of women has been joining the academic field; needless to say, teaching continues to be a female-friendly profession in Indian social milieu owing to its flexible character. Although more number of women is now found to be employed, the attitude towards women has not changed where there is a clear evidence of a "glass ceiling" that is preventing women from reaching the top-ranking academic positions on parity with men. Working women face lots of hurdles in their path as a careerist which can be categorized under different criteria as physiological problems, adjustment problems, social problems and economic problems. Thus, although women's presence in public work domain like a profession in teaching appears 'insignificant' from a layman's perspective, the issues arising out of their intervention are quite 'significant' from a sociological perspective and hence are worth exploring. There is a changing meaning of work and the alterations witnessed by the domain of work itself. Hence, it is methodologically imperative to understand the metamorphosis in public work domain from the perspectives of sociology and women's studies.

The study of women in academia has attracted some attention over recent years, resulting in evidence of women's disadvantaged position in international universities (Dugger, 2001). The idea that woman academicians face serious barriers in their career pursuit is greatly debated. It is seen that a woman can win more social approval and undergo less role conflict through full-time marriage and motherhood than through an occupational career. There is an asymmetry of responsibilities, with the primary domestic responsibility falling on women. Women try to meet the professional requirements being academicians where they are expected to engage in continuous studies, workshops, seminars and publications. There is considerable pressure to be productive and apparently the pressure is heavier for women with children. In addition, this perception that they alone are responsible for the domestic work often leads to a feeling of guilt when they are not able to look after the children or the family due to their official work, resulting in emotional disorders. There is a dual role conflict that the female academicians have in order to bring a balance between the work and family life.



### **Aim of the paper**

The paper seeks to explore women's negotiation with career and family. That is, it wishes to understand woman academicians' attitude to career in general and teaching in particular. Besides, it is curious to explore the positive and negative effects of family on profession. Public work domain is conventionally seen as a male domain and work itself is dubbed as masculine. Accordingly, patriarchy tends to divide space into spheres of public and private sphere; the former one is meant for men which encompasses various domains of work/activities and whereby work is a paid activity. On the contrary, all the activities performed in private sphere (family) go on unpaid and invisible and it is women who are responsible for activities in private sphere. Over the years, the contemporary social order is witnessing a constant metamorphosis i.e. there is a growing effort on the part of women to break this barrier and join public sphere to make a career in academics, materialize their career ambitions and achievement drives and attain financial independence. But patriarchal gender role that asks women to prioritize family than work doesn't change. It is in this context, the present research assumes its importance. The paper attempts to analyze the nature and problem of dual role conflict faced by the woman academicians to bring a balance between meeting the commitment in work and family. It basically focuses upon academicians who are women and work at university levels. It focuses on the socio-cultural conditions in Indian context and barriers on woman careerists in their path, the support system and the career-family priority conflict. The study is carried on by secondary sources of data and an analysis of the available literature is done.

### **Men and Women in Teaching as Career**

The role of career in the present society requires that all one should simply not get what one wants rather career is socially determined. Choice of career is context specific. Career success continues to be seen as an area of interest and exploration both in academia and practice. Modern career has emphasized the importance of subjective criteria for measuring career success (Heslin, 2005) by which career commitment is related to career satisfaction. Watt and Richardson (2007) argue that the motivating factors of influencing teaching as a career shows that choosing to teach as a fallback career is rated very low as a motivation for entering the profession. It appears that teaching is by and large a career of choice and not something that people fall back on when their other choices are not realized. Women in academics are able to meet the commitment relatively more than other occupation as they consider teaching to be a moral profession. It is about contributing to personality development of children, flexible timings and helps to provide better focus on family. A study by Howes and Jane (2015) shows that the reasons for choosing a teaching career are classified into five themes: personal fulfillment; practical considerations; desire to contribute; lack of alternatives; and influence from others.

Koch (1927) point out that there is a general feeling that more men should be at work in the school-rooms of the land. As an economic proposition, it is claimed that men can accomplish more than women because they are stronger physically. This is possible because of the assumed superiority of men in handling difficult disciplinary problems. There lies a difference in men and women in teaching in terms of gender discrimination in offices, wage differentials, differences in accessibility of resources, nature of work, position in higher administrative posts etc. Men have publications, prestige, authority, research-continue which dominate the reward and social systems in academia, many women will not be regarded as socially or academically equal by their peers (Clark and Shekhar, 2007). Most male faculties prefer research over teaching, graduate students over undergraduates and publications over dynamic teaching as measures of accomplishment. Female faculties, however, have expressed preferences for teaching and for increased personal contact with students. The academic productivity, promotion, and leadership appointments of women and men in academics over the span of their careers demonstrates that women publish less, advance through academic ranks more slowly, and ultimately achieve lower academic rank and fewer leadership appointments compared with men. Similarly, research frequently notes that women place a high value on spending time with their family, which may lower their career expectations over time (Cinamon and Rich, 2002). It is argued that the presence of women depresses the status of a field, and women find it easier to obtain posts in fields that are already of low status.



### **Academic identity of women in academia**

There is no dearth of literature focusing on lady academicians' negotiation with their twin roles: feminine and professional. Studies on woman academicians have focused on factors contributing to the shortage of woman professors. There are other factors which are patriarchal and non-conducive organizational culture and management practices (Smith, 1997); male's standards are seen as stereotype perceptions (Forster, 2001), work-family conflict (White, 1995), performance evaluation is influenced by sexual discrimination practices (Davidson and Burke, 1994). Latest studies by Lund (1998) and Singh (2002) primarily focus on the profile of woman academicians and administrators in public universities without analyzing their behavioural factors and experiences in managing the academic institutions. Many women feel that their career advancement is limited after having children. For example, they cannot travel freely to attend work-related conference, training and meetings. And in certain cases they travel less or not at all to accommodate the child, even if they recognize the downsides. Raising children is often seen as competing for the time and attention needed to succeed in a highly competitive academic field.

Many women value their careers and their development as central concepts of their identity (King, 1997; Shaffer et al, 2003). Evetts (1994) has pointed out the problem of identity in a male-dominated environment. Despite woman teachers' significant role towards the overall development of the family, the majority of woman teachers encountered a number of difficulties in balancing their role between family and job responsibility especially when they need to work more than the normal working time. Therefore, it is common for the majority of woman teachers to suffer from psychological stress when they are unable to complete the task at a fixed time. Their compulsion to spend a specific duration of time away from their young children and family can be considered as one factor that influences family conflict. Among the more subtle factors that may underlie the lesser likelihood of success for women in academic scientific careers are reduced access to mentoring and to rewards, including promotions, salary, and recognition. Other key factors are isolation from colleagues and career-related professional information. It has been shown that women receive fewer resources to accomplish their goals, including necessary freedom, personnel, space, and equipment. Further, academic institutions are often organized on the assumption of a "social and emotional support structure" provided to the male scientist.

### **Socio-Cultural Barrier**

There are many factors which create barriers to women's advancement with research productivity. Swanson and Woitke (1997) indicate barriers which partially explain the gap between the abilities of women and their achievements. These barriers could explain the inhibitions of women's career aspirations. These include the long-standing gendered division of academic labour that sees women more concentrated in teaching activities while men focus on research and publishing. It is well-known that research is an activity more valued for promotion purposes than teaching. Another factor that is often considered a limit to women's research development is that they have less access to academic networks which are vital for a successful research career. Both men and women as academician professionals and parents struggle with the task of achieving a balance between work and family life; however the challenge for women is greater than for men, given the simple logistics of the biological clock, the physical demands of pregnancy and childbirth, the gendered expectations of family obligations, and the ongoing disparity with which women take on the "second shift" through maintenance of children and home. For academic mothers, one of the most time-consuming aspects of their lives and a source of significant professional, personal and marital stress is the fact that many feel as though they work a 'second shift' at home. This aspect is seen to have a negative impact on women's research capabilities. In such a situation, research is the only thing that can be put off in a schedule filled with teaching, research and children. Further, cultural expectations which persist about women's responsibilities and capabilities have a negative impact on the careers of women. It can lead to interruptions in their academic career and serve as major barriers to their research and publishing activity. This social expectation about the roles women and men are supposed to perform are extremely difficult to alter (Amer, 2013)

In Indian context, owing to gender differentiated family roles, there is an asymmetry of responsibilities, with the primary domestic responsibility falling on women. Marriage, number of children, and number of children less



than six years of age determine the nature of family responsibilities. The female academic adjusts career and child bearing with regard to age compelling women to face difficult choices. Moreover, patriarchy, culture, highly politicized recruitment process and lower wages compared to other jobs pose threats to woman teachers in India. Although some efforts for their support are made in workplaces, the lived-in experience is different. When a woman teacher steps out to work, the conflict with her own instinct begins as she has to sacrifice the comforts of home leading further to half hearted efforts that become a barrier. Also, outward barriers include travelling travails in public vehicles, cultural taboos, lack of career progression and physical infrastructure of institutions not being women friendly.

### **Female careerists and work life**

Women in present era prefer to be careerists and plan their carrier goals at an early age. The subjugated state of women is now replaced with ambitious mind with greater emphasis on choosing career and indulging in reaching the set goals. Careerist women are looked down upon where they are seen to be ill-treated at the in-laws place for not being doing only the traditional role of family care rather going beyond the stereotyping role and being a careerist. Because women's work and family demands are simultaneous, these demands have a significant impact on women's careers (Valdez and Gutek, 1987). Although, career aspirations are influenced by factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, race, parents' occupation/ education level and parental expectations (Khallad, 2000; Watson et al., 2002), studies demonstrate how patriarchy operates at both levels: the place of work and family (Gupta and Sharma, 2002).

Acker (2003) has characterized women as the 'other' academics, facing not so much overt discrimination, but the everyday practices of exclusion which are more subtle, more deeply embedded, and more difficult to contest and resist. (Etzkowitz et al, 2000) have focused on how woman academic scientists endure exclusion from social networks, and overt discrimination and conflicts between personal and work lives. Despite these perceptions, findings from recent studies reveal that females show an interest in a greater number of careers and exhibit more gender-role flexibility in their career aspirations than males (Mendez & Crawford, 2002). However, Kumar (2001) contends that career paths for women are flatter than for men, and that a disparity in academic rank exists even when differential productivity is taken into account. Jaiswal (1993) finds that women are at a lower level of the professional hierarchy, and there is latent discrimination against women, both at the organizational level and in relationships. Women are challenged in academia to have their identities valued and to feel comfortable within its "patriarchal system" (Todd, 2008). They always find themselves in dilemma for family or work as priority.

### **Family Status and Career Priorities**

Career priority becomes a difficult proposition because of family conflict which gained prominence in the literature work- family conflict. Job scarcity also reduces the number of possible job combinations in one geographic location, making coordination of two career paths more difficult. It is observed by some studies that for women aspiring to professions, career is of primary importance; all other goals, including family, are given secondary status. This was also true a decade ago, but over time there has been a dramatic increase in the number of women who have professional career aspirations and the concomitant life goals that give career priority over family. Women are then left with the near-impossible dilemma of balancing 'feminine' attributes, which are seen as inappropriate to the job, and 'masculine' ones seen as unacceptable in women (Acker, 2003). Moreover, men and women prioritize their work and family roles differently (Tenbrunsel et al., 1995). Women place emphasis on relationships throughout their lives (Bardwick, 1980), whereas men are more likely to sacrifice relationships for the sake their careers in early career. The effect of daily professional activities and encounters of women and men in their academic jobs, saturated with assumptions about the differences between women and men, thus constitutes the gendered structure of academic workplaces, recreating women's relative subordination at these sites. Some women experienced feelings of guilt or selfishness if they put their career interests first. The expectation of working a 'second shift' at home creates multiple stressors for women (Hochschild, 1997).



### **Work life balance and support mechanisms**

Work–life balance for teaching professional has become one of the greatest challenges in today’s world. Clark (2001) defines work-life balance as satisfaction and smooth functioning at work and home without any role conflict where such issues are of more concern in social science. It is a balance concerning temporal, emotional, and behavioral demands of both paid work and family responsibilities (Hill et al., 2001). It is more important to understand the contemporary working position of women in job and it is an important reason for studying teachers on the aspect of work life balance; this is the profession that has overwhelmingly female than in any other profession (Acker 2003). A study conducted by Mari and Mohideen (2015) reveals two factors for work life balance for teaching faculty. The first factor relates to dependents, time flexibility, role clarity and co-worker support. The second factor relates to family culture, working hours and head support. Work-life balance is affected by six factors that are as follows: individual growth, job pressure, work life balance, work environment, professional support and mental strain.

The balance work-life score provides an organization with a productive and innovative employee, whereas disparity in the work life balance tends to develop depressed and dissatisfied staff. The stress created from being pulled in multiple directions has negative consequences for psychological and physical well-being (Kinman & Jones, 2004). Moreover, poor nutrition, lack of exercise, and high levels of stress that result from poor work/life balance can cause physical symptoms such as fatigue, headaches, insomnia, and back pains, and sometimes lead to more serious illnesses including heart conditions that result in long-term consequences for women and their families. So, gender is not found to be a significant differentiating factor. Teachers in professional courses usually experience more work-life pressures. Moreover, work interference with family is more of an issue than family interference with work. The consequences of failure of work-life balance results in familial problem, professional problem and personal problem; the health problem becomes more important. The health problems of majority of teachers are due to improper food habits and lack of exercise and relaxation. These unhealthy habits would lead to increased stress, both physical and mental, and may cause irreparable damages to any of the important body systems even by early forties.. The real task of balance takes place on a weekly and daily basis. Therefore, a support system is extremely essential.

The role of social support has consistently emerged in literature as an important factor that influences work-family balance in a positive manner. Social support outside of work includes personal social support may come from an employee’s spouse or partner, parents, siblings, children, extended family, and friends. Family support also includes the exchange of support among relatives (Voydanoff, 2002). Emotional support contributes to positive effect that helps the individual in the work domain (Wayne et al., 2006). Flexible work arrangements allow individuals to integrate work and family responsibilities in time and space and are instrumental in achieving a healthy work and family balance (Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 1993). According to Eikhof (2012), flexibility and choice over working hours and location are commonly regarded as key facilitator for reconciling work and life/family demands. Support system enables the careerist women to lead a healthy professional and personal life.

### **Conclusion**

Work-family conflict is negatively related to career satisfaction in general. The study depicts the pity situation of woman academicians in Indian context where they are found to be motivated to be careerist but fail to get adequate support for their career pursuit. Work life balance takes serious toll on their achievement motivation where women end up in lowering their academic ambitions and surviving as mere teaching employees, rather than academicians. It is observed that women's career development requires serious attention to issues of networking, power, sexual harassment, the glass ceiling and sex-based discrimination. There should be creation of facility of day care centre by the organization in its locality facilitating its workers to have balance in work and family. Extension of maternity leave benefits to men in equal terms so as to enable men to contribute to parenting on par with their female counterparts, a need of transformation in people’s prejudice and attitude. The ‘housework’ needs to be jointly shared by both the partners. Gender sensitization campaigns and research networks can also help.



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