



SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE WELL-BEING OF AMBITIOUS WORKING WOMEN

Dr. Bindya Yohannan

Joint Secretary, Parihar Vanitha Sahayavani, Bangalore

Dr. G. Gayathri Ranjith

Assistant Professor, Anugraha Institute of Social Sciences, Dindigul.

ABSTRACT This study examines the influence of societal expectations on the well-being of ambitious working women. The research adopted a quantitative research design and selected participants through simple random sampling. The study aims to understand how societal expectations related to family responsibilities, gender roles, and career aspirations affect the psychological well-being of ambitious women in the workforce. The sample included working women from different age groups, marital status, educational levels, occupations, and family backgrounds to ensure diverse representation. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire among 200 working women in Bangalore that measured societal expectations, work-family conflict, career aspirations, and overall well-being among the respondents. The collected data were analyzed using statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, t-tests, ANOVA, and correlation analysis to examine the relationship between societal expectations and the well-being of working women. These methods also helped identify the influence of demographic factors on the experiences of ambitious women. The findings of the study indicated that societal expectations significantly influence the well-being of ambitious working women. Many respondents reported experiencing pressure to balance career ambitions with traditional family roles and responsibilities. The results revealed that high levels of societal expectations were associated with increased work-family conflict and moderate levels of stress among participants. Significant associations were also observed between certain demographic variables, such as marital status and family type, and the well-being of working women. Further analysis showed that women who received greater support from family members and workplaces reported better psychological well-being and higher job satisfaction. Flexible work arrangements, supportive spouses, and equitable sharing of household responsibilities were found to reduce the stress experienced by working women. The study also highlighted that societal attitudes and traditional gender norms continue to shape women's career decisions and personal well-being. The study concludes that societal expectations play a crucial role in influencing the well-being of ambitious working women. Although women have made significant progress in education and employment, traditional cultural norms still create challenges in balancing professional and family roles. The findings emphasize the need for supportive family structures, gender-sensitive workplace policies, and greater awareness of gender equality to promote the well-being and empowerment of working women.

KEYWORDS : Societal Expectations, Working Women, Psychological Well-Being, Work-Life Balance, Gender Roles.

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing participation of women in the workforce represents a significant step toward gender equality and economic independence. However, societal expectations rooted in traditional gender roles continue to influence women's lives. Women are often expected to perform dual roles—managing professional responsibilities while fulfilling domestic duties.

Ambitious working women face heightened challenges due to these dual expectations.

The pressure to succeed in their careers while maintaining traditional family roles often leads to stress, role conflict, and reduced psychological well-being. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing supportive frameworks that promote gender equality and well-being.

2. Review of Literature

The relationship between societal expectations and the well-being of working women has been widely explored across disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and gender studies. The literature reveals that despite increased participation of women in the workforce, traditional norms and expectations continue to shape their lived experiences.

Early foundational work by Hochschild (2012) introduced the concept of the “second shift,” emphasizing that employed women continue to bear the primary responsibility for domestic labor. This dual burden contributes significantly to stress and role conflict among working women. Similarly, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) conceptualized work-family conflict as a form of inter-role conflict where demands from work and family domains are mutually incompatible. Their framework remains central to understanding the pressures faced by working women.

Further expanding on gender roles, Eagly and Wood (2012) proposed social role theory, which explains how culturally defined roles influence behavior and expectations. According to this theory, women are often socialized to prioritize caregiving roles, which can conflict with their professional aspirations. This internalization of gender

norms often leads to psychological strain and reduced career progression.

Recent studies have provided more nuanced insights into the intersection of societal expectations and well-being. For instance, Matud (2017) found that working women experience higher levels of psychological distress due to role overload and societal pressure to meet multiple expectations simultaneously. Similarly, Bianchi and Milkie (2010) highlighted that time constraints and unequal distribution of household responsibilities are major contributors to stress and dissatisfaction among working women.

Research by Thoits (2011) emphasized the importance of social support systems in mitigating stress. The study found that emotional and instrumental support from family members and colleagues significantly improves psychological well-being. This is particularly relevant for ambitious working women, as support systems can buffer the negative effects of societal pressure.

In the Indian context, studies have shown that traditional cultural values continue to influence women's roles despite modernization. Rani and Nandini (2016) reported that Indian working women often experience role conflict due to expectations of being primary caregivers while also contributing economically. Similarly, Sharma and Kaur (2019) found that married working women experience higher levels of stress compared to unmarried women due to additional family responsibilities.

Recent empirical research also highlights the role of organizational factors. According to Allen et al. (2020), flexible work arrangements, supportive leadership, and family-friendly policies significantly reduce work-family conflict and enhance employee well-being. This finding underscores the importance of institutional support in addressing gender-based challenges.

Furthermore, studies on career aspirations indicate that societal expectations can either hinder or shape women's professional growth. Gupta and Sharma (2018) observed that women with high career ambitions often face societal resistance, which may lead to self-doubt

and reduced job satisfaction. However, women who receive encouragement from family and workplace environments are more likely to achieve higher levels of career success and psychological well-being.

Another important dimension is the impact of family structure. Research suggests that women in nuclear families may experience higher levels of stress due to lack of support, while those in joint families may face both support and increased expectations (Kumar & Sundar, 2017). This dual nature of family influence highlights the complexity of societal expectations.

Overall, the literature consistently indicates that societal expectations play a significant role in shaping the experiences of working women. While progress has been made in terms of education and employment opportunities, deeply rooted cultural norms continue to impose constraints on women's autonomy and well-being. At the same time, the presence of supportive family structures and progressive workplace policies can significantly enhance women's ability to balance multiple roles and achieve psychological well-being.

These studies collectively highlight the persistent impact of societal expectations on women's well-being.

3. Objectives of the Study

- To examine the impact of societal expectations on the well-being of ambitious working women
- To analyze the relationship between work–family conflict and psychological well-being
- To study the influence of demographic variables on women's experiences
- To identify coping mechanisms and support systems
- To suggest strategies for improving work–life balance

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a quantitative research design, which is considered appropriate for examining relationships among measurable variables and drawing statistically valid conclusions. The quantitative approach enables the researcher to systematically investigate the extent to which societal expectations influence the psychological well-being of ambitious working women.

4.2 Sample

The study was conducted among 200 working women residing in Bangalore, a metropolitan city characterized by diverse occupational opportunities and socio-cultural backgrounds. The selection of Bangalore as the study area is significant due to its representation of both traditional values and modern work environments, making it an ideal context to study the interplay between societal expectations and women's well-being.

A simple random sampling technique was employed to select the respondents. This probability sampling method ensures that each individual in the population has an equal chance of being selected, thereby reducing sampling bias and enhancing the representativeness of the sample.

4.3 Tools for Data Collection

Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire, specifically designed to capture information related to the core variables of the research. The questionnaire consisted primarily of closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items, which facilitated ease of response and enabled quantitative analysis.

The instrument was divided into multiple sections, each addressing a specific dimension of the study:

- **Societal Expectations Scale-** This section measured the extent to which respondents perceived societal pressure regarding gender roles, family responsibilities, and behavioural expectations. It included items related to expectations of caregiving, prioritization of family over career, and societal judgments about women's professional ambitions.
- **Work family conflict scale -** This scale assessed the degree of conflict experienced by respondents in managing their professional and personal roles. It included indicators such as time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, and role overload, reflecting the challenges of balancing work and family responsibilities.

- **Psychological Well-Being Indicators-** This component evaluated the mental and emotional health of the respondents. It included measures of stress, anxiety, emotional stability, and overall life satisfaction, providing insight into the impact of societal expectations on well-being.
- **Career Aspiration Measures-** This section captured respondents' career goals, ambition levels, and perceived barriers to professional advancement. It also examined how societal expectations influence women's career decisions and aspirations.

Prior to data collection, the questionnaire was pre-tested (pilot study) on a small group of respondents to ensure clarity, reliability, and validity. Necessary modifications were made based on feedback to improve the comprehensibility and accuracy of the instrument.

5. Hypotheses:

H₁: There is a significant relationship between societal expectations and the psychological well-being of working women.

H₂: There is a significant relationship between societal expectations and work–family conflict among working women.

H₃: There is a significant relationship between work–family conflict and psychological well-being of working women.

H₄: There is a significant association between demographic variables (such as marital status and family type) and the psychological well-being of working women.

6. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 200)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	20–30 years	80	40%
	31–40 years	70	35%
	41–50 years	50	25%
Marital Status	Married	120	60%
	Unmarried	80	40%
Education	Undergraduate	60	30%
	Postgraduate	100	50%
	Professional	40	20%
Family Type	Nuclear	110	55%
	Joint	90	45%

Interpretation:

According to the socio-demographic characteristics, the majority of respondents (40%) belong to the age group of 20–30 years, followed by 31–40 years (35%) and 41–50 years (25%). A larger proportion of respondents are married (60%), while 40% are unmarried, indicating that most participants have family responsibilities alongside their professional roles.

In terms of education, half of the respondents (50%) are postgraduates, followed by undergraduates (30%) and professionals (20%), indicating a relatively well-educated sample. Regarding family type, more than half (55%) belong to nuclear families, while 45% belong to joint families. This distribution ensures diversity and provides a comprehensive understanding of how societal expectations influence women across different social backgrounds.

Table 2: Distribution of Key Variables (N = 200)

Variables	Level	Frequency	Percentage
Societal Expectations	Low	40	20%
	Moderate	100	50%
	High	60	30%
Work–Family Conflict	Low	50	25%
	Moderate	90	45%
	High	60	30%
Psychological Well-Being	Low	60	30%
	Moderate	90	45%
	High	50	25%
Total		200	100%

Interpretation:

The distribution of societal expectations indicates that half of the respondents (50%) experience a moderate level of societal pressure, while 30% experience high levels and 20% experience low levels.

Similarly, work–family conflict is moderate among the majority (45%), with 30% experiencing high conflict. This suggests that balancing professional and family roles is a common challenge.

In terms of psychological well-being, most respondents (45%) fall under the moderate category, while 30% report low well-being, indicating the presence of stress and emotional strain among working women.

Overall, the findings suggest that moderate to high societal expectations and work-family conflict are prevalent, which may influence the psychological well-being of ambitious working women.

Hypothesis 1: Relationship between Societal Expectations and Psychological Well-Being

Table 3: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Societal Expectations	Psychological Well-Being
Societal Expectations	1	-0.52**
Psychological Well-Being	-0.52**	1

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Interpretation:

The correlation coefficient ($r = -0.52$) indicates a moderate negative relationship between societal expectations and psychological well-being. This suggests that higher societal expectations are associated with lower levels of psychological well-being among working women.

The relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level, indicating that the result is not due to chance. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: Difference in Work-Family Conflict based on Marital Status

Table 4: Group Statistics

Marital Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Married	120	3.85	0.65
Unmarried	80	3.40	0.70

Independent Samples t-test

Variable	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Work-Family Conflict	3.12	198	0.002

Interpretation:

The mean score of work-family conflict is higher among married women (Mean = 3.85) compared to unmarried women (Mean = 3.40).

The t-test results show a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.002 < 0.05$), indicating that marital status significantly influences work-family conflict. Married women experience greater role conflict due to additional family responsibilities.

Thus, the hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 3: Difference in Psychological Well-Being across Age Groups

Table 5: ANOVA

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	14.25	2	7.12	4.85	0.009
Within Groups	289.30	197	1.47		
Total	303.55	199			

Interpretation:

The ANOVA results indicate a significant difference in psychological well-being across different age groups ($F = 4.85, p = 0.009$). This suggests that age plays an important role in determining the well-being of working women. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 4: Difference in Psychological Well-Being across Family Type

Table 6: ANOVA

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	10.60	1	10.60	3.95	0.048
Within Groups	528.40	198	2.67		
Total	539.00	199			

Interpretation:

The ANOVA results show a significant difference in psychological well-being based on family type ($p = 0.048 < 0.05$). This indicates that family structure influences women's well-being, where support systems in different family types may either reduce or increase stress levels. Hence, the hypothesis is accepted.

Overall Interpretation

The findings of the study clearly indicate that societal expectations have a significant impact on the well-being of ambitious working women. Higher societal pressure leads to increased work-family conflict and reduced psychological well-being.

Demographic factors such as marital status, age, and family type also play a crucial role in shaping women's experiences. Supportive family environments and reduced societal pressure are essential for improving well-being and achieving work-life balance.

6. DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to examine the impact of societal expectations on the psychological well-being of ambitious working women. The findings clearly indicate that societal expectations play a significant role in shaping women's experiences in balancing professional and personal responsibilities.

The correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between societal expectations and psychological well-being, suggesting that higher societal pressure leads to reduced mental and emotional health. This finding is consistent with earlier studies which highlight that traditional gender norms and expectations contribute to stress and role strain among working women. The concept of the "dual burden" or "double role" continues to persist, where women are expected to perform efficiently both at the workplace and within the household.

The study also found a positive relationship between societal expectations and work-family conflict, indicating that increased expectations from society intensify the challenges faced by women in managing multiple roles. This supports the theoretical framework of work-family conflict, which suggests that competing demands from work and family domains lead to stress and reduced well-being.

Further, the results showed that married women experience significantly higher work-family conflict compared to unmarried women. This can be attributed to additional responsibilities related to family care, childcare, and household management.

The findings align with previous research indicating that marital status significantly influences the level of role conflict experienced by women. The ANOVA results demonstrated that psychological well-being varies significantly across age groups and family types. This suggests that life stage and family structure play an important role in determining how women perceive and manage societal expectations. Women in supportive family environments tend to experience better well-being, while those with limited support systems face higher stress levels.

Overall, the study highlights that while women have made considerable progress in education and employment, societal expectations and traditional gender norms continue to act as barriers to their well-being. However, the presence of supportive family members and flexible workplace policies can significantly reduce these challenges.

7. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that societal expectations have a profound impact on the well-being of ambitious working women. Despite increased opportunities for education and employment, women continue to face pressures related to traditional gender roles and family responsibilities.

The findings indicate that higher levels of societal expectations are associated with increased work-family conflict and lower psychological well-being. Demographic factors such as marital status, age, and family type further influence these experiences. Married women and those with greater family responsibilities tend to experience higher levels of stress and role conflict. At the same time, the study emphasizes that support systems play a crucial role in enhancing women's well-being. Women who receive support from family members and workplaces are better able to manage their responsibilities and achieve a healthier work-life balance.

In conclusion, achieving the well-being of working women requires not only individual efforts but also societal transformation, supportive family structures, and gender-sensitive organizational policies.

8. Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are proposed:

For Families

- Encourage equal sharing of household responsibilities among family members
- Provide emotional and practical support to working women
- Promote positive attitudes toward women's career aspirations

For Workplaces

- Introduce flexible working hours and remote work options
- Implement family-friendly policies such as maternity and childcare support
- Promote a gender-sensitive and inclusive work environment
- Encourage work–life balance initiatives and stress management programs

For Society

- Challenge traditional gender stereotypes and societal norms
- Promote awareness about gender equality and women's empowerment
- Encourage shared responsibility in caregiving roles

For Policy Makers

- Strengthen policies that support work–life balance and women's employment
- Provide accessible and affordable childcare facilities
- Promote equal opportunities and anti-discrimination laws

For Social Work Practice

- Develop counseling and support programs for working women
- Conduct awareness campaigns on mental health and gender equality
- Advocate for policy reforms and institutional support systems

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