

Factors Influencing Role Conflict among Working Women – A Sociological Analysis

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Abstract: This article is an empirical inquiry into the intricate realities pertaining to the influence of socio-economic factors on the role conflict of the working women in organized sectors of Bangalore city in the State of Karnataka. Since Independence, significant changes have taken place in the socio-economic and politico-legal status of women in India. The provisions of Constitution of India, the democratic set-up and increased educational opportunities for women have opened up numerous opportunities for Indian women in diverse professional and educational spheres on par with men, but not without several stresses and strains in their working lives. The present study seeks to ascertain empirically the extent of role conflict on the one hand and the implications of socio-economic factors for role conflict among women working in the organized sector on the other. The study is based on data gathered from 280 working women, 70 each from education, banking, health and government sectors in the city of Bangalore. The findings seem to suggest that a majority of Indian working women experience a relatively high degree of role conflict and as a result, seem to be under stress at work, which is a cause of concern for working women themselves as well as the employers and the society at large. Moreover, there is a statistically significant association between socio-economic status and the extent of role conflict among working women.

Keywords: Role Conflict, Socio Economic Factors, Stress, Working Women

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I. INTRODUCTION

Women are the integral part of family and play a crucial role in the socio-economic wellbeing of the family and thereby to the process of nation building. The prosperity and growth of a nation depend on the status and the contribution of its women as they not only constitute almost half of its population, but also groom and nurture the remaining half of the population (Varma, 1992). Perhaps this philosophy was well accepted by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who stated that “when a woman moves forward, then the entire family and village move forward, and when the village moves then the entire nation moves”. Realizing the importance of women these days, families are providing better education to their girl children and encouraging them to take to gainful employment. In the modern days, women perform different tasks depending on their socio-economic status, number of people in the family, the nature of occupational activities they are involved in and many other factors (Reddy and Narayan, 1987). Now-a-days women are educated and trained enough to acquire capabilities and skills to enter into all types of occupations and professions like; police, military, governance, administration, transport and so forth which were considered as male dominated jobs. A woman performing multiple roles has to, quite often, face conflict of roles she is expected to perform for work-family because time and energy are shared between the two. When a housewife enters into gainful employment outside home, she not only experiences a change in her role and status within the family and society, but also finds herself under increasing pressure to reconcile the dual burden of the two roles at home and at workplace. Coping with the situation requires not only additional physical strength, personal ability, a high degree of adaptability and intelligence on the part of a working woman but also requires the members of her 'role set' to simultaneously make necessary modifications in their expectations. When conflict between the two life domains occurs, the consequences are reflected in both professional and domestic life. With this backdrop, the present study purports to analyse the influencing factors for role conflict, role overload, stress, anxiety among working women and their coping strategies.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

In one of the renowned work on work-family-conflict, 'Work and Family: Allies or Enemies', Friedman and Greenhaus (2000) found that conflict between work roles and family significantly influence the quality of family life and achievement and success on career front for working women. The degree of role conflict appears to be positively associated with factors like role overload, role ambiguity, lack of autonomy and lack of appreciation, compensation, and rewards (Moore, 2000; Carlson et.al., 2000). Empirical literature on work and family conflict indicates that higher levels of role conflict have detrimental and dysfunctional implications for both individuals and the work organizations. In case of individual it has ramifications like lower job satisfaction, quality of marital life, stress, depression and resultant health and psychological disorders (Allen, Hurst, Bruck and Sutton, 2000; Boles, Johnston and Hair, 1997; Frone, Yardley and Markel, 1997; Higgins, Duxbury and Irving, 1992; Kinunnen and Mauno, 2004; Kossek and Ozeki, 1998; Thomas and Ganster, 1995).

Increasing participation of women in workforce is viewed as a welcome development but this advantage has come with predicament for women as they are not only subject to the same working conditions as men but also have to face tight situations owing to the multiple roles, demands and conflicting role expectations. The economic independence has not brought them freedom from "nurturing" roles in family domain irrespective of their professional status or position in their work organizations (Sunita Malhotra and SapnaSachdeva, 2005). Studies have also indicated that, though work and family spill-overs affect both domain influence of family on work is stronger among women and influence of work on family is stronger among men (Pleck, 1977; Williams and Alliger, 1994; Frone et al., 1997). Family-to-work conflict, is experienced when participation in family activity interferes with participation in work activity (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). It is observed that working women are hard pressed for time to relax and hence tend to feel overworked and stressed all the time and the situation is much worse with married women in developing economies.

Further, as empirically substantiated in the review, women in Indian society are furthermore prone to experience role conflict than their counter parts from the West. It is with this review, providing the empirical and theoretical backdrop for the analysis, interpretation and attribution of the findings, an attempt is made in this study, to focus on the extent, causes and consequences of role conflict among Indian working women in the organized sector.

Scope of the Study

The present study seeks to probe empirically into the occupational life of working women, in the context of contemporary Indian work organizations. It could prove to be of applied significance to the management of Indian work organizations in gaining insights pertaining to the stresses and strains of women employees. Women employees themselves would find such study useful in approaching the day to day problems of role stress and role incompatibility they could be facing in their professional lives. This study on role conflict among working women could certainly be of special interest and significance to national, state and local women's organizations since they would be concerned with the issues affecting the working womenfolk in organized sector to streamline their objectives and strategies for the welfare and amelioration of working women. Hence, the present study is a conscious attempt to ascertain empirically the extent of conflicting situations working women encounter due to the changing and often incongruent role expectations in the context of family, profession and the societal norms.

Objectives

In consonance with the scope of the study set out as stated above, following are the main objectives, the present study seeks to address itself to.

1. To ascertain empirically the nature and extent of role conflict faced by the Indian women working in the organized sector.
2. To identify the major factors and causes owing to which the Indian working women tend to face a situation of role incongruence.

III.METHODOLOGY

The data were gathered through interview schedule from 280 respondents working in various organized sectors such as; education, health, banking and government organizations. In order to keep parity in the composition of the sample, 70 respondents were selected from each of the four occupational groups for the present study. The simple random sampling technique was preferred to select the study group for the present study.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the present study role conflict of the respondents is classified as ‘low’, ‘moderate’, and ‘high’ based on the responses of the respondents to the questions specifically framed for the purpose. The respondents who feel at ease while discharging their responsibilities both at home and on the job are considered as experiencing low role conflict. The respondents who feel sometimes at ease but not all the time while discharging responsibilities both at home and job are considered those with moderate role conflict and the respondents who never feel at ease while discharging responsibilities both at home and on job are considered to be women with high role conflict.

Table-1 Extent of Role Conflict

Sl No	Extent of Role Conflict	Frequency	Percentage
1	High Degree of Role Conflict	148	52.8
2	Moderate Degree of Role Conflict	94	33.6
3	Low Degree of Role Conflict	38	13.6
Total		280	100

A majority of the respondents (52.8 percent) were of the opinion that they never felt at ease in meeting the obligations both at work and family. Therefore, such respondents were categorized as those with ‘high degree of role conflict’. The one-third (33.6 percent) of the respondents were identified with the moderate degree of role conflict and a very small proportion (13.6 percent) of respondents are found to be relatively free from such role conflict. It is evident from the table that the role conflict is widespread and therefore it is very much necessary to probe into the causal factors associated with role conflict and to suggest suitable remedial measures to minimize the problem. It is pertinent to note that role conflict is a dependent variable determined by diverse factors pertaining to social background of the working women which could be viewed as causal variables. The social background variables like marital status, rural urban background, caste, educational level, income and type of family and socio economic status are differentially associated with the degree of role conflict experienced by the respondents, and such association in some cases is as assumed and in certain cases defy the common sense understanding. The cross tabulation of data pertaining to the extent of role conflict and the social background factors is presented in Table 2.

Table-2 Socio-economic Factors and Extent of Role Conflict

Socio-economic Variables		Extent of Role Conflict				Chi-square Value
		High	Moderate	Low	Total	
Marital Status	Unmarried	34 (41.4)	29 (35.4)	19(23.2)	82 (100)	13.264**
	Married	101(60.1)	53(31.6)	14 (8.3)	168(100)	
	Widow	11(47.8)	9(39.1)	3(13.1)	23(100)	
	Divorcee	2(28.6)	3(42.8)	2(28.6)	7(100)	
	Total	148(52.8)	94(33.6)	38(13.6)	280(100)	
Native Place	Rural	120(56.3)	68(31.9)	25(11.8)	213(100)	7.291
	Semi-Urban	13(54.2)	7(29.2)	4(16.6)	24(100)	
	Urban	15(34.9)	19(44.2)	9(20.9)	43(100)	
	Total	148(52.8)	94(33.6)	38(13.6)	280(100)	
Caste	SC/ST	45(57.7)	27(34.6)	6(7.7)	78(100)	10.972**
	OBC	74(55.2)	45(33.6)	15(11.2)	134(100)	

	GM	29(42.6)	22(32.4)	17(25.0)	68(100)	
	Total	148(52.8)	94(33.6)	38(13.6)	280(100)	
Education	Up to PUC	38(65.5)	20(34.5)	0(0.0)	58(100)	11.009
	Diploma & JOC	27(50.9)	18(34.0)	8(15.1)	53(100)	
	Graduation	77(51.3)	48(32.0)	25(16.7)	150(100)	
	Post-graduation	6(31.6)	8(42.1)	5(26.3)	19(100)	
	Total	148(52.8)	94(33.6)	38(13.6)	280(100)	
Income Level	Up to 10000	51 (62.2)	30(36.6)	1(1.2)	82(100)	13.612**
	10001 to 20000	61(55.5)	38(34.5)	11(10.0)	110(100)	
	20001 to 30000	31(49.2)	20(31.8)	12(19.0)	63(100)	
	30001 & above	5(20.0)	6(24.0)	14(56.0)	25(100)	
	Total	148(52.8)	94(33.6)	38(13.6)	280(100)	
Family Type	Nuclear Family	115(57.5)	67(33.5)	18(9.0)	200(100)	13.634*
	Joint Family	33(41.2)	27(33.8)	20(25.0)	80(100)	
	Total	148(52.8)	94(33.6)	38(13.6)	280(100)	
Social Origin Scaling	Low	116(59.2)	65(33.2)	15(7.6)	196 (100)	21.842*
	High	32(38.1)	29(34.5)	23(27.4)	84(100)	
	Total	148(52.8)	94(33.6)	38(13.6)	280(100)	

Note: Figures in parenthesis are percentage to respective row total

* and ** Indicate the significance at 0.01 and 0.05 probability level respectively

It could be assumed that living style of a woman in general and her family responsibilities in particular depend prominently on their marital status. Keeping this in view, respondents were classified as unmarried, married, widowed and divorcees based on their present marital status. Most of the respondents were found to be in the married category (168) followed by Unmarried (82). The proportion of women in high degree of role conflict is found to be highest among married women (60.1 percent) followed by widowed women (47.8 percent). It could be attributed to the fact that family responsibilities are more for married women compared to unmarried women. Similarly, quite often widows need to shoulder more number of family responsibilities. In consonance with this the proportion of women with low degree of role conflict is found to be highest among divorcees (28.6 percent) followed by unmarried women (23.2 percent). Family responsibilities might be fewer for unmarried women as well as to divorcees and added to it divorcees might have the inevitability to show more commitment to work in lieu of the family. Chi-square value has been calculated to test the significance of association between the marital status and degree of role conflict. The calculated chi-square value was found to be statistically significant at 0.05 probability level. The married working women, owing to their multifarious responsibilities in the family, and more so in case they have children to nurture and look after, experience greater role conflict compared to those who are unmarried, with far less domestic responsibilities. It is also pertinent to note that owing to least family obligations and probably living alone, it is the divorcees among whom the incidence of role conflict tends to be lowest. Although whether marriage and employment are incongruent in case of Indian women may not be stated conclusively, at least we could state that marriage tends to adversely influence performance on job and being in job affects a women's responsibilities toward family in Indian context, warranting favourable consideration by the family members on the one hand and employers on the other in mitigating the incompatibilities between the two.

Social values, culture and life style of women living in urban areas are significantly different from those of the women living in rural areas. Though the respondents of this study are the women working in Bangalore city, most of them are in-migrants to Bangalore city. The native places of the respondents are different and hence information on the native place of the respondents was elicited and results are summarized in the table. The nativity of the majority of the respondents (213) is rural.

However, only 43 respondents were originally from urban places. The proportion of respondents in high degree of role conflict is found to be slightly more for the respondents whose native places are rural area (56.3 percent) compared to the women whose native place is semi-urban (54.2 percent) and urban areas (34.9 percent). However, the chi-square value calculated to test the significance of association between native place and degree of role conflict is not statistically significant. Thus, nativity of working women has nothing to do with or it has no say in determining the extent of role conflict among them.

Although it is expected that rural woman, being more orthodox and less used to working outside family could be more prone to experience role conflict, the findings do not conclusively support such an argument significantly. Nevertheless, on the whole, the proportion of those experiencing higher levels of role conflict is relatively higher among rural women compared to women coming from urban background. This phenomenon may also be due to rural women being more adjusting and adaptive in their attitudes and approach to be life, which could be taken up for more focused research.

Caste is one of the most important variables, closely associated with the living standard of the respondents. As it has already been noted, the majority of the respondents belong to OBC category (134) followed by SC/ST (78). Further, the data pertaining to the respondents' caste and degree of role conflict were cross tabulated in order to assess the association between these variables. The proportion of respondents with high degree of role conflict was found to be 55.2 percent among the OBC's, whereas the proportion of respondents among low degree of role conflict was found to be the lowest among GM category (25 percent). The chi-square value calculated to test the significance of association between caste category and degree of role conflict is found to be significant at 0.05 probability level. Therefore, caste is one of the variables which could influence the degree of role conflict of working women in an urban setting.

Further, the findings also suggest that women coming from lower castes are more prone to experience role conflict. This may be attributed to such women taking to formal employment in the recent past and hence get to come to terms or grips with striking a balance between work and family. This may require the employees and family to be more considerate and sympathetic to women employees from rural background so as to enable them to overcome the dilemma of work and family.

With regard to education, the level of knowledge among women has greater influence on their ability to make better choices, ability to earn and on their overall quality of life. Information on the educational level of the respondents was collected and they were classified into four categories based on the level of education. The level of education among the respondents is on the whole is high. Graduates and post-graduates together account for (150 + 19 = 169) 60.4 percent of total respondents. The proportion of respondents in the high degree of role conflict could be found to be higher among the respondents with relatively lower level of education compared to the respondents with higher level of education. Similarly, the proportion of respondents in the low degree of role conflict is relatively higher among the respondents with higher level of education. It means the degree of role conflict decreases with increase in the educational level. However, calculated chi-square value is not statistically significant.

Education is one such background variable which could have an important role in reducing the role conflict as it is assumed that, higher the educational level, higher is the level of awareness and adaptability. The negative association, though not statistically significant, found between the level of educational attainment and the extent of role conflict could be attributed to such a positive role of education in the lives of working women and even people at large. As such there appears to be a good rationale and justification in promoting and encouraging women's education.

Income is an economic variable which is found to be having direct influence on the level of role conflict. Respondents with higher income will have higher purchasing power and they could enjoy the better choice. However, a majority (110) of the respondents are having the income level between Rs. 10,001 to 20,000 and only 25 respondents are having the monthly income of Rs. 30,000 and above. Degree of role conflict was found to be having a negative relationship with income level. The proportion of respondents in the high degree of role conflict is found to a greater extent with lower level of income. Similarly, the proportion of respondents in the low degree of role conflict is found to be more among the respondents with higher level of income. Thus, it could be stated that the

higher the levels of income, the lower the level of role conflict and conversely, the lower the level of income the higher the level of the role conflict among working women. The chi-square value calculated to test the significance of association between the level of income and degree of role conflict is found to be statistically significant. Therefore, we could draw the inference that income level is having significant influence on the role conflict. Thus degree of role conflict decreases with increase in the income level.

Further, with regard to the influence of income on the level of role conflict, it is quite logical to expect a negative association between the two that is, higher the income, lower the extent of role conflict. It may be attributed to the higher professional or occupational status those with higher income could be occupying that are in turn associated with higher levels of education, which was found to be having a dampening effect on role conflict. Further, those with higher income can afford to avail services of domestic servants or other helping hands who can substitute for their absence from family.

It is generally assumed that the extent and nature of family responsibilities depend on the type of the family. Information on the type of the family of the respondents has been collected and the analysis of the same are presented in the table. A majority of the respondents are from nuclear families (200) and only 80 respondents are from joint or extended families. The proportion of respondents in the high degree of role conflict is found to be relatively more among the respondents of nuclear family (57.5 percent) compared to the respondents from joint family (41.2 percent). The calculated chi-square value was found to be statistically significant at 0.01 probability level. Therefore, it could be inferred that there is a significant association between the type of the family and degree of role conflict. Role conflict is relatively more among the respondents of nuclear family compared to those from the joint family.

The significant association found between the type of family and the level of role conflict could be attributed to the age old functions, the joint families are performing in Indian society. Women from nuclear families owing to none available to substitute for them in taking up a few family responsibilities appear to be more prone to suffer higher levels of role conflict. Although it may not be possible or feasible to reverse the universal trend toward nucleation of the family, the positive implication of joint family for working women need to be borne in mind.

Socio-economic status (SES) is a composite variable made up of caste, family income, and father's education and is taken for all the purposes of sociological analysis as a more integrated and realistic index of the social background of an individual in the Sociological literature known popularly as Social Origin. Based on SES, respondents were classified into two categories: respondents with low social background (lower social origin) and the respondents belonging to better social background (higher social origin). A majority of the respondents are from lower SES (196) and they account for 70 percent of the respondents and remaining 30 percent were from higher SES. The proportion of respondents in the high degree of role conflict is found to be more among the respondents belonging to the lower SES (59.2 percent) whereas it was only 38.1 percent among the respondents belonging to the higher SES. The proportion of respondents in the low degree of role conflict was found to be relatively more among the respondents belonging to the higher SES (27.4 percent) compared to the respondents belonged to lower SES (97.7 percent). The chi-square value calculated to test the significance of association between SES and degree of role conflict was found to be statistically significant at 0.01 probability level. Therefore, it may be stated that there is significant association between SES and degree of role conflict. Role conflict is more among the respondents belonging to lower SES category.

As a combined effect of all the social background factors mentioned above, the findings indicate to a very significant association between the social origin and role conflict. Higher education, higher income and higher caste background would provide an obvious advantage for women in overcoming the role conflict and enable them to strike balance between work and family. Such an association found between the social origin and role conflict in itself could be viewed as having suggestive value in the sense, special provisions and considerations should be provided to working women coming from lower social origins.

V. CONCLUSION

The data obtained and analysed for the present study suggest that more than one-half of the respondents are found to be experiencing high degree of role conflict, whereas another nearly one-half of them are identified as facing low to moderate level of role conflict. Working women coming from lower social origins tend to experience work and family conflict more often due to the socio-economic conditions in which they find themselves resulting in lack of flexibility and ability to control work situations and a lack of economic resources to afford high quality childcare and dependent-care. Such a situation renders it essential to undertake more structured and focused research not only to measure conflict, but also to assess the nature of the processes and reasons for role conflict particularly from the point of view of the structure and functioning of work organizations, the nature of job requirements as well as the familial situations in which the working women live and operate.

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