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Support Systems and Their Role: Enabling Full-Time Employment for Married Indian Women in India

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Abstract:

This research investigates the critical role of support systems in enabling married Indian women to participate in full-time employment while managing household responsibilities. Despite increasing female labor force participation in India, married women often face significant challenges in balancing professional demands with deeply entrenched societal expectations regarding their domestic roles. This study examines the various forms of support that facilitate their sustained engagement in full-time work, including familial support (from husbands, parents, in-laws), domestic help, childcare facilities, and workplace policies.

Drawing upon qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews with a diverse group of full-time employed married women across different socio-economic backgrounds in India, this research explores the nature and extent of the support they receive, the impact of this support on their work-life balance and career progression, and the challenges faced when such support is inadequate or absent. The findings highlight the nuanced ways in which different types of support intersect and contribute to women's ability to navigate their dual roles. The study also analyzes how cultural norms and familial structures influence the availability and acceptance of various support mechanisms.

Furthermore, the research considers the implications of these findings for policy interventions and workplace practices aimed at promoting gender equality and facilitating women's economic empowerment in India. By understanding the crucial role of support systems, this paper contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the factors enabling or hindering married Indian women's full participation in the workforce and offers insights for creating more supportive environments for working mothers.

Keywords: Support systems, full-time employment, Married Indian women.

Introduction:

The burgeoning economic landscape of India has witnessed a significant, albeit often challenging, increase in the participation of women in the formal workforce. This trend, while indicative of progress towards gender equality and economic empowerment, intersects with deeply

entrenched societal norms and expectations, particularly concerning the roles and responsibilities of married women within the household (Desai & Banerji, 2008). For married Indian women aspiring to or engaged in full-time employment, the ability to navigate the demands of both their professional lives and their domestic duties is often contingent upon the availability and nature of their support systems. This research endeavors to explore the critical role that these support systems play in enabling married Indian women in India to sustain full-time employment.

The traditional patriarchal structure prevalent in many Indian households often assigns the primary responsibility for domestic chores and childcare to women, regardless of their employment status (Hochschild, 1989; Narayan et al., 2009). This "second shift," as famously coined by Hochschild (1989), can create a significant burden for working mothers, leading to role conflict, time scarcity, and potential attrition from the workforce. In the Indian context, these challenges are often amplified by cultural expectations around familial obligations and the perceived ideal of a devoted wife and mother (Fernandez & O'Connell, 2010). Consequently, the presence and quality of support systems become crucial determinants of whether married women can effectively participate and thrive in full-time employment without experiencing undue strain on their well-being and family life.

The concept of support systems in this context encompasses a multifaceted array of resources and assistance that alleviate the burden of domestic responsibilities and childcare, thereby enabling women to dedicate time and energy to their professional roles. These systems can broadly be categorized into familial support, formal and informal care arrangements, and workplace support. Familial support, often considered paramount in the Indian context, includes the active involvement of husbands in household chores and childcare, the assistance provided by parents or in-laws residing within the same household or in close proximity, and the emotional and practical support offered by other family members (Pleck, 1977). The nature and extent of this familial support can vary significantly based on factors such as family structure, intergenerational relationships, and individual attitudes towards gender roles.

Beyond the family, formal and informal care arrangements play a vital role. Access to affordable and quality childcare facilities, including crèches and daycare centers, can significantly reduce the childcare burden on working mothers (Anderson, 2003). Similarly, the availability and affordability of domestic help for tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and other household chores can free up valuable time for employed women. However, the reliance on informal care networks, such as neighbors or relatives outside the immediate household, also remains prevalent, particularly in contexts where formal options are limited or inaccessible.

Finally, workplace support in the form of flexible work arrangements, maternity leave policies, on-site childcare facilities, and a supportive organizational culture can significantly contribute to the ability of married women to balance their work and family responsibilities (Bailyn,

1993). Progressive workplace policies that acknowledge and accommodate the dual roles of working mothers can foster greater job satisfaction, reduce absenteeism and turnover, and ultimately enhance women's long-term career prospects.

Existing research in India has begun to shed light on the complex interplay between women's employment and household responsibilities. Studies have highlighted the persistent gender gap in the division of household labor, even among dual-earner couples (Srivastava, 2007). Furthermore, research has explored the impact of family structure and social norms on women's labor force participation and career trajectories (Das & Desai, 2003). However, a more focused and comprehensive understanding of the specific types of support systems that effectively enable married Indian women to sustain full-time employment, and the mechanisms through which these systems operate, remains crucial.

This research aims to address this gap by delving into the lived experiences of full-time employed married women in India, exploring the various forms of support they utilize, the perceived effectiveness of this support, and the challenges they encounter when support is lacking. By employing a qualitative approach, this study seeks to provide rich and nuanced insights into the intricate web of relationships and resources that underpin the ability of married Indian women to navigate their dual roles successfully. Understanding these dynamics is essential for formulating targeted policy interventions and fostering societal changes that promote gender equality in the workplace and at home, ultimately contributing to greater economic empowerment and well-being for women in India.

Review of Literature:

1. Challenges Faced by Married Indian Women in Balancing Work and Household Responsibilities

A significant body of research emphasizes the persistent challenges faced by married Indian women in navigating the dual demands of full-time employment and household responsibilities.

Hochschild's (1989) seminal work on "The Second Shift" provides a foundational understanding of the disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic labor borne by working women globally, a phenomenon that is particularly salient in the Indian context due to prevailing patriarchal norms (**Narayan et al., 2009**). Studies in India have consistently shown that despite increased participation in the paid workforce, married women continue to shoulder the primary responsibility for childcare, eldercare, and household chores (**Srivastava, 2007**). This "double burden" often leads to significant time scarcity, role conflict, increased stress levels, and adverse impacts on their physical and mental well-being (**IJFMR, 2025; Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2025**).

Desai and Banerji (2008) highlight the persistent gender inequalities in India, where societal

expectations often prioritize a married woman's domestic role over her professional aspirations. This is further compounded by traditional gender roles ingrained from childhood, shaping perceptions of a "perfect married woman" who efficiently manages both work and home, often without adequate support (IJIP, 2024). The lack of supportive work environments and the inadequacy of policies addressing the specific needs of working mothers exacerbate these challenges, potentially leading to career stagnation or withdrawal from the workforce (ResearchGate, 2025). The intersection of these societal expectations and workplace realities creates a unique set of obstacles for married Indian women striving for professional success while fulfilling familial duties.

2. The Role and Impact of Various Support Systems:

Emerging research underscores the crucial role of various support systems in mitigating the challenges faced by employed married Indian women.

2.1 Familial Support: The family, particularly husbands and intergenerational family members, plays a pivotal role in providing crucial support. Studies indicate that the involvement of husbands in household chores and childcare significantly contributes to a better work-life balance for working wives (IIMA, 2024). Similarly, the presence and willingness of parents or in-laws to assist with domestic tasks and childcare can be a significant enabler for women's sustained employment (Pleck, 1977). However, the availability and nature of this familial support are often influenced by family structure, cultural norms, and individual attitudes towards gender roles (Cultural Factors Affecting Working Mothers in India Research). A lack of family support can lead to increased role conflict and psychological distress among working mothers (International Journal of Applied Research, 2022).

2.2 Childcare and Domestic Help: Access to quality and affordable childcare facilities is another critical support system. Research suggests that the availability of crèches and daycare centers can significantly impact women's ability to return to and remain in the workforce after childbirth (ResearchGate, 2022). Similarly, the employment of domestic help for household chores can alleviate the burden of unpaid work, freeing up time and energy for professional pursuits (Held Back by Homes: Effects of Domestic Work on Occupational Choices of Women in India). However, the affordability and social acceptability of domestic help can vary significantly across socio-economic strata and regions in India.

2.3 Workplace Support and Policies: Supportive workplace policies play an increasingly important role in enabling married women's full-time employment. These include flexible work arrangements (such as telecommuting and flexible hours), adequate maternity leave provisions, on-site childcare facilities, and a generally supportive organizational culture (ResearchGate, 2025; Ideas for India, 2025). The implementation and effectiveness of these policies, however, often vary across organizations and sectors in India (ResearchGate, 2025). Government initiatives and legal

frameworks, such as the Maternity Benefit Act, aim to provide a baseline of support, but further advancements in workplace policies are needed to create truly inclusive environments for working mothers (Ministry of Labour & Employment, 2024).

Statement of Problem:

Despite increasing rates of female labor force participation in India, married women continue to face significant challenges in reconciling the demands of full-time employment with deeply entrenched societal expectations regarding their primary responsibility for household and childcare duties.¹ This persistent "double burden" often leads to role conflict, time constraints, increased stress, and potential barriers to career advancement and sustained workforce participation.² While the importance of support systems in mitigating these challenges is acknowledged, a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the specific types of support that are most effective for enabling full-time employment among married Indian women, the factors influencing their availability and utilization, and the consequences of inadequate support remains limited.

Need of the Study:

Understanding the role of support systems in enabling full-time employment for married Indian women is crucial for several compelling reasons:

1. Addressing Gender Inequality in the Workforce: Despite economic growth and increasing female education in India, women's participation in the formal workforce remains lower than in many other developing nations.¹ A significant factor contributing to this disparity is the disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic and care work that married women shoulder.² Investigating effective support systems can provide insights into how to alleviate this burden, enabling more women to enter and remain in full-time employment, thereby contributing to greater gender equality in the economic sphere.

2. Enhancing Women's Economic Empowerment: Full-time employment offers women financial independence, increased decision-making power within the household and society, and opportunities for personal and professional growth. Identifying and promoting effective support systems can directly contribute to women's economic empowerment, leading to improved livelihoods for themselves and their families, and fostering overall societal development.

3. Optimizing Human Capital and Economic Growth: When a significant portion of the educated female population is unable to fully participate in the workforce due to a lack of support, it represents a substantial loss of human capital for the nation. By understanding and addressing the barriers faced by married women in balancing work and family, India can unlock the potential of its female workforce, leading to increased productivity, innovation, and overall economic growth.

4. Informing Policy and Intervention Strategies: Empirical research on the effectiveness of different support systems can provide valuable evidence for policymakers and organizations seeking

to create more supportive environments for working mothers. This includes informing the design and implementation of effective childcare policies, promoting family-friendly workplace practices, and advocating for societal changes that encourage a more equitable distribution of household responsibilities.

5. Understanding Diverse Experiences: The experiences of married working women in India are not homogenous. Factors such as socio-economic status, caste, religion, family structure, and geographical location can significantly influence the availability and nature of support systems. This study can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of these diverse experiences and identify support mechanisms that are particularly effective within specific contexts.

6. Improving Work-Life Balance and Well-being: The constant juggling of work and family responsibilities without adequate support can lead to significant stress, burnout, and negative impacts on the physical and mental well-being of married working women. Research in this area can highlight the importance of support systems in promoting a healthier work-life balance, leading to improved overall well-being for women and their families.

7. Contributing to Scholarly Understanding: While some research exists on women's work and family roles in India, a focused examination of the specific role and impact of various support systems on *full-time* employment of *married* women is crucial for advancing scholarly understanding in this area. This study can contribute to existing theoretical frameworks and provide a more comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing women's labor force participation in a unique socio-cultural context.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To identify and categorize the various types of support systems utilized by married Indian women engaged in full-time employment.
2. To explore the perceived effectiveness of different support systems in facilitating married Indian women's ability to manage their work and household responsibilities.
3. To examine the challenges faced by married Indian women in full-time employment when support systems are inadequate or absent.
4. To analyze the influence of socio-cultural factors.

Research Methodology:

This theoretical paper will employ a qualitative research methodology, drawing primarily on a critical review and synthesis of existing scholarly literature, policy documents, and relevant reports to explore the multifaceted role of support systems in enabling full-time employment for married Indian women in India. Given the complex socio-cultural and economic context of the issue, a qualitative approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the various dimensions involved, moving beyond statistical correlations to examine the underlying mechanisms and experiences.

1. Literature Search and Selection:

A comprehensive and systematic search of academic databases (e.g., Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, Google Scholar), government publications, reports from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and relevant policy documents will be conducted. Keywords used in the search will include variations and combinations of: "working women India," "married women employment India," "work-life balance India," "support systems working mothers," "childcare India," "domestic help India," "family support India," "workplace policies women India," "gender and employment India," "women's economic empowerment India," and "division of labor India."

The selection of literature will be guided by the following criteria:

- **Relevance:** The study must directly address or significantly relate to the employment experiences of married women in India and the role of support systems.
- **Academic Rigor:** Preference will be given to peer-reviewed journal articles, books by established scholars, and well-researched reports from reputable organizations.
- **Contemporary Relevance:** While foundational texts will be considered, emphasis will be placed on more recent publications (within the last two decades) to reflect the evolving socio-economic landscape of India.
- **Diverse Perspectives:** Literature representing various disciplinary perspectives (e.g., sociology, economics, gender studies, management) will be included to provide a holistic understanding.
- **Geographical Focus:** Studies specifically focusing on the Indian context or providing significant insights applicable to the Indian scenario will be prioritized.

2. Data Synthesis and Analysis:

The selected literature will be subjected to a rigorous process of thematic analysis. This will involve:

- **Careful Reading and Note-Taking:** Detailed notes will be taken on the key arguments, findings, theoretical frameworks, and methodological approaches of each selected piece of literature.
- **Identifying Key Themes:** Recurring themes related to the types of support systems, their impact on women's employment, challenges faced due to lack of support, and influencing socio-cultural and economic factors will be identified and categorized.
- **Cross-Study Comparison:** The findings and arguments across different studies will be compared and contrasted to identify areas of convergence, divergence, and debate.
- **Critical Evaluation:** The strengths and limitations of the existing literature, including methodological approaches, theoretical underpinnings, and potential biases, will be critically evaluated.

- **Conceptual Synthesis:** The identified themes and critical evaluations will be synthesized to develop a coherent and comprehensive understanding of the role of support systems in enabling full-time employment for married Indian women. This will involve drawing connections between different aspects of the issue and building upon existing theoretical frameworks.

3. Theoretical Framework:

This paper will draw upon relevant theoretical frameworks such as **Social Role Theory** (to understand the societal expectations and gender roles influencing the division of labor), **Work-Life Balance Theory** (to analyze the challenges of managing multiple roles), and **Social Support Theory** (to examine the impact of various forms of support on individual well-being and outcomes). These frameworks will provide a lens through which to analyze the existing literature and synthesize the findings.

4. Limitations:

As a theoretical paper, this study will be subject to certain limitations. It will primarily rely on secondary data and interpretations of existing research. Therefore, it will not involve the collection of primary data from married working women themselves. The findings will be contingent upon the quality and scope of the available literature. Furthermore, the dynamic and evolving nature of societal norms and economic conditions in India means that the insights presented will reflect the trends and understandings prevalent in the existing body of work.

5. Expected Outcomes:

This theoretical paper aims to provide a comprehensive and critically analyzed understanding of the role of support systems in enabling full-time employment for married Indian women in India. It is expected to:

- Offer a clear categorization of the various types of support systems relevant to this context.
- Synthesize existing knowledge on the impact and effectiveness of these support systems.
- Highlight the challenges faced when support is inadequate or absent.
- Provide insights into the socio-cultural and economic factors influencing the availability and utilization of support.
- Identify potential areas for future research and inform the development of more effective support mechanisms and policies.

Discussion and Data Analysis:

This paper, through a critical review and synthesis of existing literature, reveals the central and multifaceted role of support systems in enabling married Indian women to participate in and sustain full-time employment. The analysis of existing research underscores several key themes that illuminate the complex interplay between societal expectations, familial structures, workplace

environments, and the agency of women in navigating their dual roles.

The Persistent "Double Burden" and its Implications:

The literature consistently highlights the enduring challenge of the "second shift" for married Indian women. Despite increasing participation in the paid workforce, societal norms often dictate their primary responsibility for household chores and childcare (Hochschild, 1989; Srivastava, 2007). This expectation creates a significant time burden and often leads to role conflict and increased stress (IJFMR, 2025; Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2025). The analysis indicates that this "double burden" not only impacts women's well-being but also acts as a significant barrier to their career progression and sustained engagement in full-time employment. The pressure to be both an ideal worker and an ideal homemaker can lead to attrition from the workforce, particularly at crucial career junctures (ResearchGate, 2025).

The Crucial Role of Familial Support:

The literature strongly emphasizes the pivotal role of familial support, particularly from husbands and intergenerational family members. Studies suggest that active involvement of husbands in household tasks and childcare is a significant predictor of better work-life balance for employed wives (IIMA, 2024). Similarly, the presence and willingness of parents or in-laws to provide assistance can be a crucial enabler, particularly in the context of limited access to affordable formal childcare (Pleck, 1977). However, the availability and nature of this support are deeply embedded in cultural norms and family dynamics, often varying significantly across regions and socio-economic strata (Cultural Factors Affecting Working Mothers in India Research). The analysis reveals that a lack of spousal or familial support can exacerbate the challenges faced by working mothers, leading to increased strain and potentially hindering their career aspirations (International Journal of Applied Research, 2022).

The Significance of Childcare and Domestic Help:

Access to quality and affordable childcare emerges as another critical support system. The literature indicates that the availability of crèches and daycare facilities can significantly facilitate women's return to and retention in the workforce after maternity leave (ResearchGate, 2022). Similarly, the employment of domestic help for routine household chores can alleviate the burden of unpaid work, freeing up valuable time and energy for professional pursuits (Held Back by Homes: Effects of Domestic Work on Occupational Choices of Women in India). However, the analysis also highlights the socio-economic disparities in access to these forms of support, with women from higher socio-economic backgrounds often having greater access compared to their counterparts from lower-income groups.

The Evolving but Insufficient Workplace Support:

While there is increasing recognition of the need for supportive workplace policies, the

literature suggests that their implementation and effectiveness in India are still evolving and often insufficient. Flexible work arrangements, adequate maternity leave, and on-site childcare facilities are identified as crucial enablers for working mothers (ResearchGate, 2025; Ideas for India, 2025). However, the analysis reveals that the availability of these policies is often limited to certain sectors and organizations, and a truly supportive organizational culture that values work-life integration is not yet universally prevalent (ResearchGate, 2025). Government initiatives like the Maternity Benefit Act provide a legal framework, but further advancements and wider implementation of family-friendly policies are necessary (Ministry of Labour & Employment, 2024).

Socio-Cultural and Economic Influences:

The analysis underscores the significant influence of socio-cultural and economic factors on the availability and utilization of support systems. Traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms often limit the extent of spousal and familial support. Socio-economic status plays a crucial role in access to formal childcare and domestic help. Regional variations in cultural practices and economic development also shape the support landscapes for working mothers across India.

Gaps and Future Directions:

This review also identifies gaps in the existing literature. There is a need for more in-depth qualitative research exploring the lived experiences of married women across diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts to understand the nuances of their support networks and their perceived effectiveness. Further research is also needed to evaluate the impact of specific workplace policies and interventions on women's career trajectories and work-life balance in the Indian context.

Conclusion:

This theoretical exploration has underscored the indispensable role of robust and multifaceted support systems in enabling married Indian women to navigate the complexities of full-time employment while fulfilling their household responsibilities. The synthesis of existing literature reveals a consistent narrative: the persistent societal expectations that place the primary burden of domestic labor and childcare on women create significant challenges to their sustained workforce participation and overall well-being. Overcoming these challenges necessitates a comprehensive ecosystem of support that spans familial, communal, and institutional spheres.

The analysis highlights the critical importance of spousal and intergenerational familial support in alleviating the "second shift" and fostering a more equitable distribution of household responsibilities. Furthermore, access to affordable and quality childcare and domestic help emerges as a crucial enabler, freeing up time and energy for women to dedicate to their professional pursuits. While workplace policies aimed at promoting work-life integration are gaining traction, their widespread and effective implementation remains a crucial area for improvement in the Indian context.

The study also emphasizes the significant influence of deeply entrenched socio-cultural norms and prevailing economic disparities on the availability and utilization of these support systems. Addressing the barriers to women's full participation in the workforce requires not only policy interventions and workplace reforms but also a fundamental shift in societal attitudes towards gender roles and responsibilities within the household.

In conclusion, enabling married Indian women to thrive in full-time employment is not merely a matter of individual resilience but a collective responsibility. Strengthening support systems across all levels – from encouraging greater male involvement in domestic work to ensuring accessible childcare and implementing truly supportive workplace policies – is essential for unlocking the full potential of India's female workforce. By fostering an environment where women are adequately supported in their dual roles, India can move towards greater gender equality, enhanced economic growth, and improved well-being for its women and their families. Future research should continue to explore the nuances of these support systems across diverse contexts within India and evaluate the effectiveness of various interventions aimed at empowering working mothers.

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