

# Marital Adjustment, Perceived Stress and Work-Life Balance: Childbirth Effects Among Working Mothers

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## Abstract

This study looks into the impact of childbirth on marital adjustment, perceived stress, and work-life balance among working mothers in Bangalore, India. As more women enter the workforce while raising families, knowing the challenges they deal with is critical to creating a more inclusive and equal environment. In view of this present study is an effort to understand the significant difference of childbirth effects between working mothers with single child and working mothers with 2 or more children in their Marital Adjustment, Perceived Stress and Work-Life Balance. The study will take a quantitative approach, using standardised questionnaires to assess marital adjustment, perceived stress, and work-life balance. Purposive sampling techniques was adopted to select 200 working women with children aged up to six years of old from various professional institutes and institutions in Bangalore. Statistical tools such as using t-test, and stepwise multiple regression to investigate differences between the two groups of mothers as well as to understand the impact of demographic factors on dependent measures. The results revealed a significant difference between childbirth effects between working mothers with single child and working mothers with 2 or more children. Further there is significant contribution of demographic variables. The findings are likely to give light on the unique obstacles that working mothers confront in Bangalore's cultural and socioeconomic environment, with the potential to impact workplace regulations and support services. This study fills a large gap in the literature by examining the concurrent effects of childbirth on several elements of working women' life in India, with implications for organisations, policymakers, and families seeking to assist working mothers' well-being and career growth.

**Keywords:** marital adjustment, work-life balance, perceived stress, childbirth effects, working mothers

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Motherhood is widely regarded as the most significant role for women in all countries. Although some women delay or postpone childbirth, becoming a mother is largely unavoidable (Deave et al., 2008). The birth of the first child, despite being a wonderful event, puts the mother in crisis and loads of stress and confronts her with new tasks and obligations (Deave et al., 2008). During the journey of becoming a mother, a woman experiences a period of transformation, instability, and reorganization of life (Pridham et al., 1991). Transition to motherhood are times when families' lifestyles change from one stage to the next (Price et al., 2000). As a new mother, a woman undergoes personal and interpersonal changes as

she takes on maternal responsibilities and evaluates her own parenting abilities (Chick et al., 1986). For generations, women's employment was not possible. However, in today's environment, women are becoming more involved in the workforce. As a result, women who want to start a family deal with a variety of transitional challenges following childbirth. They now have to manage not only their workload but also the child. This work-life balance causes a lot of judgements and biases. They are perceived as more self-centred and less committed to their children than stay-at-home mothers (Etaugh & Nekolny, 1990). Women around the world work greater hours than males (The Longest War : Sex Differences in Perspective, n.d.). According to Pocock (2007), work has a greater impact on one's life than vice versa. However, the home environment can also impact job performance and satisfaction. Factors that increase home-to-work negative spillover include the care needs of young children and elderly relatives (Barnett 1994; Barnett & Marshall 1992a, 1992b), housework and its distribution within families (Coltrane 2000), and the perceived quality of each parent's role, both as a spouse and as a parent (Milkie & Peltola, 1999). Working mothers in India with young children have unique challenges that differ from those in Western countries. The challenges of a mother's dual position vary depending on social, cultural, and religious contexts in a traditional environment (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [ UNESCO], 1979). Mothers' job goals, sex- role expectations, and employment support from their spouses differ (Anderson-Kulman & Paludi, 1986). Research indicates that mediating factors play a significant role in mother's employment (Locksley, 1980). Thus, this paper investigates how characteristics such as marital adjustment, psychological stress and work-life balance affect or produce an influence on working women after childbirth.

### **1.1 Research Problem**

Childbirth causes major shifts in the lives of working women, altering different aspects of their well-being. Despite the existing literature on the impacts of childbirth, there is a significant gap in understanding the concurrent influence on crucial characteristics such as marital adjustment, psychological stress and work-life balance among working mothers. While past research has focused on specific parts of this complicated phenomena, there is a requirement for a more thorough study that takes into account all of these characteristics. This study aims to fill that void by investigating the linked dynamics of marital adjustment, perceived stress and work-life balance, providing emphasis on the multiple impacts of childbirth in the context of working mothers' lives.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

1. Does Childbirth affect the working mothers having a single child and working mothers with 2 or more children differ among themselves in their Marital Adjustment, Perceived Stress and Work-life Balance.
2. Does the demographic variables of working mothers having a single child and working mothers with 2 or more children influence their Marital Adjustment, Psychological Stress and Work-life balance.

### **1.3 Perceived Stress**

Psychological pressures encompass a range of internalised, emotional, psychological, environmental, and civilization challenges that individuals face (Hayes & Watson, 2012). To support this, a study was conducted on 72 working women in Jordan to understand the effect of psychological stress and marital adjustment on the raising of children (ALZyoud, 2020b). The results showed that there was no correlation between stress and marital adjustment but the scores showed that the psychological stress affected the women's upbringing of the children (ALZyoud, 2020b).

A study was conducted in the united states where 541 employed women, 18 years of age and older were

recruited while hospitalized for childbirth and followed for 18 months. The results showed that women who reported high levels of job spillover to home had mental health scores slightly, but significantly, worse than women who reported low levels of spillover ( $\beta = -1.26$ ;  $SE = 0.47$ ). Women with medium and high levels of home spillover to job also reported worse mental health ( $\beta = -0.81$ ,  $SE = 0.30$ ; and  $\beta = -1.52$ ,  $SE = 0.78$ ) relative to those with low spillover. Women who reported medium (versus low) levels of home spillover reported slightly improved physical health ( $\beta = 0.64$ ,  $SE = 0.30$ ). There was no significant association between job spillover and physical health. The study also found that flexible work arrangements were associated with lower postpartum mental health scores, which could be due to unexpected consequences such as increased work taken home (Grice et al., 2010b).

#### **1.4 Work-life Balance**

Kenexa Research Institute conducted a survey in which they found that job-life balance, engaging job, respectful managers, fair pay, and a clear career path all contribute to lower work stress among women (Rekha, 2018). Research has identified both good and negative impacts between job and family, but positive spill over has gotten less attention (Barnett, 1998). Brunton in 2006 conducted a recent research of New Zealand parents in paid work and discovered that the majority of parents (89%) believe that job satisfaction leads to enhanced home life quality and that their children learn good values from their parents' paid work (MSD, n.d.). According to Grice et al.'s (2010) study "Balancing work and family after childbirth: A Longitudinal Analysis," 53% of women returned to work 11 weeks following childbirth, and practically all of them were back at work six months later. Women were more likely than men to experience job spillover into their homes.... There was "a positive relationship" between health and total hours worked, with each extra hour of labour having a minor influence on both mental and physical health. Women's mental health scores were found to be positively associated with both social support from coworkers and favourable feedback from family members regarding how a woman balanced work and family. Flexible work arrangements do not increase a woman's ability to spend more time with her child, according to research.

Working women face challenges while balancing work and family responsibilities (The Adjustment of Working Mothers in Coping with Work/Family Role Conflict - ProQuest, n.d.-c). Buehler (1990) defines adjustment as the existing state of functioning in reaction to change. Adjustment can be understood from three perspectives: psychological, physiological, and societal (Buehler, 1990). To successfully combine work and home life, working women must make adjustments with their partners, such as sharing housework, participating in childcare, making joint decisions, having equal financial influence, and managing emotional stress (Zimmerman, 2003b).

#### **1.5 Marital Adjustment**

According to a qualitative study by Misra (1988), a woman is supposed to be devoted, active, competitive, straight forward, non-sentimental, and a "professional" at work, but pleasant, soft, sensitive, adaptive, gentle, unassertive, and domesticated at home. Research (Valimaki et al., 2009) indicates that spouse support and encouragement lead to increased dedication to family and job. Ellis described marital satisfaction as a state of contentment, satisfaction, and pleasure that every partner of a married couple experiences mutually when all aspects of their living together are considered (Tavoni et al., 2005). It reflects the broader situation of every person of a married couple (Javanmard & Garegozlo, 2013). (Javanmard & Garegozlo, 2013).

Demographic factors like age, salary, experience, and marital status impact women employees' work-life balance. Several studies were undertaken to assess the impact of demographic characteristics on work-

life balance among female employees (Hochschild, 1997). The workplace and employee demographics have shifted in recent decades, raising concerns about the separation of work and personal lives (Hayman, 2005). A study regarding the same was conducted in Bangalore on 340 women employees. The results showed that there is a significant relationship between demographic variables and work-life balance. These demographic variables include age, income, experience, marital status (Thriveni & Devi, 2012).

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **2.1 Procedure**

After obtaining the IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval for ethical clearance, The questionnaires were circulated online and by handing it out individually or by calling organisations such as Montessori. Before collecting the data from participants it was made sure that informed consent was obtained from everyone. It was fully a voluntary participation and no incentives were provided. Every Participant was also briefly informed about the research and confidentiality was ensured before participation.

### **2.2 Measures**

#### **2.2.1 The Perceived Stress Scale**

Developed by Sheldon Cohen in 1994, is a widely used instrument for assessing the perception of stress. This scale consists of 10 items rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from (0) Never to (4) Very Often. The reliability of this scale is supported by a Cronbach's alpha that ranges from 0.78 to 0.91, indicating good internal consistency.

#### **2.2.2 The Work-Life Balance Inventory**

Created by Subooh Yusuf in 2018, evaluates individuals' work-life balance through 15 items rated on a five-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). This inventory boasts a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87, reflecting its reliability as a measure of work-life balance.

#### **2.2.3 The Relationship Assessment Scale**

Developed by Susan S. Hendrick and colleagues in 1998, assesses general relationship satisfaction through seven questions rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (high satisfaction). The scale demonstrates strong reliability with a Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.86 to 0.90. Together, these instruments provide valuable insights into stress perception, work-life balance, and relationship satisfaction, contributing to the understanding of individual well-being in various contexts.

### **2.3 Analysis Procedure**

Once the data are collected it undergoes a data cleaning process in which the incomplete data or the data that doesn't fit the inclusion criteria are removed. After, these cleaned data were coded. Jamovi was used to perform Independent Sample T-test analysis to know the relationship between variables. For finding the influence of demographic variables on the dependent variable, Multiple stepwise regression was used in SPSS.

### 3. Result

#### 3.1 Independent Sample T-test

**Table 1 shows the results of Independent Sample T-test for Perceived Stress, Work-life Balance and Marital Adjustment.**

Independent Samples T-Test					
		Statistic		df	p
perceived stress	Student's t	0.592	a	148	0.555
	Mann-Whitney U	2252			0.742
work-life balance	Student's t	-1.076	a	148	0.284
	Mann-Whitney U	2154			0.463
marital adjustment	Student's t	3.639	a	148	< .001
	Mann-Whitney U	1754			0.017

As shown in table 1, the results show a significant difference in marital adjustment between working mothers with a single child and those with two or more children ( $t(148) = 3.639, p < 0.001$ ).

The results show no significant difference in perceived stress levels between the two groups of mothers ( $t(148) = 0.592, p = 0.555$ ). The Mann-Whitney U test shows no significant difference ( $U = 2252, p = 0.742$ ).

The results show no significant difference in work-life balance between working mothers with a single child and those with two or more children ( $t(148) = -1.076, p = 0.284$ ). The Mann-Whitney U test shows no significant difference ( $U = 2154, p = 0.463$ ).

#### 3.1 Stepwise multiple Regression

**Table 2 shows the stepwise multiple regression of demographic variables for Perceived Stress**

Factor	Beta-co-efficient	Std .error	R	R <sup>2</sup>	t-value
Child age range from 4-5 years	-3.19	4.345	.319	.102	-2.874

Note. \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ , Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .102

**Table 3 shows the stepwise multiple regression of demographic variables for Work-life balance**

Factor	Beta-co-efficient	Std .error	R	R <sup>2</sup>	t-value
Part-time Employee	-.230	6.832	.359	.129	-2.035

Note. \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ , Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .129

**Table 4 shows the stepwise multiple regression of demographic variables for Marital Adjustment**

Factor	Beta-co-efficient	Std .error	R	R <sup>2</sup>	t-value
Single child	.287	3.948	.287	.082	2.556
Middle class	-.228	3.861	.366	.134	2.506

Note. \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ , Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .082 & .134

From analysing the various demographic variables such as age of the mother, number of children, age

of the child, socio-economic status, employment type and family status using stepwise multiple regression, we found that Child age range from 4-5 years has been a significant predictor of perceived stress ( $\beta = -3.19$ ,  $SE = 4.345$ ,  $t = -2.874$ ) This model has an adjusted  $R^2$  of .102 which indicates that there is a small variance of 10.2% in perceived stress.

We found that the Part-time Employee has been a significant predictor of perceived stress ( $\beta = -.230$ ,  $SE = 6.832$ ,  $t = -2.035$ ) This model has an adjusted  $R^2$  of .129 which indicates that there is a small variance of 12.9% in work-life balance.

We found that single child and middle class factor has been a significant predictor of perceived stress ( $\beta = .287$  &  $-.228$ ,  $SE = 3.948$  &  $3.861$ ,  $t = 2.556$  &  $2.506$ ) This model has an adjusted  $R^2$  of .082 & .134 which indicates that there is a small variance of 8.2% and 13.4% in marital adjustment.

#### 4. Discussion

The study found no significant difference in perceived stress between mothers with one child and those with two or more children ( $t(148) = 0.592$ ,  $p = 0.555$ ). This conclusion implies that perceived stress does not always increase with more children. A research by Barnett and Marshall (1992) conducted study on the spill over effects of work and family life among dual- earner couples, observing that balancing these roles could cause psychological suffering. The current research adds to this discussion by demonstrating that perceived stress may not increase solely owing to an increase of children, but may also be influenced by other mediating factors such as support systems and workplace policies. Contrary to this was a study conducted by Deave et al. (2008) where the paper discussed the transition to motherhood as a period of significant stress and adjustment challenges for women. Their findings suggest that new motherhood inherently brings about increased psychological strain.

The results show no significant difference in work-life balance between working mothers with a single child and those with two or more children ( $t(148) = -1.076$ ,  $p = 0.284$ ). Grice et al. (2010) conducted a longitudinal analysis on working mother's post-childbirth, finding that high levels of job spillover into home life correlated with worse mental health outcomes. Their findings support the notion that the complexities of balancing work and family roles can lead to increased stress, yet they also highlight that not all mothers experience this uniformly. The current study's results align with Grice et al.'s findings in that the anticipated increase in stress with more children was not observed. Pocock (2007) underlined the major impact of work on personal life, implying a negative relationship between job demands and family satisfaction. This viewpoint implies that as work obligations increase—potentially aggravated by extra children—stress should logically rise; however, the current study contradicts this idea by finding no significant difference based on child quantity.

According to research, parenting stress varies greatly depending on the developmental stage of the child. For example, parents with younger children frequently report higher levels of stress as a result of increasing caregiving obligations and concerns about child development (Hautzel et al., 2012). The negative beta coefficient indicates that as children mature within this range, perceived stress reduces, which is consistent with results that show a reduction in parenting stress as children achieve greater independence (El-Wahsh et al., 2021). The study also finds that being a part-time employee is a strong predictor of work-life balance. This shows that part-time employment may help to improve work-life balance, maybe because shorter working hours allow for more family time. Previous research has emphasised the difficulties experienced by full-time professionals in reconciling job

obligations with family duties, which frequently leads to elevated stress levels. The data presented support the idea that flexible work arrangements can improve employees' capacity to balance their personal and professional life (Hazenberget al., 2013). Family structure and socioeconomic level have important factors in marital dynamics. According to the literature, couples with only one kid may have different relationship dynamics than those with several children, which is generally owing to less parental conflict over resource allocation. Furthermore, socioeconomic characteristics are known to influence relationship satisfaction. Middle-class couples may experience specific stressors related to financial stability and social expectations (Mishra & Mishra, 2017).

## 5. Limitations

1. The study relies mainly on self-reported data, which may induce response bias. Participants may give socially acceptable answers on sensitive areas such as marital adjustment, perceived stress and work-life balance.
2. As the study focuses specifically on working mothers, the findings may not be applicable to non-working mothers or those with different employment statuses. This limits the broader applicability of the results to the entire population of mothers.

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