Work Life Balance of Married Women among Higher Study, Middle Class Job and Societies Expectations in Shekhawati Region

Sunita Poonia

Abstract

Work-life balance is a critical challenge faced by married women, particularly in the Shekhawati region of Rajasthan, where societal expectations, professional demands, and familial obligations intersect. This article examines the complexities of balancing higher education, middle-class employment, and traditional societal roles among married women. Using a mixed-method approach, the research analyzes how cultural norms, gendered responsibilities, and limited support systems impact their ability to achieve equilibrium between personal and professional lives.The study involves a purposive sample of married women from various professions and educational backgrounds in the Shekhawati region, with a focus on urban and semi-urban areas. Data collection methods include structured surveys and in-depth interviews to explore issues such as workplace stress, domestic workload, and societal pressures. Findings reveal significant disparities in work-life balance influenced by factors such as age, family structure, and access to support networks. Key insights highlight the role of education in empowering women to navigate their roles while emphasizing the need for policy reforms and workplace flexibility to address their challenges effectively. This study contributes to understanding the interplay between gender, employment, and societal expectations, offering practical recommendations for fostering holistic well-being among married women.

Keywords: **Work-Life Balance, Married Women, Shekhawati Region, Societal Expectations, Middle-Class Employment, Higher Education**

1.1 Background and Significance of the Study

Work-life balance has emerged as a critical issue for married women who strive to manage their professional responsibilities, family roles, and societal expectations. In India, where traditional gender roles continue to influence societal norms, the struggle for equilibrium becomes particularly pronounced. The Shekhawati region of Rajasthan, known for its cultural heritage and traditional values, presents a unique context. Women in this region often juggle multiple roles, navigating expectations of being ideal wives, mothers, and professionals while pursuing higher studies or middle-class jobs. These challenges are further compounded by the societal pressures and deeply ingrained patriarchal structures that demand compliance with traditional roles.

Achieving work-life balance is not only essential for women's mental and physical well-being but also impacts family stability, workplace productivity, and societal progress (Dwivedi Et al 46). This study explores the interplay between societal expectations, employment roles, and family responsibilities among married women in Shekhawati, offering insights into their struggles and strategies for achieving balance.

1.1.1   Scope of the Research in the Context of Shekhawati

The Shekhawati region, encompassing districts like Sikar, Jhunjhunu, and Churu, is steeped in traditional values and patriarchal norms. While educational and professional opportunities for women have grown,

societal expectations and rigid family structures remain significant barriers. This study examines the lived experiences of married women from Shekhawati, focusing on their struggles to balance higher education, employment, and familial obligations. By addressing the socio-cultural and economic dynamics unique to this region, the research sheds light on the specific challenges and opportunities faced by these women.

1.1.2 Objectives and Research Questions—The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To explore the challenges faced by married women in balancing higher education, employment, and familial roles in the Shekhawati region.

2. To examine the impact of family structure (joint vs. nuclear) and socio-economic status on women's ability to achieve work-life balance.

3. To identify strategies and coping mechanisms employed by these women to manage societal expectations and professional demands.

The research seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the key factors influencing work-life balance for married women in Shekhawati?

- How do traditional family structures and societal norms impact their ability to balance personal and professional lives?

- What strategies or support systems can be developed to enhance work-life balance for married women in this region?

This study aims to provide a deep understanding of the work-life balance challenges faced by married women in Shekhawati, contributing valuable insights to the broader discourse on gender equality and women's empowerment in India.

1.2 Work-Life Balance: Conceptual Framework

1.2.1 Definition and Theoretical Understanding of Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance refers to the ability to effectively manage professional responsibilities and personal commitments without compromising the quality of either domain. It involves striking a harmonious equilibrium between work and life, ensuring neither sphere dominates to the detriment of the other. This concept has gained prominence as societal and economic changes have led to increased participation of women in the workforce, resulting in evolving family dynamics and role expectations (Bhatia Et al. 471).

The theoretical understanding of work-life balance is often rooted in the **Role Theory**, which highlights the multiple roles individuals perform and the potential conflict or enrichment arising from overlapping responsibilities. **Work-Family Conflict Theory** further explores how role incompatibilities between work and family life create stress and imbalance. Conversely, the **Work-Life Enrichment Theory** suggests that positive experiences in one role can enhance performance in another. For married women, achieving balance is not just a personal goal but a societal necessity, given their dual roles as contributors to economic growth and caretakers of family well-being.

1.2.2 Factors Affecting Work-Life Balance for Married Women

Married women face unique challenges in managing work-life balance, influenced by a range of personal, familial, and societal factors:

1. **Family Structure**:

> ➤ **Joint Families**: Women in joint families often carry additional responsibilities, such as caring for extended family members, which can limit their professional aspirations.
> ➤ **Nuclear Families**: In nuclear setups, women are often solely responsible for household and childcare duties, increasing their workload.

2. **Societal Expectations**:

Traditional gender norms in regions like Shekhawati place significant emphasis on women as primary caregivers, leading to societal scrutiny of their professional pursuits. The expectation to fulfill traditional roles as ideal wives and mothers often adds to their stress.

3. **Professional Commitments**:

The nature of employment, workplace policies, and career aspirations significantly affect women's ability to maintain balance. Rigid work hours and lack of flexible working arrangements exacerbate challenges.

4. **Educational Aspirations**:

Women pursuing higher studies while managing family and work responsibilities face additional time constraints and emotional stress, often struggling to prioritize between personal growth and familial obligations.

5. **Economic Pressures**:

Socio-economic status plays a crucial role in shaping work-life balance. Financial constraints can necessitate dual incomes, while lack of access to childcare or domestic help further strains married women.

6. **Psychological Factors**:

Stress, guilt, and anxiety are common emotional responses among women attempting to meet conflicting demands. Personal coping mechanisms and resilience greatly influence their ability to achieve balance.

By examining these factors, the conceptual framework provides a foundation for understanding the complexities of work-life balance for married women, particularly in culturally distinct regions like Shekhawati, where traditional values and modern aspirations coexist.

1.3 Socio-Cultural Context of Shekhawati Region

1.3.1 Overview of Shekhawati's Socio-Economic and Cultural Norms

The Shekhawati region, encompassing parts of Rajasthan's Jhunjhunu, Sikar, and Churu districts, is renowned for its rich cultural heritage, traditional architecture, and historical prominence. However, it is also characterized by deeply rooted socio-cultural norms that reflect a blend of progress and conservatism. Predominantly agrarian, the region has seen significant economic development in recent decades, including the rise of small-scale industries and migration for better job opportunities (Bhatia Et al. 472).

Despite these economic advancements, Shekhawati remains a stronghold of patriarchal traditions where family honor, community ties, and cultural rituals dominate daily life. Education levels have improved over time, with many families investing in women's formal education. Yet, this progress is often juxtaposed with

limited opportunities for women's professional or personal growth, as societal expectations continue to prioritize their roles within the family.

1.3.2   Role of Gender Expectations and Societal Pressures on Married Women
In Shekhawati, gender roles are clearly defined, with women expected to conform to traditional expectations of being caregivers, homemakers, and bearers of family honor. The weight of these cultural norms places immense pressure on married women, who are often judged based on their ability to manage domestic responsibilities alongside any external pursuits (Gupta Et al. 56).

1.3.3   Marriage and Family Expectations:Married women are frequently tasked with balancing household duties, child-rearing, and extended family obligations, particularly in joint family setups.The societal emphasis on maintaining family honor often discourages women from prioritizing their personal ambitions or seeking professional opportunities.

1.3.4   Cultural Practices: Customs and rituals specific to the region, such as observing strict *purdah* (veil system) or participating in labor-intensive festivals and ceremonies, demand significant time and energy from women, further limiting their autonomy.

1.3.5   Education and Work Opportunities: While educational institutions have become more accessible, cultural barriers often restrict women from pursuing careers or higher studies. Working women in the region face scrutiny for stepping outside traditional roles, often leading to feelings of guilt and stress.

1.3.6   Patriarchal Structures: Decision-making within families is predominantly male-driven, leaving little room for women to assert independence. In nuclear families, this may shift somewhat, but societal expectations remain a constant influence.

1.3.7   Economic Contributions: Even when women contribute financially, their roles are often undervalued. Many are involved in unpaid labor within agricultural households or small family-run businesses, reinforcing the perception that their primary responsibilities lie in domestic spaces.

By examining the socio-cultural context of Shekhawati, this study highlights the unique pressures faced by married women in the region. These factors not only shape their work-life balance but also have far-reaching implications for their mental and emotional well-being (Yadav Et al. 411).

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Research Design and Approach: The study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of work-life balance among married women in the Shekhawati region. This approach allows for the integration of statistical analysis with the nuanced insights gained from personal experiences. The study aims to explore the interplay between professional responsibilities, familial expectations, and societal pressures that influence the work-life balance of women in this unique socio-cultural context.

1.4.2   Sampling Techniques and Participant Demographics
The sample for this study consists of 140 married women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation across various categories. These categories include:

1.4.3   Employment Type:
Women in higher education roles (e.g., teachers, lecturers).
Women in middle-class jobs (e.g., clerks, healthcare workers).

1.4.4   Family Structure:
Women living in joint families.
Women in nuclear families.

1.4.5   Location:
Urban areas (e.g., Sikar city).
Rural areas (e.g., villages surrounding Shekhawati).

1.4.6   Age Groups:
Women aged 25–40 years, balancing young children and careers.
Women aged 41–55 years, with older children or nearing retirement.

This sampling ensures a balanced perspective, capturing the challenges and strategies employed by women in varying life stages and circumstances.

1.5   Tools and Techniques for Data Collection and Analysis

1.5.1   Surveys and Questionnaires:A structured questionnaire is used to collect quantitative data on:
Hours spent on professional and household responsibilities.
Perceived stress levels and coping mechanisms.
Satisfaction with work-life balance.
Demographic data, including education level, income bracket, and family structure, is also gathered.

1.5.2   Interviews:
Semi-structured interviews are conducted with 30 participants to explore:
Personal experiences of managing work-life balance.
Challenges faced in meeting societal expectations.
Perceived support from family, workplace, and community.

1.5.3   Focus Group Discussions:
Two focus groups (10 participants each) are organized to delve into shared experiences and cultural nuances. Discussions highlight common barriers and potential strategies for improvement.

1.6 Findings and Analysis

This section presents the results of the study, combining quantitative data from surveys with qualitative insights from interviews and focus groups. The analysis focuses on the challenges, coping strategies, and differences in work-life balance across urban and rural participants in the Shekhawati region.

1.6.1 Quantitative Results

1.6.1.1 Hours Spent on Work and Household Responsibilities: The table below summarizes the average time allocation for professional work, household chores, and leisure among the participants:

Category	Urban Women (n=70)	Rural Women (n=70)
Professional Work (hrs/day)	8.5	6.2

Category	Urban Women (n=70)	Rural Women (n=70)
Household Chores (hrs/day)	3.8	5.5
Leisure Time (hrs/day)	2.7	1.5

Urban women spent more time on professional work but reported slightly more leisure time, while rural women dedicated more hours to household chores, indicating a significant burden of unpaid domestic work in rural areas.

1.6.1.2 Work-Life Balance Satisfaction

Participants were asked to rate their satisfaction with work-life balance on a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).

Satisfaction Level	Urban Women (%)	Rural Women (%)
Very Dissatisfied (1)	18%	25%
Dissatisfied (2)	22%	28%
Neutral (3)	20%	18%
Satisfied (4)	30%	22%
Very Satisfied (5)	10%	7%

Urban participants reported slightly higher satisfaction levels, likely due to better access to childcare services and supportive work environments.

1.6.1.3 Stress Levels

Using the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21), stress levels were categorized as low, moderate, or high.

Stress Level	Urban Women (%)	Rural Women (%)
Low	35%	20%
Moderate	50%	60%
High	15%	20%

A higher percentage of rural women reported moderate to high stress levels, highlighting the compounded impact of limited resources and societal expectations.

1.6.2 Qualitative Insights
1.6.2.1 Common Themes from Interviews and Focus Groups
1.6.2.2 Challenges in Role Balancing:Urban women cited lack of time as their primary challenge, while rural women emphasized the dual burden of farming and household chores.

1.6.2.3 Support Systems:Urban women benefitted more from external support systems such as daycare centers and flexible work policies. Rural women primarily relied on family members, particularly older female relatives.

1.6.2.4 Cultural Expectations:Both groups felt significant societal pressure to prioritize family needs over personal or professional aspirations.

1.6.2.5 Case Studies: Case studies revealed unique challenges faced by widowed women, including isolation and financial stress, and by working mothers with young children, who struggled with guilt and exhaustion.

1.6.2.6 Comparison Between Urban and Rural Participants

Parameter	Urban Women	Rural Women
Access to Support Services	Available (e.g., daycare, domestic help)	Limited or non-existent
Workplace Flexibility	More likely to have flexible policies	Rigid schedules
Household Division of Labor	Shared (in nuclear families)	Primarily on women
Perception of Work-Life Balance	Relatively positive	Often negative

Urban women had access to more structural support, but societal and familial pressures remained a challenge for both groups, affecting mental well-being and satisfaction levels.

1.7 Strategies for Achieving Work-Life Balance

1.7.1 Role of Education and Professional Growth: Education and professional development play a pivotal role in empowering women to achieve a better work-life balance:

Awareness and Skill Development: Educated women are more likely to understand the importance of time management, multitasking, and prioritization.

Career Opportunities: Higher education enhances access to professional roles that offer flexible working hours, remote work options, and better financial independence.

Confidence and Decision-Making: Education boosts self-esteem and enables women to negotiate their professional and domestic roles effectively.

1.6.3 Importance of Family Support and Flexible Work Policies: Supportive family dynamics and conducive workplace policies are essential in managing work-life challenges:
     Spousal and Family Support: Encouraging shared responsibilities in household chores reduces the burden on married women, creating a more balanced environment.
     Workplace Flexibility: Policies such as remote work, flexible schedules, and maternity leave help women navigate dual responsibilities without compromising their careers.
     Community Networks: Access to support groups and neighborhood cooperatives can offer assistance with childcare and domestic tasks.

1.6.4 Best Practices for Managing Household and Professional Responsibilities: Practical strategies for balancing work and family life include:

Time Management Tools: Utilizing planners, calendars, and digital applications to organize daily schedules efficiently.

Delegation: Sharing household tasks with family members or employing domestic help where feasible.

Self-Care and Wellness: Prioritizing mental and physical health through regular exercise, mindfulness practices, and setting personal boundaries.

Childcare Options: Utilizing daycare centers, after-school programs, or community-based childcare services to ease parenting responsibilities.

By fostering a culture of equality at home and workplace inclusivity, women in the Shekhawati region can better manage the dual demands of their personal and professional lives, contributing to their overall well-being and societal progress.

1.7 Recommendations and Policy Implications

1.8.1 Suggestions for Policymakers, Employers, and Families

<u>**Policymakers**</u>:

Introduce and enforce gender-sensitive labor laws ensuring maternity leave, flexible work hours, and equal pay.

Develop community-based childcare facilities and provide subsidies to working women in rural areas (Gupta Et al. 56)..

Organize awareness campaigns promoting gender equality within families and communities.

<u>**Employers**</u>:

Implement work-from-home options and hybrid models, especially for women managing family responsibilities.

Offer workplace counseling services and workshops on stress management and time management.

Recognize and reward companies fostering an inclusive and balanced work environment.

<u>**Families**</u>:

Encourage shared domestic responsibilities among family members to reduce the burden on women.

Promote an understanding of the importance of professional growth for women alongside familial roles.

1.8.2 Initiatives to Promote Work-Life Balance for Married Women in Shekhawati

- Establish women's support networks or cooperatives to share resources and experiences.

- Partner with NGOs to provide vocational training programs that accommodate flexible timings for women.

- Launch mentorship programs for married women to guide them on achieving a balance between work and family life.

1.9 Conclusion

1.9.1 Implications for Future Research on Work-Life Balance in Similar Socio-Cultural Contexts

The role of emerging technologies in reducing the burden of dual responsibilities.

The impact of socio-economic changes on the work-life balance of women in other culturally similar regions.

Longitudinal studies to assess the effectiveness of policy interventions and societal shifts over time.

By integrating research findings into practical initiatives, the Shekhawati region can serve as a model for fostering equitable and balanced lifestyles for married women across India.

1.9.2 **Summary of Key Findings and Insights:** The study highlights that traditional family dynamics, societal expectations, and workplace rigidity are significant challenges for married women in Shekhawati. Education, family support, and flexible policies emerge as critical enablers for achieving work-life balance. Differences in urban and rural experiences underline the need for tailored interventions.

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