

THE TYRANNY OF MODERN MOTHERS: UNDERSTANDING THE LIVED REALITIES OF MOTHERHOOD AMONG MIDDLE-CLASS PROFESSIONAL WOMEN IN DHAKA

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Abstract

Motherhood, which generally relates to a combination of joy, pleasure, and fulfilment, frequently defines the social status of women within their families and communities. Although as a social institution, motherhood provides women with expanded authority and responsibilities, these are frequently defined by gendered social norms and behaviours. As a result, there is a significant disparity between the myths and celebratory appeal of motherhood and the everyday realities that mothers encounter. Particularly, among Dhaka's middle-class, where professional mothers are expected to strike a balance between their personal and professional roles, the challenges and constraints of motherhood double. In Bangladesh, the societal pressure on women to become mothers and fulfil their obligations results in a gendered division of labour and multifaceted problems that hardly received adequate attention in existing feminist literature. This empirical study explored the meanings and manifestations of motherhood, as well as the tension, role conflict, and dilemma that middle-class mothers in Dhaka encounter in everyday personal and professional lives. Guided by the principles of feminist research methodology, this qualitative study employed twenty-five Life History Interviews (LHI) and two Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with professional mothers in Dhaka. The results of this ethnographic study indicate that professional mothers in Dhaka experience challenges with household chores, caregiving roles, and professional responsibilities, which add a triple burden to their everyday lives.

Keywords: Motherhood, Professional Middle-Class Women, Role Conflict, Lived Experiences, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Introduction

The concept of motherhood is universally associated with women since this role has historically been performed by women. It has been presumed since the nineteenth century that motherhood is the primary identity of most adult women.

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There is a common thread in the definitions of motherhood, such as the social practises of nurturing and caring for dependent children. A mother is typically viewed as the individual responsible for the relational and logistical aspects of childrearing. According to Arendell (2000), motherhood is a set of socially constructed nurturing and compassionate relationships and activities. Chodorow (1978) asserts that motherhood and notions of femininity are commonly regarded as identical status and experience categories for women.

The key texts of second-wave feminism addressed the forms of motherhood inherited from the 1950s, freeing caring practises from essentialist and oppressive conceptions of motherhood and femininity (for example, Rich, 1976; Chodorow, 1978; Ruddick, 1980). In the 1980s and 1990s, the explosion of feminist social history and policy analysis was crucial to recognising the role of different social institutions such as religion, law and the state in regulating women's role as mothers (Woollett & Phoenix, 1996). In the late 1990s, the commodities frontier of global capitalism altered the private sphere and the concept of the heterosexual nuclear family (Silva, 2000). Since then, as a result of the altering family structure, the definition of motherhood has also evolved (Hochschild, 1997; Bailey, 2000).

Motherhood is one of the few aspects of the sexual and reproductive division of labour that is eternally universal (Chodorow, 1978). The universal obligation of women to rear the next generation and care for the current one is socio-cultural, not biological. As an institution, motherhood is crucial in all societies in which the biological capacity of women to produce life has evolved into a culturally accepted mode of thought and behaviour (Schrijvers, 1985). Feminist scholars have written about mothers and mothering in a wide variety of categories and theoretical perspectives (Kawash, 2011). The research on motherhood is, therefore, diverse. In this research, I tried to comprehend a context-specific conception of motherhood, the myths and mystiques of maternal experience, desire, or subjectivity, and its deconstruction in recent years by middle-class professional mothers in Dhaka. The primary objective of this research, therefore, is to understand how middle-class professional women in Dhaka experience motherhood and the resulting conflict, dilemma, and ambivalence in their personal and professional life.

This article is divided into three sections. The first section describes the research design and data collection procedures. The second section summarises contemporary conceptions of motherhood based on a review of relevant scholarly works. The concluding section presents the findings and analysis of this empirical study.

Research Design and Data Collection

Data collection in this research began in 2012 when I conducted a six-month ethnographic study on motherhood among professional women in Dhaka as part of my research monograph. Since then, my interest in understanding the shifts of femininity, especially in the urban middle class kept growing, which led me to observe the changes in professional women's everyday lives from a feminist lens in recent years. As part of my PhD research in 2018, I re-examined the current shifts in motherhood and developed a thorough understanding of the perceptions and experiences of motherhood among professional middle-class women in urban Dhaka.

Given that feminist methodology employs considerable evidence of reality against which hypotheses are tested (Harding, 1987), this study utilised a feminist approach to provide empirical evidence of mothers' everyday experiences. The use of feminist approaches not only helped in the exploration of empirical evidence on women's experience, but also incorporated my own emotion, social position, and subjective interpretation as a feminist researcher. In accordance with feminist traditions and practices, this research included qualitative methods such as the Life History Interview (LHI) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) which will be briefly discussed below. The objective of the qualitative data collection was to understand the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours of professional women regarding motherhood and their real-life experiences.

The sections that follow describe the methods of data collection and analysis, the location and demographic profile of the participants, and the ethics associated with this research process.

Research Location and Target Population

In this section, first I explain my field location, Dhaka, and summarise the socio-economic and geographical landscapes of the middle-class neighbourhoods where I conducted my fieldwork. The target population for this study consists of middle-class professional women between the ages of 25 and 45 in Dhaka. Among twenty-five Life History Interviews (LHI), five were conducted among women who taught in schools and colleges, such as Viqarunnisa Noon School and College and Habibullah Bahar University College. I have also conducted ten LHIs among women based in banks and a private media such as Channel I. The remaining LHIs were conducted with women from international and local development organisations, such as Save the Children, STEPS towards Development, and Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB).

In addition to time and resource constraints, the selection of Dhaka as the target location was influenced by the city's dynamic socio-economic terrain. According to Hubbard (2013), vibrant images of cities are frequently a source of data regarding the most prevalent representations and behavioural shifts of its citizens. As the nation's capital, Dhaka has become the epicentre of a growing economy over the past several decades, transforming it into one of the world's fastest-growing cities. Additionally, enormous population growth along Dhaka's major highways and the construction of high-rises as part of urbanisation initiatives have resulted in a dramatic shift in family ties over the past decade. Therefore, it was of interest to me to investigate how shifts in gendered social lives in this dynamic city influence the experiences of professional mothers.

Research Methods

This research followed an ethnographic approach to analyse the lived realities of motherhood among middle-class professional women in Dhaka, Bangladesh. To accomplish this, I conducted twenty-five life history interviews (LHIs) and two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with six participants each.

In this research, the LHI was applied to mothers in Dhaka with a variety of professional roles to collect data on women's perceptions and challenges of motherhood in their everyday lives. Life history is typically viewed as the narrative of a singular individual told from a particular vantage point (Harrison, 2009). Life History Interview is a prominent research method because it provides an articulate voice and an authentic lens for research that endeavours to extract data on everyday life. In recent decades, LHI has acquired popularity as a method of articulating the voice of the marginalised, particularly among feminists. The life history method challenges the fetishization of certainty and objectivity in traditional epistemologies because individual experiences are inherently political and intertwined with power relations (Dhunpath, 2000). This method also seeks to bridge the gap between the personal and the political, the story and its context, the narrator and the narrated, as well as identification and representation (Goodson, 2001). The LHIs were conducted in middle-class neighbourhoods, including Dhanmondi, Mohammadpur, Mirpur, Agargaon, Shahbag, Baily Road, Uttara, and Tejgaon.

In addition to the LHIs, I conducted two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with professional women in Dhaka. FGD, as a qualitative method of social research, facilitates in the understanding of group dynamics as a social process. In this process, group members work together to develop an account of themselves and

their ideas at a particular time and place (Lewin & Somekh, 2011). This approach is found useful for feminist scholars investigating context-based gendered experiences. In this research, FGDs were conducted in order to elicit critical reflections from participants and develop a common understanding of working mothers' everyday lives. One of the FGDs was held in Dhanmondi, while the other was held in Mohammadpur.

Ethical Considerations

In feminist research, ethical considerations merit particular attention. Following that, a great deal of consideration has been given to the issue of ethics in this research. As a feminist researcher, I adopted the position of respecting the participants' rights, interests, values, and desires. Prior to contacting my participants, I considered their comfort and convenience. During data collection in the neighbourhood of the participants, I considered their working hours, the distance between their residences and places of employment, and Dhaka's severe traffic congestion. In this study, research objectives and a description of how data will be used were provided to the participants. A consent letter was developed in order to obtain the participants' formal permission to share their personal information before conducting the interviews. The consent form was also read to help participants understand the entire data collection process and accompanying devices. The majority of interviews were conducted in Bengali, the official language of Bangladesh, with a couple conducted in both Bangla and English for good measure.

Conceptual Clarification

This section provides a coherent theoretical perspective on the institution of motherhood, which has emerged as a distinct body of knowledge over the past few decades. To understand the significance of this institution in determining women's personal and professional roles, this section addresses the conflict between the existing conception of motherhood and the reality. In order to do so, I evaluate the meaning of motherhood in various contexts and how it is shifting across generations. In trying to understand the changes in the historical construction of motherhood and the shifts in professional women's lives, the institution of the family has been used as an analytical unit and entry point to the larger social and historical landscape.

As an institution, motherhood facilitates the transformation of women's inherent capacity to reproduce into a broader, cultural pattern of thought and conduct

(Schrijvers, 1985). Since the 20th century, the term 'mother' has primarily referred to a female as a biological parent who has been traditionally responsible for childrearing, with little emphasis on the role of males. According to Oakley (1974), women's mothering roles are almost immutable; as a result, their position in the family is predicated on motherhood. In recent decades, the gendered construction of women's roles and responsibilities in their personal and professional lives has been demonstrated and debated. In feminist debates and discussions, the social construction of motherhood and the subjectivity of mothers have been addressed repeatedly.

The concept of a 'good mother' influences the conflict between the reality of motherhood and societal expectations. As the primary carers of society's children, women are responsible not only for childbearing, but also for providing for their basic requirements and fostering their socialisation. De Beauvoir (1997) stated in "Second Sex" that the biologically determined unequal division of reproductive labour is the underlying cause of women's oppression. De Beauvoir (1997) also argued that by placing additional responsibilities on women, society restricts their identity as 'other,' limiting their access to the public sphere and rendering them powerless. According to Chodorow (1978), motherhood is one of the few common aspects of women's existence that reinforces the gender division of labour. This division of labour not only makes women responsible for rearing the next generation but also highlights the socio-cultural aspects of introducing a new or increased level of authority within the household. Chodorow's (1978) emphasis on the mother-child relationship was essential for understanding the crisis and difficulties faced by working mothers.

Occupational Changes are also vividly seen in middle class working women. Rather than selecting only feminine types of professions like teaching, nursing, receptionists etc most of them are now involved in many challenging professions, including e.g., media, corporate house multinationals, NGOs, GOs and INGOs. Ultimately a job has broadened their vision and their autonomy from the household drudgery. In spite of bearing all the odds and pain, tension and crisis women do not want to go back to their traditional role in the household. Therefore, the male breadwinner model, which dominated both policy assumptions and social ideals in the post-war welfare state, is increasingly being supplanted by an adult worker family model. In this new model, both men and women are assumed to be primarily workers in the employment sector, who as fathers and mothers pool their earned income into supporting children.

There is abundant evidence of work-family role conflict and identity dilemmas for mothers from a range of occupational groups in the United States and the United Kingdom. Greenhaus and Kopelman (1981) reported, there is evidence of role conflict in men's lives also. They reported that there is no difference between male managers with employed and unemployed wives in the amount of work-family conflict, but those married to managerial or professional women, who may exert more pressure for egalitarian relationships, reported more role conflict than other men. Thus, in dual-earner lifestyles both the spouses in demanding occupations create substantial conflict, while women report conflict, irrespective of their type of occupation (Lewis & Cooper, 1988). Traditional expectations concerning gender roles create the potential for role ambiguity and conflict for dual-earner parents and may be a source of considerable stress. Attitudes toward the maternal role are such that employed mothers experience the greatest role strain and consequently may be particularly vulnerable to psychological ill health.

Literature review shows features of the role of working women perceived as quite distinct from the other roles of men and women. The potential for role strain associated with parenthood may begin prior to the birth of a first child and the widely held expectations that childbirth marks the end of a woman's career, if only temporarily, impose considerable pressure. The socio-cultural perspective in Bangladesh clearly reflects this gender division of labour. Although feminist researchers in Bangladesh have prioritised maternal mortality, infertility, and other maternal health-related issues, there has been very little insight into how the social construction of motherhood impacts women's everyday lives. They have not yet paid sufficient attention to the anxiety and ambiguity of women's roles in their everyday lives, particularly in the context of the middle class, where most women are now engaged in professional roles. Considering this, the research focuses on the question of women's subjectivity and myths of femininity in the professional middle-class context of Bangladesh.

From my review of the literature, I found that the experiences of motherhood varied according to various categories, including marital status (single, married), family structure (nuclear, joint), as well as professional categories. In addition, my research suggests that when analysing the mothering status of women in Bangladesh, class diversity, which poses significant challenges to the domestic and professional lives of women, must be taken into account. Therefore, the concept of motherhood must be re-examined and incorporated into our extant feminist epistemologies from a class perspective that has received inadequate attention.

The definition of middle class depends on a variety of factors, including economic independence and social influence as well as power. It is traditionally considered a class between the working class and the upper class. In the context of the middle class, the term class is frequently used to refer to an economic stratum, a *descriptive statistics of income categories* within a society (Stoffel, 2016). Melber (2017) focused solely on economic factors, disregarding ideological concepts, lifestyle choices, and social status factors that contribute to middle class status. In countries such as Bangladesh, where the middle class is associated with subjective experiences such as a sense of belonging, bargaining power, shared values, and acting in accordance with shared agendas, the middle class cannot be measured exclusively by income statistics.

To define middle class, I, therefore, relied primarily on the self-identification of my participants based on their income, education, and family status. To identify participants for this study, I utilised a snowball sampling technique. This was done to ensure that there were no significant differences in attitudes between demographic groups (Dasandi, 2015). In order to account the fluidity and diversity of the middle class, I considered women with varying incomes, occupations, and living conditions. For instance, the earnings of my participants ranged from 30,000 to 80,000 Bangladeshi Taka (BDT). And their living arrangements ranged from nuclear to joint families in various neighbourhoods, including Dhanmondi, Mohammadpur, Uttara, and Bailey Road.

Following discussion explores working mother's role conflicts and challenges within household.

Findings and Analysis

This study examined how traditional conceptions of motherhood impose a double burden on the personal and professional lives of working mothers in Dhaka. The study found that working mothers' personal and professional roles frequently lead to role conflicts and role strains in their daily lives. Professional mothers in a variety of designated positions are expected to strike a balance between their contradictory roles at home and in the workplace. Their pursuits, aspirations, and individual planning are constrained by societal norms, values, and other responsibilities. In order to comprehend the multifaceted personal and professional responsibilities of working mothers in Dhaka's professional middle class, I have created the following diagram. The diagram, derived from fieldwork, depicts the role conflict and role strain professional mothers experience in their everyday lives.

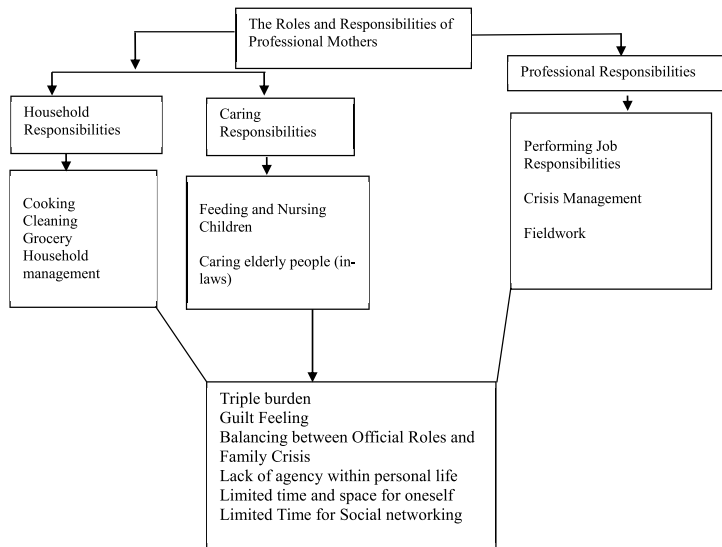


Diagram 1 -Everyday Life of a Professional Mother

The findings of this study are divided into two sections. The first section discusses the challenges mothers confront within the family, including space, leisure, and authority issues, as well as the joys and sorrows of motherhood. The second section focuses on the issues of motherhood in their professional lives, including attitudes and dynamics of motherhood at the organisational level, and the policies associated to this.

The Lived Realities of Professional Mothers in their Personal Lives

In this section, I discuss how working mothers’ exposure in the public world leads to questioning their role as home maker and carers within families and their lived experiences as a result.

Working Mothers and Household Responsibilities: Who Does What?

This study revealed that the hours working women devote daily to household, such as cooking, washing, and cleaning, are typically considered unpaid domestic labour. There are two significant and interrelated aspects of domestic labour. First, it is performed primarily by women, and second, it has a low status. The participants concurred that cooking, washing, and housekeeping are primarily women’s responsibilities, regardless of income. During a FGD in Mohammadpur, participants, including schoolteachers and bankers, shared their personal experiences.

Rina and Sabina, who both work in private banks, reported that their spouses occasionally assist with housekeeping, even though they are responsible for the majority of domestic duties. In contrast, the remaining FGD participants reported that their spouses were never interested in household responsibilities, instead told them that,

The household is the domain of women, and they should take full responsibility prior to committing to professional roles. Cooking, cleaning are the low status works that do not suit men being the head of the household!

Despite such challenges, it was found in the FGD with women in Dhanmondi that working mothers yet continued their work. Khushi (34), a mother of two works in a local NGO also confessed about her life as a working mother. She stated that before going to the office each day, she is responsible for preparing, cleaning, and organising the house. However, she does so in order to continue her career, which she believes gives her a sense of empowerment despite adding stress to their daily lives. According to Khushi,

Economic empowerment is something that has given me the strength to earn my freedom and dignity, as well as the ability to fight for my rights over life choices. Although it is a nightmare to continue such terrible life while performing the triple roles, I cannot think of losing my job.

Other FGD participants, like Khushi, identified economic independence, self-respect, and family welfare as the factors that motivate them to continue working despite the difficulties at home.

Professional Mothers and their Guilt Feelings- Is the Caring Career in Question?

Women in Bangladesh continue to bear the arduous, often disheartening responsibility of caring for adult and elderly family members, which is a heavy burden. Bithi (29) has just begun her career as a development professional. It took her a while to locate a job because she married before completing her higher education and had two children in the meantime. "Finding a suitable job for women, particularly mothers, is a further challenge," she said. For a working mother like Bithi, it is highly challenging to juggle responsibilities at the office and at home. Bithi's mother-in-law is opposed to her job because it consumes her entire day and prevents her from caring for her children and in-laws as she once did. While Bithi is determined to continue her career, she often feels that she is failing as both a professional woman and a decent mother and wife at home as a result of these incidents.

It was found from the research that working mothers' tension and feelings of guilt interfere with their concentration at work. As working hours necessitate lengthy absences from home, the majority of working mothers feel they are causing injustice to their children. The inability to provide proper care, adequate nutrition for healthy growth, and appropriate socialisation for their children, as well as security concerns, causes them anxiety. In the focus group interviews with mothers in Mohammadpur, it was revealed that they had to make numerous daily arrangements to maintain a balance between their responsibilities. For instance, mothers who breastfed their children were required to find employment closer to their families so they could return quickly during lunch to feed their children.

For the majority of working mothers, each morning's commute to the office is a struggle. Some of them need to hurry to keep their children with their parents, while others have to depend on neighbours. As a result, the majority of women are frequently compelled to quit their jobs. This study explored the role conflicts and challenges faced primarily by working mothers in nuclear families. It examined how the lack of assistance from family members in child upbringing makes their lives more difficult. It frequently forces them to locate an alternative source of care for their children during office hours. Their search for helpful neighbours, relatives, or domestic assistance is therefore a common occurrence. Naila (35) is a single mother, working in an NGO expressed her grief. The travel to office in each morning is difficult for Naila, as it is for the majority of women. Before she goes to work, she has to rush to her mother's house to leave her daughter. When her mother departs to her part-time job, Naila's commute to the office becomes more challenging. She expressed her anguish by stating,

I feel helpless when I see my mother and daughter in pain due to my career. I cannot feed my daughter, nor can I accompany her when necessary. If I did not have any financial concern, I would leave this job and choose the life of a housewife.

The absence of a mother at home has an effect on children's social security and mental and psychological development. When mother and mother-in-law, neighbours, or relatives are unable to assist, working mothers have to put their children in the care of domestic workers. When daughters are left at home with domestic workers, the protection of their children is of the utmost concern. Children growing up in a confined setting are often preoccupied with cartoons, and social networks result in a lack of life values and becoming self-centred. Such tensions and feelings of guilt frequently manifest as psychological disorders or hypertension in mothers.

This traditional role conflicts with professional roles and responsibilities for working women. Eventually, they lose social contact and frequently avoid social gatherings and recreation with extended family. Mishu (33), an NGO employee, remarked, "I avoid social gatherings as much as possible because I find them to be challenging. I could not even get home early on the birthday of my own daughter. It becomes impossible to entertain guests or relatives on special occasions".

In the corporate and media sectors, where women frequently work more than eight hours a day, their family life is more constrained. They have fewer opportunities to resolve their children's emotional needs. According to the mothers, the only way to compensate is to buy gifts for the children or prepare their favourite foods on the weekend. Tonni (37), a media professional, stated that her responsibilities as a news reporter have no set schedule. Due to the nature of her work, she is always unable to attend the school's parents' meeting for her daughter. Due to her inaccessibility, inconvenience, and security concerns, she was compelled to cancel the idea of transferring her daughter to a better school in another location. Tonni is less concerned about her daughter's safety, nutrition, and school attendance so long as she remains in her current neighbourhood. Instead of concentrating on her child's better schooling, she chose to value the privileges she receives from her neighbours.

The Dilemmas of Working Mothers in Their Professional Lives

According to the collected data, more than ninety percent of mothers pursued professional occupations upon their child's enrolment in school. The dearth of gender-based policies in most institutions and the absence of childcare facilities frequently posed obstacles in their everyday lives. As a result, mothers with pre-school-aged children often sacrificed their careers in favour of teaching or other flexible part-time work.

By analysing the responses of all participants, I tried to figure out how much time these women have to spend in their offices. News Reporters, for instance, are frequently required to work nearly twelve hours per day. Women in private organisations have to work approximately nine hours per day in the office. After spending so much time at work, it can be taxing and difficult to focus on domestic matters. Women who work in NGOs and other research organisations spend an average of eight hours per day in the office but frequently have to put in extra time to complete their responsibilities because some of them leave the office for an hour to collect up their children from school or to breast feed. Frequently, it is

impossible for these working mothers to devote adequate time to their children and equally time-consuming domestic responsibilities.

In the majority of Bangladeshi organisations, gender policy and its implementation are not a central focus. There is still a paucity of implementation of the benefit of maternity leave in the public sphere. Although gender policies exist on paper in many organisations, they do not exist in practice. Some non-governmental organisations provide a “lactating period” for nursing mothers instead of a creche. Due to traffic and other family issues, it is not always convenient for a working mother to go home and return within a brief period of time. Due to these obstacles, working mothers sometimes avoid overtime, field work, training, and other pressures that necessitate outgoing work. To avoid this issue, many working women give up their jobs in favour of less taxing, closer-to-home positions.

As a result of their challenge to keep their jobs, working mothers are desperate to obtain additional benefits from their employers, such as a crèche, transportation, and flexible work hours. The participants asserted that women who do not have children are free to consider their career advancement, negotiate their salary, promotion, and increase their productivity. Particularly when a woman becomes pregnant, it becomes extremely difficult for her to continue and maintain her performance. Fatema’s (34) pregnancy caused her difficulty at work. She commented that, “as pregnancy is a physical, mental, and psychological change in a woman’s everyday life, sympathy from family members and colleagues is essential, but this is not always the case. In the office, where there is no elevated toilet, it can be challenging to use the loo. Therefore, the entire process of balancing a career and a family requires perseverance, integrity, and difficulty”.

At the organisational level, there is a lack of concern for the health and well-being of working women. A pregnant woman’s psycho-social development receives inadequate attention at the workplace. The post-pregnancy issues, such as the ‘blue period,’ which causes women to feel incapable of managing their infant and other responsibilities, are also extremely important. Although psychosocial care and attention are especially important during and after pregnancy, lactating mothers often experience shame in the workplace due to their breast changes and nutrition concerns.

But what happens after fulfilling household chores and professional responsibilities? Working mothers who are double- and frequently triple-burdened lack leisure time for recreation and health care in the majority of cases. As a result, women

experience elevated levels of stress and anxiety and are unable to fulfil their domestic and professional obligations. For the vast majority of working mothers, socialising with friends or family is unimaginable. Working mothers, particularly those with young children, have little time for themselves. Due to their familial responsibilities, they lose interest in social networking. Papia (32), a schoolteacher, was outgoing and used to organise gatherings for her friends on special occasions. Before she became a mother, she used to make plans with her friends to attend the *Ekushey Boimela* every year. Now, she no longer remembers the last time she attended the book fair.

As a result of losing contact with friends and family, many working mothers now prefer to be friends with their neighbours or other parents at their child's school, according to my discussions with mothers. Shaila, an employee of an NGO who relocated to Dhaka following her marriage, lost her familial network in the last five years. Therefore, she began interacting with her neighbours and school guardians, who assisted her in picking up and dropping off her child when she was preoccupied at work.

According to Tanu (32) who works in a business company,

Creating a space for oneself after meeting all the social and family expectations is another journey of struggle. We both worked full-time and except for the weekend it was hard to manage quality time for us. But my in-laws always expected me to spend time the whole weekend with them, which was not something interesting to me. I always wanted to visit some nice places with my husband during the weekend but could not plan any vacation without the whole family. This was stressing our couple relationship and after lots of discussions and arguments, I have decided to separate my weekends.

As a result of these obstacles, the study's findings also disclosed a negative attitude towards motherhood, as many of the respondents emphasised the biological discomfort that threw their lives into disarray and frequently enriched or damaged them. Taking into consideration pregnancy-related discomforts at work, such as being overweight, unable to move or kneel, and vomiting, many working women have compared motherhood to a state of discomfort.

Conclusion

In this study, I examined the lived experiences of middle-class professional women in Dhaka and the challenges they face in their personal and professional lives. In the last two decades, particularly in the urban middle class, the number of women in the workforce has increased dramatically. While this has been viewed as a sign

of women's economic empowerment, the study's findings reveal what is really happening behind the scenes. It is true that women's mobility and financial advantages have increased, but their empowerment in their personal and private trajectories has been hampered by numerous obstacles. Unfavourable employment patterns, job segregation, low pay, and low status in the parameters of women's paid work are common characteristics of working women's participation in the public arena, according to the findings of this study. The fact that women have less access to mobility, security, promotion, decision-making options, leave, and benefits, as well as sexual harassment, is also a cause for concern. In addition, horizontal and vertical segregation patterns have remained unchanged for decades (Hakim, 1979; Coyel, et al., 1988). Multiple studies on professional stress have demonstrated that changes in perception, attitude, norms, values, and organizational behaviour may be effective in mitigating such a tense situation.

Due to a lack of time, it was not possible to consider professional women in fields such as the civil service, medicine, and public and private universities. To make the study more representative, an effort will be made in the near future to examine other professions and interview a large number of working women in order to identify their challenges and dilemmas. Through identifying these issues, proper initiatives need to be taken to ensure women's holistic empowerment. Reformulation of public policy, for instance, could play a significant role in reducing maternal guilt. Through encouraging fathers to perform more domestic chores and unpaid care work, it may be possible to significantly reduce working mothers' stress and triple burden. This will ultimately increase women's productivity and allow them to spend more quality time with their families.

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