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Investigating Role Strain, Well-Being and Health Problems of Dual Earner Couples



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Abstract

In the recent years, the participation of women in work force has increased considerably. Working women face more difficulties due to dual work i.e. paid work outside the home and unpaid domestic labor and child-care inside the home, both of which may occupy many hours each day. This situation results in role strain and the detrimental effects on women's health due to the unequal division of labor within the home. The present study was carried out in Jaipur city of Rajasthan state. Total 400 respondents (200 couples= 200 husbands and 200 wives) were selected. Data were analyzed using SPSS 16.0. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. Results of Independent t-test shows that females experienced higher level of role strain, and had poor well-being and some health problems like anxiety, depression, sadness, irritability, body pain, thumping heart, giddiness, tiredness etc. as compare to males. Bivariate analysis and Pearson Correlation Coefficient result shows a negative correlation between role strain and subjective well-being. There was a positive correlation between role strain and health problems. This indicates that compared to men, women are expected to work more as homemakers and caregivers. Thus, while facing incompatibility between work and family roles, women may feel more role strain than men. These situations could be harmful to one's mental and physical well-being. Consequently, the combination of employment and family roles may well have more impact on health for women than for men.

Keywords: Dual Earner Couples, Role Strain, Well-Being, Health Problems.

Introduction

Today women expect to gain life satisfaction from occupational roles as well. They are entering the labour force in large numbers. In today's world the women have dual role i.e. the occupational role while at the same time the major responsibility for home. The men expected their wives to be homemakers and child rearers. Evidences indicate that today's women are preparing themselves for future work with the expectation of combining family and household activities with regular employment (Mary, Van and Somuel, 1982). Women have a dual role to play, when they take up jobs they have to take care of their homes along with their outside employment. This leads to scarcity of time and energy which may put strain on them and affect their mental and physical well being.

One of the most commonly researched problems of dual-earner couples is work and family role strain. Many dual-earner couples experience role strain because of the gendered stereotypes they have adapted from societal expectations and norms (Silverstein, Auerbach, & Levant, 2002). The work and home interface creates much strain for the dual-earner woman because of the different role expectations and demands on her time. It is not surprising that dual-earner women suffer from role strain, poor well-being and health problems. Dual-earner women do not have time to perform the tasks of the different roles incumbent on them resulting in a compromise of some degree in one or more roles. This tends to have an impact on either their work or personal life.

The effect of multiple roles on women's psychological well-being remains controversial (Arber, 1991 and Avison, 1995). Although it is well recognized that women's social roles affect their mental health, it is unclear whether the effects are beneficial or detrimental (McBride, 1988). Traditionally, this research has been conducted within two competing hypotheses: role strain theory proposes that because each person has limited time and energy, women with multiple roles often experience "role

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conflict," which results in harmful effects on their mental and physical health (Froberg et al, 1986 and Gove, 1984). The opposing theory suggests that each additional role brings benefits, including increased social contacts and self-esteem, which contribute to better health and greater psychological wellbeing (Barunch and Barnett, 1986).

More recent research indicates that involvement in each role has both harmful and beneficial effects, and the balance between these varies depending on the characteristics of the role, the specific combination of roles, and the socio-economic context of women's lives (Barnett and Marshall, 1991). Socio-economic status creates different experiences and exposures in daily life and these, in turn, have consequences for women's psychological health (Moss, 2002 and Matthew et al 2001). In terms of combinations of roles, there is mixed evidence as to the effects of various combinations on women's psychological well-being. Although more roles often protect mental health, certain combinations can also lead to strain (Barnett, 1997 and Maclean et al. 2004).

Objectives:

1. To find out the difference between husbands and wives in role strain.
2. To find out the difference between husbands and wives in their subjective well-being.
3. To find out the difference between husbands and wives in perceived health problems.
4. To find out the relationship between role strain and subjective well-being of husbands and wives.
5. To find out the relationship between role strain and health problems of husbands and wives.

Methodology

Design

The study on impact of role strain on dual earner couples' health and well-being was conducted in Jaipur city of Rajasthan state.

Sample

According to Jaipur Municipal Corporation Jaipur city is divided into eight zones i.e. Mansarovar zone, Motidungari zone, Hawamahal-East, Vidyadharnagar, Civil Line, Hawamahal-West, Aamer zone and Sanganer zone. Total 400 respondents- 200 wives and 200 husbands were selected for the study. Twenty-five female respondents and their husbands were purposively selected from each zone. The female respondents were purposively selected from their working places and selection of the male respondents on the basis of female respondents. The selection of the respondents were based on following criteria- (1) nuclear family (2) husband-wife and at least one child living together (3) youngest child below 12 years of age and (4) husband – wife both having at least eight hours job period.

Instruments

1. To assess role strain of the female spouses 'Women's Role strain Inventory' developed by Lengacher and Sellers in 2003 was used. To assess role strain of the male spouses a questionnaire was prepared by the investigator on the basis of 'Women's Role strain Inventory'.

The role strain inventory consisted of total 44 items. A five point Likert rating scales with responses of strongly agree, frequently agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree and rating scale 1-5 was used. In the 44 item inventory there was a possible range of the items from 44-220 points, with 44 indicating absolutely no role strain and 220 indicating complete role strain.

2. In the study, for assessing the well-being of the dual-earner couples, the Subjective Well-Being Inventory (SWBI) developed by Nagpal and Sell in 1985 was used. SWBI consists of 40 items, 19 of these elicit positive affect i.e. whether one feels happy or good or satisfied about particular life concerns. The remaining 21 items elicit negative affect, i.e. unhappiness or worry or regret about a particular life concern. All the 40 items permit three response categories, very positive, positive and neutral (or negative) affirmation for the positive items and very negative, negative and neutral (or positive) assertion for the negative items.
3. In the study, for assessing the health problems of the dual-earner couples, a questionnaire was prepared by investigator on the basis of SWBI. Health problems questionnaire consisted of 15 items with three response categories i.e. very much/ most of the time, to some extent/ sometime and not so much/ hardly ever and rating scale 3-1 was used. Finally two packets of the questionnaire were prepared by the investigator, one for female spouses and other for male spouses.

Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents in their working places after the permission of their managing director along with written and verbal instruction that explained the nature and scope of the study. Two sets of the questionnaire were distributed to each respondent, one for their own and other for their spouse. Respondents were requested to complete the questionnaire without discussing their responses with others. After few days questionnaire were collected by investigator.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS 16.0 statistical tools and descriptive and inferential statistics were used. To analyse the level of role strain and subjective well-being of male and female spouses', numbers and percentages were used. To analyse the difference between male and female regarding role strain, subjective well-being and health problems, mean, standard deviation and Independent T-test were used. To analyse the relationship between role strain and subjective well-being and role strain and health problems of male and female spouses, Bivariate analysis and Pearson Correlation Coefficient were used.

Result and Discussion

Role Strain of Spouses

Many researches in the west on dual earner couples indicate considerable amount of role strain for

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the current day couples, especially the female spouse. Role theorists maintain that the amount of role strain experienced by a working woman depends on the degree of her commitment to different roles and the role reward value expected by her from these roles. When a working woman expects to gain life satisfaction from more than one role, especially the occupational role along with other traditional roles of hers, the likelihood of role strain increases.

Table- 1. Level of Role Strain of Respondents
N=400 (200+200)

S. No.	Level of Role Strain	Wife		Husband	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1.	High	134	67	86	43
2.	Average	66	33	112	56
3.	High	0	0	2	1
	Total	200	100	200	100

This table clearly indicates that more than half (67 %) of the wives experienced high level of role strain, while only 43 percent husbands were in this category. Majority (56 %) of the husbands and 33 percent wives encountered an average level of role strain. It is also highlighted in the above table that wives either have average or high level of role strain whereas 1 percent husbands show low level of role strain. One of the possible conclusions for this table is that male spouses (husbands) experienced a lower level of role strain compared to their female spouses (wives). Here percentage of females' experiencing role strain is also higher than that of males'. Which clarifies females also experienced high role strain as compared to males. This indicates that increased levels of engagement in multiple roles are burdensome and increases strain among women. These findings support those of **Humphrey et al (2006)**, who found that women experienced more role strain due to multiple roles than men.

Table- 2. Difference in Role Strain Among Female and Male Spouse
N=400 (200+200)

S. No.	Gender	Mean	S.D.	T-Value	Level of significance
1.	Females (Wives)	170.06	16.870	9.603	0.01
2.	Males (Husbands)	151.56	21.391		

Table- 2 shows difference in the aspect of role strain among female and male spouse. The difference in scores related to role strain is quite apparent in male and female spouses. The mean score of females was 170.06 as compared to mean score of males was 151.56. The T- test to understand the differences in the mean score of role strain felt by the respondents indicates that there was statistically significant difference between the male and female spouses. It was significant at 0.01 level. It indicates that in dual-earner families females experienced higher level of role strain as compared to their husbands. This could be due to the fact that balancing career and family roles and commitments has been a

difficult issue for most working women because of society's expectation of women to continue to fulfill their traditional roles in addition to their work responsibilities. Under these circumstances, individuals have to face the role strain. These results also supported by Bird and Bird (1986) and Dahiya (1992) they observed that the wives experienced a significantly higher level of internal role strain than did husbands because of multiple responsibilities and lack of time for socializing with friends and leisure. Wives' level of external role strain was also higher, but not significantly so.

Subjective Well-Being of Spouses

Generally, subjective well-being is the overall field that attempts to understand how people evaluate their own lives and includes variables such as life satisfaction and marital satisfaction, lack of depression and anxiety, and positive moods and emotions (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). A large number of studies in dual earner families reveal a lower level of life satisfaction for dual earner couples. This is especially true of the female spouse as she has multiple roles to play.

Table- 3.
Status of Subjective Well-Being of Respondents
N=400 (200+200)

S. No.	Status of SWB	Females (Wives)		Males (Husbands)	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1.	Good	85	42.5	165	82.5
2.	Medium	114	57	35	17.5
3.	Poor	1	0.5	0	0
	Total	200	100	200	100

Above table clearly indicates that majority (82.5 %) of the male spouses' showed good status of well being as compared to 42.5 percent females. However 57 percent females and 17.5 percent males experienced medium status of well-being. A striking feature of the above table is that none of the male spouse attributes a poor status of well-being whereas 0.5 percent wives exhibit poor status of well-being. This is an indication of the fact that females spouses showed a poor well-being compared to their male counterparts. The reason is that, Indian working women have dual responsibility of concentrating on the family and work. The men expect their wives to be homemakers and child-rearers and at the same time continue to work outside home for earning. Thus women have a dual role to play, when they take up jobs they have to take care of their homes along with their outside employment. This leads to scarcity of time and energy which may put strain on them and affect their mental and physical well being. Such findings are in agreement with those of Greenberger and O'Neil (1993), who stated that men reported higher levels of well-being than women and women reported significantly higher levels of depressive symptoms, role strain and higher levels of anxiety than men.

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Table- 4.
Difference in Subjective Well-Being Among Female and Male Spouse

N=400 (200+200)

S. No.	Gender	Mean	S.D.	T-Value	Level of significance
1	Female (Wives)	79.86	6.925	14.028	0.01
2	Male (Husbands)	88.96	6.016		

One of the prominent findings of above table is that the wives experienced a poor well-being because the mean score of females is 79.86 and the mean score of males is 88.96 Independent t-test result shows a significant difference between male and female spouses in well-being. It was significant at 0.01 level. These findings clearly indicate that working women experienced poor well-being as compare to their husbands because an increase in multiple demands increases the risk of suffering from fatigue and decrease their well-being. Compared to men, women are expected to work more as homemakers and caregivers. Thus, while facing incompatibility between work and family roles, women may feel more

role strain than men. These situations could be harmful to one's mental and physical well-being. The result also shows that husbands experienced more life satisfaction and frequent joy as compared to their wives. Similar findings also made by Andrade et al (1999), they found that wives scored more poorly than their husbands on various measures of subjective well-being. In particular, wives perceived poorer self-health and experienced greater negative affect than their spouses.

Health Problems of Spouses

The role strain perspective, or scarcity hypothesis, proposes that increased numbers of roles lead to overload and strain, which can translate into negative effects on physical and psychological well-being (Goode, 1960; Marks, 1977). Middle-aged women are primarily responsible for education of the children, family management and taking care of their parents, and burdened with ever-increasing roles and responsibilities, they suffer psychological distress such as dissociation, depression and anxiety (Kim & Park,1989).

Table- 5. Difference in Health Problems among female and male spouse

N=400 (200+200)

S. No.	Health Problems	Female		Male		T-Test	Level of Significance
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
1.	Upset	2.19	0.791	1.97	0.795	2.773	0.01
2.	Sad	2.18	0.768	1.71	0.675	6.428	0.01
3.	Irritation	2.07	0.743	1.79	0.733	3.859	0.01
4.	Anxiety	2.05	0.586	1.85	0.761	3.016	0.01
5.	Losing Temper	2.20	0.569	2.07	0.798	1.946	0.05
6.	Low Blood Pressure	1.96	0.769	1.74	0.771	2.856	0.01
7.	Tension	2.10	0.756	2.14	0.650	0.567	NS
8.	Headache	2.11	0.762	2.02	0.664	1.259	NS
9.	Body Pain	1.92	0.701	1.73	0.705	2.702	0.01
10.	Palpitation	1.85	0.655	1.75	0.721	1.451	NS
11.	Giddiness	1.87	0.604	1.27	0.445	11.309	0.01
12.	Tired	2.15	0.761	1.83	0.737	4.268	0.01
13.	Disturb Sleep	1.95	0.689	1.85	0.667	1.473	NS
14.	Depression	2.09	0.619	1.81	0.657	4.303	0.01
15.	Thumping Heart	1.82	0.779	1.75	0.661	0.969	NS
16.	Health Problems	30.54	5.143	27.30	3.290	7.493	0.01

Above table highlights that wives perceived higher level of health problems as compared to their husbands because the mean scores of females were higher in upset, sad, irritation, anxiety, losing temper, high blood pressure, body pain, giddiness, tiredness, and depression as compare to male spouses. A significant difference was observed between female and male spouses in aforesaid diseases. It was significant at 0.05 and 0.01 level. There was no significant difference found between husbands and wives in tension, headache, palpitations, disturbing sleep and thumping heart because there was not large difference between mean score of husbands and wives. This indicates that women in dual earner families perceived higher rate of ill-health as compared to their male counterparts because females experience high level of role strain which often gets

somatized leading to multiple aches and pains and other physical and psychological complaints. Such findings are in agreement with those of Mellner et al (2006), who observed that the high workload of paid and unpaid work has increased the risk of negative health outcomes among middle-aged women such as shoulder and neck pain, headache, high blood pressure, fatigue, psychosomatic strain, and low self-rated health. Similar findings also made by Philip (2000), who observed that female spouses of pure double track families (dual earner families) experience a higher level of perceived ill-health because occupational commitment of female spouses often leads to a remarkable degree of role strain which in turn is manifested in the form of physical complaints like sleep disturbances, multiple aches and pains, giddiness, headache etc. he further revealed that as a

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whole, husbands in the study exhibit signs of higher subjective well-being compared to wives in all the three groups.

Table- 6. Relationship Between Role Strain and Subjective Well-Being and Role Strain and Health Problems Among Female and Male Spouses

S. No.	Gender & Role Strain	Subjective Well-Being	Health Problems
1.	Female(Wives)	-0.406**	0.315**
2.	Male (Husbands)	-0.177*	0.164*

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level,

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Relationship between role strain and subjective well-being and role strain and health problems among female and male spouses were analyzed using bivariate analysis (table-6). Pearson correlation coefficient result shows that female and male spouses' role strain was negatively correlated with their subjective well-being. It was significant at 0.01 level and 0.05 level respectively. This indicates that as the role strain increases the subjective well-being decreases among both spouses. A striking feature of the above table is that husbands' role strain and their subjective well-being was not highly correlated as female spouses. These findings clearly indicate that husbands experienced more life satisfaction and frequent joy as compared to their wives and wives experienced high role strain and poor well being as compared to their husbands. The reason is that increased levels of engagement in multiple roles are burdensome and increases strain among women and decrease their well-being. Role theorists maintain that role strain can lead to decreased psychological well-being, indicating that employed women will have lower degrees of well-being due to their role strain. However, husband's participation in household chores can decrease the role strain for a working woman and can enjoy greater marital satisfaction leading to greater psychological well-being (Saenz et al., 1989).

Table-6 also indicates that both spouses role strain was positively correlated with their health problems. This indicates that as the role strain increases the health problems also increases among both spouses. But interesting findings of this table is that husbands' role strain and their health problems ($r=0.315$) was significant at 0.05 level and wives' role strain and their health problems ($r=0.164$) was significant at 0.01 level. This shows that wives perceived higher rate of ill-health as compared to their male counterparts because females experience high level of role strain due to their multiple roles. Role strain increases the risk of health problems among wives. Similar findings also made by Staland-Nyman et al (2008), who found that higher strain in domestic work was associated with lower self-rated health in women. Strain in domestic work, including perceived inequity in the relationship and lack of a satisfactory relationship with a spouse/ cohabiter, was associated with lower self-rated health.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that female spouses scores higher in role strain and health problems. This indicates that wives experienced higher level of role strain and perceived ill-health as compare to their male counterparts. It can be also concluded that husbands scores higher in subjective well-being. This clarifies that male spouses' perceived good well-being. Husbands perceived life as functioning more smoothly and joyfully compared to their wives. Husbands experienced more life satisfaction and frequent joy as compared to their wives. Female spouses experienced poor well-being because Indian women still perform major role in parental and homecare responsibility. These multiple responsibilities put strain on them and affect their mental and physical well being. Compared to men, women are expected to work more as homemakers and caregivers. Thus, while facing incompatibility between work and family roles, women may feel more role strain than men. These situations could be harmful to one's mental and physical well-being. Consequently, the combination of employment and family roles may well have more impact on health for women than for men.

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