

# **Conflicts and Challenges Faced by Employed Women in Family Life: A Study on Sylhet City**

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## **Abstract**

The contributors of every human civilization are both men and women. No success or development is possible without the participation of the women. Now-a-days, women are increasingly participating in outdoor activities. This is a good sign for society and for the women themselves. This study is based on primary and secondary data and the researchers tried to identify the conflicts and challenges, which are being faced by women employee in family life and the nature of such conflicts. This is an exploratory study to examine the problems of employee women in family life. Quantitative method has been used for the study and the data has been collected through questionnaire survey and secondary sources. The study has been conducted by selecting 51 samples from the women employees in Sylhet city. The findings of the study illustrate that, the education rate is higher among women employees and they get married at a later age than usual (average age 25.43). The women employees in Sylhet city like other cities of Bangladesh face many problems due to job. Support from the family is very important for their functioning. Though women employees are independent economically but they face various problems within family and society. They have to bear most of the workloads both in office and in family. Therefore, further study on the concerned fields is very essential to get the real picture of the present trends.

**Key words:** women employment, gender issues.

## **Introduction**

Women are found in a large number in the work force today. The great industrial revolution and the consequent industrialization opened up doors of employment for women. Women started availing themselves of the

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employment countries including Bangladesh. Adult women are no longer associated solely with the role of 'homemaker' especially in the urban areas. Millions of women married and single, with and without children are working outside the home. In Bangladesh about half of the population is women. Most of the women of our country are engaged in domestic work. From our social perspective their domestic work is considered to be inferior to that of men. A full and absolute participation in every sphere of life, including decision making, is vital to elimination of discrimination against women and improvement of their socio-economic status. Women's empowerment and freedom of women have become a common term in every corner of the globe at present. In general, most of the people's attitude is not favorable toward employment of women. They wish to see women to work at home, give birth and rear children and take care of other members of the family. So, employed women face many problems from family, society and their working area including eve teasing. Women empowerment is the pre-condition of development in society and family. Employment of women is not a new concept in Bangladesh but it is more prevalent in the urban areas. Participation of women and their awareness in working sector is increasing. Most of the women living in urban areas are employed due to urbanization and industrialization. In Sylhet city, many women are employed in government and non- government organizations like other towns/cities. But they have to face barriers from family and society due to employment. This study was conducted to find out the kinds of problem they face and how these problems may be solved. This study targets married and unmarried employed women in Sylhet city and examines their experiences regarding work-family conflict.

Bangladesh has been trying to extend support to women as they constitute nearly half of its population and half of the potentials. The constitution of Bangladesh guarantees certain rights and privileges for women. These are articulated in Article 27, 28(i, ii, iii, and iv), and Article 29(i) of the constitution of Bangladesh. These articles include provisions for ensuring women's rights, empowerment and participation in the labor-force. In addition to fulfilling the constitutional obligations, the government took several measures to uphold women's interests. These include enactment of various women-related laws and ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The government also announced National Policy for the Advancement of Women and National Action Plan (Women Policy-2011). Particular emphasis has

also been given on women in the Fifth Five-year Plan and in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

### **Literature Review**

A number of books, articles and reports have been reviewed here, which are relevant to the study that we have conducted. A literature review referring to different journals and studies conducted by different researchers has been added to this study to show relevance of the work. In a study conducted in Pakistan, work-family conflict, job satisfaction, and turnover intention have been explored extensively among female university teachers. Having a supportive supervisor and jobs with flexible time are negatively related to all the parameters of work- life conflict. Bad supervisor's role during hard time is highly positively related to demands at work and peer assistance is highly negatively correlated to work overload and restricted work hours which means peer assistance can reduce demands at work but has no significant impact on reducing time conflict, mental distress and work overload. When there is more household expense i.e. money requirement and children (regardless of their number) are also present then all 4 parameters show more work- life conflict. Whereas, family size and husband's income are negatively related to demands at work, time conflict and mental distress show the same trend. As the number of family members increases and there are more earning hands in the family, so there will be a reduction in work life conflict. However, this is likely to result in work overload for women and there will still be more burdens on them to manage all the work. An increase in husband's income is likely to lower the mental distress and time conflict faced by women because they will be at ease with having an additional earning support for the family in the form of their husbands (Shakil & Muhammad, 2011).

Working women's occupation or income influence their present role and status. They can help their families to have a better life. So, the attitude of their husbands and other family members towards them has changed for the better. Working women have gained control over their income and decision making in family and society (Moin, 1998).

Working women have to encounter a number of problems. Major difficulties come from their families. Women have to seek permission from male family members for going out to work. They do not have any choice about their job. Thus an indifferent attitude develops among women about their career. Similarly, at workplace they are treated as 'women', as if they do not have

adequate skills to do a job like a man. Male colleagues do not cooperate and subordinates do not like to accept them as a boss. Women are considered as mentally weak, inexperienced, unskilled, physically unfit, delicate and submissive. So they are not capable of decisions making, policy making and visiting field offices alone. Some other problems such as lack of separate rest rooms, prayer rooms, separate canteens and inadequate transportation facilities make their job harder (Islam, 1997).

The way families organize their working and family lives are one of the most important issues to consider in this Year of the Family. While at one level, how families make these arrangements is a private matter, these decisions are influenced by and, in turn, affect many public spheres of life - health care, education, transport, leisure, social security provision and the law. Present and future trends in family and work life depend on how we as a society make decisions about the way individuals - as employees, family members, careers of the young, elderly and ill and contributors to community activities - will participate in these dimensions of life as a whole. In families of the not-so-long-ago 1960s, wives and children were thought to remain on the domestic doorstep while the breadwinner went to his workplace. While this scenario never applied to all, it was the way for the majority of families, particularly those with young children. In 1961 women comprised only 25 per cent of the labor force; the participation rate of married women aged 25-34, the child bearing years, was 17 per cent. The pattern was very different in the 1990s. In 1991, women comprised 42 per cent of the labor force; married women's participation rate for the age category 25-34 had leaped to 61 per cent, AIFS 1993, Wolcott, 1994.

According to Muslima (2005), women empowerment begins at home. In work place participation of women plays an important role in our economic development. She found out that sincerity and honesty of women is very high in working sector. Although they are respected at their work place for sincerity and honesty but they are sexually harassed by men as their attitude towards women has not changed (Muslima, 2005).

In every society, women tend to spend far more hours in unpaid work than men do. This unpaid work constrains women's choices about whether or not they can participate in the labor market, for how much time, and how far from home. These issues have long been at the core of discussions about gender equality. In industrialized countries, these patterns are clearly visible in the lower labor force participation rates and higher part-time employment

rates of women with young children. In developing countries, there has been less research or policy dialogue on the relationship between workers, family responsibilities and paid work. But it is clear that for many women, lack of public and private supports for family responsibilities means that the informal economy may offer only paid work that provides enough flexibility, autonomy, and geographic proximity to home to allow them to combine paid economic activity with family responsibilities. The situation has been changing gradually (Cassirer & Addati, 2007).

Mahtab (2007) said that women have to face varieties of problems in diverse occupations. She stated that women are working mostly at the bottom of the hierarchy. Her study found that gender discrimination and sexual harassment at work place are two major problems that every working woman faces in Bangladesh. Institutional culture is male dominated and it restrains women to participate in decision making. In addition, supportive mechanism among women is also lacking. There is no congenial atmosphere for women to work together as a group for common interest. The study identified another constraint faced by professional women which is the “maternal wall.” Career opportunities become limited for them after having children. Low paid working women suffer from health hazards due to stressful and unhealthy working environment. Career women also experience health problems. This is due to stress from overload, work-family-conflict, child rearing, etc. All these adversities lead women to lower level of performance, poor satisfaction with job and life, which ultimately affect their career prospects (Mahtab, 2007).

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objectives of the study are to know the challenges and conflicts employed women have to face in family life due to employment. Some specific objectives are given below:

1. to know the socio-economic and demographic information of employed women and their families;
2. to understand the types of problem they have with family due to employment;
3. to know the nature of conflicts which they have in family;
4. to explore the types of challenges they face;
5. to identify the role in decision making in family and society;
6. to find out their suggestions as to how these problems may be solved.

## **Rationality of the Study**

In Bangladesh about half of the population is women (population census-2011). They already have proved that without their participation, sustainable development cannot be achieved for our people. In modern societies, women engaged in job outside of home having a good salary are more respected than women without a job. In terms of power dynamics, women clearly gain some degree of power within the family by earning their own income. Preoccupation of women with jobs outside of home has its adverse consequences on the maintenance and continuation of the family traditions and religious customs. Working women have contributed much to the economic betterment of their families as such. At the same time, the inability of working women to spare enough time for their children has often resulted in emotional and psychological problems. Working women face various problems in family life. This study has explored the real conflicts and challenges of women and the problem they face in family and society.

### **Operational Definitions of Concepts Used in the Study**

**Women:** In the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, an adult female human being is termed as women. In this study females above 25 years of age would be considered as women.

**Employed Women:** In this study, employed women means all women who work in renowned and recognized government and non-government organizations (school, college, university, medical sector, bank, law, police, administration, association etc.) and they would have at least a bachelor's degree and would earn a minimum of 5,000 taka monthly.

**Conflict:** Conflict is the deliberate attempt to oppose, resist or coerce the will of others. Conflict usually arises out of a clash of interests. In this research, conflict means resistance to the interest of employed women imposed by their family members, relatives, colleagues and others.

**Challenges:** In this study familial challenges refer to the challenges due to employment in family. The married employed women face various challenges in family, office and other places.

**Sylhet City:** Sylhet city is one of the six divisional headquarters in Bangladesh. It is divided into 27 wards and these wards constitute the city corporation area. It is situated in the northern part of Bangladesh. It is surrounded by the Sunamganj district on the West, Moulovibazar and Habiganj districts on the

South and by India on the North. In this study Sylhet city means all areas of Sylhet City Corporation.

### **Methodology**

This is an exploratory study done with the support of quantitative data. This study mainly worked with quantitative primary data. The data collected from primary sources were entirely based on interviews of fifty-one respondents. All areas of Sylhet City Corporation were covered in this study. All the employed women in schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, banks, and other government and non- government organizations were considered as the population of the study. The researchers purposively selected 51 samples and collected information from each of them. Actually the researchers purposively selected 51 samples from 21, 22, and 23 wards among 27 wards under Sylhet City Corporation. As there was no specific data or survey on educated women employees of Sylhet city, so the researchers collected data from those wards which were close to their residence. Data were collected during September-October 2012. Interviews were taken by the researchers. Interview protocol was pre-tested and carefully constructed so that it did not have any physical, psychological and social affects against the participants. The collected data were processed through editing, coding, tabulating and classifying based on its characteristics. Later the processed data were analyzed by using simple statistical tools (i.e. percentage) in light of the objectives of the study. The researchers used secondary sources of data like books, journals and articles for analyzing the real situation and better understanding of the research problem.

### **Major Findings of the Study**

#### **Demographic information of the respondents**

The majority of the respondents (43.14%) belonged to the age group of 30-35 years, 17.65% of the respondents belonged to the age group of 25-30 years, 21.61% belonged to the age group of 35-40 years, 13.72% belonged to the age group of 40-45 years and 3.88% belonged to the age group of 45-50 years. The average age of the women employees is 33.90 years. Most of the employed women's age level is 30-35 in Sylhet city. Education is the backbone of a nation. Women's education is essential for development of nations. From the collected data it was found that 35.3% of the women employees were graduates, 62.7% women employees were post- graduates and 1.9% of them had a diploma. In Sylhet city, rate of education is increasing day by day.



Due to rapid growth of industrialization, joint family patterns have diminished and now there are mostly nuclear families. About 66.7 % of the households were found to be nuclear families. From this study it was found that 33.3% of the respondents were from joint families. The family as a basic social institution has been undergoing change. Modern family radically differs from that of the traditional ones. Most of the women employees in Sylhet city were found to have nuclear families. Bangladesh is a multi-religious country. Mainly four kinds of religions are prevalent in this country. According to the data collected, about 66.7 % of the respondents were Muslims and about 33.3% were Sanatan/Hindus. So, it was found that, religion did not have much influence on having a job. In Sylhet city most of the women employees were Muslims while a significant number of Hindu women also work.

### **Profession, income and expenditure of respondents**

Most of the women like to work outside of home alongside their household work. In the modern age, women employees work in various sectors and make contributions to achieving national goals. According to the collected data, 9.81 % of the respondents were lawyers, 15.69% were bankers, 21.57% were NGO workers, 9.81% were school teachers, 11.76% were college teachers, 7.84% were university teachers, 11.76% were administrators, and 11.76% were doctors. In Sylhet city 25.49% of the respondents were found to earn a monthly income of 20000-25000 taka. About 27.5 % of the respondents were found to spend 18000-23000 taka per month.

### **Marriage age, husband's profession, head of family and number of children of respondents**

From the collected data it was found that 25.5% of the women employees got married between ages 19-23, 35.3% of the respondent's marriage ages were 23-27 years, and 39.2% of the respondent's marriage ages were 27-31 years. The age of marriage of the employed women is increasing. The average age of marriage of employed women was 25.43 years. Employed women who have higher education tend to get married at a later stage. They want to establish themselves in their careers. According to this study, most of the employed women got married between 27-31 years. Among their husbands, 33.33% were found to be administrators, 3.92% were lawyers, 19.60% were businessmen, 29.41% were teachers, 3.92% were engineers, 7.84% were doctors and 1.96% were police officers. The societal nature of Bangladesh is



patriarchal. According to the data collected about heads of the family, 80.3% of the respondents had their husbands as head of the family while 11.8% had the father-in-law, 2.0% had the mother-in-law, 2.0% had the wife, and 3.9% had other persons as head of the family. In Bangladesh, most of the families are controlled by the husband. According to the data collected, about 46.4 % of the women employees had 1 child, 43.9 % had 2 children, 7.3 % had 3 children, 2.4 % had 4 children and 19.6% had no children. Most of the employed women with higher education were found to have only one child.

### **Who encourages the respondents to take the job?**

According to the data collected, about 45.1% of the married women employees took jobs by their own effort, while 21.6% were encouraged by husbands, 29.5% by parents, 1.9% by fathers and mothers in law and 1.9% are encouraged by other persons for having a job.

### **Cooperation of husband in household work**

This study revealed that, 78.8% of the women employees were able to have time for familial work while 21.2% of them could not manage to. In modern societies, employed women have to play a dual role and most of their time is spent for their jobs. From this study, it was found that most of the women get time for their household work. It is the positive side of women empowerment in our country. Employed women can have time for their household work after their work outside of home. Cooperation of husbands of working women in household work is remarkable. Research revealed that about 17.5 % husbands of employee women helped in child rearing, 37.5 % of them helped in household work, 20.0 % husbands helped their wives in outside work and 25.0 % of them helped in doing all these work together.. From the study it was found that husbands of 78.4 % of the respondents cooperated in household work while husbands of 21.6 % of the respondents did not. In modern age cooperative tendency has increased between husband and wife. Such tendency has reduced the stress of employed women.

### **Problems created in family due to job**

Most of the respondents thought that problems were created because of their jobs. 23.9 % of the respondents expressed fear that their jobs might hamper mental development of their children, 19.6 % faced problems in balancing job and household work, 8.7% mentioned insecurity problems, 47.8 % mentioned difficult problems and 9.8 % said that they had no problems at all.

About 90.2 % of the respondents were found to have problems in family life because of their jobs. Pre –occupation of women with jobs outside of home has its adverse consequences on maintenance and continuation of family traditions and religious customs. Employed parents are no longer able to give cultural training to their children in family traditions and religious practices.

### **Impact on conjugal life**

From this study it was found that, 11.8 % of the respondents have adverse impact on conjugal life and 88.2 % have no impact on conjugal life. In this study, most of the employed women have no negative impact on their conjugal life due to jobs. Most of the employed women are well educated and so they can manage everything properly and motivate their husband easily. It is the positive side of women empowerment.

### **Issues of conflict in conjugal life**

In this study, it was found that, 70.6% of the respondents had different sorts of conjugal conflicts. Among them, 16.7% stated that the issues concerned child- rearing matters, 41.6 % stated that causes of conflicts were household matters, 13.9 % said that they were unable to express their opinion freely and 11.1 % said that their husbands never had enough time for family. Again 16.7 % of the respondents had different issues in this case while 29.4 % said that they did not have any marital conflicts in their lives. In this study, it was found that, 70.6% of the respondents had conjugal conflicts due to issues regarding children, familial matters, expressing opinions, having time for family etc. In this study, most of the employed women were found to face conjugal conflicts for familial matters. It should also be noted that most of the respondents were found to have played positive roles in solving marital problems by their own efforts.

### **Opportunity for expressing opinion for decision making in family and office**

In modern societies, women can express their opinions freely in case of important decision making in family. In this study, 86.3 % of the respondents said that they take part in decision making in the family. This reflects women's status in family and society. About 68.6% of the respondents were given opportunity for expressing their opinions for decision making in the office. About 23.6% of the respondents were given importance sometimes and 7.8% were found to have no importance at all. When women are able to

employ their own creativity in decision making in office, it tends to increase their status at work place.

### **Some other challenges faced by employed women**

Working women face challenges in their conjugal life due to their jobs. From the study it was found that 45.1% of the respondents got jobs by their own efforts but 17.6% stated that in some cases their husbands and parents in law did not like their jobs. Though the ratio is low but still 19.6% of the respondents had shared that they often got pressure from their husbands and parents –in-law for leaving their job. In most of the cases it was found that children of employed women were deprived of proper care. Another interesting finding from the study showed that 11.8% could not help their own parents as they wished. In most cases their husbands and mothers-in-law did not allow them to do so. Also 13.7% of the respondents opined that they could not participate in social programs of their office because of family restrictions.

### **Some major recommendations**

It was evident from the study that women employees faced a lot of challenges in their family life because of their jobs. This affects their performance and efficiency levels. In the long run, it wastes away national resources and potentials. In order to utilize full potentials of women employees, certain measures should be taken. The following recommendations are put forward to reduce problems, conflicts and challenges and to create a congenial atmosphere for women employees in their families:

1. As employed women remain busy and cannot have enough time for their children, so initiatives may be taken (both by the Government and by the NGOs') to develop day care facilities in every working station which might ensure better childcare and reduce tension of working mothers.
2. Initiatives should be taken to raise social awareness to reduce "double burden" of the working women. Men should be encouraged from childhood to share household work with women. Family education is important in this regard.
3. The role of family members should be widened to support employed women. Especially husbands and parents-in-law should be more cooperative and empathetic towards women employees.

4. Working women should be allowed to participate in decision making in the family. Husbands of working women can initiate this. Their husbands should also be open- minded and have a significant level of tolerance. Husbands should also have respect for their wives and make sure that their wives have equal contribution to decision making.

### **Conclusions**

It may be said that an ever increasing number of women are entering into employment. The processes of modernization, industrialization, urbanization and globalization have provided new opportunities for women to become wage-earners, salaried professionals and individual entrepreneurs. This new trend has added greater momentum to the processes of social change which have been taking place in society. But they have to face various problems in their family and society. In spite of the contributions these working women make in case of family and society through financial support and decision making, their children are often deprived of proper care and affection as they are sometimes unable to have enough time for family. Support from the family of working women is very important for their proper functioning at work. The study reveals that women who work outside are in a disadvantageous position as compared to their male colleagues. Employment of women outside of home has contributed much to the economic betterment of the family. At the same time, inability of employed women to spare enough time for their children has often resulted in emotional and psychological problems. In the study, most of the women employees takes part in decision making in family and office but still a fair number of educated working women cannot take part in decision making process in family. Patriarchy can be one of the important factors behind it. Though the cooperation rate of husband is high in this study but still employed women have to face various sorts of challenges every step in their daily life. They take double burden in office as well as at home. Sometimes they are frequently ordered to give up the job. These pressures come from their husbands and from in-laws which make their situation more miserable. Though most of the husbands are cooperative but still a portion of them are unwilling to give enough time for their family. A major part of women employees feel that they face conflicts in different issues like child raring, maintaining households, freedom of expression etc. They share some recommendations to overcome conflicts in family life also. The other notable issue found in the research is that in some cases women employee cannot contribute in her own paternal family financially because their husbands and in-laws do not allow them to do so.

If conflicts and challenges faced by working women in family life are reduced, they can be expected to perform better. As women are increasingly becoming involved in employment outside of home, men will have an opportunity to become more involved in activities regarding childcare. In terms of power dynamics, women clearly gain some degree of power within the family when they have their own incomes. This study has also revealed that when a woman provides sole financial support for her family, even a low-end occupation will have a positive effect on her self-esteem. In the modern societies, women engaged in jobs outside of home and having good salaries are more respected than women who are unemployed. As far as women are concerned, their self-esteem and power within the family is deemed to increase as they move outside the home and function as productive wage earners. Lastly the researchers think that the women policy should be implemented as soon as possible to minimize the challenges and conflicts of women employees which will help them to contribute in national economy. The research was based on Sylhet city only which does not represent the whole picture of women employees of Bangladesh so further researches should be carried on this issue to identify the barriers and conflicts of women employees.

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