The Representations of "Working Mothers" in Management Literature

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ABSTRACT

The portrayal of working mothers[1] in management literature often fails to capture the diverse experiences of mothers in contemporary urban India, potentially reinforcing traditional gender roles and overlooking the multifaceted realities they face. This research critically examines recent management literature to uncover prevailing representations of urban Indian working mothers. Utilizing Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis methodology, 12 relevant studies published within the last decade were analyzed, revealing three candidate themes: "Obstructed at Work," "Pressured Caregiver," and "Desperate Superwoman." These themes highlight systemic barriers hindering career advancement, the pressures of balancing caregiving responsibilities with professional obligations, and unrealistic expectations. By illuminating gaps in representations, this research lays the groundwork for future directions in management scholarship, urging scholars to adopt more nuanced approaches, explore intersectionality, and incorporate diverse perspectives.

Introduction

"Working Mother" is a term used for women engaged in motherhood while actively engaging in paid employment, as opposed to women who work for the home (Sarkar, 2020). Women in this

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[1] The term "working mother" carries a narrow connotation, focusing solely on paid employment and potentially undermining the substantial unpaid caregiving and household responsibilities that many women shoulder. It often implies a rigid classification, separating women into those who work outside the home and those who do not. However, women's roles are far more complex, involving a blend of paid work, household chores, and caregiving, which may not be fully encapsulated by the term "working mother." To provide a more comprehensive representation of a mother's work, the phrase "mother engaged in paid employment" is preferable. However, the term "working mother", in this research, is deliberately used to emphasize the particular subset of women who navigate the complex interplay between their professional careers and their roles as mothers.

role are tasked with managing dual responsibilities: caring for their children and households while maintaining active professional careers (Hochschild, 1990; Saha & Basawaraj, 2022). This societal role, embodying nurturing motherhood and professional commitment, presents unique challenges and forms a significant study area (Belliappa, 2013). However, as Khanna (2018) points out, the term itself can inadvertently devalue domestic work, implying that managing a household is not 'work' without financial compensation. The lack of a corresponding term, such as "working father," underscores societal biases, reflecting the traditional expectation that while fathers are the breadwinners, mothers' roles are predominantly domestic. This dichotomy highlights a deep-seated gender bias in societal roles and expectations.

In the 1990s, the term "working women" emerged as a significant cultural and societal marker, reflecting the growing influx of women into the workforce (Perry-Jenkins, 2000). This shift signified a departure from traditional gender roles, acknowledging women's expanding roles beyond domestic spheres into diverse professional fields. However, despite overt support for gender equality in mainstream Indian workplaces, there remains a disparity between progressive work-life policies and entrenched gender biases, particularly concerning motherhood and perceptions of the ideal worker (Nesic, 2010). This dichotomy underscores the ongoing struggle to reconcile evolving workplace dynamics with deep-rooted societal expectations. While there have been advancements in workplace policies aimed at promoting gender equality, biases persist and subtly reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations.

The perception of working mothers, contrasted with idealized notions of motherhood and employment, plays a pivotal role in shaping representations within both practical contexts and research landscapes concerning working mothers in India (Mendonca, 2023). Unfortunately, many studies rely on narrow and often outdated views of working mothers, inadvertently reinforcing societal biases and limitations (Hampson, 2018). Consequently, addressing and dismantling these representations becomes imperative. Doing so is crucial for fostering more inclusive and equitable workplace practices and steering research in a direction that authentically represents and supports the actual experiences and challenges faced by working mothers in India.

This research aims to delve into the representation of working mothers in urban India within current management literature. It seeks to closely examine the language, narratives, and underlying assumptions embedded in these texts to discern the portrayal of working mothers and elucidate how these representations reflect organizational policies and societal perceptions. The research identifies gaps and misrepresentations in the existing literature through this scrutiny. By shedding light on these deficiencies, it aims to lay the groundwork for future studies that are more inclusive and more representative of the authentic experiences and challenges encountered by working mothers in urban India. This comprehensive analysis intends to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the multifaceted realities working mothers face, thereby fostering the

development of more equitable workplace practices and supportive societal frameworks.

Positionality Statement

My background in psychology primarily influences my research into representations of working mothers. Initially, my focus was shaped by an individualistic perspective, emphasizing the personal experiences and societal frameworks affecting working mothers. This empathetic and explorative orientation allowed me to delve deep into the subjective realities of these women, understanding how societal norms impact their lives. As my interest evolved, I began contemplating the aspect of choice in motherhood, which naturally extended to the interaction between career and motherhood. This exploration led me to management literature, where I encountered a different, more policy-driven angle.

Despite not having a background in management, this literature provided me with new perspectives on the structural and organizational challenges working mothers face. It allowed me to see beyond individual experiences and societal norms, incorporating insights into workplace policies and their impact on these women. However, instead of adopting the typical quantitative approach of management studies, I chose to integrate this new perspective with my initial psychological focus. This integration enriched my research, adding layers to my understanding of the complex conflicts working mothers face in balancing their professional roles and familial responsibilities.

By combining these perspectives, I can analyze not only the individual and collective impacts of representations but also the organizational research and policies that either perpetuate or mitigate these challenges. This holistic view positions this research to offer meaningful contributions to the discourse on working mothers. As a psychology student, I am inherently inclined towards a more explorative and empathetic examination, aiming to grasp the nuanced realities of working mothers within the urban Indian milieu. This orientation is fundamental to my methodology and analysis, as I prioritize examining subjective experiences and societal norms over the more quantitative, data-driven aspects typical of management research.

In this research, my perspective is rooted in a constructivist understanding of representations. This means that I recognize representations, including those found in research, as socially constructed and influenced by various factors such as culture, history, and power dynamics. From a post-feminist standpoint, I focus on highlighting the specific experiences and challenges working mothers face. It acknowledges that while women have made significant strides in entering the workforce, they continue to face challenges related to traditional gender roles and expectations, particularly regarding motherhood and professional roles. This lens is crucial for delving into how societal constructs, particularly those about motherhood and professional roles,

intersect and impact the representations of working mothers in management literature.

My interpretive lens is shaped by an assumption that societal and cultural norms in urban India significantly influence the representations of working mothers. I also presume that these representations profoundly impact these women's personal and professional lives, affecting their opportunities, work-life balance, and societal perceptions. Lastly, I suspect that much of the existing management literature primarily emphasizes organizational strategies and policies, potentially overlooking the nuanced individual experiences and societal influences that shape the realities of working mothers.

Theoretical Framework

In a social constructivist framework, meaning is not inherent within an object itself but is constructed through systems of representation, which include language, signs, and images (Burr & Dick, 2017). Cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1997) describes representation as the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged among members of a culture. The constructivist approach recognizes the social nature of language and acknowledges that meaning is not fixed by things or individual language users. Instead, meaning is constructed through the interaction of concepts and signs within systems of representation (Hall,1997). Therefore, representations are not simply reflections of reality but are actively constructed and negotiated within cultural contexts.

In studying how management literature represents working mothers, I integrate the aforementioned theoretical perspective, recognizing representations as dynamic constructs influenced by cultural and social contexts. Within management literature, representations of working mothers may encompass not only language, signs, and images but also broader organizational practices, policies, and discourses that shape perceptions of motherhood in the workplace. By examining management literature through this lens, I aim to understand how working mothers are portrayed, perceived, and addressed within organizational settings. This approach allows for a nuanced exploration of the complexities involved in managing work-life balance, career advancement, and maternal identity within the context of employment. Additionally, by considering representations as situated articulations rather than fixed categorical images, I seek to uncover the diverse ways in which management literature constructs and negotiates the roles, responsibilities, and challenges faced by working mothers, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the intersection between management practices, cultural norms, and lived experiences.

Feminist theory becomes crucial in analyzing and deconstructing gender-based representations, as it offers a framework to understand how these representations are not only reflections of

cultural norms but also tools that reinforce patriarchal systems (Spencer-Wood, 2013). Feminist theory allows for a deeper understanding of how representations influence individual behaviors and organizational dynamics, especially regarding gender roles in the workplace and beyond. This approach can help uncover the complexities of role-based representations and their broader implications in various research domains.

This research relies heavily on the intersection of motherhood studies and feminist theory as a foundational framework. Motherhood scholars challenge the notion of a singular, universal mothering experience, emphasizing the diversity and complexity of women's experiences as mothers (O'Reilly, 2021). This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of working mothers, who often face stereotypical representations that homogenize and oversimplify their experiences. These typically paint working mothers in a limited scope, failing to capture the multifaceted nature of their lives and the unique challenges they face in balancing professional and familial roles.

This critique can be extended to the broader category of "woman," aligning with the argument that it is not a universal concept (Takseva, 2018). This is especially pertinent in the context of working mothers, as normative representations often fail to account for the varied identities, backgrounds, and circumstances that shape women's experiences in the workforce and at home. Similarly, Krishnaraj (2019) emphasizes that women's identities extend beyond their roles as mothers, suggesting that normative ideas about working mothers frequently overlook the other dimensions of their identities, such as their professional aspirations, personal interests, and cultural backgrounds. By applying the concept of situated knowledge, as discussed by Nandy (2014), the research recognizes that the understanding of working mothers is influenced by contextual and subjective factors.

Literature Review

Motherhood in Contemporary India

In contemporary India, motherhood carries significant cultural weight, profoundly impacting both the individual experiences of women and the broader societal norms and attitudes about motherhood. According to Belliappa (2009), motherhood is often viewed as the defining aspect of a woman's identity in India, emphasizing fulfilling family obligations through childbearing. Bagchi (1992) points out that motherhood in India is not just a biological milestone but is idealized and revered, embodying a socially constructed identity that encompasses nurturing self-sacrifice and a deep commitment to family. This societal definition of motherhood creates powerful social constructs that impose specific maternal roles, influencing the lives of both cisgender women and queer individuals (Kapoor, 2021). These roles come with distinct

expectations and ideals, shaping the experience of motherhood in modern Indian society.

Ideal mother, Ideal worker

The normative Indian perspective on motherhood, deeply ingrained in a hetero-patriarchal ideology, portrays the "ideal mother" as someone who continues the family lineage through son-bearing, raises obedient daughters, and excels in domestic management (Sarkar, 2020). This idealization places a significant emotional and social burden on women, profoundly impacting their personal aspirations, educational pursuits, and career trajectories. Mothers are judged based on their ability to fulfill these maternal roles.

For "working mothers," this concept intersects with the notion of the "ideal worker" (Hampson, 2018). The ideal worker is envisioned as someone without child-rearing responsibilities or with an invisible support system at home to manage domestic duties. This worker is expected to be fully dedicated to work, including being available for full-time and overtime work without the distractions of maternity leave or caring for a sick child. (Hampson, 2018). This notion creates a dichotomy where good workers are seen as wholly devoted to their jobs. At the same time, those whose attention is divided by external responsibilities, such as childcare, are viewed less favorably.

In addition, Sarkar (2020) introduces the concept of the "ideal neoliberal mother-worker," emphasizing the societal expectations imposed on women to balance their roles as mothers and professionals. This ideal is particularly challenging during early adulthood, a period crucial for career development yet often coinciding with childbearing years. It underscores the societal pressure for women to seamlessly navigate the conflict between professional growth and traditional maternal duties. Synthesizing these perspectives reveals a multi-layered challenge faced by working mothers in India. They are caught in a complex web of societal expectations that idolize the perfect mother and the ideal worker, both roles demanding undivided dedication and excellence. Referred to as "superwomen," these women are expected to excel in various domains, from bringing pride to their families through their professional achievements to fulfilling traditional roles as wives and mothers (Arabandi, 2016). However, beneath the surface of this idealized portrayal lies a reality fraught with tough choices and systemic challenges.

The Role of a Working Mother

The role of a working mother often conflicts with normative ideals of motherhood (Belliappa, 2013; Krishnaraj, 2019). Paid work and motherhood are viewed as conflicting entities, with society often prioritizing women's reproductive roles over their professional contributions. In most Indian heterosexual households, childcare and household responsibilities are disproportionately borne by women, leading to an uneven distribution of domestic labor. This

expectation is deeply rooted in traditional gender roles, viewing the unpaid work done at home as an inherent part of being a working mother. Furthermore, Mendonca (2023) highlights that societal norms often dictate that an ideal mother is one who does not let her professional commitments interfere with her caregiving duties despite her involvement in the paid labor force. This imbalance often forces new mothers to reduce their work commitments (Baker, 2010) or choose between career and motherhood (Dillaway & Paré, 2008), reflecting historical gender norms.

In urban India, the early years of a woman's career, typically characterized by high commitment and extended work hours, often coincide with significant life events like marriage and motherhood. This coincidence places additional pressure on women to adjust their priorities, a demand less frequently expected of men (Belliappa, 2013). The need to conform to the "ideal mother" norms dictates women's choices, limiting their agency and exposing them to societal judgment and backlash for deviating from these norms (Kapoor, 2021; Nandy, 2013). The role of a "working mother," while embodying the potential for professional achievement and personal fulfillment, also encounters societal barriers and biases that significantly impact women's lives and careers.

The Representations of the Role

In contemporary urban India, the experience of working mothers is profoundly shaped by a set of popular representations, each carrying its own set of expectations and pressures. Deeply rooted in societal norms and cultural narratives, these representations create a complex landscape for mothers. These representations are not just reflections of cultural expectations but also actively shape the experiences and self-perceptions of working mothers. As women increasingly enter the professional workforce, seeking economic independence and personal fulfillment, they are confronted with these idealized narratives that contrast sharply with the evolving realities of caregiving and professional responsibilities (Hampson, 2018). In the workplace, mothers who deviate from conventional notions of motherhood often encounter significant challenges and penalties, mainly when evaluated by individuals holding more traditional gender ideologies (Nesic, 2010). These perspectives reveal a critical need to reassess and challenge these representations. Recognizing the diverse and dynamic experiences of working mothers is essential in fostering more inclusive, supportive, and realistic narratives reflecting modern motherhood's multifaceted nature.

The Context of Management Literature

Management literature comprises academic research, scholarly articles, books, and publications centered on management theory, practice, and application. It covers diverse topics such as

organizational behavior, leadership, human resource management, strategic management, and operations management. This body of work aims to enhance understanding and provide guidance for managerial decision-making and organizational performance. In India, research on working mothers within the management sector has shed light on the challenges and biases they encounter. The traditional positioning of women in workplace settings has restricted the intensity of their efforts toward realizing the benefits of the globalization process (Budhwar, 2005). Indian working mothers in various organizational roles often face career impediments, indicating a pressing need for organizational interventions to support them (Sharma, 2019). Proposed interventions, such as enhancing workplace flexibility, bolstering social support, and emphasizing work-life balance, aim to mitigate these issues (Kadale, 2018).

However, Hampson (2018) argues that the policies intended to mitigate the tension between work and family responsibilities contribute to creating and reinforcing specific representations. This occurs through discursive, institutional processes, where the language and narratives used in organizational research reflect and strengthen certain notions associated with working mothers. This underscores the critical importance of conducting a thorough reevaluation of the research and the underlying institutional dialogues that shape perceptions of working mothers in India. Given that literature intended to enhance the conditions of working mothers inadvertently reinforces these representations, it becomes imperative to reexamine and challenge their portrayal within such studies to ensure they authentically support and empower working mothers.

Problem Statement

Upon reviewing the preliminary literature, it becomes evident that management literature often represents "working mothers" in a manner that is far from value-neutral and may not fully capture their diverse experiences. These representations commonly depict working mothers juggling their professional and familial responsibilities, portraying ongoing struggle and compromise. However, it is crucial to recognize that such representations may not accurately reflect the multifaceted realities of working mothers in contemporary urban India. Instead, they might inadvertently reinforce traditional gender roles and overlook the varied challenges and strengths that working mothers bring to the workforce.

The portrayal of working mothers in management literature, which may or may not align with the actual experiences of working mothers, is likely to influence organizational policies and practices, potentially limiting the support and resources available to them. Therefore, it is imperative to critically examine these representations in recent management literature, acknowledging that they may either accurately reflect or misrepresent the experiences of working mothers in urban India. By uncovering and understanding these underlying

representations, this research can contribute to developing more inclusive and supportive management practices and policies tailored to the authentic experiences of "working mothers." Hence, the research question to be explored is: How are urban Indian "working mothers" represented in recent management literature?

Research Objective

The primary objective of this research is to examine recent management literature focused on the experiences of "working mothers" in contemporary urban India and identify prevalent representations shaping the discourse surrounding working mothers. This analysis aims to elucidate the various representations prevalent in these studies while offering a clear understanding of how working mothers are perceived and represented within management literature.

Impact Statement

This research dissects how working mothers are portrayed and represented in academic and professional discourse. The analysis will examine the representations of working mothers' roles and challenges in management research. By doing so, it intends to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implications of workplace policies, practices, and the broader socio-cultural landscape on these representations. Additionally, the research seeks to highlight gaps in the current literature and propose areas for future research, contributing to a more nuanced and inclusive discourse around working mothers in the professional domain.

Methodology

The thematic analysis methodology suggested by Braun and Clarke (2015) was employed to answer the research question. This method prioritized meaning over frequency while embracing diverse perspectives, allowing themes to emerge from the full spectrum of narratives. This method was aligned with the overarching aim of the research since it prioritized depth and nuance over the frequency of occurrences. It was particularly effective in distilling complex and varied data into meaningful themes. Its flexibility and adaptability made it well-suited for exploring the complex nature of representations, ensuring that a wide range of narratives was authentically represented in the analysis.

Thematic Analysis offered the flexibility to critically analyze a range of qualitative and quantitative studies, reflecting the complex and varied nature of management literature. This methodological choice enabled the synthesis of data from diverse sources and study designs, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the representations of working mothers. It also supported the construction of a coherent narrative that encapsulated the breadth and depth of the

existing literature, thereby providing insights that were both meaningful and contextually relevant to the topic of study.

Search Strategy

For the purposes of this research, management literature is defined as any research published in management or business studies journals or authored by individuals affiliated with business studies organizations or business schools. This definition confines the scope of literature to academic work published in scholarly outlets within the field of management or business studies, ensuring that the research is grounded in the academic discourse and rigorously reviewed by experts in the field. The targeted search strategy that was followed has been outlined:

Database Selection:

Academic journals known for high-quality peer-reviewed management and business studies research were targeted initially. The targeted journals included *Gender in Management*, *International Journal of Business and Administration Research Review, Employee Relations, Global Business Review,* and *Review of Integrative Business & Economics Research.* Databases covering interdisciplinary research, like Google Scholar and JSTOR, were later included to ensure a more comprehensive search. At this stage, the definition of management literature was meticulously applied to ensure that only management literature was incorporated into the next steps.

Keyword Development:

A combination of keywords and phrases relevant to the topic was used to search within issues of the identified journals from the past ten years. Examples include "working mothers," "urban India," "management," "motherhood," "professional mothers," and "employment." These keywords were combined using Boolean operators, for example, ("working mothers" OR "professional women") AND "urban India" AND "management." A similar logic was applied to the search across general databases with additional filters in place as defined in the search limits.

Search Limits:

Filters were applied to restrict the search to articles published in the last ten years. The search was limited to articles written in English.

Preliminary Screening

A preliminary screening was conducted initially to screen titles and abstracts and, mainly, to assess relevance. Those papers that were found outside of the focused journals were checked for

being peer-reviewed. Full-text articles were obtained for those that met the inclusion criteria. From the search process, a total of 21 papers were identified. After applying inclusion criteria, 17 papers were retained.

The following inclusion criteria were applied:

- Geographical Focus: Studies specifically focused on urban India.

- Studies on Working Mothers: Literature that had working mothers in urban India as its primary focus group.

- Recency of Literature: Studies published within the last ten years.

- Type of Research: A variety of study designs from the field of management, including qualitative studies, quantitative research, and mixed-methods approaches.

- Language: Studies published in English.

The following exclusion criteria were applied:

- Older Literature: Research published over a decade ago.

- Non-Management Literature: Studies outside the management discipline.

- Broader Population Studies: Studies not specifically focusing on working mothers.

Quality Appraisal

After obtaining full texts, identified sources were critically assessed for relevance, credibility, methodology, ethics, and alignment with the research question to gauge their contribution to the depth of analysis in the synthesis. This was to comprehensively capture relevant literature on working mothers in urban India within the management field. It balanced breadth and depth by including a wide range of sources while specifically targeting relevant studies in the field. Following this step, 12 papers were deemed suitable for analysis.

Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2015) thematic analysis method was employed to analyze and synthesize the data from the selected management studies. The thematic analysis was carried out in the following six steps:

Becoming Familiar with the Data:

The initial step involved immersing myself in the collected data by reading and re-reading the studies to comprehensively understand the material. Each cycle of reading was accompanied by the exploration of unfamiliar terms, ensuring a thorough grasp of the content and its associated terminology.

Generating Codes:

Following the familiarization with the data, codes were generated to label and categorize meaningful segments within the data. Utilizing the open-source software Taguette, codes were systematically "tagged" to specific segments of text within the study (Rampin et al., 2021). This tagging process facilitated the identification and categorization of meaningful segments, ensuring that key themes and patterns could be effectively captured and explored. Efforts were made to code for as many topics as possible and to apply codes to contextual segments rather than isolated phrases, ensuring that the analysis captured the complexity of the data.

Generating Themes:

By using the merge tags feature in Taguette, redundant or overlapping codes were merged, enabling a more concise and coherent representation of the data. The generated codes were then organized into higher-level themes using various tools, such as tables, mind maps, and theme piles, to cluster related codes into broader thematic categories. This resulted in the identification of "candidate themes" and subthemes.

Reviewing Themes:

Candidate themes were critically examined by revisiting the data that had been coded. This process involved exploring whether the data sufficiently supported the themes or if there was too much variation across text segments to justify them. Adjustments were made as necessary, such as refining or consolidating themes, renaming them, or reorganizing them into sub-themes to better align with the data.

Defining and Naming Themes:

Once the themes were finalized, they were carefully defined and named to encapsulate their essence succinctly. This involved articulating the central concept or idea represented by each theme in clear and descriptive language. Additionally, efforts were made to ensure that the themes were conceptually parallel, meaning they occupied the same semantic plane and maintained a consistent level of abstraction across themes.

Locating Exemplars:

The final step involved producing a report describing the meaning within each theme with illustrative examples from the selected studies. This step not only delved into the meaning of individual themes but also explored connections between themes to identify connective takeaways or meta-themes that provided a comprehensive perspective on the research question (Table 1).

Results and Analysis

By applying the six steps of Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis, I was able to discern three candidate themes: "Obstructed at Work," "Pressured Caregiver," and "Desperate Superwoman."

The three candidate themes reflect the portrayal of working mothers within management literature, illuminating the multifaceted challenges they encounter in balancing their professional careers with caregiving responsibilities. "Obstructed at Work" delves into the systemic barriers hindering their career advancement, depicting them as individuals navigating organizational and societal constraints. The theme, "Pressured Caregiver," sheds light on the immense responsibilities shouldered by working mothers, emphasizing their dual roles and pressures in managing domestic and professional duties simultaneously. Moreover, the representation of "Desperate Superwoman" captures the unrealistic expectations of working mothers to effortlessly balance these roles, showcasing them as striving for an idealized image despite their challenges. Together, these themes provide a nuanced understanding of the experiences of working mothers, highlighting their struggles, strengths, and the complex interplay of factors shaping their professional and personal lives within the urban Indian context.

Under the theme of "Obstructed at Work," I have aggregated four subthemes that shed light on the barriers hindering the career advancement of working mothers. Firstly, "Family Responsibilities as Career Disablers" underscores how familial obligations impede professional growth. "Informal Setbacks" highlights the subtle yet significant barriers working mothers face in the workplace, such as biases and microaggressions. "Perceived Inefficiency of Returning Mothers" reflects the unjust perception of working mothers as less productive due to their caregiving roles. The "Suppressed in Silence" subtheme also highlights the absence of vocalization and advocacy for working mothers' challenges within organizational environments. Together, these subthemes portray the systemic challenges and biases that obstruct the career trajectories of working mothers.

Under the "Pressured Caregiver" theme, I have organized four subthemes that encapsulate the demanding nature of balancing caregiving responsibilities with professional obligations. "Obligated to Fulfill Maternal Care Duties" highlights the societal importance of mothers' family duties over career advancement, often leading to career stagnation. The subtheme

"Double-shifts" illustrates the pressures of shouldering work and home responsibilities, resulting in physical and emotional exhaustion. "Childcare Concerns" emphasize the perpetual worry and stress of finding reliable childcare arrangements while pursuing a career. Additionally, being labeled as a "Special Category Employee" underscores the pigeonholing of working mothers into a distinct workforce category solely based on their caregiving roles, further complicating their professional identity and advancement opportunities. These subthemes underscore working mothers' immense pressures and challenges in managing their caregiving responsibilities.

Figure 1: Framework Illustrating Candidate Themes and Underlying Sub-Themes
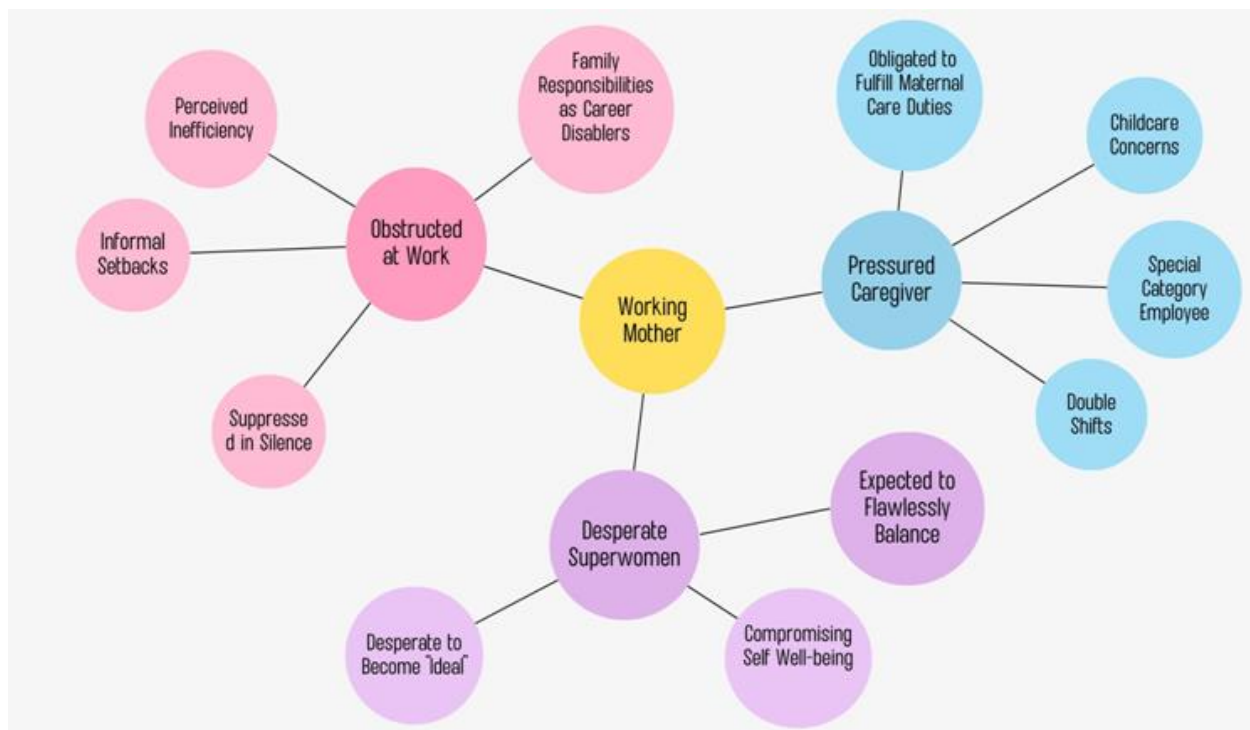
Note: The provided framework depicts candidate themes alongside their corresponding underlying subthemes.

Under the theme of "Desperate Superwoman," I have organized four subthemes that encapsulate the multifaceted challenges faced by working mothers striving to meet societal expectations. There is an expectation to effortlessly balance all aspects of life, epitomized by the subtheme "Expected to Effortlessly Balance." This pressure to excel both at work and at home often leads to compromising one's well-being, as indicated by "Compromising on Self Well-being." Additionally, the relentless pursuit of an idealized image, portrayed through the subtheme "Desperate to become 'Ideal,'" can create overwhelming stress and feelings of inadequacy. These subthemes underscore the unrealistic standards imposed on working mothers, highlighting

the constant struggle to meet societal ideals while grappling with the inherent challenges of balancing career and family.

Table 1: Candidate Themes, Underlying Subthemes, and Exemplars

Theme	Subtheme	Examplers
Obstructed at Work	Family Responsibilities as Career Disablers	Family, health and maternity aspects are some of the reason why women have not progressed in their career.
Theme	Subtheme	Examplers
		Childbirth and pregnancy seem to be among the most important career disablers contributing to the leaky pipeline among other career disablers such as marriage, childcare, spouse relocation and eldercare responsibilities. The burden of household responsibilities and the strong socio-cultural indoctrination of the primacy of women's role in the domestic sphere over other roles is a major restricting factor that

Theme	Subtheme	Examplers
		prevents the advancement of women in the workspace in the Indian context. Researchers also established that family responsibilities including but not limited to household activities, marriage and childcare can slow down women managers' career
Theme	Subtheme	Examplers
		achievements.
	Informal Setbacks	Returning mothers often face unofficial demotions and have to accept lower positions due to a lack of viable alternatives, reflecting their unwelcome status in the workplace. Supervisors and colleagues may hold biases against returning women, leading to negative experiences and deteriorating professional relationships.

Theme	Subtheme	Examplers
		Commonly termed as 'Maternal wall ' or 'Glass ceiling', all of the participants in the study have faced discrimination of some kind after their re-entry. Also there is lot of gender
		bias at work place which prevents women climbing the career ladders.
	Perceived Inefficiency of Returning Mothers	Even as they are welcome per policy, the STEM organisations in India often doubt women with a young child to balance work and family needs (Sharma, 2020), paving the way to ideological PC breaches for these returning women.

Theme	Subtheme	Examplers
		Many of these presumptions held by colleagues and supervisors, casting doubt on issues such as time and availability or a change in priorities and assumed diminishing interest in work after childbirth, stalled the new mothers' progress.
		However, the key stakeholders continue to view
		them through the lens of "the returned mother" who would not be as efficient or "up to it".

	Suppressed in Silence	'Diffidence' means unassertiveness or lack of confidence in oneself and one's abilities. Based on the years of conditioning in a patriarchal society, our study posits that women are less than optimistic regarding a breach resolution and opt for emotion-focused coping strategies such as acquiescent silence. Employees free up considerable cognitive space by inculcating a sense of detachment.
Theme	Subtheme	Examplers
		After experiencing a continued lack of voice, the silence adopted as a psychological detachment choice by the returning mothers in our study helps them seek retributive justice.

Theme	Subtheme	Examplers
		Some working mothers silently accept mistreatment or discrimination in the workplace, fearing repercussions if they speak up.
Pressured Caregiver	Obligated to Fulfill Maternal Care Duties	Mothers often feel responsible for everything at home, contributing to their mental burden and impacting their physical and mental health. Family demands on employed women like child care, elder care, house work is higher
Theme	Subtheme	Examplers
		than the employed men. This commitment for familial role is emphasised by the Indian culture as central to their very being. Despite their contributions to the household income, mothers may still be viewed

Theme	Subtheme	Examplers
		as secondary breadwinners compared to their male counterparts.
	Double Shifts	Irrespective of education, income and employment, professional women in India are still doing three jobs - office, housework and child care. Working mothers often work double shifts, both at work and at home, to meet the demands of homemaking and
		childcare. However, what has not changed is the fact that women work double shifts, the second at home after their hours at workplaces to carry out the duties of homemakers. Indian women face more severe problems with

Theme	Subtheme	Examplers
		"having to do it all" and internalize the "double shift" as a payment for empowerment.
	Childcare Concerns	Moreover, in India, working mothers face significant stress and pressures prior to going out to work and coming back post work because of insufficient childcare conveniences and inflexible workloads. Childcare decisions of
		working mothers are highly affected by the support of family, and organization. As children require additional care, the commitment to meet their needs influences working mothers work roles, which leads to worklife conflict.

Theme	Subtheme	Examplers
		Further, childcare has emerged as a leading issue among other family-related problems like waking up at night, house hold chores and unsupportive family members.
	Special Category Employee	According to their perspective, the category of "flexible worker" is frequently associated with women and those with young children.
		Thus, within the masculine definitions of organisational capability, these women are assumed to have faltered by opting for maternity-based solutions their organisation had offered. Clearly, one of the keys to attracting and retaining women in companies is supporting them through

Theme	Subtheme	Examplers
		motherhood, allowing them the time and flexibility to work and raise children at the same time. The study has uncovered the paradox of work-family research by outlining the inevitable stigmatization faced by first-time mothers seen availing of the "organisational sops" on offer before and post-partum.
Desperate "Supermom"	Expected to Efforlessly Balance	Indian women face the "superwoman" syndrome, internalizing impossible expectations to be perfect at both home and work, as a by-product of patriarchy. Mothers are expected to be "superwomen," managing work and family responsibilities effortlessly, despite facing severe

Theme	Subtheme	Examplers
		challenges in balancing both roles. Society expects working mothers to embody the image of a "superwoman," effortlessly balancing work and family responsibilities. This highlights the internalization of impossible expectations by Indian women of being "a
		superwoman", which is seen as a payment for their empowerment, or a way to "neutralize" their "deviance" from traditional gender roles.
	Compromising on self well-being	Professional women hardly find space for themselves to accomplish basic necessity of life like adequate sleep, exercise and a healthy diet. A mother barely thinks of taking leave for herself as

Theme	Subtheme	Examplers
		she prioritizes everything above her. Whenever working mothers perceive stress, they are likely to forgo their self-well being immediately. The blurring of boundaries resulted in working mothers operating without an off
		button. It is interesting to note here is the coping mechanism of stoicism or 'working through spells of pain'- both physical and mental, employed by these women while negotiating the dissonance between both the spheres and through the blending-in processes as well.

	Desperate to become "Ideal"	Working mothers, particularly mother-managers, portrayed by the media and experts as neglectful and a threat to their children's emotional development, are desperate to show that they can be supermoms, managing to work as well as raise happy, healthy children and maintaining a blissful marriage.
Theme	Subtheme	Examplers
		However, what is to be understood here is that these women not only try to blend into the private spheres of ideal motherhood but also into the always-on-the-toe masculine expectations of the workplace as well. Mothers are very aware of managing their impressions as good mothers and driven by a fear of unpleasant

		scenes in which the presented self may differ from the projected self. Managing the motherly appearance might dictate carrying a diaper bag.

Note: The table encapsulates a structured framework delineating candidate themes, their respective underlying subthemes, and exemplars to illustrate each subtheme within the given context.

In the following sections, I will detail the construction process for each theme and its corresponding subthemes:

Obstructed at Work

Working mothers are represented as being obstructed at work through an emphasis on various factors that impede their professional growth and success. Some of these were highlighted as career disablers - a term attributed to family responsibilities such as childcare and eldercare, as well as societal expectations regarding women's roles in the family. These responsibilities are shown to disrupt career trajectories, contributing to what is commonly referred to as the "leaky pipeline" phenomenon, where women's advancement within organizations is hindered (Shanmugam & Agarwal, 2019, p. 253).

I also view obstruction as stemming from the hostile nature of the workplace, with subtle forms of discrimination and biases creating a challenging environment for their return after maternity leave or assuming caregiving responsibilities, which have been highlighted in literature. Setbacks such as unofficial demotions and negative perceptions of their efficiency are highlighted as contributing to marginalization. Additionally, working mothers have been portrayed as lacking the voice and assertiveness necessary to advocate for themselves effectively in the workplace. This is attributed to societal conditioning, internalized biases, and fear of repercussions for speaking up. Even as a way to cope with injustices, they are portrayed as remaining silent in the face of mistreatment or discrimination, further perpetuating cycles of obstruction.

The following subthemes collectively underscore the obstructed nature of the working mothers' advancement in the workplace:

Family Responsibilities as Career Disablers

Working mothers were depicted as facing significant obstruction in their career advancement due to family responsibilities. According to one study, "childbirth and pregnancy seem to be among the most important career disablers," reflecting how these life events disrupt career trajectories and hinder women's professional growth (Shanmugam & Agarwal, 2019, p. 255). Career disablers, here, refer to factors or circumstances that inhibit or impede an individual's career progression or advancement. These disablers can take various forms, including personal, societal, or systemic barriers that hinder mothers' ability to achieve their professional goals. Researchers also portrayed various family-related responsibilities, such as marriage, childcare, spouse relocation, and eldercare, as burdensome and all-consuming, placing additional strain on working mothers and hindering their ability to focus on career development (Shanmugam & Agarwal, 2019; Kapoor et al., 2021).

Kapoor et al. 2021 have recognized family responsibilities as the primary reason that disrupts working mothers from pursuing career opportunities, advancing within their professions, or achieving a work-life balance. Furthermore, Sharma and Dhir (2022) acknowledged the societal and cultural norms that prioritize women's roles in the domestic sphere over other responsibilities. This was evident in the mention of "the burden of household responsibilities" and the "socio-cultural indoctrination" that restricts women's advancement in the workplace (Sharma & Dhir, 2022, p. 194). This ingrained belief system not only impacts women's opportunities for career growth but also perpetuates gender inequality in the workplace by limiting women's access to leadership positions and other career advancement opportunities.

Informal Setbacks

I viewed the obstruction of working mothers' careers as stemming from informal setbacks they encounter upon returning to the workforce after maternity leave or assuming caregiving responsibilities. These setbacks were characterized by subtle forms of discrimination that created a hostile work environment for returning mothers. I employ the term "informal" in this subtheme to emphasize the subtle and often unrecognized forms of discrimination and obstacles they face in the workplace. Unlike formal barriers such as explicit company policies or regulations, mothers are depicted as encountering more implicit setbacks, making them challenging to identify and address directly. Moreover, I use the term "setback" to signify how women may be sidelined or overlooked for career advancement opportunities despite their qualifications and experience.

The observation that they often experience "unofficial demotions and have to accept lower positions due to a lack of viable alternatives" evidenced the structural barriers they confront upon re-entering the workforce (Varma & Sivarajan, 2023). These not only hamper their professional growth but also perpetuate the marginalization of mothers in the workplace. Additionally, biases

from supervisors and colleagues further compounded these challenges, leading to negative experiences and strained professional relationships for returning mothers. The presence of a "maternal wall" or "glass ceiling" is emphasized as reinforcing the perception that motherhood is incompatible with career success, perpetuating gender inequality within the workplace (Varma & Sivarajan, 2020, p. 293).

Perceived Inefficiency of Returning Mothers

Researchers describe working mothers as being perceived as less efficient due to their caregiving responsibilities. The perception of working mothers as "the returned mother" who "may not be as efficient or up for it" post-childbirth attributed mothers' perceived inefficiency to their caregiving obligations (Varma & Sivarajan, 2023). Despite their qualifications and capabilities, working mothers are depicted as facing scrutiny and skepticism regarding their ability to perform effectively in the workplace, which underscores the pervasive gender stereotypes and biases that hinder their professional advancement. As noted in another study, despite policies welcoming women back into the workforce after maternity leave, doubts persisted among colleagues and supervisors about their ability to balance work and family needs (Maiya & Bagali, 2014). This perception of inefficiency was based on assumptions about women's availability, commitment, and priorities rather than objective assessments of their performance.

I refer to the idea of inefficiency as being "perceived" to emphasize the subjective nature of these judgments and underscores how women's abilities are unfairly questioned based on societal stereotypes. Furthermore, it aims to suggest that these judgments are not immutable truths but beliefs that can be challenged and dismantled. By recognizing the subjective nature of these perceptions, researchers in management studies are poised to challenge traditional assumptions and biases regarding working mothers in the workplace.

Suppressed in Silence

The subtheme "suppressed in silence" encapsulates the notion that women, particularly working mothers, often feel compelled to remain silent in the face of mistreatment or discrimination in the workplace. Due to years of conditioning in a patriarchal society, women have internalized feelings of inferiority or lack of confidence in their abilities, leading them to avoid confrontation or assertive behavior. This was evident in their struggle with "diffidence," characterized by a "lack of confidence in oneself and one's abilities," which often results in a loss of self-efficacy, negatively impacting productivity, self-esteem, and confidence levels (Sharma & Dhir, 2022, p. 197).

Moreover, I use the term "suppressed" to highlight the emotional toll of workplace mistreatment on working mothers. Conditioned by years of patriarchal societal norms, women are shown to

resort to "emotion-focused coping strategies such as acquiescent silence" to navigate workplace injustices (Varma & Sivarajan, 2023). This silence serves as a form of "psychological detachment choice," enabling them to seek retributive justice (Varma & Sivarajan, 2020, p. 294). The fear of repercussions for speaking up further reinforced the need for silence as a self-preservation. Silence being a means to self-preservation suggests that it is not merely a sign of acquiescence but an intentional decision to foster one's well-being. However, it can also result in "negative consequences and withdrawal," perpetuating cycles of inequality and injustice in the workplace if left unresolved (Varma & Sivarajan, 2023).

Pressured Caregiver

In management literature, I recognized caregiving pressures as a defining factor that sets working mothers apart from other employees. Researchers increasingly focused on the inequitable distribution of caregiving responsibilities and attribute the primary caregiving role to mothers within the Indian cultural context. Consequently, working mothers are faced with "double shifts," where they do both paid work and unpaid care work (Purang, Chittem & Narsimhan, 2024). Moreover, in the urban Indian context, childcare concerns further compounded the challenges faced by working mothers. The lack of adequate childcare facilities, family support, and inflexible work arrangements exacerbated work-life conflicts for urban working mothers.

Researchers make it evident that caregiving responsibilities disproportionately fall on women, particularly mothers, due to entrenched societal norms and expectations. This emphasis on caregiving responsibilities painted the picture of working mothers as a special category of employees who must be accommodated in the workplace. This designation implies that working mothers have distinct needs and considerations that must be recognized and accommodated within the workplace. It reflects a broader recognition within management literature of the critical role played by caregiving responsibilities in shaping the experiences of working mothers and underscores the importance of accommodating them.

The following subthemes collectively underscore the caregiving pressures working mothers face:

Obligated to Fulfill Maternal Care Duties

The notion of working mothers as being "obligated to fulfill maternal care duties" underscores the disproportionate burden placed on them regarding household and caregiving responsibilities. This pressure emanates not only from the responsibility itself but also from the unequal distribution of caregiving duties, with mothers often bearing the sole responsibility. The construction of the mother's caregiving role as obligatory emphasizes the societal expectation that women, particularly mothers, are primarily responsible for caregiving activities within the family. As noted in a study, "family demands on employed women like child care, elder care,

housework is higher than the employed men" (Anuradha & Pandey, 2018, p. 121). This unequal distribution is further perpetuated by cultural norms, as noted in the assertion that "this commitment for familial role is emphasized by the Indian culture as central to their very being," reflecting deeply ingrained societal expectations (Shanmugam & Agarwal, 2019, p. 256).

Researchers use this representation to assert how the unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities exacerbates the pressure on women, constraining their ability to engage in their professional pursuits fully and perpetuating gender inequality. As highlighted in a study, "mothers often feel responsible for everything at home," where the expectation for women to oversee all domestic tasks contributes to their mental burden and affects their overall health (Purang, Chittem & Narsimhan, 2024). Furthermore, despite their significant contributions to household income, women are still perceived as "secondary breadwinners," indicating a societal bias that undermines their financial contribution and reinforces traditional gender roles (Varma & Sivarajan, 2020).

Double Shifts

Management scholars depict mothers as working double shifts, illuminating the persistent reality for many women who engage in both paid work and unpaid household work. As evidenced by one study, "irrespective of education, income, and employment, professional women in India are still doing three jobs - office, housework, and child care" (Maiya & Bagali, 2014, p. 166). Despite their professional commitments, working mothers often find themselves working double shifts, as stated in a study: "Mothers who usually work full time also spend their quality time in performing childcare, cleaning house and preparing meals" (Anuradha & Pandey, 2018, p.119).

Even after fulfilling their formal employment duties, women continue to bear the brunt of household chores and caregiving responsibilities, exemplifying the enduring gender disparities in the division of labor. By internalizing this phenomenon as a "payment for empowerment," women are shown to perceive the burden of balancing multiple responsibilities as a necessary sacrifice to assert their agency and autonomy in society (Purang, Chittem & Narsimhan, 2024). This suggests that women may view their ability to manage competing demands as a form of empowerment despite the inherent challenges and sacrifices involved.

Childcare Concerns

In the urban Indian context, childcare concerns among working mothers were particularly pronounced. As highlighted by a study, in India, working mothers faced significant stress and pressures before going out to work and coming back post-work because of "insufficient childcare conveniences and inflexible workloads" (Sharma & Dhir, 2022, p. 193). This underscores the challenges faced by urban working mothers due to a lack of adequate childcare facilities and the

rigidity of their work schedules, exacerbating their caregiving responsibilities.

Researchers deemed childcare as "a leading issue among other family-related problems like waking up at night, household chores, and unsupportive family members," highlighting how childcare concerns intersect with various other household-related issues faced by urban working mothers (Anuradha & Pandey, 2018, p.126). These included disruptions to sleep patterns, increased household chores, and lack of support from family members, all of which contributed to the overall stress and burden experienced by working mothers.

Another researcher noted that "childcare decisions of working mothers are highly affected by the support of family and organization," emphasizing the critical role of family and organizational support in addressing childcare needs (Sharma & Dhir, 2022, p. 194). I see this representation as directly stemming from the nature of urban Indian settings where nuclear families are prevalent and support systems are limited. Therefore, the availability of childcare services and flexible work arrangements becomes crucial for working mothers to balance their professional and caregiving responsibilities effectively. This reflects the interdependence between familial and organizational structures in shaping the experiences of working mothers

Special Category Employees

Caregiving pressures uniquely position mothers as a special category of employees with distinct needs within the workplace. Researchers highlighted how mothers, particularly those with young children, are often associated with the category of "flexible workers" within organizational contexts (Javad, Nema & Chowdhary, 2023). This association stems from the perception that mothers require flexibility to balance their caregiving responsibilities with work obligations. The literature also highlighted the challenges faced by mothers within the masculine definitions of organizational capability.

Mothers may be perceived as having "faltered" by opting for maternity-based solutions offered by their organizations, which can contribute to stigmatization and undermine their professional standing (Varma & Sivarajan, 2020). This suggests that when mothers utilize maternity-based solutions provided by their organizations, such as maternity leave or flexible work arrangements, they may be viewed as having fallen short or deviated from traditional workplace norms. This perception can lead to stigmatization and negatively impact their professional reputation. This representation emphasizes the vulnerability and additional pressures faced by mothers in navigating the expectations and norms within the workplace. It is suggested that organizations have to accommodate mothers' caregiving responsibilities by acknowledging the unique challenges they face and providing them with the necessary time and flexibility to work and raise children simultaneously.

Desperate Superwomen

The representation of working mothers as "desperate superwomen" highlights the societal expectations and pressures placed on women to excel in both their professional and caregiving roles simultaneously. I found the term "superwoman" (often used synonymously with supermom) conveying the expectation and the ideal of a woman who can effortlessly manage everything that they are 'supposed to do' as dictated by their socio-cultural environment. In the urban Indian context, this included managing their careers, raising happy and healthy children, and maintaining a harmonious family life (Purang, Chittem & Narsimhan, 2024). These mothers are expected to flawlessly balance multiple responsibilities without showing signs of struggle or vulnerability.

Working mothers are portrayed as desperate because they are driven by a deep-seated fear of falling short of this idealized image and being judged as inadequate or neglectful. Mothers are depicted as feeling compelled to conform to this image to dispel negative stereotypes and validate their worth as mothers and professionals. In response to these pressures, they are portrayed as prioritizing their children's needs above their own, sacrificing personal time and well-being, and striving to maintain a facade of perfection to meet societal expectations. This desperate quest to become superwomen reflects the internalized pressure to reconcile their roles as caregivers and professionals, often at the expense of their own mental and physical health.

The following underlying subthemes behind the "desperate superwoman" subtheme are outlined below:

Expected to Effortlessly Balance

The representation of mothers being "expected to effortlessly balance" underscores the immense pressure and unrealistic expectations placed on them to balance their roles at home and in the workplace with ease. The idea of the "superwoman" is deeply ingrained in cultural norms, shaping expectations regarding women's capabilities and roles. Additionally, the idea that mothers internalize the impossible expectations of being a superwoman, which is seen as a "payment for their empowerment" or a way to "neutralize their 'deviance from traditional gender roles," suggested that the concept of the superwoman serves as a mechanism for women to reconcile their empowerment with societal expectations, further perpetuating the myth of "effortless balance" (Purang, Chittem & Narsimhan, 2024). To me, "effortless" conveys a sense of natural aptitude and inherent capability, implying that women should inherently possess the skills and abilities required to excel in both spheres of life without needing external support or accommodations. This expectation overlooks the systemic barriers and structural inequalities that may hinder women's ability to balance work and family responsibilities, further exacerbating the

pressure placed on them.

Compromising on Self Well-being

Working mothers were depicted as significantly "compromising on self well-being" as they navigated the demands of their roles. Mothers often prioritize their work and family responsibilities above their own health and personal needs, leading to neglect of fundamental aspects of self-care such as adequate sleep, exercise, and nutrition. The statement that "professional women hardly find space for themselves" underscored the scarcity of time and resources for self-care activities, resulting in exhaustion and burnout (Maiya, & Bagali, 2014, p. 166). This reflects systemic issues within workplaces and households prioritizing productivity and caretaking duties over individual health and wellness. Additionally, the assertion that "a mother barely thinks of taking leave for herself" glorified a self-sacrificial kind of motherhood, where women prioritize the needs of others over their well-being (Menon, 2022, p. 359).

The assertion that "whenever working mothers perceive stress, they are likely to forgo their self-well-being immediately" highlighted the immediate sacrifice of self-care that working mothers often make when confronted with stressors (Kapoor et. al., 2021, p. 1302). The absence of an "off button" suggested that working mothers may feel constantly overwhelmed and unable to disconnect from their professional obligations, compromising their mental and physical health (Purang, Chittem & Narsimhan, 2024). While the coping mechanisms of stoicism or "working through spells of pain" were seen as allowing women to persevere in the face of adversity, I recognized them as perpetuating a harmful narrative that valorizes suffering and self-sacrifice as inherent virtues of motherhood (Varma & Sivarajan, 2020, p. 299).

Desperate to become "Ideal"

Researchers describe working mothers as being desperate to embody the ideal of a "superwoman" in response to societal perceptions that portray them as neglectful and detrimental to their children's well-being. According to one researcher, these women were "desperate to show that they can be supermoms, managing to work as well as raise happy, healthy children and maintaining a blissful marriage" (Roy, 2016, p. 27). This desperate quest to prove themselves stemmed from the media representations that often cast working mothers as threats to their children's emotional development. Additionally, working mothers are confronted with the daunting task of adhering to traditional standards of ideal motherhood while simultaneously fulfilling their professional obligations. It is also noted that mothers are acutely aware of the need to manage their impressions as good mothers, driven by a "fear of unpleasant scenes in which the presented self may differ from the projected self" (Roy, 2016, p. 26).

The concept of "ideal motherhood" played a central role in the self-perceptions of these working

women, influencing how they navigate the competing demands of work and family life (Varma & Sivarajan, 2020). As highlighted in a study, the pressure to embody this ideal is so profound that it dictates even the smallest details of their behavior, such as "managing the motherly appearance might dictate carrying a diaper bag" (Roy, 2016, p. 26). This illustrates the extent to which these women feel compelled to conform to societal expectations and dispel negative stereotypes about their ability to balance career and family responsibilities.

Discussion

The following sections aim to contextualize the findings within relevant theoretical frameworks and cultural contexts:

Understanding Representations

Representations of working mothers in management literature encompass an array of perceptions and practices that are not only constructed but also negotiated within the dynamic interplay of organizational and social contexts. These representations are shaped by a multitude of factors, including cultural norms, organizational policies, and individual experiences, all of which interact to influence how working mothers are perceived and represented in management literature. It is pertinent to acknowledge that these representations are not merely reflections of working mothers' reality but dynamic constructs influenced by cultural context and broader discourses surrounding motherhood in the workplace. At the core of my understanding of representations lies the recognition that meaning is not inherent within the construct of a "working mother" but is actively constructed and negotiated within the urban Indian cultural context, which influences perceptions and practices surrounding motherhood in the workplace. In viewing representations as situated articulations, I intend to emphasize the importance of understanding representations as contextually embedded within specific social, cultural, and economic environments.

It is pertinent to acknowledge that management scholars are implicated in the process of representing "others," in this case, working mothers. This representation is not merely an academic exercise but directly influences the production of knowledge and power dynamics within organizational contexts (Hinterberger, 2007). Consequently, ethical and political dimensions are inherent in how working mothers are portrayed and understood within management literature. Management scholars must grapple with the complexities of representing the subjectivities and identities of working mothers. The feminist project of transforming power relations and improving the material conditions of people's lives intersects with the challenges of representing the experiences of working mothers within organizational structures (Hinterberger, 2007). The representation of working mothers cannot be divorced from broader societal power

structures that perpetuate gender inequalities.

Representations in the Urban Indian Context

In the urban Indian context, representations of working mothers within management literature take on a unique dimension shaped by the intersection of cultural, social, and economic factors. They become linked to broader discourses surrounding modernity, globalization, and economic development (Perry-Jenkins et, al., 2000). As urbanization accelerates and more women enter the workforce, there is a growing recognition of the vital role that working mothers play in driving economic growth and social change (Das, 2017). Management researchers are therefore deeply invested in understanding and addressing the factors contributing to low female labor force participation, attrition, and the "leaky pipeline" phenomenon among working mothers (Shanmugam & Agarwal, 2019). I perceive this deep investment of management researchers as a reflection of their awareness of the systemic barriers and gender inequalities that persist within the workforce, particularly concerning working mothers. This drive leads management researchers to focus their attention on the myriad factors that hinder working mothers in the urban Indian context, ultimately shaping their representation as "obstructed at work."

Challenges faced by Working Mothers

I use the term "obstructed" to evoke a sense of being hindered or impeded, which aligns with the systemic barriers and structural inequalities that working mothers often encounter in the workplace. It recognizes a departure from the idealized notion of a level playing field, highlighting the realities of gender disparities and inequities that persist despite advancements in gender equality initiatives. As per the patriarchal capitalist framework that dominates urban India, women disproportionately shoulder caregiving responsibilities, leading to penalties in professional spheres that prioritize profit-driven objectives (Folbre, 2014). Consequently, patriarchal capitalism reinforces gender disparities by obstructing women's career advancement and perpetuating unequal distribution of caregiving labor.

Mothers are assumed to be the mandatory bearer of family responsibilities (Anuradha & Pandey, 2018). This assumption manifests through unofficial barriers, unfair judgment, and marginalization with organizations, all hindering mothers' career progression. The examination of how mothers are viewed in organizations upon their return is a significant contribution made by management literature. It captures the dynamics of reintegration into the workforce after maternity leave or other caregiving responsibilities, shedding light on the challenges and biases that mothers often encounter.

Responding to Challenges: Coping Mechanisms and Strategies

Researchers attribute mothers' silence in the face of workplace challenges and discrimination to their perceptions about themselves. These perceptions are characterized by internalized beliefs about their abilities, compounded by societal expectations, lack of confidence, and fear of repercussions, contributing to an "acquiescent silence" (Sharma & Dhir, 2022; Varma & Sivarajan, 2023). This silence becomes a coping mechanism driven by a desire to avoid conflict or further marginalization, perpetuating cycles of inequality and hindering their career progression.

Silence can also be understood as a strategic choice or a form of resistance within feminist discourse. In Maureen A. Mahoney's article on the problem of silence in feminist psychology, she challenges the simplistic equation of voice with authority and silence with victimization (Mahoney, 1996). Instead of solely being interpreted as a lack of voice or agency, silence may serve as a deliberate tactic to navigate oppressive systems or to reclaim power in certain contexts. In the context of working mothers in management literature, silence can be seen as a response to the constraints and expectations imposed by patriarchal structures. Rather than being passive recipients of silencing, working mothers may strategically choose when and how to speak out or remain silent to assert their agency and protect their well-being. This reframing of silence challenges traditional narratives that equate voicelessness with powerlessness, highlighting the complexity of women's experiences and their diverse strategies for navigating patriarchal norms and structures.

Mothers as Employees: Navigating Work and Caregiving

A significant portion of the literature on working mothers delves into caregiving responsibilities precisely because it is a defining aspect that distinguishes their experiences from their male counterparts in the workforce. Caregiving responsibilities, including those related to childcare, eldercare, and household management, disproportionately fall on women in many societies, including urban India. As a result, these responsibilities significantly impact women's ability to participate fully in the workforce and advance in their careers (Anuradha & Pandey, 2018). As I became increasingly cognizant of the profound influence of gender norms on women's work experiences, it prompted a deeper exploration of how these caregiving duties impact women's career paths and overall well-being, revealing the interplay between societal expectations, workplace policies, and individual decisions.

Management researchers often emphasize the challenges and pressures of caregiving within the context of women's employment. This includes exploring how traditional gender norms and expectations shape caregiving dynamics, as well as the impact of caregiving responsibilities on women's career trajectories, job satisfaction, and overall well-being. Moreover, researchers examine how workplace policies and practices, such as maternity leave, flexible work

arrangements, and childcare support, influence women's decisions to enter or remain in the workforce (Maiya & Bagali, 2014). Each subtheme within the representation of facing caregiving pressures contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the challenges unique to the urban Indian context while also acknowledging how this context itself perpetuates these pressures. Indeed, several issues compound "childcare concerns" in urban India. Firstly, the absence of extended family support places the primary responsibility for childcare squarely on mothers' shoulders, as they are designated as the primary caregivers. Secondly, the scarcity of viable and accessible childcare facilities adds another layer of complexity, making it even more challenging for mothers to fulfill their professional obligations while ensuring the well-being of their children (Sharma & Dhir, 2022).

Supporting Mothers as Employees: Organizational Responses

The need for support systems and accommodations to address the unique challenges faced by working mothers places them in a distinct category within the workforce. The representation of working mothers as "special category employees" reflects a negotiation of meaning depending on the context of interpretation, encapsulating both recognition of the unique challenges faced by mothers in the workplace and the perpetuation of traditional gender norms and marginalization (Javad, Nema & Chowdhary, 2023). While labels such as "flexible worker" and "special category employee" may appear neutral or benign on the surface, they carry deeper connotations and implications that may be interpreted in accordance with broader social norms and expectations. As discussed by Galinsky et al. (2003), the concept of labels and their significance in shaping social identities and perceptions is particularly relevant when discussing these representations. These labels serve as guiding themes and organizing principles within the workplace, influencing how individuals perceive themselves and are perceived by others. For instance, being labeled as a "special category employee" can influence a woman's self-perception in significant ways. While some may embrace this label as recognizing their unique contributions and needs, others may perceive it as a form of tokenization or segregation within the workplace. This label may also impact perceptions of professional competence and status, particularly if it is associated with assumptions about women's commitment or capabilities.

Furthermore, the discussion of labels in the context of stigmatization and reappropriation sheds light on the potential for these terms to either reinforce or challenge existing power dynamics within the workplace (Galinsky et al., 2003). While they may be intended to acknowledge and address the needs of working mothers, they must be critically examined to ensure they do not inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes or marginalize certain groups. A crucial aspect overlooked in management literature is how women make sense of and potentially reappropriate labels such as "flexible worker" and "special category employee" within their own experiences.

Understanding how women interpret and respond to these labels is essential for gaining a more nuanced understanding of their impact on individual identities and perceptions.

The Mother Part of "Working Mothers"

While the predominant focus of management literature often centers on enhancing the work aspect of individuals' lives, often relegating the discussion of motherhood to a secondary or tangential role. When mentioned, motherhood is frequently depicted in a glorified and celebratory manner, with researchers assuming it is a constant or fixed aspect of women's lives (Purang, Chittem & Narsimhan, 2024). In this portrayal, motherhood is often idealized, and the traits associated with it, such as sacrifice and nurturing, are sometimes romanticized or presumed to enhance an individual's capabilities automatically. Researchers implicitly assume that motherhood is a constant and innate aspect of women's identities, which can enhance their performance in the workplace through the acquisition of skills such as multitasking, empathy, and management (Roy, 2016).

The glorification and celebration of motherhood in management literature can contribute to the emergence of the representation - "desperate superwoman." This portrays working mothers as individuals who strive to excel in both their professional careers and caregiving responsibilities, often at the expense of their own well-being. This representation underscores the immense pressure and unrealistic expectations placed on working mothers to excel in both their professional and caregiving roles effortlessly. It implies an expectation of perfection and flawlessness in managing multiple responsibilities, further contributing to the myth of the idealized mother-professional.

Labeling working mothers as "superwomen" implies that they possess extraordinary capabilities to navigate the complexities of work and family life effortlessly. Arabandi's (2016) views on "superwomen" reveal how this narrative evokes admiration and praise for women's ability to excel in all aspects of their lives while simultaneously glossing over the inherent challenges and sacrifices required to meet these expectations. This expectation sets an impossibly high standard that is difficult, if not impossible, to meet. Moreover, the emphasis on perfection suggests that these mothers must constantly be in a state of productivity, leaving little room for rest or self-care. While researchers applaud the resilience and stoicism displayed by working mothers, it is equally crucial for them to challenge the glorification of productivity and perfectionism inherent in the superwoman narrative (Varma & Sivarajan, 2020).

Current Gaps and Future Directions

When discussing representations, it is crucial to acknowledge whose experiences are being represented (Hinterberger, 2007). Management researchers often fall short in this regard, as they

frequently make generalizations based on limited samples that predominantly reflect middle-class heteronormative households, mothers with small children, and what could be termed as "partnered" mothers. These representations overlook the diversity of experiences among working mothers, including those of single mothers, LGBTQ+ mothers, mothers from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, and those with varying family structures (King, Huffman & Peddie, 2013). This oversight not only perpetuates stereotypes but also neglects the complex realities faced by different groups of working mothers, leading to an incomplete understanding of the challenges and experiences within the workforce. Future research should strive to broaden the scope of inquiry by exploring the experiences of working mothers from diverse backgrounds and family structures. This could involve conducting studies that center the voices of single mothers, LGBTQ+ mothers, and those from varying socioeconomic backgrounds to gain a deeper understanding of their unique challenges and coping mechanisms. Additionally, research efforts should aim to investigate the intersectionality of identities, recognizing that individuals may experience multiple forms of oppression or privilege based on factors such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and immigration status alongside their gender and parental status (Hinterberger, 2007).

The portrayal of working mothers in management literature often reinforced a gender binary perspective, framing their experiences solely within the context of traditional heteronormative gender roles. Women were typically depicted as caregivers, responsible for managing household duties and childcare, while men were positioned as breadwinners, primarily focused on their careers (Varma & Sivarajan, 2020). This binary representation fails to recognize the diversity of gender identities and roles among working parents, reinforcing outdated stereotypes and limiting the understanding of the complex dynamics within families and workplaces. By perpetuating this gender binary, management literature overlooks the experiences of non-binary individuals and families with non-traditional gender roles, further marginalizing their identities and contributions in the workplace (Fletcher & Swierczynski, 2023). This exclusion not only perpetuates harmful stereotypes but also limits our understanding of the diverse ways in which individuals navigate work and family responsibilities. Moving forward, it is imperative for management literature to adopt a more inclusive and intersectional approach that acknowledges and embraces the full spectrum of gender identities and family structures present in today's workforce. This requires researchers to actively seek out and amplify the voices of individuals and families with non-traditional gender roles, ensuring that their experiences are not only recognized but also valued and respected within scholarly discourse.

The fact that many researchers studying and representing working mothers are females adds an interesting dimension to the discussion. It suggests a potential alignment between the researchers' experiences and the subject matter they are exploring. Female researchers may bring

a unique perspective and empathy to their studies of working mothers, as they may have firsthand experience navigating the challenges of balancing work and family responsibilities. Subjectivity and reflexivity in scholarship can enrich female researchers' representation of working mothers, leading to more meaningful and impactful research outcomes (Huopalaine & Satama, 2019). It underscores the importance of acknowledging and valuing the researcher's own lived experiences as integral components of the research process, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and realities faced by working mothers.

Future research can benefit from the acknowledgment of the researcher's own positionality, which in turn can lead to a deeper exploration of the complexities inherent in the experiences of working mothers, allowing for a more nuanced and empathetic portrayal in the literature.

Ethics Statement

This research was exempt from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review as it relies on anonymized private information on living human subjects without direct involvement. A critical and reflexive approach was followed to maintain objectivity and rigor. This involved scrutinizing the quality and methodology of primary studies, recognizing their inherent limitations, and openly addressing any such constraints. Additionally, proper citation and attribution of sources were prioritized to uphold academic integrity and respect intellectual property rights. Moreover, transparency was upheld throughout the research process. Detailed documentation of search strategies, data extraction methods, and analysis procedures was maintained to facilitate scrutiny and replication by other researchers.

Limitations

The research employed a purposive search strategy to select relevant studies, which, while effectively focusing on the most pertinent literature, also constrains the scope of the research. The research question inherently limits the range of studies included, potentially excluding literature that could offer additional or contrasting insights. As a result, the findings may not encapsulate the full spectrum of research on working mothers in urban India.

This study was limited to management literature based on the experiences and perspectives of urban Indian working mothers. It may not fully represent the diverse perspectives of mothers in other regions or contexts. This limitation was driven by the recognition that the experiences of urban Indian working mothers may differ significantly from those in rural areas or other cultural settings. Factors such as socio-economic conditions, cultural norms, and workplace dynamics can vary, influencing the perspectives and challenges mothers face. Therefore, focusing on urban contexts allows for a more targeted and specific examination of the representations pertinent to this particular demographic.

The representations uncovered in the management literature were confined to the specific sample of studies identified within the scope of this research. These studies predominantly focused on middle-class women with young children in heteronormative households, often characterized by partnered relationships and traditional family structures. The limitations of this sample restricted the diversity of experiences captured within the research, overlooking the unique challenges faced by working mothers from different backgrounds, family structures, and sexual orientations. As a result, the representations captured through this study may not fully reflect the complexities and nuances of the experiences of all working mothers, potentially leading to a skewed understanding of the issues at hand. This limitation underscores the need for future research to adopt more inclusive methodologies and sampling strategies to capture a broader spectrum of experiences and perspectives within the discourse on working motherhood in management literature.

Conclusion

In examining the representations of working mothers within management literature, it becomes evident that these portrayals are deeply intertwined with broader societal expectations, cultural norms, and organizational dynamics. The term "working mother" encapsulates a complex intersection of identities and roles actively negotiated and constructed within the urban Indian context. Moreover, these representations are not static but dynamic constructs that evolve, reflecting shifting attitudes and societal changes. The themes of "Obstructed at Work," "Pressured Caregiver," and "Desperate Superwoman" highlight the diverse experiences and struggles of working mothers, shedding light on the systemic barriers and structural inequalities that hinder their career advancement and well-being. While management researchers strive to understand and address the challenges faced by working mothers, there is a risk of perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing traditional gender norms through the language and labels employed. Moving forward, management literature needs to move beyond idealized portrayals and acknowledge the diverse kinds of realities faced by working mothers. By fostering a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of working mothers' experiences and advocating for policies and practices that support them, management literature can contribute to creating supportive and equitable workplaces that enable all individuals to thrive, regardless of their caregiving responsibilities or gender ideas.

Annotated Bibliography

Shanmugam, M. M., & Agarwal, B. (2019). Support perceptions, flexible work options and career outcomes: A study of working women at the threshold of motherhood in India. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 34(4), 254-286.

The study focuses on the "leaky pipeline" problem, where women leave the workforce due to motherhood-related challenges. The research explores how organizational support, flexible work options, and their impact on careers intersect for young working women in India. Key findings show a lack of flexible work usage despite adaptable IT jobs. Examining career outcomes, the research reveals a positive connection between flexible work use and reduced work-life conflict, lower turnover intentions, and increased job satisfaction. However, the impact is less pronounced for middle-level positions, likely due to higher job responsibilities. The study also highlights the moderating role of support perceptions on the relationship between flexible work options and career outcomes. Supportive supervisors, especially for pregnant women, play a crucial role in easing the transition into motherhood. This emphasizes the need for organizations to foster a supportive culture. By recognizing motherhood as a social role, the study advocates for female-friendly measures and increases awareness among policymakers and organizations.

Maiya, S., & Bagali, M. M. (2014). An empirical investigation on work-life balance among working mothers: Emerging HRM interventions. *International journal of business and administration research review*, 1(5), 165-176.

The paper discusses the evolving role of Indian women in the workforce due to changing societal attitudes, economic factors like inflation, and increasing educational levels. It emphasizes the challenges working mothers face, especially in balancing their professional careers with family responsibilities. The study conducted empirical research in both the Public and Private sectors to understand the dynamics of work-life balance among working mothers. Working mothers across sectors face difficulties managing work demands and family responsibilities, leading to stress and work-life imbalance. There is a significant correlation between corporate support, career advancement opportunities, and psychological factors affecting work-life balance. Different age groups exhibit varying responses to work-life balance challenges. Younger employees prioritize career advancement and flexibility, while older employees focus more on organizational support and career growth opportunities. The study suggests implementing innovative HR policies to address work-life balance issues, including mentorship programs, counseling sessions, and recognition for work-life balance.

Sharma, R., & Dhir, S. (2022). An exploratory study of challenges faced by working mothers in India and their expectations from organizations. *Global Business Review,* 23(1), 192-204.

The study delves into the challenges faced by working mothers in India and proposes actionable interventions for organizations to address these issues. Through a comprehensive mixed-method approach combining GT, qualitative interviews, and quantitative analysis, the research identifies three overarching challenges encountered by working Indian mothers: lack of organizational support, diffidence, and lack of social support. It sheds light on the impact of societal norms and

gender roles on women's career aspirations, emphasizing the need for tailored organizational policies and cultural shifts to support working mothers effectively. The study's findings underscore the importance of initiatives such as coaching and mentoring programs, promoting parental leaves for fathers, providing quality daycare facilities, and raising awareness about maternity laws and policies.

Menon, A., (December 2022). HYBRID WORK MODEL AND WORKING MOTHERS. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*. Vol. 9, Issue 12, pages e353-e360.

The objectives were to study working mothers' preference for a Hybrid Work Place, to find out working mothers' perception of the challenges of the hybrid work model, to list down the benefits of a Hybrid Workplace for Working Mothers, and to suggest ways workplaces can modify their policies that can help them retain their talented working mothers. 100 working mothers participated in this study. A self-structured questionnaire was made to collect information related to the effect of the hybrid work model on working mothers. Overall, the discussion about hybrid work models and their impact on working mothers shows both progress and challenges in balancing work and life for women. While hybrid work offers flexibility that can empower mothers, it also reveals ongoing issues that make it hard for them to advance in their careers. The study highlights the importance of understanding the many responsibilities mothers face, especially during the pandemic, and the need for workplaces to adapt policies and attitudes to support them better. Despite the benefits of hybrid work, like better balance and productivity, we still need to address biases and unequal sharing of household duties, which can make things harder for women. While the study suggests helpful changes to workplace policies, we also need broader societal changes to support working mothers better and treat them with empathy and fairness.

Javad, S., Nema, P., & Chowdhary, N. (2023). Exploring Indian working mothers' transition to involuntary telecommuting. *Employee Relations: The International Journal*, 45(6), 1392-1414.

The research explored the experiences of Indian working mothers who involuntarily transitioned to telecommuting during the COVID-19 pandemic. Adopting a phenomenological research design, the authors conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews via telephone and online platforms. The analysis, using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis framework, revealed two overarching themes: characteristics of involuntary telecommuting and its impact.

The study examines the telecommuting experiences of working mothers, emphasizing the challenges and implications for work-life balance, social support, and organizational policies.

While some women find telecommuting beneficial for accommodating family needs, others describe it as exhausting and stressful, particularly in involuntary telecommuting arrangements where control over work schedules is limited. Gendered expectations and societal pressures further complicate telecommuting experiences, leading to work-family conflicts and feelings of isolation among telecommuting mothers. The study underscores the importance of developing employee-friendly telecommuting policies that address work-family conflicts and promote social interactions among telecommuters. It contributes to Role conflict theory and emphasizes the need for tailored support systems and policies to address the unique challenges faced by telecommuting mothers

Anuradha, & Pandey, M. (2018). Problem Faced by New Mothers in Balancing Work and Family Life. *PACIFIC BUSINESS REVIEW INTERNATIONAL*, 10(8), 119-129.

The research focused on understanding the relationship between work and family-related problems and their impact on work-life conflict. The study collected responses from mothers working in the private sector, each with a first child below the age of 3 years. The findings revealed that mothers encounter various challenges, including childcare, waking up at night, household chores, and a lack of family support at home. Additionally, they face inflexible work schedules and heavy workloads in their professional lives. Ultimately, the study concluded that family-related problems have a more significant impact on work-life balance for these working mothers compared to work-related issues.

Kapoor, V., Yadav, J., Bajpai, L., & Srivastava, S. (2021). Perceived stress and psychological well-being of working mothers during COVID-19: A mediated moderated roles of teleworking and resilience. *Employee Relations: The International Journal*, 43(6), 1290-1309.

The study is grounded in the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, emphasizing individuals' efforts to obtain, retain, and protect essential resources, especially during stressful situations like the COVID-19 pandemic. It posits that stress arises when crucial resources are threatened or lost, encompassing physical objects, personal energies, social support, and opportunities for development. The research focuses on understanding the impact of mandated teleworking on the psychological well-being of working mothers. It acknowledges that working mothers often experience overlapping responsibilities between work and home, particularly during teleworking arrangements. The study highlights how the increased stress associated with teleworking, compounded by family responsibilities, can negatively affect the psychological well-being of working mothers. Additionally, the research recognizes the role of resilience in buffering the adverse effects of teleworking on working mothers' psychological well-being, emphasizing the importance of individual coping mechanisms in navigating challenging circumstances. Overall,

the study provides insight into the experiences and challenges faced by working mothers in balancing professional responsibilities with family commitments, particularly in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Roy, S. (2016). Motherhood in Management: A Paradigm Shift. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management,* 18(9), 25-35. DOI: 10.9790/487X-1809032535.

The paper investigates the intricate relationship between motherhood and managerial roles among professional mothers in Kolkata, India, operating in private and public sectors. It uncovers that while a significant portion of mother managers perceive a positive correlation between mothering and managerial duties, viewing motherhood as an asset in organizational management, many also face challenges stemming from traditional gender norms, where management roles are predominantly male-dominated. Despite these challenges, a considerable number of mother managers identify as "supermoms," striving to balance both family and career responsibilities. This highlights the ongoing struggle to achieve work-life balance and the complex interplay between personal and professional identities for women in leadership roles.

Varma, A. M., & Sivarajan, R. (2020). Normalizing Maternal Stoicism at the Workplace. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 56(2), 292-303. Published by Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources.

This study explores the challenges faced by working mothers, focusing on the dual burden of meeting workplace expectations while fulfilling caretaking duties. It examines how maternal stoicism serves as a coping mechanism for these women, allowing them to persist through discomforts. The paper delves into the impact of stoicism on their efficacy levels and identity formation. It addresses the influence of organizational glass ceilings, maternal walls, and societal mother blaming on the sensemaking process for new mothers. The 'ideal motherhood' plays a significant role in their self-perceptions, blending into private and workplace expectations.

Maternal stoicism is a prevalent coping mechanism, aiming to maintain separation between the private and work spheres. Mothers fear leakage across these borders, affecting their intellectual capital and sociality, particularly in masculine workplace structures. The study notes that mothers who employ stoicism develop stronger identities and improved efficacy. However, burnout may occur after a certain period, with a slowed identity formation pace. Perceived organizational support plays a crucial role in mitigating burnout, as participants discuss how various actors in their organizations assist in navigating between the two spheres, maintaining improved efficacy levels.

Purang, P., Chittem, M., & Narsimhan, H. (2024). Reimagining work but operating with a no off button: experiences of working mothers in India during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Gender*

in Management: An International Journal.

The study highlights the profound impact of the pandemic on work practices, particularly for working mothers in India. It underscores the challenges of enforced remote work, emphasizing the blurring of boundaries between professional and personal life. The study emphasizes the necessity for adaptation and innovation in response to unprecedented challenges, showcasing how working mothers, despite initial difficulties, reimagined and re-strategized their work to regain satisfaction and positive emotions. Notably, the gendered realities of domestic responsibilities are brought to the forefront, revealing the heightened expectations on women to manage both professional and household duties. The text advocates for supportive work environments, suggesting that organizations should prioritize flexibility, acknowledge the unique roles of working mothers, and address the potential impacts on mental and physical well-being.

Varma, A. M., & Sivarajan, R. (2023). All's (not) fair in motherhood and work? Post partum psychological contract breach experiences of Indian first-time mothers. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Business Administration.* Advanced online publication. DOI: 10.1108/APJBA-04-2022-0167.

The paper investigates the experiences of Indian first-time mothers returning to work in STEM organizations, focusing on perceived breaches of the psychological contract (PC) from a work–home resources perspective. Utilizing interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) within the work–home resources (W-HR) model, the study reveals that significant life events such as childbirth and lack of career growth can lead to resource depletion, resulting in mothers perceiving ideological PC breaches at work. It emphasizes the role of key resources and macro support structures in mitigating work-home conflict. The study sheds light on how first-time mothers cope with organizational re-entry in the Indian context, offering valuable insights into women's experiences in STEM fields and their coping responses.

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