

Stress Experienced by Working and Non-Working Mothers and their Perceived Relationship with their Younger Children

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ABSTRACT

This study compares the stress experienced by working and non-working mothers, as well as their perceptions of the relationship they share with their younger child. The relationship between mother's stress levels and perceptions of the mother- younger child relationship were also studied. The study followed a mixed methods approach. In the first phase which was quantitative, 65 working and 65 non-working mothers between the ages of 25-35 years with two children, were administered the Child-Parent Relationship Scale (Pianta, 1998) and the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, et al, 1983). In the second phase of the study, which was qualitative, 7 working and 7 non-working mothers from the larger sample were interviewed. Findings indicate that working mothers experienced higher levels of stress and more conflict in their relationship with their younger child. Stress levels of working mothers and conflicts in their mother- younger child relationship were positively correlated. Interviews indicated that working and non-working mothers used similar coping techniques. Non-working mothers perceived their younger child to be more dependent on them than did working mothers. No differences were found in mothers' perceptions of the positive aspects of their relationship with their younger child.

INTRODUCTION:

Families in India have traditionally displayed a preference for non-working brides. A woman's role as housewife is appreciated by heads of Indian families as a 'domesticated' woman is considered more virtuous than a 'working woman' (Kumar, Verghese & Kumar, 2005). However impressions of virtuosity have existed within spaces of gender inequality where men on account of their role as providers have enjoyed greater power than women. Bergmann (1981) suggests that to be a housewife is to be the member of a peculiar occupation considering that the duties performed, the form of pay and the physical hazards are extremely different from conditions found in other occupations. Feminists have pointed out that the work women do at home is often neither publicly nor privately acknowledged. Traditions are changing and women in urban India have begun to step out of their homes in greater numbers to pursue careers. This is a both a result of the changing perceptions about women's roles as well as the increased need to supplement household incomes in times of rising expenses. However

women who work outside the house are not relieved of their housework (Bhai, 2000) and one role that remains central to the lives of working and non-working married women is motherhood.

Singh (2011) notes that within Indian society, the mother-child relationship is considered supreme amongst all relationships. Becoming a mother gives a woman status and recognition in the family (Kakar, 1979) and women who cannot be mothers are often stigmatized (Saraswati & Dutta, 1988). Research has supported the significance of the maternal role in India. In a study on sex role attitudes of college students in three major universities in Southern India (Rao & Rao, 1984), men and women expressed the view that marriage is incomplete without children. Singh (2011) interviewed thirty mothers in the age group 18 to 35 years from rural and urban backgrounds to study the experience of motherhood amongst Indian women and found that motherhood was highly valued by all the interviewees with a strong sense of devotion and sacrifice expressed towards rearing children.

Mothering was characterized by holding the child as God-like, giving the mother—child relationship priority over the husband-wife relationship and complete involvement in the mother's role. The traditional expectations from mothers and the high value placed on their role within Indian culture are bound to conflict with their job role demands, especially considering that working women in India face several challenges. Unlike some Western countries India offers few options to women in terms of flexible working hours, part time work or working from home. Even big cities like New Delhi and Mumbai provide limited day care facilities for young children and often the services available are unsatisfactory. Moreover urban India is witnessing a transition from joint to nuclear family setups. This means that grandparents are not always available to look after children when women are away at work. Hence one of the central issues faced by women in urban India is the difficulties posed by reconciling demanding careers with their caring roles at home. Though working and managing the home at the same time may be challenging for women, most past research has shown that having a working mother is not detrimental to children's development (Ahmad, 2002; Juneja, 1979). Employed mothers, especially those with higher education, make special efforts to compensate for their absence (Hoffman, 1984) for example by cutting down on their sleeping and relaxing time more than they cut down on the time spent with the child (Hill and Stafford, 1979). Evidence also suggests that employed mothers use the time that they are with their children to do almost as much of certain types of child care as non-working mothers do. They prioritize active, engaged child care time over non-engaged supervisory time (Bittman et al, 2004).

While the impact of maternal work status on child development has been well documented, little research has compared how working and non-working mothers themselves perceive their relationships with their children to be like. For example there is not much existing literature on how a mother's work status affects the degree of conflict in the mother-child relationship. The literature that exists pertains to the adolescent age

group and indicates working mothers to have more disagreements with their adolescent sons and daughters than do non-working mothers (Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Propper, 1972). The present study seeks to study this and other aspects of the mother-child relationship as perceived by working and non-working mothers who have young children. The focus in this study was on the mother's relationship with the younger of her two children as the younger child would be in greater need of the mother's assistance and hands-on care than the older child.

The second variable assessed in this study is the stress levels of working and non-working mothers. Previous research has indicated working women in India to be more stressed than non-working women (Aujla, Gill & Sandhu, 2004) and show higher levels of anxiety, guilt, and arousal (Sharma & Pandey, 1996). The need to compare the stress levels of working and non-working mothers arose from the fact that stress appears to affect the parent-child relationship adversely (Addis & Bernard, 2002; Dehle & Weiss, 2002). Elder, Nguyen and Capsi (1985) found that a parent's distress is related to harsh and punitive parenting. Vig and Jaswal (2008) examined the relationship between stress and the parent-child relationship amongst adolescents in Punjab and found that mothers who experienced lower stress showed significantly more accepting behavior of their sons as compared to mothers who experienced moderate levels of stress. Therefore this study also attempted to understand the nature of the relationship between mothers' stress levels and their perceptions of their relationship with their younger child. More specifically the objectives of the study were:

1. To compare working and non-working mothers' perceptions of their relationship with their younger child in terms of:
 - The amount of conflict seen to take place in the relationship
 - The amount of dependence the child is seen to have on his/her mother
 - The positive aspects of the mother-child relationship.

2. To compare the stress levels of working and non-working mothers.
3. To assess the nature and strength of the relationship between the stress levels of working and non-working mothers and their relationships with their younger child.

Sample

The present study followed a mixed methods approach and was conducted in two phases. The first phase was quantitative in nature during which data was collected through the administration of two questionnaires. The sample for this phase consisted of 130 mothers (65 working and 65 non-working women). All the participants were within the age group of 25-35 years (mean age of working mothers= 27.05 years; mean age of non-working mothers= 30.12 years). The working mothers were engaged in a variety of professions such as teaching, banking, nursing, event planning etc. The amount of time that the working mothers worked each week ranged from 30 to 60 hours. It was ensured that the working and non-working groups were matched on important demographic variables such as age, socio-economic status, place of residence, marital status, family structure and number of children. All the respondents belonged to the upper and upper middle income groups and were residents of Delhi and adjoining regions. They lived with their husbands and children in nuclear family set-ups. Only women with two children, with the younger child being between the ages of 3 and 8 years were included in the sample. The second phase of the study was qualitative in nature, during which data was collected through semi-structured interviews. 7 working and 7 nonworking women were selected from the sample recruited in the first phase. Women who had agreed to be interviewed during the conduction of the first phase were contacted and the first 7 who responded in each group were spoken with.

Measures

The two questionnaires administered to the respondents during the first phase of the study were,

•**Child Parent Relationship Scale (CPRS)** (Pianta, 1998) is a self-report instrument completed by mothers and fathers that assesses parents' perceptions of their relationships with their sons or daughters. The 30 items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale and the ratings can be summed into groups of items corresponding to conflicts, positive aspects of the relationship and dependence subscales. The three sub-scales have been defined by the authors as:

Conflict in the parent-child relationship: The degree to which a parent feels that his or her relationship with a particular child is characterized by negativity.

Positive Aspects of parent-child relationship: The degree to which a parent feels that his or her relationship with a particular child is characterized by positivity

Dependence in the parent-child relationship: The degree to which a parent feels that a child is dependent on him/her.

The authors calculated alpha reliabilities for each scale based on 714 subjects, ages 4.5 - 5.5 years. The coefficients reported were: conflict subscale ($\alpha=0.83$), positive aspects of the relationship subscale ($\alpha= 0.72$) and dependence subscale ($\alpha= 0.50$). The correlations between the three subscales are-Conflict with Positive, $r = -.16$; Conflict with Dependence, $r = .21$; Positive with Dependence, $r = .04$.

•**Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)** (Cohen, 1994) is a measure of the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful. It assesses the degree to which participants evaluate their lives as being stressful during the past month. Items are designed to tap how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded respondents find their lives.

The scale also includes a number of direct queries about current levels of experienced stress. It comprises of 14 questions with responses varying from 0 to 4 for each item and ranging from never, almost never, sometimes, fairly often and very often respectively on the basis of their occurrence during one month prior to the survey. The PSS has an internal consistency of 0.85 (Cronbach α coefficient) and test-retest reliability during a short retest interval (several days) of 0.85. (Shah, Hasan, Malik, & Sreeramareddy, 2010).

•**The Interview Schedule-** A semi-structured interview was used to obtain an in-depth view of the perspectives of the participants on the variables under investigation. The interview schedule was constructed to cover the following domains.

- ✓The amount of time spent with the younger child.
- ✓Impact of mother's work status on younger child's development
- ✓Conflicts with the younger child
- ✓Dependence of the younger child
- ✓Disciplinary strategies used with the younger child
- ✓Challenges and pleasures of motherhood.
- ✓Role of other family members in caring for the younger child.
- ✓Causes and effects of stress in the mother's life.
- ✓Means of managing stress

RESULTS:

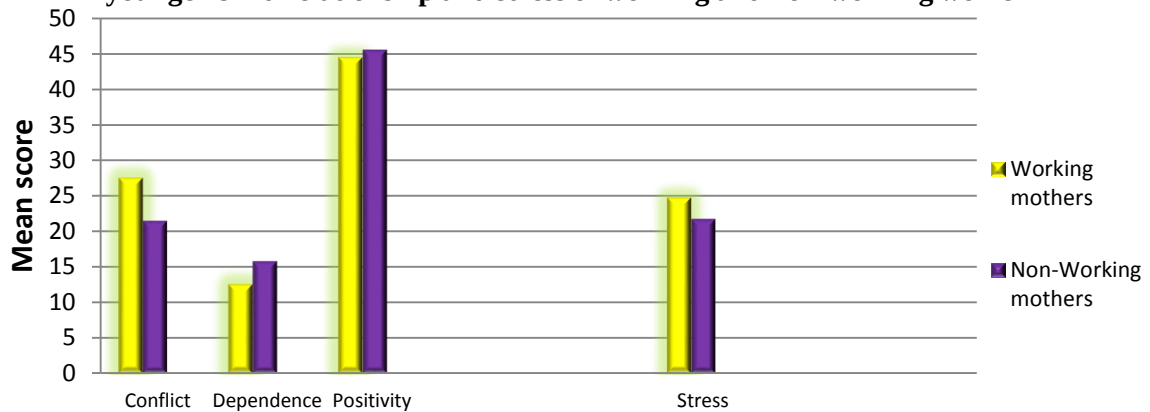
Questionnaire results: In case of the CPRS, 3 scores were obtained for each participant for each of the 3 subscales of the test i.e. Conflict, Positive aspects of the relationship and Dependence. Means and standard deviations for both questionnaires were calculated for each group. Thereafter, the t-test for independent samples was used to see if differences in scores of working and nonworking mothers were significantly different. Pearson's correlation was used to calculate the relationship between the two variables of the study.

Table 1: Comparison of perceived conflict, dependence, positivity in the mother-younger child relationship and stress of working and non-working women

Mother-younger Child Relationship		Working Mothers		Non-working Mothers		T-value	Df
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
	Perceived Conflict	27.53	6.78	21.53	7.28	4.86**	128
	Perceived Dependence	12.56	3.87	15.86	3.37	5.18**	
	Perceived positivity	44.50	4.09	45.6	2.68	1.81	
	Stress levels	24.75	5.46	21.81	6.38	2.81**	
**significant at 0.01 level of significance							

As seen in table 1 and figure1 (given below), the mean score and standard deviation for the conflict sub-scale of the CPRS were 27.53 and 6.78 for working mothers. The mean score and standard deviation for non-working mothers were 21.53 and 7.28. The difference in scores of the two groups was found to be statistically significant ($t=4.86$, $df=128$, $p<0.01$). The results indicate that working mothers perceived higher amounts of conflict to take place between them and their younger child as compared to non-working mothers.

Figure 1: Comparison of perceived conflict, dependence, positivity in the mother-younger child relationship and stress of working and non-working women



The mean and standard deviation for the dependence sub-scale of the CPRS were 12.56 and 3.87 for working mothers. The mean score and standard deviation were 15.86 and 3.37 for non-working mothers. The difference in scores of the two groups was found to be statistically significant ($t=5.18$, $df=128$, $p<0.01$). This means that non-working mothers perceived their child to be more dependent on them than working mothers.

The mean score and standard deviation for the positivity subscale of the CPRS were 44.50 and 4.09 for working women. The mean and standard deviation were 45.6 and 2.68 for non-working women. The difference in the scores of the two groups was found to be statistically insignificant ($t=1.81$, $df=128$, $p>0.05$).

The mean score and standard deviation for the scores on the Perceived Stress Scale were 24.75 and 5.46 for working mothers and 21.81 and 6.38 for non-working mothers respectively. The difference in the scores of the two groups was found to be statistically significant ($t=2.8$, $df=128$, $p<0.01$). Results indicate that working women experienced more stress than non-working women.

Table 2: Relationship between the stress levels of working mothers and three aspects of their relationship with younger child

Variable	Stress	Df
<i>Conflict in relationship</i>	0.28*	63
<i>Dependence</i>	0.12	
<i>Positivity</i>	-0.004	

***significant at 0.05 level of significance**

As seen in table 2 the relationship between stress levels of working mothers and conflict in the mother-child relationship was found to be positive and significant ($r_{63}=0.28$, $p<.05$). The relationship between stress and dependence was found to be positive although insignificant ($r_{63}=0.12$, $p>.05$) while the relationship between stress and positive aspects of the relationship was negative although insignificant ($r_{63}=-0.004$, $p>.05$).

Table 3- Relationship between the stress levels of non-working mothers and three aspects of their relationship with younger child

Variable	Stress	Df
<i>Conflict in relationship</i>	0.21	63
<i>Dependence</i>	0.05	
<i>Positivity</i>	-0.03	

As seen in table 3, the relationship between stress levels of non-working mothers and conflict in the mother-child relationship was found to be positive although insignificant ($r_{63}=0.21, p>.05$). The relationship between stress and dependence was found to be positive although insignificant ($r_{63}=0.05, p>.05$) while the relationship between stress levels of non-working mothers and the perceived levels of positivity in the relationship was found to be negative although insignificant ($r_{63}=-0.03, p>.05$).

Interview data: Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected through interviews. The themes that emerged are presented here.

Theme 1: Benefits and drawbacks of work status

Benefits accorded by work status. Both working and non-working mothers reported certain advantages of their work status for the development of their younger child. All the non-working mothers felt that the main benefit of their staying at home full time was that they could constantly be there for their younger children, care for them and devote their full time to them. One mother explained "My child gets constant attention and supervision from me. And I am there whenever (the children) need me, for whatever. They have never felt lonely, they have never come back from school without me opening the door for them, and they have never come back to an empty house". Two non-working mothers felt that leaving their younger child and going to work could have made the child insecure. Most non-working mothers believed that had they been working, their relationship with their younger child would have

been different because they would be pre-occupied by both working and mothering their children at the same time. Some felt that staying at home had allowed them and their children to share a stronger emotional bond. One mother said "We share a very close and loving bond which I don't think would be possible if I would have been working as I would not be getting adequate time to spend with her."

Working mothers also identified certain benefits of their working for their younger child. Two types of benefits were repeatedly mentioned. One was that they felt their children were more independent and confident. One working mother mentioned "I think that (my working) has made them more self-reliant. They don't have to rely on me for small-small things, they just do it themselves." The other benefit was the additional income being earned by the working mothers. One respondent said "I think the benefit that my child gets is financial. Because I am working, my children get the best benefits, go to good schools and get the best facilities. I can also afford a good domestic help for my younger child."

Drawbacks of work status. Four out of seven non-working mothers did not believe there to be any negative effects of them not working on the development of their child. Of the three that mentioned negative effects, two felt that their children were dependent on them as they were always around. One of them reported "*I think I give my children too much of my attention. Also I pamper them a lot, things have constantly been done for them, I think this has made them late in doing things on their own, I don't think they are as independent in doing things on their own, they are also not very confident in taking their own decisions I think*". One non-working mother identified the lack of additional income as a disadvantage. Three out of seven working mothers felt that there were no negative effects of their working on their children.

The remaining four mentioned the main negative effects to be the inability to spend enough time with their child, missing out on events with them and losing their patience with the children. One mother said "There are definitely negatives of working when you have two young children at home. Like, I can't be with them all the time. I think I miss out on a lot... like you know their friends birthday parties, the activities classes and all." Another mother said "At times I feel that I finish off my patience where I'm working and have very little left for my daughters, so that way I think it's bad." Two mothers felt that if they weren't working they could spend more time with their child, would understand them better and be closer to them. However five out of seven mothers believed that the relationship they shared with their younger child would not be different if they had not been working.

Thus many of the things that non-working mothers perceived as the benefits of their staying at home, were the things working mothers felt they were losing out on. On the other hand some of the things, working mothers perceived as the advantages of their work status, were the things certain non-working mothers considered disadvantageous.

Theme 2: Time spent with child

This theme looks at the amount and quality of time both groups of mothers reported spending with their younger child. A number of nonworking mothers felt that the time that they spent with their younger child was adequate. This was in contrast to the findings for the working mothers. None of the working mothers felt that they spent as much time with their children as they would have liked to. Three mothers explicitly stated that they wished they could spend more time with their children. When asked if she spent enough time with her younger child, one working mother said "No, not as much as I would want to...See, I come back home at 7-7:30. By that time my children have come back from their activity classes which they go to and are also tired like me. But I make it a point that

we can make it to dinner together since their father is mostly out on tours and isn't home every day." Another mother said that her work as an event manager sometimes kept her out of the house till late hours. She however added "...I do make sure to spend quality time with my children when I can."

When asked about what they did in the time that they spent with their child, most nonworking mothers mentioned a range of activities like playing games, feeding, bathing, going out to the park, getting homework done etc. Despite the paucity of time that working mothers faced, several of them also mentioned things like helping their children with their studies, playing with them and taking them to the park. Four working mothers reported talking to their children about how they spent their day, what school activities they engaged in and planning how they would spend the weekend together. One working mother expressed that talking to the children was a way of keeping a tab on their lives which was otherwise difficult due to her rigorous working schedule. The weekend seemed to be a time when the working mothers made up for the time they lost out with their children. One mother said "...on weekends and on holidays, I take them out to the mall, or their favorite eating joint, where we have a lot of fun together."

Theme 3: Conflicts and disciplining

This theme looks at the issues over which working and non-working mothers had conflicts with their children, the ways by which conflicts were resolved and the means adopted by the mothers for disciplining their children. Nonworking mothers said that the conflicts they had with their younger child mostly occurred over issues like homework, choice of dress and play timings. For example one mother said "...sometimes he won't agree to come home even if it's like seven (o'clock) or something.... I have to really pull him and drag him back home." One mother talked of her child's behaviour as an issue of conflict, for instance if the child started throwing a tantrum.

The reasons for conflict mentioned by working mothers were quite similar and consisted of homework, television timings, play timings etc. However two working mothers also had conflicts with their children over going out with them after coming back from work.

Five nonworking mothers mentioned handling situations of conflict or those that required disciplining with their younger children through reasoning and providing explanations. However two nonworking mothers also mentioned using shouting and physical punishment to get their child to understand the problem. The mothers felt that their disciplining strategies were mostly effective. They reported that although children would cry and sulk for a while, they would eventually understand. Working mothers on the other hand tended to mention only softer ways of handling conflict with their children and disciplining them like talking to the child or explaining the problem to the child. Although one mother spoke of being strict and another spoke of using a combination of the “soft and the hard approach” none of the working participants mentioned using physical punishment. In fact three of them said that they would often give into the demands of their children. This style was explained by one mother to be a result of the fact that she was very exhausted after work and that she spent very little time with her children. Another mother said “I come home late most days and I’m not in a condition to really scold or hit them”. Like the non-working mothers, the working mothers also reported their disciplining strategies to be effective. Most working mothers mentioned that their child’s reaction to disciplining was quite positive and the child would not cry or be angry.

Theme 4: Role of others in the child’s development

This theme looks at the part other people in and outside the family played in the growth of the younger child. All the non-working mothers said that their husbands helped with the children whenever they could. While some fathers were

engaged in the children’s lives on a daily basis, other fathers mainly helped when they were in town or on weekends. A major area of assistance by husbands emerged to be children’s homework and studies. Working mothers also perceived their husbands to be quite active in the rearing of children. The participants reported their husbands as helping them out in a variety of ways ranging from cooking for the family to helping the children in their studies. One participant said that her husband helped her when needed by coming back home early on days that she was busy. Another participant reported that she would go off to work early in the morning and it was her husband who woke up the younger child, dressed and fed her and dropped her off to the crèche before he went to office. Surprisingly only one working mother spoke about relying on her parents for child care at times when she as busy or there was an emergency. This may have been because the families studied were nuclear and not every child’s grandparents would have been nearby or always easily accessible. None of the mothers in either group reported their older child to engage actively in care taking of the younger child, possible because the older children themselves were not yet independent or responsible enough to take care of the younger child.

Nearly all working mothers reported having domestic help who took care of their younger child after the child came back from school. One working mother reported “My children usually stay with the maid. My maid is a full-time maid. She stays the whole day. They spend the whole day after school with her. In the evening she drops them off at art class”. Another working mother said “After he gets back, the maid looks after him. In the evening he goes to the park with the maid.” Most nonworking mothers said that they had a maid but not to look after their child which they did themselves. Some nonworking mothers also exhibited fear at keeping their child with the maid the whole day.

One of the non-working mothers said “On days when he is at home and I have to go out or something like that, either my husband is at home or I keep him with the neighbors. I don’t keep with him the maid ever. It’s scary, specially these days”. None of the working mothers reported being fearful of keeping their children with the maid.

Theme 5: Stress: Sources, effects and coping

Sources. All seven nonworking mothers mentioned at least one child related factor that stressed them out. The health and safety of the family emerged to be another major stressor. For instance, one mother said in explaining her stressors “the future of my kids, safety of my family and the health of my parents. Another mother said her greatest stressors were “My children’s studies, the household chores and my mother’s health”. The other things that stressed them out included shifting of home, rising prices, the maid etc. Hence most worries of non-working mothers revolved around family concerns and the domestic sphere. Four of the seven non-working mothers felt that their stress levels would have remained the same had they been working. One of them said “It wouldn’t matter if I was working or non-working. It’s me so the stress remains the same. I am a stressful person by nature.” Two non-working mothers said that it was they who had higher stress levels than working mothers because they were at home all day and had more time to think about their stressors and also that they could not escape at all from their sources of stress at home. One of these mothers said “ Since I’m constantly at home, these irritants are constantly there, in front of me.... and I can’t ignore them , but working mothers I think don’t come to know of so many little problems because the maid usually takes care of them.” Only one non-working mother felt that stress levels would be higher for working mothers.

All seven working mothers mentioned work as an important stressor in their lives. In addition another important stressor in their lives included the safety and security of their children, husbands and other family members. One working mother

said “Husband, daughters and my mother are the three important pillars of my life. Anything going wrong with them stresses me out and work obviously.” Several working mothers felt that their levels of stress could be attributed to the fact that they had to juggle two roles at the same time. One of them said “As I said being a mother and working both are huge tasks and if you’re doing both then, you get double the stress.”

Effects and coping methods. When they were asked what effects the stress had on them non-working mothers mentioned a variety of physiological and psychological reactions. Some nonworking mothers reported experiencing restlessness and insomnia. For example one mother said “(Stress) makes me irritative and restless. Once I start to think about these things, I can’t stop them. It gets frustrating.” Another participant said “I get sleepless nights, sometimes palpitations. When I get those I can’t sleep the whole night and then I’m irritable in the morning with my children and husband”. Coping methods generally used by nonworking mothers included praying, meditation, pranayama, long walks, playing with the children, talking to close friends or parents and distracting one’s self. Most mothers felt that they were quite adept at tackling their stress.

The effects of stress on working mothers included irritability, frustration, feeling hassled and overwhelmed. Compared to the non-working mothers who reported some physical effects of the stress, working mothers reported a higher number of psychological reactions. Working mothers used coping strategies that were quite similar to the non-working mothers. Five working mothers mentioned praying or belief in God as a way of combating stress. Other means were meditation, taking long walks, listening to music, reading and relying on their mother and other family members for support. Five of the mothers felt that they were quite competent at handling their stress.

DISCUSSION :

Working and non-working mothers were found to differ from each other with respect to two of the three dimensions of the mother-child relationship measured in this study. Researchers often hypothesize that because of the demands by the dual roles of mother and worker, the working mother in contrast to the non-working mother might be stricter and impose more conformity so as to ensure that the household can function smoothly in her absence (Yin, 1979). Yet like the results of the present study, Hoffman & Arbor (1999) found working mothers to be more likely to use an authoritative approach that relied on reason, rather than assertions of parental power. In an older study, Yin (1979) also found that working mothers who showed a positive attitude towards their employment engaged in milder disciplining with their children. Yin suggests that the discipline style of working mothers could be a way of compensating for their absence from home. This reasoning was also expressed by a few working mothers in the present study. Working mothers also reported having more independent children. They stated in their interviews that one of the advantages of their work status had been that their children were self-reliant, capable of making choices and more confident in their decisions. It has been suggested that the time mothers spend away from home provides children opportunities to explore the environment and to take independent decisions (Mathur & Misra, 1995). Employed mothers display and also provide greater independence to their children (Rai, 1979; Singh & Sharma, 1975). The encouragement of independence is consistent with the situational demands of the mother's dual role since it enables the family to function more efficiently in the mother's absence. Moreover it has been found that employed mothers are more likely as compared to non-working mothers to cite independence as a goal for their daughters and less likely to indicate the 'obedience' or 'to be feminine' as their goal (Hoffman, 1998). Hock (1978) has suggested that if mothers do not feel guilty about leaving their children behind while at work, the employment

status of mothers encourages self-sufficiency and independence in their children at an early age. Although all the working mothers in the study wanted to spend more time with their children, the majority did not express guilt at going for work. This may explain the greater self-sufficiency of the children. The non-working mothers in the present study said that they were always there for their children, could devote all their time to them and provide help whenever needed. While this was perceived as an advantage by these mothers, it may also explain why their children were more dependent.

Though working mothers experienced more stress than non-working mothers, they reported their relationships with their younger child to be as positive as did non-working mothers. Both sets of mothers said that they enjoyed motherhood. While positive relationships between stay-at-home mothers and their children may be seen as normative, the results of this study indicate that even when women work and juggle multiple roles, they continue to share good relationships with their children. In fact Hoffman and Youngblade (1999) found that working mothers are more affectionate with their offspring than those who do not have full-time jobs. In the present study responses on the questionnaire indicated that working as well as non-working mothers saw themselves as sharing an affectionate relationship with their children, felt in tune with their feelings and felt that their children shared their feelings with them. Similarly the interviews also showed that mothers felt watching their children grow, prosper and do well were things that gave them greatest pleasure. When asked who their youngest child was closest to in the family two out of seven working mothers mentioned themselves. The rest mentioned either their husbands, both their husbands and themselves or their older child. In the group of non-working mothers three mentioned that their children were closest to them. The rest mentioned others in the family. Hence in both groups, a similar proportion of mothers mentioned that their children were closest to them.

Certain factors may have contributed to the fact that even working mothers who are more stressed than non-working mothers and spend more time away from their children, felt they had a positive relationship with their children. Firstly even though the working mothers were away from their children for a certain part of the day, they did spend time with their children when they could and some compensated for lost time on weekends. This time together may have allowed working mothers to emotionally bond with the children. The results indicated that even on weekdays, working mothers were quite involved in the lives of their children. Some working mothers reported talking to their children about the events of the day. Another factor possibly contributing to the results was that like the non-working mothers, the working mothers found their husbands to be supportive in child-rearing. With husbands taking on some of the role of child care, the wives may have been able to enjoy their time with their children to a greater degree. For women spousal support is a key to the success of dual career families. Mothers who receive a great deal of positive spouse support feel positive about their lives. Husbands' contributions in household work have been positively linked to women's psychosocial health (Khawaja & Habib, 2007). Many working mothers who participated in the study also had the support of domestic helpers who looked after the children when the mother was away. Domestic help in caring for the children and in tackling household chores might have also allowed working mothers to get more time with their children and bond with them. In the case of working mothers what may also contribute to the perceived positive nature of the mother-child relationship may be that working mothers feel that even though they cannot spend as much time with their children, their financial contributions make it possible for them to provide good resources to the children (Malone, 2011) and also be role models for the children.

Findings from the first phase of the study indicated that the stress levels of working mothers were significantly higher than those of non-working mothers. The qualitative results in the study clearly indicated why this was the case.

When both sets of mothers were asked about their stressors, the non-working women mentioned mainly domestic matters. It has been suggested that non-working mothers may feel stressed due to lack of financial independence, the monotony of housework and isolation from social networks. However no such sources of stress were found for the non-working participants of this study. On the other hand working women mentioned both work as well as domestic matters, indicating that there was an additional major source of stress in their lives. Several working mothers felt that their levels of stress could also be attributed to the fact that they had to juggle two roles at the same time. The working mothers made a special effort to spend time with their children, ask them about their day, help them with their homework and so on. While being involved mothers may have enabled working women to bond well with their children, it appeared to create stress for them as well. Research has shown that the more role-juggling incidents that a woman experiences in a day, the better are her chances for having low satisfaction at the end of the day (Williams, Suls, Learner & Wan, 1991). Williams et al, (1991) found that mothers who had to juggle roles frequently in a day had greater negative feelings and less task enjoyment as well as increased stress due to task interruption.

Interestingly the non-working mothers who were interviewed by and large did not feel that their stress levels were lower than that of working mothers. Four of the seven non-working mothers felt that their stress levels would have remained the same had they been working while two others said that it was they who had higher stress levels than working mothers. The only significant association was found between the stress levels of working mothers and the amount of conflict with their younger child. This association was found to be positive in nature. Hence higher levels of stress amongst working mothers appear to be associated with higher levels of conflict. Past research has found maternal stress to be related to hostility, anger, irritability, mistrust of and alienation from one's children (O'Connor & McCartney, 2006).

Some working mothers explained that they would get tired after a long day's work and would get irritated if their children did not listen to them or insisted on going out. It is possible that the stress mothers felt from having to work and then come and manage the home taxed the mothers' resources and created more conflicts with their children. It may also be that working mothers have more conflicts with their children and this contributes to their stress levels. However in the interviews conducted, working mothers did not mention conflicts with their children to be a source of stress for them. Rather the stress appeared to come from work, juggling roles, traffic, worries about safety of children and family, their own safety and so on. The relationship between maternal stress and conflict with younger children was not found to be significant in the case of non-working mothers. That means that the level of stress being faced by non-working mothers did not appear to impact or be impacted by the conflicts with their children. Rather maternal stress in the case of non-working mothers appears to stem from sources other than conflict with the younger child. Non-working mothers mentioned their sources of stress to be children's studies and their future, health of the family, safety of the family and so on.

No significant relationships were found between maternal stress and the variables of the younger child's dependence and positive aspects of the mother-younger child relationship. The lack of relationship between maternal stress and the child's dependence shows that although the mothers perceived their younger children to need them, this did not contribute to their stress levels. In the case of working mothers this may have partly been because they saw their children as quite independent. Another reason could be that the age of the younger children was such that their dependence on the mother can be said to be expected and not something that is out of the ordinary. Hence even if the mothers found it challenging, it did not appear to stress them out. Also the lack of relationship between mother's stress levels and the positive aspects of their relationship with their child appears to indicate

that irrespective of the amount of stress mothers feel, they continue to enjoy certain aspects of their relationships with their children.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY:

The results of the study show that working mothers are significantly more stressed than non-working mothers. Considering that more and more women are taking up careers while rearing young children makes this a finding worth paying attention to. Despite major changes in the composition of the workforce over the last several decades, especially in the number and percentage of mothers of young children who are working, including the fact that a majority of mothers with children less than 1 year old work outside the home, there have been few societal attempts to realign the world of work with the realities of contemporary life. Flexible working hours, high quality day care centers, paternity leaves for child care, family-friendly policies as well as the possibility of working from home in both the public and private sector may help reduce the burden felt by working mothers. The study also indicated that the support of husbands makes the task of child rearing easier for working as well as non-working mothers and needs to be encouraged for the well-being of the modern nuclear family. Also although working mothers have more conflicts with their children, the fact that working and non-working mothers displayed no differences in the positive aspects of relationships with their younger children is encouraging. Thus women can work and continue to enjoy their relationship with their children.

The present study has certain limitations. Firstly, the sample size of the study was small and belonged to the Delhi and adjoining regions. Also the participants belonged to upper and upper middle income families and held college degrees. Hence the results of the study cannot be generalized to other groups such as families having low income and low education levels, without due consideration.

Also during the second phase of the study the participants were met with only once. A larger number of interviews over a long period of time might have brought out a richer picture of the mothers' lives and their relationships. Lastly, one cannot disregard the possibility that there may have been facets of their lives that the participants did not divulge. There may be more to their experiences that the present study captured since the nature of any person's experience is always in-part inaccessible to others.

The present study indicates some areas of future research. Similar studies in other regions of the country including those that are less cosmopolitan than Delhi, might be beneficial for broader understanding of the phenomenon. It may also be useful to conduct such studies with women living in joint families to see how varied family dynamics shape variables that have been studied here. The presence of grandparents and extended family members has been known to differentially effect children's development (Uhlenberg & Cheuk, 2010). It is also important to understand how it shapes working and non-working mothers' stress levels and maternal relationships. Similarly such studies can be conducted in single child families as well as those with more than two children. Families which cannot afford domestic help and where husbands do not engage in child care also need to be studied to understand the implications of such circumstances for women's well-being and their relationship with their child. This study used self-report measures to assess stress levels and mother-child relationships. For triangulation it may be beneficial to use other methods to study these topics. For example naturalistic observations of the mother-child interaction may be carried out to assess conflicts, child dependence and other aspects of the mother-child interaction through objective measures.

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