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Association between role expectation and role strain among dual-earner couples

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Abstract

Today women expect to gain life satisfaction from occupational roles as well as traditional roles. Men and women have ambitions and commitments in both the work and family arenas simultaneously. Past studies shows that the amount of role strain experienced by a dual earner couples depends on the degree of their commitment to different roles and the role reward value expected by them from these roles. Role strain increases, when a dual earner couple expects to gain life satisfaction from more than one role. The present study was conducted on dual-earner couples of Jaipur city to find out the relationship between role expectation and role strain among dual earner couples. Total 200 couples (200 wives and 200 husbands) were selected for the study. Data were analysed using SPSS 16.0 statistical tools. Bivariate analysis and Pearson correlation coefficient result shows that both wives' and husbands' role strain was positively correlated with their role expectation i.e. 0.261 and 0.160 respectively. It was significant at 0.01 level and 0.05 level respectively. This indicate that both husbands and wives role expectation was related to their role strain. Greater role reward value and greater role commitment in different roles increase role strain among dual-earner couples.

Keywords: dual-earner couples, role reward value, role commitment, role expectation, role strain.

1. Introduction

Traditionally, the parental role assumed primarily by women while men define themselves exclusively by their work. Today men and women frequently have ambitions and commitments in both the work and family arenas simultaneously. Managing the demands of competing life roles has become a common experience for many dual earner couples. A common problem for dual earner couples in today's society is increased responsibilities from work and family. With the addition of children to the family, caregiving responsibilities increase dramatically. Parents are responsible for caring for the children's best interests, education, wellness, housecleaning, clothing care, food preparation, and financial management. A dual income can benefit families by easing their financial burdens, but can also cause them more financial trouble because of the need to pay for child care, household cleaning costs, yard care, and other needs. A dual-earner family can have increased stress if these services are not contracted out but assumed by the working parents when they return home at the end of a workday (Humphrey *et al* 2006)^[8]. Brazelton (1988)^[3] explains, "As women and men begin to face squarely the unforeseen anxieties of dividing the self into two important roles – one geared toward the family, the other toward the working world."

Past researches shows that a key source of stress for individuals managing such multiple role commitments is the nature of their personal work and family role expectations. These are defined as internalized beliefs and attitudes about (a) the personal relevance of a role, (b) the standards for performance of the role, and (c) the manner in which personal resources (i.e., time, money, and energy) are to be committed to performance of the role. Because personal role expectations are a key variable that must be considered in order to explain role strain and to predict the degree of involvement in particular roles (Amatea *et al.* 1986)^[1].

There are many interpersonal differences regarding how individuals combine life roles and view the roles they occupy. Some perceive their life roles as enhancing one another, others see their roles as conflicting, and many see roles as both complementing and conflicting with one another (Frone *et al.*, 1997)^[7]. Often, a high degree of expectation for multiple roles can cause

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role strain, especially when each role demands a substantial time commitment (Scheck *et al.*, 1997; Perrone & Civileto, 2004) ^[15, 13].

Role strain refers to feelings of stress that may result from the demands of multiple life roles. Role theory suggests that the maintenance of multiple roles across work and family institutions is a source of strain (Voydonoff 1987, 1988) ^[20, 19]. Role strain has been defined as "a transactional process reflecting an imbalance between demands and the resources available to cope with those demands" (Scharlach, 2001) ^[14]. This role strain is a direct result of taking on a number of responsibilities and not being able to successfully balance them.

Role strain refers to a condition whereby an individual experiences unease in fulfilling role expectations. For various reasons, the expectations associated with a role may be mutually incompatible or undesirable, leaving a person with feelings of discomfort as she or he is called upon to fulfill role obligations. Sources of role strain may originate with the individual or with the expectations of a role. Role strain can be a consequence of social arrangements that create a situation in which an individual experiences strain. In this case, the source of the strain resides with the role expectations. An individual may experience role strain when expectations associated with a role are incompatible, competing, or ambiguous. In this case, an individual may want to fulfill expectations but is unable to do so due to a lack of clarity of expectation (Feldman, 2008) ^[6].

Role strain has been linked to negative outcomes such as psychological distress (Voydandoff & Donnelly, 1989) ^[21], decreased quality of life (Duxbury & Higgins, 1991) ^[4], and decreased relationship quality (Suchet & Barling, 1986) ^[18]. In the present study, we examined the relationships between role expectation and role strain among dual-earner couples who combine multiple life roles.

2. Methodology

2.1 Locale of the study

The present study was conducted in Jaipur city of Rajasthan state.

2.2 Sample

According to Jaipur Municipal Corporation, Jaipur city is divided into eight geographical zones i.e. Mansarovar zone, Moti-Dungari zone, Hawamahal-East zone, Vidyadhar Nagar zone, Civil Line zone, Hawamahal-West zone, Amber zone and Sanganer zone. To get the complete representation of the population. Total 40 organisations were selected for data collection. In each zone five organisations were selected for the study purpose, which are expected to meet out the objectives of the study i.e. such organisations 1) where a good number of females are working, 2) work has to be done as per the MNCs or large organisation management system, 3) where the employee is supposed to work hard meet out their targeted work in stipulated time and 4) minimum working hours being 8 hrs.

Five female respondents and their husbands were randomly selected from each organisation after acquiring the list of workers from the organisation. Those female respondents were selected who fulfill the study criteria. The study criteria was (1) nuclear family (2) husband-wife and at least one child living together (3) youngest child below 12 years of age and (4) husband – wife each having at least eight hours job period. Twenty-five female respondents and their husbands were randomly selected from each zone. Selection of the male

respondents was done on the basis of female respondents. Total 200 dual earner couples (200 wives and 200 husbands) were selected for the study.

2.3 Instruments

2.3.1 Role Expectation: To assess role expectation, the 'Life Role Salience Scale' (LRSS) developed by Amatea *et al.* (1986) ^[1] was used after suitable modification. The LRSS was designed to assess women's personal expectations. In the LRSS, four major life roles- the occupational, the parental, the marital and the homecare roles were assessed in terms of two dimensions. The first dimension was role reward value, indexed by means of statements in which the individual agree that the role is an important means of self-definition and personal satisfaction. The second dimension, the role commitment level dimension, was assessed by statements describing the extent to which the person demonstrates a willingness to commit personal resources to assure success in the role or to develop the role. A total of eight separate scales, assessing each of these two dimensions for each of the four life roles, were used. The LRSS is a 40 items scale (5 statements in each aspect). A Likert type attitude scale format was adopted, with five possible response choices: (1) disagree, (2) somewhat disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) somewhat agree, (5) agree.

2.3.2 Role Strain: To assess role strain of the female spouses 'Women's Role strain Inventory' developed by Lengacher and Sellers in 2003 was used. To assess role strain of the male spouses' aforesaid inventory was used after suitable gender effect modification. The role strain inventory consisted of total 46 items. Five point Likert rating scales with responses of strongly disagree, disagree, agree, frequently agree, and strongly agree and rating scale 1-5 was used. In the 46 item inventory there was a possible range of the items from 46- 230 points, with 46 indicating absolutely no role strain and 230 indicating complete role strain. The questionnaires were divided in three sub-scales:

2.3.2.1 Role Distress: indicating that there was adverse strain associated with multiple roles of working and family/ significant others/ personal.

2.3.2.2 Role Enhancement: indicating a positive response to multiple roles of working, family and personal.

2.3.2.3 Role Support: indicating the importance of support from family/ friends/ children and significant other.

2.4 Research Design

Descriptive cross-sectional study with survey method was used. Survey method is organized attempt to analyze, interpret and report the present status of a social institution, group or area.

2.5 Procedure

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

2.6 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS 16.0 statistical tools. To analyze the relationship between role expectation and role strain among dual-earner couples, Bivariate analysis and Pearson correlation coefficient test was used.

3. Results and Discussion

The relationship between role expectation and role strain among dual-earner couples were analyzed. The results in this respect are presented in following tables.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation value (Bivariate Analysis) depicting Relationship between Role Expectation and Role Distress (Aspect of Role Strain) based on gender

N=400 (200+200)

S. No	Aspects of Role Expectation	Wife (Female) Role Distress	Level of Significance	Husband (Male) Role Distress	Level of Significance
1	Occupational Role Reward Value	0.190	0.01	0.166	0.05
2	Occupational Role Commitment	0.156	0.05	0.104	NS
3	Parental Role Reward Value	0.193	0.01	0.161	0.05
4	Parental Role Commitment	0.274	0.01	0.155	0.05
5	Marital Role Reward Value	0.159	0.05	0.131	NS
6	Marital Role commitment	0.202	0.01	0.114	NS
7	Homecare Role Reward Value	0.213	0.01	0.122	NS
8	Homecare Role Commitment	0.192	0.01	0.117	NS

Relationship between aspects of role expectation and role distress among dual earner couples were analyzed using Bivariate analysis and Pearson correlation coefficient. Above table highlights that significant positive relationship exists between role distress and all the aspects of role expectation among wives. It was significant at 0.01 and 0.05 level. This indicates that with an increase in role expectation of female spouses there was also an increase in the role distress. This could be due to the fact that balancing career and role expectations have been a difficult issue for most working women because of society's expectation of women to continue to fulfill their traditional roles in addition to their work responsibilities. Under these circumstances, individuals have to face the role distress. Such findings are in agreement with those of Simon (1992) [17], who revealed that women's emotional involvement in the parental role and their psychological involvement in the parental identity, may lead them to experience role strains as more distressing. He further found that highly committed parents are more affected by parental strains than less committed parents. Women's greater exposure to family role strains is partially responsible for their higher rates of distress. Perrone & Civiletto (2004) [13] found that high role salience would be related to high levels of role strain.

Pearson correlation coefficient result shows that a statistically significant positive relationship was also observed between role distress and parental role expectation and occupational role reward value among husbands. It was significant at 0.05 level. This indicates that with the increased expectation of male spouses in occupational and parental roles there was also an increase in their role distress (Table- 1). This could be due

to the fact that traditionally, men in our society consider occupational role as their primary role and the most important role performed by them but now, with a constant rise in women's participation in paid work across the world, traditional notions about men and women have begun to decrease and more egalitarian notions have increased among both men and women. Now, men are accepting more responsibility as parental, marital and homecare roles as well as occupational role. In dual earner families, men also attribute high level of personal importance and commitment to parental, marital and homecare roles as well as occupational role. Despite their engagement in multiple roles, an increase in the role strain among male spouses may be seen. Similar findings were also made by Bhowon (2013) [2], who revealed that the family's importance emerges as a significant cause of work-family conflict for only males in the study. More men see their family role as conflicting with work experiences. As compared to women, men's socially defined role has been work oriented and they may see the family role as an extra role which intrudes into their work role. As a result they report more work-family conflict and role strain. Simon (1992) [17] revealed that fathers are more affected by parental strains because they have become more involved in parenting, yet have less realistic expectations about the physical and emotional demands of children. He further revealed that strain from combining parenthood with employment increases distress. Keith and Schafer's (1980) [9] study of 135 two-job families revealed that hours worked per week, age and numbers of children at home are major sources of work/family role strain among husbands.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation value (Bivariate Analysis) depicting Relationship between Role Expectation and Role Enhancement (Aspect of Role Strain) based on gender

N= 400 (200+200)

S. No	Aspects of Role Expectation	Wife (Female) Role Enhancement	Level of Significance	Husband (Male) Role Enhancement	Level of Significance
1	Occupational Role Reward Value	-0.078	NS	-0.100	NS
2	Occupational Role Commitment	-0.073	NS	-0.066	NS
3	Parental Role Reward Value	-0.077	NS	-0.091	NS
4	Parental Role Commitment	-0.120	NS	-0.101	NS
5	Marital Role Reward Value	-0.104	NS	-0.003	NS
6	Marital Role commitment	-0.104	NS	-0.116	NS
7	Homecare Role Reward Value	-0.085	NS	-0.044	NS
8	Homecare Role Commitment	-0.133	NS	-0.020	NS

This table (table- 2) indicates that there is no significant relationship (either positive or negative) exists between role enhancement and role expectation among both spouses. It shows that with the increased expectation of dual earner couples, role enhancement neither increases nor decreases. The aspect of role enhancement is based upon Sieber's (1974) [16] role accumulation hypothesis, which proposes that multiple roles contribute to better health and focus on the rewards or privileges associated with multiple role

involvement. He further revealed that involvement in multiple roles allows for rewards and privileges, overall status security, resources for status enhancement and role performance and enrichment of personality. Amatea, *et al.* (1986) [1] concluded that the primary sources of personal strain are an individual's occupational and family role expectations. The results of this study are not supportive to the Sieber's (1974) [16] role accumulation hypothesis, which proposes that having multiple roles in general has positive effects on individuals.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation value (Bivariate Analysis) depicting Relationship between Role Expectation and Role Support (Aspect of Role Strain) based on gender

N= 400 (200+200)

S. No	Aspects of Role Expectation	Wife (Female) Role Support	Level of Significance	Husband (Male) Role Support	Level of Significance
1	Occupational Role Reward Value	0.113	NS	0.138	NS
2	Occupational Role Commitment	0.080	NS	0.068	NS
3	Parental Role Reward Value	0.213	0.01	0.123	NS
4	Parental Role Commitment	0.323	0.01	0.097	NS
5	Marital Role Reward Value	0.011	NS	0.076	NS
6	Marital Role commitment	0.009	NS	0.052	NS
7	Homecare Role Reward Value	0.202	0.01	0.055	NS
8	Homecare Role Commitment	0.211	0.01	0.089	NS

Above table (Table- 3) shows that there is no significant relationship (either positive or negative) between husbands' role expectations and their role support (aspect of role strain). This indicates that husbands receive high support from their spouses and family members therefore they perceived low role strain.

A statistically significant relationship exists between role support (aspect of role strain) and parental and homecare role expectations among wives. It was significant at 0.01 level. It shows that with the increased expectation in parental and homecare roles there was also an increase in the role strain in aspect of role support among wives. This could be due to the facts that, working women continue to perform the traditional household chores, domestic responsibilities and child care responsibilities alone besides the demands of work outside. The more commitment and personal importance is attached to a role by an individual, the more time and emotion are devoted in the role. Despite this engagement in multiple roles and only little support from their family members (elderly support), may increase their role strain.

The level of strain increases for an individual when there is high role expectation and high demands from both work and family, and little support from their partner and significant others. Family support is a most important factor of family life that positively influences the participant's work life. Such findings are in agreement with those of Erdwin *et al.* (2001) [5], who observed that spousal support in family tasks such as child care and household chores and supervisor's support as taking phone calls from home, staying back at home with a sick child, and maintaining flexible work hours can reduce role strain among women.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation value (Bivariate Analysis) depicting Relationship between Overall Role Expectation and Overall Role Strain based on gender

N=400 (200+200)

S. No.	Gender & Role Expectation	Role Strain	Level of Significance
1.	Wife (Female)	0.261	0.01
2.	Husband (Male)	0.160	0.05

Relationship between overall role expectation and role strain among female and male spouses are presented in table- 4. Bivariate analysis and Pearson correlation coefficient result shows that both wives' and husbands' role strain was positively correlated with their role expectation i.e. 0.261 and 0.160 respectively. It was significant at 0.01 level and 0.05 level respectively. These findings indicate that with an increase in self role expectation of male and female spouses there was also an increase in the level of role strain. The reason is that dual earner couples perform multiple roles. The performance of multiple roles; that of a spouse, parent and worker, often create role strain in the form of role overload and role interference. The amount of role strain experienced by a dual earner couple depends on the degree of their commitment to different roles and the role reward value expected by them from these roles. When dual earner couples expect to gain life satisfaction from more than one role, especially the occupational role along with other traditional roles, the likelihood of role strain increases. Nordenmark (2004) [12] found that an increased level of engagement in family matters, at least in some sense, is burdensome and increases strain among both women and men. Both men and women experience more strain when they are exposed to multiple demands. Marshall and Barnett (1993) [11] observed that full-time employed two-earner couples experience greater work-family strains and work-parenting strains when their workload is greater at work and at home, and when their experiences on the job and at home are more negative. They further revealed that dual earner couples, who have higher prestige jobs, representing a greater commitment to the work role, are associated with greater work-family strains.

4. Conclusion

It can be concluded that both husbands and wives role expectation was related to their role strain. Greater role reward value and greater role commitment is related to higher level of role strain. High commitment in the work role can interfere with family involvement, and may increase the potential for competition between work and family for the individual's emotional involvement. High commitment in the family role may interfere or overlap with work role to such an extent that

they cannot adequately meet their work demands. These situations create role strain among dual earner couples. Women who are highly committed to their family role may experience greater role strain because by committing so much time and energy to their family role they may have to struggle to meet the demanding claims of their work role. High occupational role commitment is also related to high role strain. Role strain also increases among working women, when they receive little support from husbands and other family members, but support from family members in child care and household tasks can reduce role strain among women.

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