ABSTRACT

The present study was an attempt to understand how the mother’s work status made a difference in the perception of family characteristics and psychological well-being of herself and her adolescent children.

The problem was investigated using the conceptual framework of Moos’s (1973) "Family Environment" for understanding family characteristic dimensions. Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) theoretical construct and Pestonjee’s (1983) "Bounce Model" of stress, and Shaffer and Shoben’s concept of adjustment were used to identify the areas, sources and the process of individual's psychological well-being. Further Descartes’ (1965) and Rapoport and Rapoport’s (1976) theoretical explanation of role perception were used to understand wife’s/children’s perception of husband’s/father’s role in family involvement. Also used was Csikszentmihalye and Larson’s (1984) understanding of time to see how the mothers and her adolescent children spent their time.

The following hypotheses were formulated:

1. a) Working and non-working mothers and their adolescents will differ significantly in their perceptions of the existing family characteristics.
   b) Mothers in different work categories and their adolescents will differ significantly in their perceptions of the existing family characteristics.

2. a) Working and non-working mothers and their adolescents will differ significantly in various areas of stress.
   b) Mothers in different work categories and their adolescents will differ significantly in their perceptions of stress in different areas.

3. a) Working and non-working mothers and their adolescents will differ significantly in their adjustment in different domains.
b) Mothers in different work categories and their adolescents will differ significantly in their adjustment in different domains.

4. Different dimensions of family characteristics, stress and adjustment will relate to each other differently for working and non-working mothers and their adolescents.

5. Family characteristics dimensions will have varied impact on psychological well-being of working and non-working mothers and their adolescents.

6. Perceptions of family characteristics and psychological well-being of the working mothers and their adolescents will differ by the span of mother's work.

7. Perceptions of family characteristics and psychological well-being of the adolescents (boys and girls) of working mothers will differ by the adolescent age category.

8. a) Working mothers and their adolescents will differ from non-working mothers in their perceptions of the role of husband/father in family involvement.

   b) Mothers in different work categories and their adolescents will differ in their perceptions of the role of husband/father in family involvement.

9. a) Time distribution on daily activities will differ for the working and non-working mothers and their adolescents.

   b) Time distribution on daily activities will be different for the mothers in different work categories and their adolescents.

In this study using a correlational design, an attempt was made to study the differences on different variables at two time periods. The paired comparisons were made between working and non-working mothers and their adolescents. As the analysis did not indicate significant differences between Time 1 and Time 2, the data were merged in the final analysis.

The sample was drawn through purposive sampling and consisted of 432 working mothers and 250 non-working mothers, and 726 adolescents of working and non-working mothers.
The control variables were age, nuclear family, and number of children - two or more.

The explanatory variables were work status of the mothers, the different work categories (executives, doctors, business women, university teachers, school teachers and clerks/stenos), family characteristics, sex of the child, span of work, perceptions of the role of husband/father in family involvement.

The dependent variables (stress and adjustment) was psychological well-being

The modified version of Family Environment Scale by Moos and Moos was administered to measure the family characteristic dimensions. In order to measure the stress levels a Stress Inventory was designed for the study. For assessing the adjustment, Saxena’s Adjustment Inventory was used. For perception of husband/father’s role in family involvement, subjects were given a brief outline and asked to write a paragraph. For time distribution a table format with daily activities mentioned was used on which subjects had to indicate the amount of time spent on different activities.

The questionnaires were self administering. It was made sure that the subjects understood and followed the instructions. The questionnaires were then coded and analyzed to find out differences, relationships and significant impact. The data were analyzed by using percentages, means, standard deviations, t values, correlation and regression analysis. Appropriate graphical representations were worked out.

The important findings were:

It was observed that working and non-working mothers differed significantly in perceiving some family characteristic dimensions, namely; the expressiveness, achievement orientation, conflict, independence, and control. On all these dimensions, working mothers scored higher than the non-working mothers. They also differed significantly on stress in home, social and emotional areas, with working mother’s scores being higher than the non-working mother’s. The same areas of adjustment also showed significant differences between working and non-working mothers, with working mothers scoring higher than the non-working mothers.
There weren’t many significant differences between the work categories on family characteristic dimensions. However, when clerks were compared with other work categories, significant differences were observed on the family characteristics. Significant differences were observed between the work categories on stress and adjustment areas.

Significant differences were observed between children of working and non-working mothers on family characteristic dimensions. Scores were in favor of children of working mothers, who like their mothers perceived more positive characteristics in their family environment. Also, boys and girls of working and non-working mothers differed significantly on some family characteristic dimensions.

Significant differences were observed between children of mothers in different work categories, on family characteristic dimensions, particularly between children of mothers working as clerks/stenos as compared to others.

In case of working mothers stress and adjustment in home and emotional areas showed significant relationship with quite a few family characteristic dimensions. Stress and adjustment had one to one correlation, and particularly home and emotional areas showed significant relationships with other areas. For the Non-working mothers, particularly emotional and miscellaneous areas showed significant relationship with some of the family characteristic dimensions. Only home and emotional areas showed significant relationship with each other.

Children of working mothers showed significant relationship between perceived conflict in the family and stress, whereas cohesion, active recreational orientation, organization and control had significant relationship with home as well as social stress. There were significant relationships observed between stress and adjustment in home, emotional and school areas. Adjustment areas had negative relationship with conflict, and positive relationship with cohesion and organization in the family. Children of non-working mothers showed significant relationship between emotional stress and some family characteristic dimensions. For these children, stress and adjustment indicated significant relationship between home and emotional areas.
In case of working mothers, few family characteristic dimensions had significant impact on all stress areas except health as well as on adjustment areas but only partially. For the non-working mothers also the family characteristic dimensions contributed to stress as well as adjustment.

In case of boys of working mothers, the achievement orientation and control showed significant impact on stress as well as adjustment areas. For these boys, family characteristics dimensions predicted significantly their social well-being, followed by school and home. For girls of working mothers, conflict in the family showed significant impact on almost all the stress and adjustment areas. Few others partially predicted their psychological well-being. For boys of non-working mothers only a few dimensions showed significant impact on their psychological well-being. For girls of non-working mothers, cohesion, conflict, independence, organization and control showed significant impact on stress, whereas adjustment was predicted by conflict, followed by cohesion, expressiveness, independence and organization. For these girls family characteristic dimensions showed significant impact particularly on emotional well-being followed by home and social area.

By the span of work, mothers showed variations on the family characteristics dimensions. With longer work span they perceived more cohesion, expressiveness, moral religious emphasis, organization and control at home. On stress areas, except health, mothers working for 5 years often indicated higher stress, followed by 10 and 15 years. Mothers working for 15 years showed more adjustment, followed by 10 and 5 years. Mothers working for 10 years showed better social and occupational adjustment.

When children of mothers classified by span of work were compared, the mean differences were found significant only on conflict, organization and control. Mothers with varying work span did not influence their children’s perception of family characteristic dimensions much, as their mean scores were very close to each other. Their scores on adjustment areas were also very close to each other.

Children in the late adolescent age group had higher mean scores on the family characteristic dimensions. Stress was experienced more by middle adolescents, followed by late and early
adolescents. Higher mean scores in adjustment areas were indicated by late and early adolescents (in one or the other areas), followed by middle adolescents.

Working mothers used more positive and less negative characteristics in perceiving their husband’s role. But a significant percentage of non-working mothers perceived their husband more negatively. A low percent of working mothers indicated negative characteristics of their husbands. The difference was not much in case of non-working mothers.

The differences among mothers in different work categories were not significant. Almost all rated their husbands more positively. The significant differences were visible mainly on perceiving husbands as helpful, sharing, adjustable, attentive, organized, social and office work at home.

Children of working mothers perceived their father more positively than children of non-working mothers. There was very little difference between boys and girls of working and non-working mothers. Percentages on average basis were higher on positive attributes than negative. Significant differences were observed in case of boys and girls of working mothers only on disagreeable, and in case of boys and girls of working mothers on sharing, encouraging, organized, expectations and critical, whereas, girls of working and non-working mothers indicated significant difference on attentive, sharing, encouraging, organized, social and expectations. There were no significant differences between boys of working and non-working mothers.

Children of mothers in all working categories perceived their father having more positive than negative characteristic. Differences in mean scores were visible between extreme categories.

Working mothers enjoyed fewer sleeping hours than non-working mothers. They spent less than half the time than non-working mothers on personal work. On household chores and market work there wasn’t much difference between holidays and working days, but working mothers seemed to be covering a lot on holidays. Leisure time at home was remarkably low for working mothers.
Mothers working as doctors and in business spent little more time on sleep than mothers in other work categories. On other daily activities there were hardly any differences. There were category difference on working hours (as expected), and the differences were more on holidays.

Children of non-working mothers spent more time in sleeping. Children of working mothers spent more time on household chores, particularly on holidays. They also spent more time on school work at home. There was very little difference on leisure time.

Boys of working and non-working mothers enjoyed more sleeping hours. Girls spent more time on personal work and household chores than boys. They spent more time on school work at home. Boys of non-working mothers indicated more time on leisure and market work than girls, whereas girls of working mothers spent more time on market work than boys.

Very low mean differences were observed between children of mothers in different work categories.

The following conclusions were drawn:

There were significant differences between working and non-working mothers as well as their adolescent children. Differences were also observed when mothers of different work categories and their adolescents were compared, in their perception of the family characteristics dimensions and psychological well-being. Significant relationships were observed between family characteristics dimensions and areas of psychological well-being, for working and non-working mothers and their children. Family characteristics dimensions showed significant impact on the areas of psychological well-being for working, non-working mothers and their adolescent children. The perception of family characteristics dimensions and areas of psychological well-being of working mothers and their adolescent children differed by the span of mother's work. Also, the perception of family characteristics dimensions and areas of psychological well-being differed by the adolescent age category. Working and non-working mothers as well as their children differed in their perceptions of the role of husband's/father's in family involvement. Mother in different work categories
differed in their perceptions of the role of husband in family involvement. A similar pattern was observed for their children. Mothers and their adolescent children differed in their time distribution on daily activities. The differences were observed in case of mothers in different work categories and their children in their time distribution on daily activities.

Findings of the research have following implications and limitations:

This study used family environment scale of Moos and Moos which was based on the concept of ‘Behavior Setting’ by Barker, the premise being that the individual and environment were the key determinants of behaviour setting. This framework in the context of this study did not capture the existing reality. Differences in the family characteristics of working and non-working mothers now extended beyond individual and family ecology to other social contexts; like friends and work places. In fact, not even the physical infrastructure and facilities made a difference, as the inclusion of this dimension failed to validate it.

The fact, that not all the dimensions of family environment scale emerged as significant for the most paired groups, vindicated that probably the issue of family environment should be approached differently and through a different set of questions.

The finding that the dimensions, which were significant for mothers, were so for children as well, indicated that mothers could successfully inculcate values in their children. This congruence in perceptions supported the Moos conceptualization of human environments in which persons accommodated themselves into environments they inhabited and grew.

The results also supported the person-environment perspective, as those mothers who were working but did not want to work were in greater stress and those who were not working but wanted to work were also under stress. The results also supported the cognitive relational theory of stress by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), as the working mothers were stressed and yet but also indicated greater adjustment because of conducive environment. This was in conformity with the primary and secondary appraisals of the meta-theoretical system approach. Even Pestonjee’s theory was found true in this study, as the high level of stress was accompanied by low level of adjustment. Pestonjee’s theory also relied on role of
individual in stress processes, but here the family relations emerged more important in stress. As observed in the analysis of the perception of husband/fathers, mother and children had different perceptions in different settings.

Results despite the fewer differences than expected illustrated that the working and non-working women remained two distinct categories, each having different potential to provide parental supervision and monitoring to their adolescents. A policy perspective was needed however, for the women in organized sector and in full employment. These women suffered from dual role conflicts, which ought to be helped through some policy and programmes of child care etc. Legislation may try to ensure good working conditions for women at the place of work, so that they could spend some quality time with their adolescent children. Provision of flexible working hours, occupational health and safety, freedom from workplace harassment need to be made part of policy framework. National Perspective Plan for Women (1988) attempted a broad framework for women, but it did not pay significant attention to women in urban areas. A comprehensive plan for this sector of women was thus needed. As far as adolescents were concerned, there was no policy framework for young adults to take note of their age specific pressures and growth potential, and to provide the constructive guidance. Education was only one component of life. We require a National perspective plan for the young adults to grow into responsible citizen. Education Policy failed to imbibe in children core values. The curriculum should provide for some national core values. The fact that the boys and girls differed significantly on some dimensions, indicated the need for policy that would eliminate sexist bias. National Policy on Education (1986) stressed the need for education for equality, as well as gender bias free curriculum. It had been observed that the moral religious emphasis did not emerge significant in the entire analysis. This was rather critical, as it implied that this aspect was not considered important in life either by children or mothers. Since children of today would be adults tomorrow, it was desirable that that the education curriculum had some moral values to focus on. There was also the need for some good counseling of children because of the stress, some of which did not even get expressed. Parents and teachers should work together to ensure that counseling was not taken negatively and confined to very few schools.
There was need to organize programmes for families and couples than women alone, which would focus on family relations and efficient management of the family as a whole. These could be organized in informal settings incorporating day to day experiences. The results had particularly highlighted stress in home and emotional areas, and learning from each others experiences could help in empowering themselves to cope with the problems. Some programmes on confidence building could be needed by non-working mothers, as stress had negative impact of expressiveness and intellectual cultural orientation. This was supported by the fact that expressiveness and intellectual cultural orientation had positive impact on adjustment.

The results implied that working and non-working mothers need to be treated as separate categories in terms of perceived family characteristics. The search for improved family environment should be based on the interplay with other contextual variables. The differences in stress and adjustment areas implied that more adjusted families had stress but different coping mechanisms than others. Both groups developed their own strategies of adjustment and all these need to be recognized. Further, family characteristics dimensions which were important for stress were not necessarily important for adjustment indicated that appraisal of stress and acting towards adjustment involved different cognitive and affective processes. An important implication of the results on family characteristics was that more than the nature of the work, the mother was working was important. It showed that mothers in different work categories developed their individualized strategies to come to terms with demands of work.

The significant differences between children of working and non-working mothers on family characteristics implied that the contexts of their growth were different. While attempting to find ways and means to make family environment better for children, these contexts will have to be seen as whole units of socialization, where strengths need to be reinforced and weaknesses need to be contained. Further boys and girls tended to be different as they lived and functioned under different contextual variables and generated different web of relationships. This confirmed the old social divides, which also extended to children of different work categories. It was important that while these divides diminished for mothers in different work categories, these were very much present in their children. Educational
programmes and counseling should consider ways and means of reducing these divides at the school stage itself.

When mothers started working, they needed time to come to terms with work demands. Therefore in the initial years they were more stressed. With the passage of time, they developed better appreciation for work environment and coped with stress. It was therefore necessary that when women entered work, the employers paid attention to create an environment at the place of work, which facilitated their adjustment. The children of working mother attached more positive value to characteristics of their fathers, as compared to the children of non-working mothers. This implied that in families with working mothers, there was a better appreciation for role of other family members.

An interesting implication of the study was that while working and non working mothers paid equal attention to domestic chores, as indicated in terms of time distribution, working mothers were not able to get enough time for personal care like sleeping and leisure, which made life stressful having implications for a range of other domains of functioning.

It has to be recognized that it could have been useful to use the same respondents to make it a true longitudinal study. Fathers being primary socializing members in a family and their contributions being equally important, they should have also been included in the study. More work categories of mothers could have been included to cover a wide range of occupations. It could have been meaningful to cover children from Government schools and Government Aided School too, to see differences in family environment. Questions on physical dimension of Family Characteristic Scale should have tried to capture material aspects of home through some direct questions. Time management activities should be more elaborate. The category of non-working mothers consisted of typical housewives as well as those in ad-hoc, irregular employment. These should have been desegregated as it is likely that this clubbing together had subdued differences and overall findings.