



The Silent Burden: Psychological Challenges of Being a Housewife

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Abstract

The role of a housewife, or homemaker, is often overlooked in societal discourse, yet it encompasses a myriad of responsibilities that profoundly influence psychological well-being. This article explores the psychology of housewives, shedding light on the challenges they face and the implications for their mental health. Drawing on research and psychological theories, this paper delves into identity struggles, emotional labour, social isolation, and financial dependence as key factors contributing to depression and distress among housewives. By understanding these complexities and implementing strategies to support their well-being, housewives can be empowered to navigate their roles with resilience and fulfilment.

Keywords: Housewife, Home-maker, distress, Depression, Identity

I. Introduction:

The role of a housewife, or homemaker, is often regarded as a cornerstone of society, yet it frequently remains underappreciated and misunderstood. While the image of the serene homemaker managing a household may seem idyllic, the reality is far more complex. Behind the scenes, housewives navigate a multitude of responsibilities that shape not only the functioning of the home but also their own psychological well-being.

This article delves into the psychology of housewives, aiming to uncover the intricate web of challenges they face and the toll they take on their mental health. From identity struggles to emotional labour, social isolation, and financial dependence, the role of a housewife is fraught with complexities that warrant deeper exploration.

By shedding light on these challenges, the aim is to foster a greater understanding of the psychological landscape of housewives and advocate for strategies to support their well-being. Through recognition, validation, and targeted

interventions, housewives can be empowered to navigate their roles with resilience, fulfilment, and a renewed sense of purpose.

Psychological and Psychosocial Condition of Housewives

In the dynamic landscape of societal roles, the role of a housewife, or homemaker, stands as a cornerstone. Often overlooked, this role encompasses a multitude of responsibilities that delve deep into the realms of psychology, often leading to various forms of depression and distress. Understanding the intricate psychology of housewives is essential for unravelling the challenges they face and devising strategies to support their well-being. A study found that women who work outside the home tend to have better marital adjustment and overall well-being than housewives. Working women reported higher levels of health, life satisfaction, and self-esteem, along with lower levels of hopelessness, insecurity, and anxiety compared to housewives. Additionally, housewives generally experienced lower negative emotions compared to employed women.¹ In 2017, another research was conducted in Mithila Region, North Bihar, India, in which data suggests that 63.33% of housewives reported higher psychological well-being compared to 55% of working women. However, 28.33% of working women showed moderate psychological well-being, higher than the 23.34% of housewives. Additionally, only 13.33% of housewives reported low psychological well-being compared to 16.67% of working women.²

¹ Nathawat, S. S., & Mathur, A. (1993). Marital Adjustment and Subjective Well-Being in Indian-Educated Housewives and Working Women. *The Journal of Psychology*, 127(3), 353–358. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.1993.9915570>

² Lakhshmi Choudhary & Anis Ahmad (2017). A Study of Psychological Well-Being Among Housewives and Working Women of Mithila



The Role and Identity Struggles

The transition into the role of a housewife can be both fulfilling and challenging. For many, it marks a significant shift from a professional identity to one centred around the home.

In India, where patriarchal norms often dictate gender roles, the expectation for women to fulfil domestic duties is deeply entrenched. As a result, this shift in identity can trigger feelings of loss, inadequacy, and a lack of fulfilment, especially if the individual previously derived a sense of purpose and achievement from their career.

Moreover, societal perceptions of housewives in India often undervalue their contributions to the family and society at large. Despite shouldering the responsibility of managing the household and caring for family members, housewives may not receive the recognition or appreciation they deserve. This lack of acknowledgement can erode self-esteem and contribute to feelings of invisibility and lack of appreciation.

According to data from the National Sample Survey Organization³ (NSSO), approximately 159 million women in India identified themselves as housewives in 2019-2020. While many women willingly choose this role, for others, it may be a consequence of limited access to education and employment opportunities, further exacerbating feelings of dependence and lack of fulfillment.

Research indicates that a housewife's sense of self-worth and psychological well-being is closely tied to societal expectations and her socioeconomic status. Factors such as education, income, and occupational prestige influence how housewives perceive themselves and their roles, often impacting their overall happiness and fulfillment.⁴

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<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/144775048.pdf>

³ National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), <https://www.mospi.gov.in/national-sample-survey-officnssso>

⁴ Thoits, P. A. (1983). "Multiple Identities and Psychological Well-Being: A Reformulation and Test of the Social Isolation Hypothesis." *American Sociological Review* 48, No.2:174-187.

Additionally, the prevalence of joint family systems in India can exacerbate identity struggles for housewives. In such setups, where multiple generations live together under one roof, the boundaries between personal and familial identities may blur, leading to a loss of individual autonomy and agency.

Stress and Burnout

Housewives are not only responsible for the physical upkeep of the home but also the emotional well-being of their family members. This emotional labor involves managing conflicts, providing support, and nurturing relationships, often at the expense of their own emotional needs. It is found that society frequently imposes expectations on women to exhibit passive, emotional, obedient, and self-sacrificing behaviours.⁵

Housewives often feel pressured to prioritise the well-being and meet the expectations of others within their social structure.⁶ In another study conducted in Surat, reported 38% of housewives are suffering from border line clinical depression.⁷

Housewives juggling household chores, caregiving, and family dynamics often experience significant stress. Research consistently shows that increased stress levels can negatively impact their sleep quality, leading to difficulties falling asleep, staying asleep, and achieving restorative rest.⁸ A qualitative research study conducted in Maharashtra revealed a sleep quality score of 43.79, indicating that housewives experience

⁵ Boz İ, Özçetin E, Teskereci G. Becoming a mother after infertility A theoretical analysis. *Current Approaches in Psychiatry*. 2018;10(4):496–511. doi: <https://doi.org/10.18863/pgy.382342>
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301298929_Study_of_Mental_Health_Status_of_Housewives_living_in_Surat_City

⁶ Malhotra, S., & Shah, R. (2015). Women and mental health in India: An overview. *Indian journal of psychiatry*, 57(Suppl 2), S205–S211. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0019-5545.161479>

⁷ Shah, Miss Nehal & Lathigara, Disha. (2015). Study of Mental Health Status of Housewives living in Surat City.

⁸ Asad S. (2021) Stress, Sleep Quality, Psychological Well-Being and Relationship Satisfaction Among Married Working Women. *Journal of Arts & Social Sciences*.;8(2):69- 77



moderate sleep disturbances.⁹ In research, the quality of sleep has been highlighted as more essential than the quantity of hours slept. Although the number of hours of sleep is typically seen as a significant predictor of well-being outcomes,¹⁰ The deterioration in sleep quality can intensify stress levels, perpetuating a harmful cycle that detrimentally impacts psychological well-being.¹¹

The constant demand for emotional support without adequate replenishment can lead to burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and a sense of detachment. A study reported that psychological distress and anxiety in housewives were influenced by perceived stress, loneliness, and burnout specific to their role, explaining 31.19% of the variance in anxiety levels. Higher distress was linked to increased stress, loneliness, and burnout, contributing to heightened anxiety among housewives.¹²

Social Isolation and Lack of Peer Support

Housewives often face social isolation, particularly if they have relocated or left the workforce to focus on homemaking. The absence of peer support networks can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and disconnect, amplifying the psychological toll of the role. Without avenues for social interaction and validation, housewives may struggle to find outlets for self-expression and companionship.

In the context of a housewife's daily life, this existential void can lead to significant mental health challenges, such as stress, low self-esteem,

obsessive thoughts, perfectionism, denial, burnout, loneliness, sexual issues, and an exaggerated sense of responsibility.¹³ The nature of household responsibilities often isolates housewives from social interactions and professional development. This isolation can lead to feelings of loneliness and can negatively impact mental well-being.¹⁴

A study investigating factors influencing life satisfaction identified social relationships as one of the most crucial contributors to happiness.¹⁵ In a study conducted in Indore, it was reported that 48 out of 250 housewives (19%) felt a lack of closeness to family members, and 70 out of 250 (28%) experienced feelings of insecurity. Additionally, nearly half of the housewives spent their alone time watching TV.¹⁶

⁹ Deshpande S., Ghatge S., Almeida S. D. (2023) Stress, Quality Of Sleep, And Psychological Well-Being Among Housewives: A Correlation Study European Chemical Bulletin 12(5), 4485 – 4490 <https://www.eurchembull.com/uploads/paper/a2bef7c03581870f53840aa8ad4ff073.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.thenationalnews.com/health/2023/03/15/quality-of-sleep-more-important-than-quantity-for-a-better-life-study-finds/>

¹¹ Han, K. S., Kim, L., & Shim, I. (2012). Stress and sleep disorder. *Experimental neurobiology*, 21(4), 141–150. DOI: 10.5607/en.2012.21.4.141

¹² Durak, Mithat & Senol Durak, Emre & Karakose, Selin. (2022). Psychological Distress and Anxiety among Housewives: The Mediation Role of Perceived Stress, Loneliness, and Housewife Burnout. *Current Psychology*. 42. 10.1007/s12144-021-02636-0.

¹³ Kaplan, Veysel. (2021). The burnout and loneliness levels of housewives in home-quarantine during COVID-19 pandemic. 3. 115-122. DOI: 10.35365/ctjpp.21.2.13

¹⁴ Mental Health Struggles of Indian Housewives, we don't talk about, 3. Isolation and Loneliness <https://medicircle.in/mental-health-struggles-of-indian-housewives#:~:text=The%20nature%20of%20household%20responsibilities,negatively%20impact%20mental%20well%2Dbeing.>

¹⁵ Özdemir Sönmez, Ferda & Yassine, Maleh. (2021). Prediction of Satisfaction with Life Scale Using Linguistic Features from Facebook Status Updates: Smart Life. DOI: :10.1007/978-3-030-72065-0_8

¹⁶ Dr. Veena Yesikar, Dr. Sanjay Dixit, Dr. Sunil Kant Guleri, Dr. Geeta Shivram (2014), IOSR Journal of Dental and Medical Sciences 13(1):63-66 DOI: :10.9790/0853-13116366



II. Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has delved into the complex psychological landscape of housewives, shedding light on the often-overlooked challenges they face and their profound implications for mental well-being. Housewives navigate a demanding role that encompasses identity struggles, emotional labour, social isolation, and financial dependence, all of which contribute to significant psychological distress, including depression and burnout.

Identity struggles are exacerbated by societal expectations, particularly in cultures where traditional gender roles prevail, leading to feelings of loss and inadequacy as housewife transition from professional identities to domestic responsibilities. Emotional labour, which involves managing the emotional needs of family members, further adds to their burden, often without adequate recognition or support.

Social isolation emerges as another critical issue, particularly for housewives who have left the workforce or relocated, leaving them without the peer support networks vital for emotional well-being. This isolation can intensify feelings of loneliness and contribute to mental health challenges.

Addressing these challenges requires societal recognition of the value of homemakers and targeted interventions to support their well-being. Strategies such as promoting self-care practices, fostering supportive social networks, and advocating for policies that enhance economic independence and social integration for housewives are crucial steps forward.

By enhancing understanding and support for housewives, we can empower them to navigate their roles with resilience and find fulfilment in their contributions to family and society. Moving forward, it is essential to continue prioritizing research and policy initiatives that promote the mental health and well-being of housewives, ensuring they receive the recognition, support, and resources necessary to thrive.

Financial Dependence and Power Dynamics

In many households, the role of the housewife is intertwined with financial dependence on a spouse or partner. This dependence can create power imbalances within the relationship, leaving the housewife vulnerable to feelings of powerlessness and subordination. The lack of financial autonomy can also limit options for personal growth and independence, intensifying feelings of trappedness and helplessness.

A study, reported it was discovered that education significantly contributes to improving the financial literacy of housewives. This enhancement enables them to more effectively assess their savings and understand the financial system of the country.¹⁷

¹⁷ Eti, Serkan & Temizel, Ece. (2021). Measuring Financial Literacy of the Housewife to Generate Marketing Strategies. DOI: [10.4018/978-1-7998-8049-3.ch029](https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-8049-3.ch029)