

Role Overload and Conflict in Family Decision Making—A Study Based on Kolkata

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Abstract : Role overload and role conflict are closely related. A frequent international phenomenon of role overload occurs in almost all families when an employed wife also does a large part of the domestic chores traditionally assigned to her. This produces role strain and as a result all tasks cannot be performed in the available time. Consciously acknowledging this imbalance may lead to marital breakup if the issue is not resolved.

Work role and other demands outside the family heighten both role strain and conflict. Married women's employment outside the home increases stress when they are expected to be primary caregivers to their elderly parents and their husbands as is expected in traditional extended and nuclear families. Moreover, family members involved in a joint decision may not share similar purchase motives, choice criteria, information, or product preferences. This paper has focused on how families with working wives adjust their time crunch by using capital equipments, assessing the degree of conflict typical in family decision-making and strategies of conflict management.

Key-words : Conflict, overload, strategies, factor analysis, customer relationship management (CRM).

1. Introduction

An important dimension of husband and wife roles in the family has to do with role load of each spouse. Role load is the continuum of demands on a spouse's time, energy, and other resources. One or both spouses may be under-loaded or overloaded in their household roles. There can be four possibilities, wife over-loaded/husband under-loaded, husband over-loaded/wife under-loaded, both over-loaded; and both under-loaded. Based on these four possibilities, a variety of implications would occur for household consumer behavior such as information acquisition, purchase decision-making and assortment characteristics. Moreover, when both husband and wife are involved in family purchase decision making some degree of conflict is likely. Decision conflict arises when family members disagree about some aspect of the purchase decision. Conflict is likely when a dual-career wife values both home-making and career and views some aspects of these two roles as incompatible. Home career conflict also arises when a dual-career husband values his own career and that of his wife, but is uncomfortable with his wife's success at work. This paper has been divided into two parts. The first paper deals with role overload and part two deals with the conflict to understand the behavior of working wives in family decision-making.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this paper are to :

- i. understand how families with working wives adjust to the time crunch;
- ii. investigate whether working wives use more capital equipment for their efforts compared to non-working wives;
- iii. understand whether there is any significant difference between working wives and housewives regarding role overload;
- iv. assess the role overload perceived by working wives with the help of Factor Analysis and 't' statistic, and
- v. understand conflict resolution strategies, decision-making styles to resolve role conflict and the marketing implications of role overload.

3. Literature Review

According to Michael Reilly, "Working wives and Convenience Consumption", Journal of Consumer Research, Vol.8 (March 1982), pp. 407-418, "Role overload has been defined as a conflict that occurs when the sheer volume of behavior demanded by the positions exceeds available time and energy".

The wife's external employment introduces another set of role demands that increases role strain and conflict through social power adjustments [Standing (1995)].

Home career conflict may exist for both spouses in varying degree in a dual career couple. Some studies have estimated that most home-career conflict in dual career couples is related to role overload (Hall F., & Hall D., 1978).

4. Methodology

Data Collection Methods

The survey work was done by visiting the families and gathering the required data for the research study. The data were mainly primary data and the results were collected by individual survey. Information from working wives and housewives were collected only by meeting them and asking them questions through the help of a questionnaire.

Besides this, the attitude of the respondents was measured by using Scaling Technique like Likert Scale.

Coverage

Sampling Elements : Families (Nuclear & Joint families).

Sampling Units : Working couples and Non-working wives.

Sample Size : 500 Working wives and 250 Housewives.

Extent : Selected wards of Kolkata.

Sampling Technique : Probability and Non-Probability Sampling like Convenience sampling and Judgment sampling were employed as per the requirement of the study.

Fieldwork

The survey was conducted on 500 working wives and 250 housewives of Kolkata. They were selected on the basis of family income and age group of the respondents. The survey was mainly conducted in the selected areas like Salt Lake, Bangur Avenue, Lake Town, North Kolkata (Dum Dum, Shyambazar, Maniktala, Baranagar), Central Kolkata, College Street, South Kolkata (Golpark, Southern Avenue, Garia, Behala, Ballygunge, Anandapur, Santoshpur etc).

Questionnaire

The questionnaire includes both open-ended and close-ended questions. An interval scale was also developed on the basis of the 7-point Likert Scale which consists of 18 variables. Pre-testing was done with 50 working and housewives in Kolkata to check the reliability of the scale used in the questionnaire (See Annexure).

Factor Analysis Using SPSS

The factor analysis option was accessed from Factor sub-option under the Data Reduction option in the Analyze menu option. Then clicking on the Factor option the researcher opened the Factor Analysis window. In the Factor analysis window, all the variables were selected for factor analysis and all of them were moved to variable box. The factor analysis window at the bottom has three important buttons named Descriptive, Extractions and Rotation, which provided important measures of factor analysis.

Under the descriptive window, coefficients, significance level and KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity under correlation matrix were selected. Depending on the research methodology and extraction objective, researcher had selected the appropriate extraction method from the drop down menu. Further, under the rotation sub-window, researcher had selected the appropriate rotation strategy i.e., varimax.

t-test

The independent sample 't-test' was employed in this study to compare means for two groups i.e., working wives and housewives. In fact, there are two variants of 't' test based on the assumption of equal and unequal variances between two groups i.e., working wives and their husbands'. In this study, 't' test was conducted to test equality of means on the basis of unequal variances.

After adequate elaboration done with Levene's test results on SPSS package for the t-test, the computed t value was compared and the associated significance of support for the null hypothesis of no difference between mean of working wives and housewives were considered for the purpose of drawing inferences.

5. Findings and Analysis

PART-I : ROLE OVERLOAD

Profile of the Respondents

The profile of the respondents is furnished in Table-1. The total sample size of 750 is divided into 500 working wives and 250 housewives.

Tabl-1 : Sex of the Respondents

| Sex | No. of Respondents |
|---------------|--------------------|
| Working Wives | 500 |
| Housewives | 250 |

In this study we have taken 500 working wives, those who constitutes 66.66% of the total sample and 250 housewives which constitute 33.34% of the total sample.

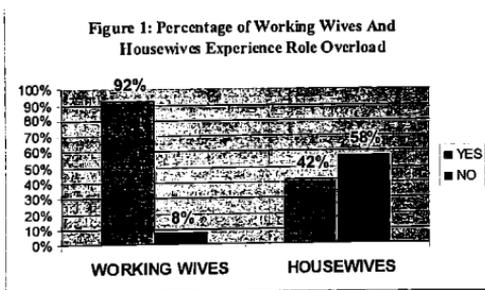
Role Overload

Role overload is especially likely when family consists of two working spouse. Sufficient time is required to perform many household tasks, such as cleaning, cooking, paying bills, bathing children, checkup by doctors, dance lessons. Traditionally, these household tasks have fallen upon the wife as the keeper of household. However, when the wife works eight or more hours per day, performing all of these household tasks is nearly impossible.

Findings

This study has investigated how families with working wives adjust to the time crunch. In this study, it has been found with the interaction with working wives that they substitute capital equipment for their efforts more than non-working wives when working wives are overloaded with work and joint decision making is minimal.

The Figure 1 shows that 92% of the working wives and 42% of the housewives experience role overload. Though the percentage is very high in case of working wives but the reasons are obvious. 92% i.e., 460 working wives respond that they substitute capital equipment in order to save time and energy.



They use more outside cleaning services than non-working wives. They spend less time for household activities than the house wives who didn't work outside the home. Some working wives handle their

time crunch by means of cutting down on leisure activities. Families with working wives also tended to purchase more meals away from home, use more disposable diapers, engage in less housework, and spend less time caring for family members. The laborsaving devices that have been associated with working wives are the microwave oven, washing machines and home delivery services or even utilize the services of maid-servants. Moreover, working wives tend to shop more in the evening and on weekends than do homemakers.

With the greater use of microwave ovens, it has been found that durables are substituted for the time wives spend in household activities as they become more involved in outside jobs. Rather, it was found that durables and wives time were complements i.e., the more time a working wife had to spend at home, the greater was her use of durable products. When working wives had less time to spend at home, they had less need for durable products, such as home appliances, lawn and garden equipment, sports equipment, and furniture.

The study found that working wives tended to solve time problem by utilizing one-use-goods e.g. (frozen dinners) and purchased services (e.g. meals away from home and child day care). The study has also found out that working does influence the likelihood that working wives purchase convenience foods and the most important single variable that affects the purchase of convenience foods is that the working wives do not enjoy preparing food or she may not have sufficient time to cook foods after a full-day work at job. Those who find cooking pleasurable or even stress relieving use fewer convenience foods and are also less likely to eat meals prepared outside the home.

Analysis

Null Hypothesis : There is no significant difference between working wives and housewives as regards role overload.

On the basis of response (questionnaire no. 4) of 500 working wives and 250 housewives, the 't' test was conducted and the result is presented in Table-2.

Table-2 : Results of t-Value With Significance Level

| VARIABLE | t | df | Significance (2-tailed) |
|---------------|------|---------|-------------------------|
| Role Overload | .168 | 491.805 | .014 |

As $p < 0.025$ (Significance level), therefore we reject null hypothesis and conclude that significant difference exist between working wives and housewives regarding role overload. That is they experience different kind of role overload when both of them are working and maintaining the home front.

Factor Analysis Results

In this part we have conducted factor Analysis on the basis of Scale to measure Role Overload (Questionnaire No. 4). The results of Factor Analysis on the basis of the responses of the 460 working wives i.e. those who experience role overload in family activities and efforts have been presented in Tables 3 and 4. The 18 identified variables have been coded against a seven point Likert type scale. The Rotated Component Matrix (RCM) for the 18 variables has been used for measuring the role

overload. This has been obtained in eight iterations using SPSS (version 12). Initially, the KMO measures and Bartlett's test have been conducted. The result of KMO (0.529) is greater than minimum of 0.50. At the same time Bartlett's test of sphericity reveals the zero level of significance of the chi-square value which is less than the required level of significance of 0.05 percent. Both these measures indicate the validity of data for factor analysis. The factor analysis results in five important factors lead to role overload. The factor loadings of the variables in each factor, its reliability coefficient, its Eigen value and the percent of variation are explained in Table-4.

Table-3 : KMO and Bartlett's Test

| | | |
|--|--------------------|----------|
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy. | | .529 |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity | Approx. Chi-Square | *345.869 |
| | df | 153 |
| | Sig. | .000 |

*Significant at 5% level

Table-4 : FACTOR ANALYSIS (Based on the responses of 360 i.e., 92% of the Working wives)

| Statements | Factor Loadings | Eigen Value | % of Variance | Cumulative% of Variance |
|--|-----------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| F1 : Scheduling of Household work | | 6.636 | 27.824 | 27.824 |
| S17 : I think that performing all the household tasks becomes nearly impossible. | .641 | | | |
| S07 : I feel I have to do things hastily and may be less carefully in order to get everything done. | .521 | | | |
| S13. I can't ever seem to get catch up with my household work. | .688 | | | |
| S09 : I find myself having to prepare priority lists to get done all the things I have to do. Otherwise I forget because I have so much to do. | .762 | | | |
| S10 : Many a times I have to cancel appointments. | .580 | | | |
| F2 : Meeting time constraint | | 1.988 | 18.740 | 46.564 |
| S01 : I have to do things I don't really have the time and energy for. | .762 | | | |
| S04 : I don't ever seem to have time for myself. | .600 | | | |

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| | | | | |
|---|------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| S11 : Sometimes I feel as if there are not enough hours in the day. | .719 | | | |
| S16 : I never use any durables for my household activities even though there can be time constraint due to my work. | .547 | | | |
| S15 : I think that when I am overloaded with work, the information acquisition activities are shortened and joint decision-making is minimal. | .518 | | | |
| F3 : Expectations | | 1.636 | 11.860 | 58.424 |
| S14 : There are times when I cannot meet everyone's expectation. | .545 | | | |
| S03 : I need more hours in the day to do all the things that are expected of me. | .647 | | | |
| S08 : I just can't find the energy in me to do all the things expected of me. | .568 | | | |
| F4 : Fulfilment of Commitment | | 1.761 | 9.832 | 68.254 |
| S02 : There are too many demands on my time. | .616 | | | |
| S12 : I seem to have more commitments than some of the other wives/husbands I know. | .761 | | | |
| S06 : I seem to have overextended myself in order to be able to finish everything I have to do. | .509 | | | |
| F5 : Allocation and Sharing of household tasks | | 1.503 | 5.591 | 73.845 |
| S18 : I think my workload can be reduced if household chores are divided between me and my husband/wife equally. | .608 | | | |
| S05 : I think a maid-servant/servant can reduce my workload. | .723 | | | |

Factor 1 : Scheduling of household work

This is the most important factor of the overall sample and it alone accounts for 27.82% of the total variance. Five out of eighteen statements load on significantly to this factor. All statements represent a traditional role overload of working wives. The statements sum up the role in terms of scheduling of household work and job duties for the purpose of reducing the role overload and completion of all tasks in time.

Factor 2 : Meeting time constraint

This is the next important factor, which accounts for 18.740% of the variance. Five statements constitute this factor and the statements depict that women should give priority to time in order to complete household work and work outside in order to meet time constraint. The statements reveal that working wives cannot adjust with the job and home when her husband is not helping her in household work and the working wives have to take care of her children and her husband which a traditional outlook of the society. Usually where a wife works, she also has to keep the kitchen fires burning, the house spic and span, and the family satisfied. In order to accomplish everything, she must not only budget her time, but she must also be flexible, since she is expected to be available round the clock. Thus, she finds herself in paradoxical situation.

Factor 3 : Expectations

Three statements account for 11.86% of the variation. Members of the family expect a lot from the working wives. But she cannot meet everyone's expectation due to linkage between spheres of dual roles and role conflict. Some working wives are unable to take their children to school, attend functions and parent-teacher meeting, serve food at the right time, cook elaborate meals and take active part in festivals and social occasions like wedding of close relatives because at work place, they were engaged in extra activities and other group activities. These women reported that they fail to meet expectations of their family members. Moreover presence of children, who require attention and help in the daily routine, causes strains on the working wives.

Factor 4 : Fulfillment of Commitment

Three statements load on this factor and together account for 9.83% of the variance. The working wives cannot meet their commitments because their engagement in outside work. This work consumes most of their valuable time. The husbands give them broad guidelines about their proper sphere of work, their desirable behavior. The husbands view their wives as care-takers of their house and themselves. This paternalistic framework of relationship is readily shared by the working wife and taken to be a mechanism to overcome role-conflict. But in spite of that she fails to meet her commitment in home front and also in the work place.

Factor 5 : Allocation and Sharing of household tasks

Two statements load on to this factor and together account for 5.591% of the variance. The factor depicts that high-level of importance is assigned to occupational status of working wives and it is being increasingly felt that husbands should share household responsibilities to ease burden on working wives. Besides, they should be encouraged to choose technical and other occupations according to their ability and motivated to acquire top position in organizations. Also, working wives should be given adequate independence and freedom in all respects especially when they have to work outside the house. This factor in accumulation calls for increasing quality for women not only at the workplace but also in the house. Moreover, sharing of household responsibilities is equally correlated with the progress of society when women are attributed status equal to men.

Table-5 : Factors affecting role overload in family decision-making

| Sl. No. | Mean Score among the respondents | | | t-Statistics |
|---------|---|---------------|----------|--------------|
| | Factors | Working wives | Husbands | |
| 1. | Scheduling of household work. | 5.071 | 4.688 | -1.5459 |
| 2. | Meeting time constraint | 6.01 | 5.672 | 2.7831* |
| 3. | Expectations | 6.04 | 5.889 | -2.2096 |
| 4. | Fulfillment of Commitment | 5.52 | 5.513 | 0.3494 |
| 5. | Allocation and Sharing of household tasks | 6.054 | 6.135 | -2.1776* |

*Significant at 5% level

The factors leading to role overload and conflict in family decision making are narrated by factor analysis. The importance of each factor is examined with the help of the mean score of the various variables in the each factor. The factor scores on each factor has been computed among the working wives and housewives separately, in order to analyze the significant difference among the two groups of decision makers regarding their importance given on factor leading to their role overload and conflict. The 't' test had been administered and the resulted mean score of all five factors and its respective 't' statistics are shown in Table 5.

The highly perceived factors among the working wives are expectations of the family members and allocation and sharing of household tasks since their respective mean scores are 6.04 and 6.054. Among the housewives, these factors are allocation and sharing of household tasks and expectations, since their mean scores are 6.135 and 5.889 respectively. Regarding the importance given on the factors, the significant difference between the two groups working wives and housewives are noticed in the case of meeting time constraint and allocation and sharing of household tasks.

PART-II ANALYZING CONFLICT TO UNDERSTAND THE BEHAVIOUR OF WORKING WIVES IN FAMILY DECISION-MAKING

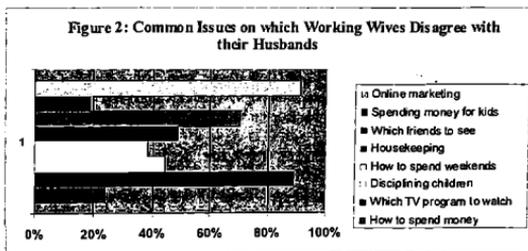
Role overload causes conflict between working wives and their husbands. Working wives disagree with their family members not only on role overload but also on several other issues. In this paper we have analyzed the various issues including the role overload which causes conflict in family decision-making and their resolving strategies. Family members may disagree about the desired end goals of purchase. Some working wives said that in choosing a family vacation, the husband may want to go somewhere for lazy relaxation, the working wife may want good shopping and night life, and the kids probably want adventure and excitement. Differences in end goals often create major conflict because very different choice alternatives are likely to be related to these incompatible ends. Serious negotiations may be required to resolve the conflict.

When it comes to making purchase decisions, working wives find themselves in disagreement with their husbands frequently about when to spend or save, how much to spend on some item, what color fits best, or where to buy something. Figure-2 which is based on the responses of the 500 working wives presents some of the issues on which working wives tend to disagree.

Marketers are interested in the relative amount of influence that a working wife has when it comes to family consumption choices. Some common issues on which working wives disagree with their husbands are shown below in figure-2 which is based on our questionnaire.

Management of conflict in family decision-making

Although serious conflicts in family purchase and financial decisions are rare, some form of family conflict is highly probable, because forming joint preference requires combining individual preference of family members. When various alternatives are being considered, working wives attempt to influence the other towards her preferred decision. A variety of influencing techniques are used depending upon the nature of purchase, the characteristics of working wives, participation in the purchase discussion, and its importance to the working wives.



These situations during negotiation may result in a preference agreement or a compromise. Findings of such strategies have been shown in Table 6 which is based on our study.

Table-6 : Influencing strategies to overcome conflict

| Strategies to Overcome Conflict | Strategies | % Of Working Wives |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Using your superior information about decision alternative | Expert | 12% |
| Use your position in the family | Legitimate | 1.6% |
| Influence over the other spouse | Bargaining | 50% |
| Offering reward to gain influence over the other spouse | Reward | 16% |
| Use Emotional reactions | Emotion | 14.8% |
| Try to persuade other spouse | Impression Management | 5.6% |

The above Table-6 describes several influencing strategies that have been identified in family decision-making research done by us.

On the basis of Table-6 it can be observed that 12% of the working wives adopt Expert strategies i.e., use their superior information about decision alternatives to avoid conflict in family purchase and financial decision-making process. 50% of the working wives adopt Bargaining strategies to overcome conflict i.e., influence over the spouse. 16% use Reward strategies. 1.6% use Legitimate strategies, 5.6% use Impression management and 14.8% use emotional strategies i.e., use emotional reactions to overcome conflict in family purchases and financial decision-making process.

6. Conclusion and Suggestion

Working wives are definitely going to face more role overload in the near future date to their outside work away from home. As a result they will substitute more capital equipment and services, for their household activities and efforts. In spite of that they should be encouraged to choose technical and other occupations according to their ability and motivated to acquire top position in the organization. Also, working wives should be given adequate independence and freedom in all respects especially when they have to work outside the house. Participative decision-making among family members was found to be associated with cognitive and relationship conflict. Conflict can damage the harmony and relationships of members in the family. The feminist movement influences gender role change both in and outside the family in multiple ways. Broadly speaking, the movement may be viewed as a social process focusing on female role identities and prescriptions. Its basic premise is that gender ascriptions produce power inequities in family systems where the male is the primary paid earner and the female is confined to domestic duties. Domestic work is viewed as important but is not well rewarded in money or status. So it can be concluded that, egalitarian decision making style between dual-career spouses can result in less conflict over home and career roles and more effective behaviours in both roles.

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Annexure

Part-I: Questionnaire for working wives and housewives

NAME :

ADDRESS :

WARD NO :

- 1) Do you experience role overload? Yes No
- 2) Do you substitute capital equipment for your efforts and activities in family?
- 3) What are the capital equipments and services you use to save time and energy?
- 4) A scale to Measure Role Overload

| Statements | Strongly Agree (AS) | Agree Mostly (AM) | Agree Somewhat (AW) | Disagree Somewhat (DW) | Disagree Mostly (DM) | Disagree Strongly (DS) | DK/CS |
|---|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------|
| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 1. I have to do things I don't really have the time and energy for. | | | | | | | |
| 2. There are too many demands on my time | | | | | | | |
| 3. I need more hours in the day to do all the things that are expected of me. | | | | | | | |
| 4. I don't ever seem to have time for myself. | | | | | | | |
| 5. I think a maid-servant can reduce my workload. | | | | | | | |

| Statements | Strongly Agree (AS) | Agree Mostly (AM) | Agree Somewhat (AW) | Disagree Somewhat (DW) | Disagree Mostly (DM) | Disagree Strongly (DS) | DK/CS |
|---|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------|
| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6. I seem to have overextended myself in order to be able to finish everything I have to do. | | | | | | | |
| 7. I feel I have to do things hastily and may be less carefully in order to get everything done. | | | | | | | |
| 8. I just can't find the energy in me to do all the things expected of me. | | | | | | | |
| 9. I find myself having to prepare priority lists to get done all the things I have to do. Otherwise I forget because I have so much to do. | | | | | | | |
| 10. Many a times I have to cancel appointments. | | | | | | | |
| 11. Sometimes I feel as if there are not enough hours in the day. | | | | | | | |
| 12. I seem to have more commitments than some of the other wives/husbands I know. | | | | | | | |
| 13. I can't ever seem to get catch up with my household work. | | | | | | | |
| 14. There are times when I cannot meet everyone's expectations. | | | | | | | |
| 15. I think when I am overloaded with work, at that time information acquisition activities are shortened and joint decision-making is minimal. | | | | | | | |

| Statements | Strongly Agree (AS) | Agree Mostly (AM) | Agree Somewhat (AW) | Disagree Somewhat (DW) | Disagree Mostly (DM) | Disagree Strongly (DS) | DK/CS |
|--|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------|
| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 16. I never use any durable for my household activities even though there can be time constraint due to my work. | | | | | | | |
| 17. I think that performing all the household tasks becomes nearly impossible. | | | | | | | |
| 18. I think my workload can be reduced if household chores are divided between me and my husband/wife equally. | | | | | | | |
| DK/CS=Don't Know/Can't say | | | | | | | |

Part-II : Questionnaire for working wives only

**ANALYZING CONFLICT TO UNDERSTAND THE BEHAVIOUR
OF WORKING WIVES IN FAMILY DECISION-MAKING**

- i) How to spend money?
- ii) Which TV program to watch?
- iii) Disciplining children
- iv) How to spend weekends?
 - v) Housekeeping
 - vi) Which friends to see?
 - vii) Spending money for kids
 - Viii) Online shopping
6. What influencing strategies you will adopt to overcome conflict?
 - i) Use position in the household
 - ii) Influence over the other spouse
 - iii) Offering reward to gain influence over the other spouse.
 - iv) Use emotional reactions.
 - v) Try to persuade other spouse