

# Role Behaviours Among Urban Women as Revealed by Time Allocation

S. Mukhopadhyay

## ABSTRACT

*The present study, conducted among 190 urban middle-class women of Calcutta city, examines the differences between a group of working mothers and a socioeconomically comparable group of non-working mothers with respect to their time use pattern. The underlying hypotheses are: (a) working mothers have less time for certain household responsibilities compared to non-working mothers; and (b) combined job and family responsibilities generate role conflicts among the working mothers, due to lack of support in the family and/or outside it. Results suggest that though the working mothers had contributed significantly less time in parental, domestic, conjugal and individual activities compared to their non-working counterparts, they hardly faced role conflicts as corroborated from their lower anxiety scores.*

---

## Introduction

With rapid increase in labour force involvement, certain factors like independent income and wider social interactions have profound impact on the behaviour pattern and life style of Indian women. The entry of middle class women into the out-of-home world of employment has helped redefine their various roles, which in turn has affected their status. Consequently new problems have surfaced. Combining job and family responsibilities can be difficult and women's health tend to suffer from effective performance of simultaneous roles. It is assumed that indi-

vidual resources of time and commitments definitely have an upper limit and thus can be exhausted, thereby giving rise to role overload and role conflict as stressors which are difficult to resolve and thus can harm well-being. The traditional family responsibilities of women tend to persist in spite of their increasing role in the work force. This change in the role and status of working women is at the root of certain dilemmas and conflicts. Women may be forced to rely on assistance provided by husbands and other family members, along with informal

support from social networks to cope with the inequitable distribution of work inside the household. Studies on time allocation have been done throughout the world as a measure of »behavioural output« of decisions, preferences and attitudes. It provides a measure of role performance... provides primary data on many kinds of social interactions and the basis for defining social groups by behaviour<sup>1</sup>. So far, very few studies have presented quantified evidence comparing the pattern of time allocation between working and non-working wives. A study by Oppong<sup>2</sup> has documented seven major roles which women play in social life and which can help us understand the dynamics of changes in women's lives and how these are linked to economic development and demographic issues. Following the conceptual framework of Oppong<sup>2</sup>, the present study is concerned with how the time use data (collected at the individual level) can be logically classified into seven roles that women play in their day to day lives. The seven roles include »parental role«, »occupational role«, »conjugal role«, »domestic role«, »kin role«, »community role« and »individual role«. In each of these seven roles, time is a resource.

The present study examines the differences between a group of working mothers and socioeconomically comparable group of non-working mothers with respect to their pattern of time use in their seven roles. The underlying hypotheses are: (a) working mothers have less time for certain types of activities compared to non-working mothers; (b) combined job and family responsibilities help generate role conflict among the working mothers due to lack of support from within and/or outside the family. The role conflict, if any, generated by performance of multiple roles by these women can be assessed in terms of levels of anxiety. It is assumed that any adjust-

ment/maladjustment to social role would be closely associated with anxiety level. Therefore, a woman who tends to suffer from role conflict will presumably show higher levels of anxiety than a woman not suffering from role conflict.

## Materials and methods

In the present study a group of women college teachers aged 25 – 50 years, living in wedlock, having at least one child, residing in the city of Calcutta comprised the study group. Each working woman selected her non-working counterpart according to broadly similar socioeconomic, educational and age characteristics. The sample thus consisted of 95 working and 95 non-working mothers. Data on time use in the two groups were collected by the recall method using a questionnaire devised by Acharya<sup>3</sup>. Respondents were asked to recall hour by hour their last working day's activities and record the code of activity in the appropriate hour space. Simultaneous activities were also recorded concurrently in the same space.

### *Time as role behaviour resource*

*Parentime* [Parental role]: Respondents indicated the hours of their time spent on parental activities, like education, health care, grooming, treatment and all other services rendered to children.

*Occupime* [Occupational role]: Respondents indicated their time spent on occupational activities, other than household work.

*Conjtime* [Conjugal role]: Respondents indicated time spent together with spouse fulfilling conjugal obligations.

*Domtime* [Domestic role]: Respondents indicated the their time spent on different domestic tasks such as the maintenance of household, shopping of all kinds, payment of taxes, bills etc.

*Kintime* [Kin role]: Respondents indicated the time spent in attending kin rituals, visiting them, caring for the sick, grooming etc. (other than self).

*Comtime* [Community role]: Respondents reported their time spent on activities involving neighbours, voluntary religious, political and social work groups.

*Indivtime* [Individual role]: Respondents reported their time spent on personal chores such as grooming and personal hygiene, e.g., bathing, dressing, health care and other personal activities, and this category also includes leisure activities.

The anxiety level of each woman was measured with the Anxiety Scale Questionnaire (ASQ) which provides an appraisal of free anxiety level. Scoring was done with the help of a scoring key, in which higher score reflects higher level of anxiety<sup>4</sup>.

A questionnaire was devised by Nagpal and Sell<sup>5</sup> under the auspices of WHO, to assess »subjective well-being« as an indicator of health. The questionnaire (structured) consists of 83 items, with a 3-point response for each item. These items can be grouped into eight theoretical areas related to or parts of »subjective well-being«. Out of these, the present study deals with two areas, »family group support« and »social support«, which are

presumed to have influence on the possible role conflict generated through role overload and the resultant increase, if any, of anxiety levels of the groups of women studied. Items from the area »family group support« reflect positive feelings derived from the perception of the wider family as supportive, cohesive and emotionally attached. Item from the area »social support« reflect perception of the social environment beyond the realm of the family as supportive in general and also at the moment of crisis.

**Results and discussion**

The present data on time allocation of two groups of educated middle class women revealed their overt behaviour in a normal working day of a week. Average time spent on a working day in fulfillment of several behavioural roles is shown in Table 1. The non-working mothers contributed significantly more hours in »parental«, »domestic« and »conjugal« role behaviours compared to working mothers. This is presumably because of latter group's commitment to work outside the home. Here »indivtime« signifies activities ranging from personal grooming-ritual and religious chores, visiting and socialization, guest entertainment at home to the amount of leisure one spent

**TABLE 1**  
TIME AS ROLE BEHAVIOUR RESOURCE

	Working [n = 95]		Non-working [n = 95]		t-value
	$\bar{X}$	sd	$\bar{X}$	sd	[df = 188]
Parentime	2.34	1.49	3.50	1.87	4.83*
Occupime	4.98	1.07	—	—	—
Conjtime	0.16	0.44	0.45	0.56	4.14*
Domtime	3.09	1.15	4.45	1.40	7.27*
Kintime	0.54	1.11	0.71	0.95	1.13
Comtime	0.08	0.45	0.07	0.36	0.20
Indivtime	4.23	1.02	5.66	1.23	8.72*

\*Significant at 5% level

during the given period of time. Non-working mothers being at home naturally could spend more time in those activities. They also have spent more »kintime« as well as »comtime« compared to working mothers. Both groups of mothers reported having hired domestic help (both part time and full time) for assistance with domestic chores and in child care. Some women had more than two domestic helps at a time<sup>6</sup>.

The observations on anxiety levels of these two groups of mothers have been discussed in detail elsewhere<sup>7</sup>. The results showed (Table 2) that with respect to the total anxiety score as well as its five personality components, the non-working mothers had higher mean sco-

res, although the difference was not statistically significant. One of the reasons proposed was that the social contacts the working women enjoyed, provided an outlet for accumulated stress.

The present study strengthens this speculation further by considering the subjective evaluation of day to day life concerns related to social and family group support received by these two groups of women. In order to compare the response of two groups of mothers, chi-square test was performed on the percentages of 3-point response of each item. From among the items eliciting »family group support«, no statistically significant difference were found between the two groups (Table 3). Both the groups re-

TABLE 2  
ANXIETY SCORES OF WORKING AND NON-WORKING MOTHERS

Working status	Working mothers		Non-working mothers		t-values (df = 186)
	(n = 94)		(n = 94)		
Anxiety components	$\bar{X}$	sd	$\bar{X}$	sd	
Low self control	4.73	2.99	5.37	3.11	1.43
Emotional instability	4.20	2.40	4.71	2.21	1.51
Suspicion	5.14	1.73	5.00	1.58	0.58
Apprehension	11.06	4.19	11.30	4.09	0.40
Tension	8.24	4.37	8.68	3.91	0.72
<b>Total score</b>	<b>33.44</b>	<b>12.15</b>	<b>35.14</b>	<b>11.09</b>	<b>0.98</b>

Source: Mukhopadhyay<sup>7</sup> et al. (1993)

TABLE 3  
SIGNIFICANCE OF ITEMS RELATED TO FAMILY GROUP SUPPORT

Item content	Chi-square (df)	Level of significance
Family life	2.27 (1)	n. s.
Agreement in family on spending income	1.94 (2)	n. s.
Closeness with family	0.21 (1)	n. s.
Joint decision making in family	0.07 (1)	n. s.
Family – a source of confidence	1.54 (1)	n. s.
Family – a source of help in solving problems	0.64 (1)	n. s.
Help by family in illness	2.63 (1)	n. s.
Help by family in crisis	0.11 (1)	n. s.

ported to have agreement in the family with respect to joint decision making, in spending family income and in solving most of the problems in the family. No consistent differences between the two groups were observed on the various items contributing to social support (Table 4). The groups differ significantly with respect to two items, i.e. ability to get help at the moment of financial crisis and involvement in a bigger group which is considered to be a source of inner strength. Working mothers perceived themselves to be more involved in a mutually supportive group and were more confident in receiving help from relatives and/or friends in case of illness or any accidents<sup>8</sup>.

mal working day of a week. However, results do not support the second hypothesis, that combined job and family responsibilities help generate role conflict among the working mothers due to lack of support from within and/or outside home.

In India, though the number of educated urban women pursuing careers outside home is increasing, they (women) still take on responsibilities for household management and child rearing. Males usually do not take on household responsibilities<sup>9</sup>. It is observed that, mothers (non-working in particular) have contributed significantly more time compared to working mothers, in providing

**TABLE 4**  
SIGNIFICANCE OF ITEMS RELATED TO SOCIAL SUPPORT

Item content	Chi-square (df)	Level of significance
Help in financial crisis	9.77 (2)	0.01
Having someone to talk freely	1.15 (2)	n. s.
Help by relatives/friends in emergency	0.48 (2)	n. s.
Belongingness to community	8.95 (2)	0.05
Help by family in illness	2.63 (1)	n. s.
Belongingness to supportive group	5.50 (2)	n. s.
Help by friends/relatives when needed	0.50 (2)	n. s.
Help by neighbours to family	0.75 (2)	n. s.
Help by friends/relatives in illness	5.51 (2)	n. s.

**Conclusion**

In the present study an attempt was made to use time allocation as a means to identify and compare seven role behaviours in two socioeconomically comparable groups of educated mothers of middle-class families in Calcutta.

Results support the first hypothesis, that working mothers spend less time (i.e. mean hours) in "parental", "conjugal" and "domestic" activities compared to their non-working counterparts in a nor-

parental and/or maternal care to the children, performing most domestic tasks and fulfilling more conjugal obligations. Working mothers performed all these various roles in addition to their full time occupational commitment which claimed a considerable amount of time from their daily schedules. Contrary to the assumption, the non-working group of mothers had anxiety scores almost similar to the working mothers. The lack of role conflict in these two groups of mothers can be explained by the fact, that they (working

mothers, in particular) have coped with the situation mostly by hiring someone else to do housework on their behalf, moreover, in an average Indian middle-class family, cultural norms encourage

members to help one another in their need, irrespective of their proximity. Both of these strategies considerably mitigate the burden of work overload.

## REFERENCES

1. GROSS, D. R., Ann. Rev. Anth., 13 (1984) 519.
- 2. OPPONG, C., K. ABU: A handbook for collection and analysis on seven roles and statuses of women. (International Labour Office, Geneva, 1985).
- 3. ACHARYA, M.: Time use data and living standard measurement study. Working paper No.18. (The World Bank, Washington, D.C., 1982).
- 4. KRUGG, S. E., I. H. SCHIER, R. B. CATTELL: Handbook for the IPAT anxiety Scale. (Institute for Personality and Ability Testing, Illinois, 1976).
- 5. NAGPAL, R., H. SELL: Subjective well-being. SEARO regional health paper No.7. (World Health Organisation Regional Office for South-East Asia, New Delhi, 1985).
- 6. MUKHOPADHYAY, S., J. Biosoc. Sc., 21 (1989) 109.
- 7. MUKHOPADHYAY, S., A. DEWANJI, P. P. MAJUMDER, Int. J. Soc. Psychiat., 39 (1993) 200.
- 8. MUKHOPADHYAY, S., Coll. Antropol., 21 (1997) 41.
- 9. RAMU, G. N.: Women, work and marriage in urban India. (Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1989).

*S. Mukhopadhyay*

*Anthropology and Human Genetics Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, 203 Barrackpore Trunk Road, Calcutta 700 035, India*

## ULOGE URBANIH ŽENA OTKRIVENE U ODNOSU NA RASPODJELU VREMENA

### SAŽETAK

Ova studija, provedena među 190 urbanih žena srednje klase u Kalkuti, ispituje razlike između skupina zaposlenih i nezaposlenih majki istih socio-ekomoskih uvjeta, s obzirom na »model« korištenja vremena. Hipoteze na kojima počiva istraživanje su:

a) zaposlene majke imaju manje vremena za određene kućanske obaveze nego zaposlene majke;

b) kombinacija poslovnih i obiteljskih obaveza proizvodi konflikt u ulogama zaposlenih majki zbog nedostatka podrške u obitelji i/ili izvan nje.

Rezultati ukazuju da iako zaposlene majke značajno manje doprinose roditeljskim, kućanskim, bračnim i osobnim aktivnostima nego nezaposlene majke, one sudeći po njihovom niskom »scoru« anksioznosti nisu suočene sa konfliktom »uloga«.