

We are Breadwinners and we are Homemakers: Do Dual-Career Couples Share Work and Family Roles?

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Introduction

The core conception of work family interference emanated from role theory developed five decades ago (Kahn et al. 1964). The way work family interference has been studied has changed over the years. Families are increasingly diverging from with the traditional male- breadwinner and female- homemaker model as women are increasingly drawn into the labour market, and raise their aspirations for educational attainment, careers and financial independence (e.g., Kulik 2004; Lafreniere & Longman 2008). Nonetheless, the role of men and women in balancing work and family in less developed economies has not been explored. Therefore, this study was designed to explore prevailing nature of men and women's roles in a collectivist cultural milieu.

Literature Review

Many developed countries with individualist cultural traditions both men and women apparently engage in fulfilling not only work but also home related activities (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010). Nonetheless, this scenario is completely different in the case of many Asian countries with collectivist cultural traditions evidencing existence of traditional gender role ideology (e.g., Dasgupta 1998; Kulik 2004; Nameda 2013). The concept of traditional gender role ideology specifies separate roles for men and women where men are the breadwinners and women are the homemakers (Gutek, Searle & Klepa 1991; Kite 1996). In Sri Lanka, over the course of last few decades, the labour force participation rate of women has been rising owing to increased attainment of educational qualifications and living costs. For instance, the percentage of women entering universities increased from 42% in 1989 to over 55% in 2012 (De Soysa 2000; Haraldstad 2012). According to the 2013 labour force survey in Sri Lanka, the participation rate of men and women was 74.4% and 34.7% respectively, and the majority of labour force was between ages of 35 to 44 years (Department of Census and Statistics 2013). Thus, there are increasing numbers of dual earner families portending change in the traditional division of labour (men breadwinners and women homemakers) in Sri Lanka. Thus, studying the pervading nature of gender role ideology is imperative leading to pose a question: "does the traditional gender role ideology (role of men and women) prevail in Sri Lanka?"

Methodology

Since this study is designed to explore the extant nature of gender role ideology belief among dual-career couples, a qualitative approach in form of in-depth interviews was adopted. Twenty employees composed of the ten working families were purposively selected. The onerous duty of the researcher was to control and guide the interview rather deviating from the phenomenon being studied. Since Interviewees share their thoughts and feeling about the subject being inquired, which are private and personal matters to them, anonymity and

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confidentiality were assured and avoided to asking personal details that supposed to be exposed person's identity. Deductive coding on manifest and latent nature of the data was employed with the aid of Nvivo 10. Of the topic materials have been coded and off the topic materials (called dross) have not been coded. Dependability and validity were also confirmed.

Results and Discussions

This study confirmed the prevalence of a traditional gender role ideology that assumes "men are mainly breadwinners and women are mainly homemakers" and the existence of patriarchy. Although high proportion of women said they were mainly homemakers, they are very well educated and qualified, and earning well above average salaries. They see their work contributing to the family income: the extracted verbatim quote is:

"I reckon my work is necessary to make reasonable earnings for running our family... But if we can manage without my contribution, I will stop working....." (interviewee 6).

The majority of participants interviewed agreed that the wife was the prime carer for their children and household chores. Nonetheless, extended family members' support for looking after children and household chores was also found. Paid carer was seldom available. The majority of participants articulated that they were struggling in managing childcare and they wish they had more time to spend with children; the extracted verbatim quote is:

"...We do work for earning money needs for running our family. Children are ours riches. Family is most important. I wish I had more time to spend with them...."
(Interviewee 9)

Male informants expressed that they are primarily responsible for earning money: they do overtime but not support in doing household chores:

".....I have got too much responsibility at work. I work roughly 49 hours per week.....I ain't really supporting in doing household chores....." (Interviewee 12).

In overall, results revealed that the majority of the respondents interviewed agreed the existence of traditional gender role ideology suggesting men are mainly breadwinners whilst women are mainly homemakers delivering the majority of household chores, childcare and dependent care.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Although there is a massive influx of women into labour market nowadays, the majority of women perceive family role as their prime role; meanwhile, they perceive work as essential for economic benefits (family functioning). The findings are strongly aligned with the theories of status characteristics (social identity of men and women) and cognitive theories of gender development. Moreover, working women experience a greater amount of nuisance between work and family in absence of reduced family role. It was also observed that the family culture is "patriarchal" explaining men's "headship" and women's "submission". It is recommended that organisations should design best work family policies to promote and sustain women workforce in Sri Lanka.

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