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**WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND CHALLENGES OF MOTHERHOOD AMONG  
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS  
AND UNIVERSITIES**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Our Indian society, like societies everywhere, has changed a lot. There has been a marked increase in the empowerment of Indian women. She is now determined to be financially independent and self-sufficient, rather than reliant on her husbands. However, things are not that cut-and-dried. It may be particularly challenging for female workers to juggle work and family responsibilities. In addition, the woman's already heavy burden of duty increases if she is a mother. Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is no easy feat for any woman, but working moms in particular have additional responsibilities outside of their paid employment. When the responsibilities of one function overlap with those of another, it may lead to stress, turnover, absenteeism, and various health problems, among other things. Included in the study's policy recommendations for making workplaces more mother-friendly are childcare facilities that are mandatory, changes to policies regarding maternity and childcare leave, modifications to workloads during the early years of motherhood, and awareness campaigns to combat maternal wall bias. The study adds to the little literature on gendered leadership in Indian higher education. In order to promote gender equality in academic leadership in India, the results have important implications for the government, university administrations, and the University Grants Commission.*

**Keywords:** *work-life balance, motherhood challenges, women academic leaders, higher education leadership, public universities, India, gender equity, maternal wall, institutional policies*

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The traditional role of males in society is emphasised from an early age: providing for one's family. They go into their chosen profession or trade with the understanding that they must provide for their family. Is it common for males to feel bad about working, even when having two incomes is necessary? There are two separate causes for this. For one, we live in a culture that expects men to put in their time at the office, and second, males are hardwired to not feel bad about it. Providing seems to be more of a natural inclination for them. Motherhood, on the other hand, is an innate biological need for women. What can we do, then, when we feel guilty about wanting to or needing to go to work? Where can we draw the line? [1]: Yes. More and more, parents and professionals are taking note of the challenges working moms have as they try to juggle their duties as mothers and employees. Problems with child care, mother-child interactions, societal expectations, work-life balance, and family-work stress are at the root of many of the challenges that mothers face while juggling employment and motherhood [2].

Caring for children and the home while also juggling a busy professional job is a heavy burden for women in this position [3]. This important social position, which encapsulates both parenting and professional dedication, is fraught with its own set of difficulties and opportunities for research [4]. Inadvertently demeaning domestic labour, the word suggests that managing a family is not "work" without financial recompense, as Khanna [5] points out. Traditional gender norms have always expected men to be the breadwinners and moms to be primarily domestic. The absence of a related term, such as "working father," highlights cultural prejudices. Social expectations and duties are deeply biased towards one gender or the other, as this dichotomy shows.

A significant cultural and social indicator of the increasing number of women in the workforce, the phrase "working women" first appeared in the 1990s [6]. This change marked a break with conventional gender norms, recognising that women's responsibilities had expanded beyond the home into many other occupations. Nevertheless, there is still a gap between forward-thinking work-life policies and deeply ingrained gender prejudices, especially when it comes to parenting and ideas of the perfect worker, even if gender equality is openly supported in most mainstream Indian organisations [7]. This contrast highlights the ongoing struggle to reconcile long-standing social norms with the ever-changing dynamics of the workplace. Policies in the workplace that seek to promote gender equality have come a long way, yet prejudices still exist and help to keep old gender roles and expectations in place.

#### **The objectives of this study:**

- To examine the extent and nature of work-life conflict faced by mothers in senior leadership positions in Indian universities and institutes of national importance.
- To identify key motherhood-related challenges and barriers (structural, cultural, and policy-related) affecting their career and well-being.
- To assess the availability, awareness and utilisation of maternity, childcare and flexible work policies in these institutions.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Academics are starting to take notice of WLB as a concept due to the challenges they face in juggling their home and professional lives [8]. This disparity has arisen as a result of three factors: the increasing number of working women, the prevalence of couples with two occupations, and the pursuit of better living standards [9]. Family life undergoes a metamorphosis as a result of the conflicts experienced by couples who have multiple careers. Both the individual and societal levels are seeing challenges to long-held beliefs and practices, such as gender role ideals, and the shifting emphasis from family functioning to individual responsibility has made both more precarious. Emotional intelligence and role efficacy are still heavily influenced by one's personal and professional lives [10]. A lack of clarity on gender roles and the erosion of traditional values may make it hard for people to strike a healthy work-life balance. Instead of being overburdened with domestic duties, males would rather focus on their careers [11].

When people struggle to find a balance between their work and family lives, it's usually because they just don't have enough time or energy to devote to each [12]. Depending on one's objectives in life, work and non-work hobbies may coexist and even foster progress [13]. How time and energy are distributed across different aspects of life determines the challenges of maintaining a work-life balance [14]. Caregiving for children, the ill, or the elderly is an example of a personal role, as is doing non-caring household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, or home upkeep [15]. Tension and complexity in the home, especially for

households with two breadwinners, have contributed to a rise in personal pressures. Leisure, rest, and relaxation are also essential components of one's personal role.

According to a study by Chawla and Sondhi [16] of female educators and BPO workers, there is a favourable correlation between work-life balance and factors including job autonomy and organisational commitment. Based on the findings, proactive schools and BPOs who recognise the importance of a dedicated and productive workforce will have to provide their employees more freedom to strike a healthy work-life balance. There was a negative correlation between work-life balance and workload and work-family conflict. According to Shanti and Sundar's [17] research on the topic of work-life balance among women in the IT21 sector, IT companies in Chennai have developed initiatives that cater to various employee demographics in different ways. The sample size was 350 female workers from different IT organisations. In this survey, researchers looked at how happy participants were with a number of work-life balance metrics. Present work-life programs have 55% employee satisfaction. The age of the children is not a major factor in affecting perceived work-life balance, according to Ignacia Levy's [18] research on working moms and their work-life balance perceptions. However, child-care assistance is an essential factor. Additionally, the research brought attention to the fact that role conflict is a factor that negatively affects work-life balance. Professional women in the IT and ITES fields had their work-life balance examined by Pandu et al. [19] using variables such as demographics, workload, work environment, attitudes towards work, family responsibilities, and time away from the office. According to the sector-wise regression analysis, the three most important factors influencing an employee's sense of balance are their emotions towards their job, their family, and their time away from the office. The correlation between one's workplace and their ability to strike a healthy work-life balance has not been shown, however. According to studies conducted by Madipelli et al. [20] on the topic of school teachers' work-life balance, the majority of educators report high levels of stress due to the high volume of work, poor working conditions, and lengthy hours put in by their employers. A work-life imbalance occurs when women experience boredom, dissatisfaction, and stress as a result of juggling various responsibilities at home and in the workplace. A number of variables, including marital relationships, attitudes, and the cooperation of spouses and family members, contribute significantly to the imbalance that exists among working women. Workers in the information technology (IT) industry were able to juggle their personal and professional responsibilities more effectively as a result of improved work-life balance regulations, according to research by Ajith et al. [21]. Significant correlations were found between role prioritisation and policies promoting work-life balance. In order to understand the connection between work-life balance and stress management, the research examined factors such as travel time, depression, temper, employment, etc.

A good frame of mind is what we mean when we talk about work-life balance, not just a relationship between the two. When a person's many responsibilities in life are well-aligned with one another, we say that they have achieved work-life balance [22]. The term "work-life balance" refers to a state of equilibrium in which one's paid and unpaid responsibilities, such as those of one's family, community, leisure, and self-development, are not mutually exclusive.

A work-family balance is "the extent to which an individual is equally-self engaged and equally satisfied with -his or her work role and family role," according to Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw [23]. The term "work-life balance" does not refer to a ratio of one's working hours to one's personal hours. Having a firm grasp on one's own personal and professional interests is more important than juggling several organisational obligations and domestic needs.

Murali and Jayita [24] The term "working mother" describes a kind of woman who provides for her family financially while also working outside the house. One definition of a working mother is a woman who is able to balance her professional life with the additional demands of childrearing. By this definition, there are two types of working women: those who remain at home to care for their children and those who work outside the house but still manage to get their jobs done.

Gomez, Josephine D., [25] An examination of the relationship between parenting techniques and the values held by Mumbai junior college students by The purpose of this research was to examine the impact of three distinct parenting styles on the moral principles held by junior college students in Mumbai: authoritarian, permissive, and mixed. This research employed the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) and the Value Rating Scale (VRS) to survey 1,068 adolescents ranging in age from 16 to 18. Higher levels of social, religious, and moral values were associated with authoritative parenting, according to the results. A transition from permissive to authoritarian parenting was associated with a rise in religious values and a significant improvement in girls' moral character. The religious values of students were greater in nuclear homes when the father had a high school diploma or less. Researchers found that children whose parents exercised authority over them were more likely to have strong moral, religious, and social principles [17].

Yogeeta Bhatia [26], Women in Corporate, Healthcare, and Academic Professions: Striking a Work-Life Balance = stresses the need of work-life balance and draws attention to the notion of an imbalance among women in these fields. Many people said that they have trouble balancing their job and family lives, especially when it comes to managing their time effectively. Support from family members, particularly spouses, in doing domestic duties was shown to be a significant mitigating influence. Women with children often benefit from this assistance since it lessens family disputes and increases family flexibility.

Gatrell [27] echoes this sentiment, noting that women may be left out of growth opportunities due to unfavourable workplace stereotypes. Some companies may see a woman's decision to become a mother as a threat to her loyalty to the company or the status quo at work.

Being childless is often seen as more acceptable among women who hold more egalitarian or feminist views [28], suggesting that these women may view parenting as less vital and place greater value on their jobs. Without children, a woman's priorities shift from parenting to her work and leisure activities, and she is less likely to respect parenthood overall. In light of this, some women who have never had children may have inflated expectations of parenting and, as a result, place greater value on motherhood than other women [29]. New evidence also shows that those with stronger religious ties place a higher value on motherhood than those without [29].

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative study uses an exploratory and descriptive research strategy. There has been no collection of original data; instead, it is based solely on a literature study.

All of the information used in the research is secondary. Publications primarily pertaining to the Indian setting from 2000 to 2016 include books, book chapters, conference papers, reports, and peer-reviewed journals.

Indian academic resources such as Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, Google Scholar, EBSCO, PubMed, and Shodhganga were all thoroughly searched. Such like "working mothers India," "motherhood penalty," "work-life balance women teachers," "women leaders in Indian higher education," "ideal worker," "ideal

mother," "gender bias Indian organisations “and” HR policies for working mothers" were among those used in the search.

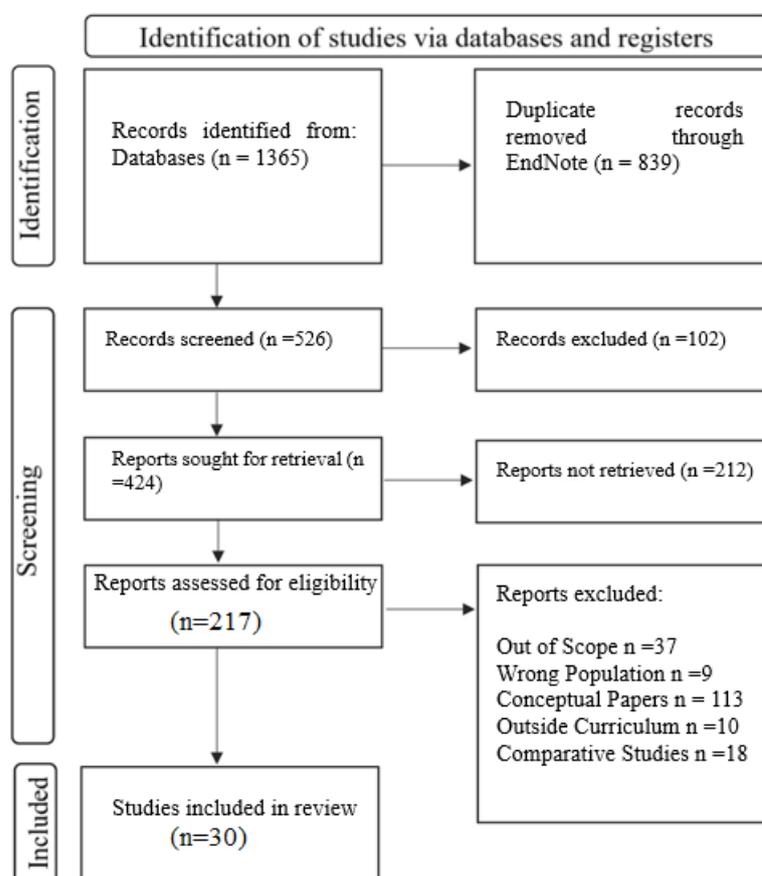
Studies could only be considered if they met the following criteria: (a) dealt with the Indian setting, (b) highlighted women in leadership or management positions, (c) covered public sector projects or offered similar insights, and (d) looked at the work-family interaction. All studies that did not have any connection to the public sector, were conducted in non-Indian settings, did not make use of grey literature, and were published in languages other than English were not considered.

Using theme analysis, we analysed the data. Patriarchal cultural standards, organisational support systems, working mothers' coping mechanisms, the motherhood penalty, and the tension between "ideal worker" and "ideal mother" norms are some of the major themes that have been discovered.

One major drawback of the research is that it doesn't include any original data from women leaders in Indian higher education institutes; all of the information came from secondary sources. To further corroborate these results, future research might use mixed-methods approaches, qualitative interviews, or large-scale surveys to gather primary evidence from Indian higher education institutes women leaders/teachers.

### Approach to search and selection of studies

Investigated topics such as work-life balance, work-family conflict, and childcare responsibilities, maternity leave utilisation, flexible work arrangements, glass ceiling for mothers, work-family penalties, maternal wall, career progression barriers linked to motherhood, and broader databases (Figure 1).



*Figure 1: Prisma diagram for literature review process*

## IV. RESULTS

All women in India, particularly those in leadership and management roles, face the formidable challenge of achieving a healthy work-life balance. Many women have managed to balance their personal lives with their hard work, defying cultural norms and conventional gender roles in the process. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go until women hold equal leadership roles, and organisations must embrace more inclusive policies if they want to create an atmosphere where women can succeed.

### *A. Working mothers & work-life balance*

A hard-working woman is an excellent manager; she can handle any situation that comes her way. Truly, they are a warrior; they can overcome any challenge. Because we are part of an Indian culture, we have elevated women to the position of goddess. Unfortunately, we also do not treat women properly, which is a sad aspect. The nation of India is skewed towards men. In this society, men rise to the role of head of the home, while women do all the labour, both inside and outside the home. Working women are forced to fulfil many responsibilities, whereas men may relax, knowing they have accomplished their day's work and are too exhausted to do any housework. A woman's life becomes more complicated and stressful when she enters the workforce, taking on additional responsibilities and challenges. As a result, she may struggle in certain aspects of her profession, leading to feelings of frustration and unhappiness. Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is challenging for everyone, but it is particularly tough for women in the workforce, especially moms. Many women want to be exceptional in all three roles: wife, mother, and professional. Evidently, this is rather challenging. After this, women tend to their in-laws, assist their husbands, keep an eye on housework, and eventually take charge of their children on their own. Beyond that, she works in the outdoors.

Additionally, she is good at what she does. Keeping up with both job and family responsibilities is tough for women nowadays. As they start to balance work and family life, women find it challenging to keep up with men on this metric. Balancing a successful career with a fulfilling family life has never been easy for women. Because being a working mother brings moments of stress and guilt for failing to offer equal attention to family and job, it still is not. Saying that, in this day and age, women are making the conscious decision to have it all: a fulfilling work, a loving family, and enough time to themselves. Finding a happy medium between job and personal life after marriage is a challenge for many professional women, but strength in numbers is a hallmark of strong women. Constant adjusting, compromising, and sacrificing are required to preserve a work-life balance. The current research compares the work-life balance of working moms across different age groups. Female workers have difficulty juggling their personal and family lives, according to studies on work-life balance. Married women with additional home responsibilities have an even more difficult time maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Companies are continually on the lookout for workers who can adapt to new situations, work longer hours, and be more flexible. An unbalanced work-life and family-life results from several factors, including, but not limited to, excessive working hours, night shifts, inadequate vacations, pressure to finish projects on time owing to cutthroat competition, etc. This leads to decreased workplace productivity, which, in turn, causes problems such as high staff turnover, low morale, and high absenteeism rates.

### *B. Notable Strengths of Indian Women in Managerial Roles*

One reason women in management positions in India are so effective is that they each offer something special to the table. Here are a few of these important qualities:

- **Proven Devotion, Loyalty, and Commitment:** Women in managerial positions demonstrate unwavering devotion to their companies. Companies with more women in leadership positions often have higher employee engagement rates, a direct result of improved employee loyalty and commitment.
- **Excellent Multitasking Skills:** Women have a knack for juggling many things at once, whether at work or taking care of their own families. This capacity to switch gears quickly and efficiently has served women well in demanding workplaces, where they often face overlapping due dates.
- **A More Collaborative Leadership Style:** Female managers are more prone to value teamwork and listen to other perspectives. Their collaborative leadership style fosters innovation and team cohesiveness. A study by the World Economic Forum found that teams led by women tend to perform better and be more creative when they practise inclusive leadership.
- **An Interactive Leadership Style:** Women are more likely to take an interactive approach to leading a team, which entails being transparent with information and welcoming input from subordinates. In addition to boosting morale and accountability, this method increases decision-making.
- **Gender-Neutral Conduct:** It is not uncommon to see women in executive positions acting beyond traditional gender norms. Their leadership approach is unconstrained by conventional gender norms, since they prioritise competence, results, and merit.

### ***C. Views on Women in Management in India***

The number of women in managerial roles in India is dismal, even though women are strong candidates. The data reveals that women make up a meagre 3% of managerial roles, primarily in administrative, information technology, and human resources support roles. Gender prejudices, cultural expectations, and an absence of mentoring opportunities are all contributors to the under-representation of women in leadership positions.

#### **Several factors contribute to the lack of women in leadership, including:**

- **Cultural norms in the workplace:** Many companies encourage a "boys' club" attitude, where male-dominated networks make it hard for women to get to the top. This may show up as prejudice in performance reviews or as a lack of access to informal networking events.
- **Difficulty Balancing Work and Personal Life:** Many women in India are responsible for both their homes and their careers. Too little time off for mothers, too few child care options, or too strict work schedules all contribute to women leaving the workforce in search of a better work-life balance. Ideal mother, Ideal worker

Conventional conceptions of motherhood often clash with the responsibilities of a working mother [4]. Society often recognises women's reproductive responsibilities as more important than their professional accomplishments, leading to the perception that paid work and motherhood are incompatible. There is a gender gap in domestic work in India since women typically take on more of the childcare and housekeeping roles in heterosexual couples. This assumption stems from long-established gender norms, which see domestic labour as intrinsic to the role of a working mother and so should not be challenged. Significant life events, such as marriage and parenthood, commonly occur during the early years of a woman's career in urban India, a period marked by strong dedication and long hours of work. Women are already under more pressure than men to rearrange their priorities due to this coincidence, while men are less likely to face this expectation [4]. Although being a "working mother" may lead to professional success and emotional fulfilment, it is not without its share of social prejudices and workplace obstacles that women face.

The traditional Indian view of motherhood, which is based on hetero-patriarchal ideology, presents the "ideal mother" as someone who successfully manages the home, produces obedient daughters, and ensures the continuation of the family lineage. Women are emotionally and socially burdened by this idealisation, which has a dramatic effect on their goals, education, and professional paths. The capacity of mothers to carry out these responsibilities is a measure of their worth as mothers. This approach overlaps with the "ideal worker" concept for "working mothers". Most people's conceptions of the perfect worker include someone who is either not responsible for raising children or has an invisible support system at home to handle housework. Without interruptions caused by maternity leave or ill children, this employee is expected to devote their full attention to their job, including being available for overtime and full-time shifts. This idea shows good workers as wholly committed to their employment.

Meanwhile, people have a dim image of individuals, whose focus is diverted by outside obligations, including child care. Further, the "ideal neoliberal mother-worker" is introduced by [1], who highlights the cultural expectations placed on women to juggle both their professional and maternal responsibilities. Early adulthood, a time critical for professional growth but often coinciding with the reproductive years, makes this goal especially difficult to achieve. It highlights the cultural expectation that women should be able to juggle their careers and family responsibilities without slacking off. When these viewpoints are brought together, it becomes clear that working moms in India confront a complex problem. Both the ideal mother and the ideal worker require one's complete attention and the highest level of performance. However, they find themselves entangled in a web of cultural expectations that glorify these ideals. The conventional expectations for these women, dubbed "superwomen," include performing admirably in their roles as spouses and mothers and bringing honour to their family through their professional accomplishments [30]. Beneath this idealised depiction, however, lies a reality full of difficult decisions and structural obstacles.

## V. DISCUSSION

The results will be discussed in light of pertinent theoretical frameworks and cultural circumstances in the sections that follow:

### *A. Understanding Representations*

In management literature, working moms are portrayed through a variety of perspectives and actions shaped by the complex web of social and organisational forces at work in their respective organisations. The way working moms are portrayed in management literature is influenced by several factors, including cultural conventions, organisational regulations, and personal experiences. These factors interact to form these portrayals. These depictions are not static accounts of working moms' experiences, but instead evolving works shaped by societal norms and larger discussions about parenting on the job. Fundamental to my interpretation of representations is the idea that the concept of a "working mother" lacks inherent meaning; somewhat, it is shaped by the urban Indian cultural milieu, which in turn affects how people see and engage with motherhood on the job. The significance of seeing representations as contextually anchored within specific social, cultural, and economic contexts is something I want to highlight by considering representations as situated articulations.

The representation of "others," in this instance, working moms, is an important responsibility for management academics. This portrayal is more than just a theoretical exercise; it has real-world implications for knowledge creation and power relations in the workplace [23]. As a result, the management literature's portrayal and understanding of working moms has intrinsic ethical and political components. Scholars in management face a formidable challenge when attempting to portray working moms'

subjectivities and identities. Representing working mothers' experiences within organisational structures are a complex task that intersects with the feminist project of changing power relations and improving people's material conditions [23]. Representing working mothers is inextricably linked to larger social power structures that uphold gender inequality.

### ***B. Representations in the Urban Indian Context***

Cultural, social, and economic variables converge in an urban Indian context, giving depictions of working moms in management literature a distinctive dimension. Modernity, globalisation, and economic progress are larger discourses to which they are inevitably tied [6].

### ***C. Challenges faced by Working Mothers***

In keeping with the structural inequities and systemic hurdles that working moms often face on the job, the word "obstructed" conjures up an image of being obstructed or hampered. It acknowledges a lack of parity between the sexes. It draws attention to the fact that gender inequality persists even as strides have been made toward equality. According to the patriarchal capitalist system that rules urban India, women are penalised in fields where profit-driven goals are prioritised since they are disproportionately responsible for caring for others. As a result, patriarchal capitalism keeps women from advancing in their careers and keeps the caring labour force imbalance alive.

Assumptions abound that mothers must shoulder the brunt of domestic duties. As a result of unofficial hurdles, unjust judgements, and marginalisation within organisations, mothers face obstacles to job advancement due to this notion. Management literature has made a substantial contribution by investigating the perceptions of returning moms in the workplace. It depicts the complexities of returning to work after caregiving, such as maternity leave, and highlights the prejudices and obstacles that women often face.

### ***D. Responding to Challenges: Coping Mechanisms and Strategies***

Within feminist discourse, silence may sometimes be seen as a deliberate option or a way to resist. The oversimplified association of speaking out with power and remaining silent with victimhood is contested in an essay by feminist psychologist Maureen A. Mahoney [24]. Silence should not be seen as a passive state, but rather as a strategy to overcome oppressive regimes or regain power in certain situations. As a reaction to the limitations and expectations placed on them by patriarchal systems, working moms' silence is discussed in management literature. Working moms have the power to take action and safeguard themselves by carefully deciding when and how to speak up or stay quiet. By reimagining silence in this way, we call attention to the multifaceted nature of women's experiences and the variety of ways they have adapted to patriarchal systems and norms.

### ***E. Mothers as Employees: Navigating Work and Caregiving***

The fact that caring for children is a central focus of most writing on working women is because this is one way in which their experiences differ from those of men in the workforce. In many civilisations, particularly metropolitan India, women bear a disproportionate share of the caregiving burden. This includes tasks such as caring for children and elders, as well as managing the home. Consequently, women's capacity to fully engage in the labour and progress in their professions is greatly affected by these obligations. The more I realised how gender norms shape women's work experiences, the more I wanted to know how caregiving responsibilities affect women's careers and health. I found out that there is a complex web of influences at play here, including cultural expectations, company policies, and personal choices.

Within the context of women's work, management academics often highlight the difficulties and demands of caring. This involves investigating the effects of caregiving on women's professional advancement, work happiness, and general health, as well as how conventional gender norms and expectations shape caregiving dynamics. Researchers also examine how workplace policies and practices affect women's decisions to join or remain in the workforce, including maternity leave, flexible work arrangements, and childcare support [33]. Subthemes within the portrayal of caring demands help us understand the particular issues faced by urban Indians and how these constraints are perpetuated by their surroundings. In fact, "childcare concerns" in India's cities are exacerbated by several factors. To begin with, when there is no help from extended family members, the onus for childcare falls mostly on moms, who are officially classified as the primary carers. Second, it is already difficult for moms to balance their work responsibilities with the care of their children, and the lack of affordable and accessible childcare facilities only makes things worse.

#### ***F. Supporting Mothers as Employees: Organizational Responses***

Working moms were classified as a distinct group in the workforce due to the need for specialised support services and accommodations to address their unique challenges. Despite their seemingly innocuous appearance, terms like "flexible worker" and "special category employee" have deeper meanings and consequences that may be understood in accordance with societal standards and expectations. It is particularly relevant to consider the impact of labels on social identities and perceptions while analysing these depictions, as pointed out by Galinsky et al. [25]. These classifications impact both the self-perception and the self-perception of others in the workplace by providing underlying themes and organising principles. A "special category employee" designation, for example, may have a profound effect on a woman's sense of self-worth. Others may see this designation as a kind of workplace isolation or tokenisation, while others may welcome it as an acknowledgement of their individual contributions and needs. Perceptions of professional competence and status may be impacted by this appellation, particularly when paired with ideas about women's ability or devotion.

The possibility that labels could either support or undermine preexisting power relations in the workplace is illuminated by discussions of stigmatisation and appropriation [25]. Their goal may be to help working moms, but we need to make sure they don't perpetuate stereotypes or exclude any particular group by not giving them the critical thinking they need. How women understand and maybe repurpose terms like "flexible worker" and "special category employee" in the context of their own experiences is a major problem that has been neglected in management literature.

To fully grasp the complex ways in which these labels shape people's identities and worldviews, it is crucial to comprehend how women experience and react to them.

#### ***G. The Mother Part of "Working Mothers"***

Motherhood and its associated qualities, such as sacrifice and nurturing, are frequently idealised or assumed to enhance one's well-being in these depictions automatically. Assumptions made by researchers about motherhood as an inherent and ever-present part of women's identities have led to the conclusion that women may benefit from parenting in the workplace by learning to multitask, empathise, and manage [37].

The "desperate superwoman" stereotype has emerged in part because management literature tends to extol motherhood and its benefits, portraying working mothers as heroic figures who put their careers and families first, even if it means sacrificing their own health and happiness. This picture underscores the tremendous strain and excessive expectations placed on working women to perform both in their careers

and in their caring responsibilities. “It suggests an expectation of perfection and flawlessness in juggling multiple obligations, thereby reinforcing the myth of the idealized mother-professional.”

Labeling working moms as "superwomen" suggests they can navigate the challenges of work and family life seamlessly. The perspectives of Arabandi [22] on "superwomen" show how this story glorifies women for their superior performance across all areas of life while ignoring the difficulties and sacrifices required achieving these lofty goals. “This expectation creates an unreasonably high standard that is difficult, if not impossible, to satisfy. Moreover, the focus on perfection indicates that these women must continually be in a state of production, leaving little opportunity for leisure or self-care.”

## VI. CONCLUSION

Research on work-life balance and the difficulties of parenting faced by women managers in Indian PSUs is limited, but this study attempts to fill that gap. The results show that mothers in management cadres face several obstacles, including institutional, cultural, and policy-related ones. Slower career advancement, less access to high-visibility assignments post-childbirth, pervasive guilt, exhaustion from the double burden, and subtle yet persistent bias from male colleagues and senior leadership are all symptoms of the "motherhood penalty" that women leaders in HEs endure, despite progressive maternity benefit legislation and constitutional commitments to gender equality. Systemic change is absolutely necessary for gender-diverse leadership in India's public higher education to really make a difference. In order to combat maternal bias, educational institutions and government agencies (such as the UGC, AICTE, and the Ministry of Education) should implement practical solutions rather than just words on paper. These solutions should include on-campus childcare facilities that are mandatory, real flexible work arrangements, adjustments to workloads during the early years of motherhood, and leadership sensitisation programs.

There will be an unnecessary restriction on the pipeline of brilliant women attaining and prospering in top leadership positions unless public higher education institutions proactively transform into mother-friendly workplaces. Developing inclusive and equitable academic leadership is crucial for modern Indian higher education in terms of quality, innovation, and relevance.

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