



UNDERSTANDING THE PREDICAMENTS OF DUAL CAREER FAMILIES

Dr.Azra Ishrat¹, Dr.Seema Wali²

^{1,2}Assistant Professor (HR), Amity University Lucknow Campus, (India)

ABSTRACT

With increasing number of women entering the work force a new dual-career family has evolved during the last decade. Dual-career couples in India are defined as two people in a committed relationship each with a career. Rapoport and Rapoport define a dual-career family as "one in which both heads of household pursue careers and at the same time maintain a family life together There has been an increase in the growth rate of the dual career families in India. Unlike most normal families the issues that face dual-career families are different and more complex. Dual-career families constantly keep on struggling to find a balance between their professional responsibilities and personal responsibilities like childcare, housekeeping and family health issues. Traditionally in India despite women having full time career they still shoulder the responsibilities of housekeeping and needs of children be it their education or medical need. These families often have to forgo promotion because cost of moving to new place is high in terms of shifting school or job of spouse. The paper attempts to understand work and family related challenges faced by dual career families. It emphasizes that among the various issues that are being faced by the dual career families, the maintenance of balance between work and family is the most significant. Hence the paper also aims at suggesting possible course of action for coping with the challenges faced by dual career families.

Keywords: Challenges, Dual Career Families, Stress, Strategies, Work Life Balance,

I. INTRODUCTION

With the increasing number of women getting into employment in India, there have been explicit changes observed with regard to the conventional norms regarding the position and status assigned to them in the family and in society. They have established their freedom, self- autonomy and personal growth, are better able to express themselves, and are striving hard to achieve their objectives. These new roles are the additional to traditional roles and responsibilities of bearing and rearing children and management of domestic and household. With this a new Rapoport and Rapoport(1969), define a dual-career family as "one in which both heads of household pursue careers and at the same time maintain a family life together. Unlike most normal families the issues that face a dual-career families are different and more complex. Dual-career families constantly keep on struggling to find a balance between their professional responsibilities and personal responsibilities like childcare, housekeeping and family health issues.

In the dual career families, where both husband and wife are earning, a different situation emerges. Women have to balance identity, power and status with family roles and responsibilities often in conflict and

psychological distancing from the spouse resulting in tension, stress and strain. There is a clash between the domestic roles and the job roles for both- working couples. The wife, in most cases, in spite of her equally demanding job and relatively comparable salary, still carried the load at home. For many of the tasks described, the husband and wife accepted joint responsibility, but the wife usually and the husband occasionally actually performed these tasks. Numerous studies have been conducted in India on the dual-career couples which recognized some authentic reasons of conflict between the spouses and conflict among all family members. There are conflicting roles which modern educated women in India have to face if they decide to pursue a career and traditional pattern of home life. The cultural and social realities of this country still force the traditional family role of house-wife and mother and not the role outside house. Along with this dual career couples face conflicts related to attending important school and community activities, Whose career is more important, relocation in case of transfers and promotions.

Despite all of these challenges, dual-worker couples enjoy their chosen lifestyle. Couples report not only experiencing financial benefits, but personal benefits. They enjoy the collegiality of having a partner with whom they can share the challenges and frustrations of work. Unlike what many once believed to be the case, both husbands and wives in dual- worker homes report experiencing higher levels of self-esteem because of their chosen lifestyle. Work outside the home appears to provide both men and women with a sense of accomplishment and competence.

Challenges Faced By Dual Career families

II. BALANCING FAMILY AND WORK

Most of the time time dual career families are facing dilemma as to how to balance their work and family life. Senge (1990) specifically identified the tension within a family when individuals feel pressured to be successful at both work and home. Family-work balance is a complex issue that involves financial values, gender roles, career paths, time management and many other factors. Like so many of the challenges and dilemmas of marriage, balancing family and work has no easy solution-no one-size-fits-all approach. Every person and couple will have their own preferences and needs. Couples are struggling with the relative priorities of their values family involvement, career, and material goals, personal growth and fulfillment.

Family-work balance is a process, not a static achievement where everyday these couple struggle with small and big issues related to kids, elderly and home. Although it's important to make the 'big decisions' - selecting careers and jobs, timing children, allocating roles and responsibilities, but the real task of balance takes place on a weekly and daily basis, even from hour to hour. This is where couples hold the line to protect family time or allow it to evaporate where they opt to take advantage of a family opportunity or allow other priorities to interfere.

The first big balance decision faced by couples is when to become parents. Often they delay parenthood to pursue their career because having children is seen as an impediment to their career advancement. Along with this the changing social system people are moving from joint to nuclear family the issue of additional responsibility attached with the child make them rethink the decision of having child. Dual-career research, of professional couples postponing parenting as they build their careers and others limiting the number of children

they will have. When children do arrive, many couples would force one parent stay home for a while (Uma, 1983)

Another key balance decision is whether one or both partners will work outside the home and the characteristics of their jobs. These decisions will depend on your financial and career goals, the amount of gratification that you experience at work, your energy levels, your willingness to forego a high level of involvement in some aspects of your children's lives, etc

If you decide to work, one key to balance is finding family friendly employers with explicit, realistic policies, programs and commitment to support the family priorities of employees, such as flexible working arrangements, on-site child care or emergency child care coverage, limits on demands for extended work hours, parent support networks, sabbaticals, etc.

Work options that can promote balance include part-time, flex time, telecommuting, compressed workweek (full-time in 3 or 4 days), extended family leave, freelance and consulting, job-sharing, seasonal work.

III. WORK-RELATED CHALLENGES

It is rarely the case that careers develop in tandem. More often than not, one partner's career is taking off while the other's is in a temporary holding pattern. Just as quickly, market conditions can reverse the pattern. These imbalances can create tension since one partner is being required to put in extra time and energy to take advantage of significant career opportunities while the other is left to pick up the slack at home. Questions regarding whose needs are more important are raised and if not properly addressed, the perceived inequities can quickly turn into feelings of resentment. Couples who do not actively plan how they will work through the stresses of unparalleled career paths are likely to experience significant relationship problems

IV. FAMILY-RELATED CHALLENGES

The division of household duties is a major issue for most dual-worker couples. In approximately 80 percent of couples, women perform 70 to 80 percent of household chores. However, an attempt to protect a traditional division of duties eventually creates an overload situation for women. At the same time, men who have been raised in traditional homes may struggle with a more equal distribution of household duties which could be seen as evidence of a lack of leadership in the home.

Given the time and energy devoted to working outside the home, a serious question facing dual-worker couples is whether or not to have children. It is enough of a challenge to spend quality time with each other. If a couple does decide to raise a family, timing may be critical. Starting a family at an early stage in one's career can have a negative impact and if the couple waits for too long, age can be a problem. Dual-worker couples who do not discuss their expectations of each other with regard to family and parenting issues run the risk of putting their relationship in jeopardy.

V. PERSONAL CHALLENGES

The personal and career challenges facing men and women are distinctly different. Women do not make decisions about work without considering the implications for their families; By contrast, men view work and

family roles as independent. What this means is that women feel that choosing in favour of one role means choosing against the other while men do not experience a similar dilemma.

Working women often struggle with feelings of guilt at having made the choice to work outside the home. They may receive little or no support from their families or from a society which labels them selfish. At the same time, the pressures to demonstrate their competence in a competitive workplace can challenge their sense of femininity. As the demands and expectations of work, home and family pile up, working women may feel they are losing control of their lives (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, Wethington, 1989)

At the same time, men are adjusting to the fact that they are no longer the sole provider in the family. Their financial contributions to the family as well as their career accomplishments may be equaled or possibly surpassed by their wives. In a society that still defines masculinity in terms of achievement outside the home, husbands may feel a sense of loss in their new role.

Time for leisure and social activities is rare for dual-worker couples. When they are not managing the demands of their working lives, they are struggling to create quality time for children or each other. This leaves little time for relationships outside the immediate family. Setting time aside for friendships and simple recreation may seem impossible. When couples are finally able to arrange time out for themselves or with friends, the occasion is often overshadowed by feelings of guilt (Duxbury, Higgins, Irving, 1992).

Despite all of these challenges, dual-worker couples enjoy their chosen lifestyle. Couples report not only experiencing financial benefits, but personal benefits. They enjoy the collegiality of having a partner with whom they can share the challenges and frustrations of work. Unlike what many once believed to be the case, both husbands and wives in dual-worker homes report experiencing higher levels of self-esteem because of their chosen lifestyle. Work outside the home appears to provide both men and women with a sense of accomplishment and competence

VI. STRATEGIES FOR RESOLVING THE PREDICAMENTS

The dual-worker lifestyle is complicated but not impossible. What we have learned however, is that couples who presume that it involves little more than a redistribution of household chores will be in for a big surprise. It's interesting to note that the majority of college students expect to adopt this lifestyle but typically underestimate the stresses they will face. Couples who are seriously considering this kind of relationship need to spend time educating themselves on the critical skills and processes required for dual-worker living.

6.1 Professional and Personal Life Is Not Separate

It is important to stop seeing "work" and "life" as separate things. This distinction is artificial. Family and work are both life and are both important. As high-tech work has globalized itself, the boundaries between work and family have eroded (blackberries in bed anyone?), making it outdated to see them as separate spheres. Remember that the best companies and managers are those who acknowledge that family responsibilities are a part of life, as are work responsibilities, and that those responsibilities pertain to both men and women. Dual careers can be more difficult when your work and your family occupy completely separate spheres. When your spouse doesn't know the people in your office, he or she can feel alienated. But finding opportunities for your spouse to meet your colleagues can create work environments that are more sensitive to your personal priorities

and an atmosphere of trust and understanding at home. Bring your spouse to company events, and if you run a company or a division, find opportunities to get people's families together.

6.2 Focus on the Positive

It's easy to bemoan the difficulties inherent in balancing the demands of careers and relationships, however, as in anything in life, it is critical to accentuate the positive. While the challenges are certainly daunting, in the end, the teamwork and shared sacrificing involved in being a dual-career couple can serve to make your relationship stronger and more fulfilling if you work at it and allow it to flourish. Be optimistic and take pride in what ever you do for your family and home. Let go of the guilt of not being able to spend time with family or not being able to take extra care or responsibility related to kid. Remember it is important to spend quality time with children and spouse. Although it one can be tough for some, due to the unrealistic societal expectations outlined above It is also important that that you are human being not robot or machine which doesn't feel tired , irritated or upset . Similarly its ok at time not to perform well at work. You fail or do poorly but that what human element is all about. Acknowledge what we accomplished at the end of the day and let go of the rest.

6.3 Be Flexible in Your Roles

Dual-career couples cannot afford to be rigid in their gender roles. In dual-career couples, there is often a lack of an official support person to provide the necessary nurturing and emotional support. Many of the dual-career couples that I work with lament, "I need a wife!" Dual-career couples need to be flexible and to be willing to switch roles back and forth in order to accommodate both careers. Paying bills, preparing meals, or maintaining vehicles are just a few examples of activities that can, and often must shift for the family to function effectively.

6.4 Have Roles and Expectations Clarity

For many of us, our marriages and careers are two of the most important parts of our lives, and making both work (in parallel) is a huge priority. Setting up expectations and clearly defining a plan to balance your job and your relationship is an important part for successful life both at work and home . But it's also important to check back in from time to time to assess what could be improved. A good starting point for couples who want to enhance their relationships is to spend time sharing their career aspirations with each other. Both partners express what work means to them and what they hope to achieve. This kind of communication highlights potential conflicting goals and can open the door to a continuing process of compromise and negotiation that marks effective dual-worker relationships. The outcome of clarifying roles and expectations is finding common ground with respect to what is most important. Dual- worker families who have learned to manage the challenges of their lifestyle successfully have learned how to prioritize what means the most to each partner and to the relationship. What brings the greatest joy to the relationship is held sacred and what is considered a luxury rather than a necessity is let go. These couples understand that core values are critical common ground, and that irrelevancies can take up too much time and energy in a relationship where quality must take precedence over quantity

6.5 Go for Flexible Time- off

Offering flexible time off opportunities to dual-career couples and parent employees represents another effective strategy available to small companies to be incorporated within their HR policies. This specific strategy is effectively being used by one of the market leaders in IT industry Hawlett-Packard (HP) where the vacation and sick leave periods of employees are combined in order to increase the amount of time employees can spend with their families.

Dual-career couples and parent employees would be able to use their flexible time off to correspond with the notable dates in their families such as wedding anniversaries, birthdays and other occasions. Moreover, the flexible time off can be selected to correspond with the holiday of the other partner in which occasion there will be a possibility for the partners to spend their holidays together and achieve greater level of work-life balance. It may lead to earn significantly less than in comparison to others. But many days one can have the luxury of time-shifting work hours, timing otherwise dreadful commutes around traffic, or work from home. This frees the couple to attend the kids' school events, take them to the doctor, or simply spend that extra half-hour focusing on them during a rough morning.

6.6 Be Clear with Your Priority

Unspoken expectations often lead to disappointment and miscommunication in a relationship. And the first step toward navigating a healthy marriage and an active two-career schedule can be managing expectations — everything from daily routines to ways of working. Do you need time to decompress after a long day at the office or do you need to debrief the day's events with someone? Do you prefer frequent, short touch points (e.g., phone calls, emails) throughout the day, or do you prefer longer personal time together in the evenings? What are your expectations about travel, meals together, child care, and money? Clarifying these things up front can help you make conscious trade-offs and decisions, rather than running afoul of each other's unspoken beliefs.

VII. CONCLUSION

The current scenario of the dual career families is changing in India at a fast rate. Day by day more women are taking up responsibilities of work and family together. There are both advantages and disadvantages to being a member of a dual-earner couple. The dual career families tend to have various benefits due to which the number of dual career couples is increasing day by day. However, due to several factors they tend to face various issues in their personal life as well as their work life.

Dual-worker families will be the preferred lifestyle of the upcoming years. It is also seen that among the various issues that are being faced by the dual career couples, the maintenance of balance between work and family is the most significant. Although the dual career couples tend to face various challenges yet they manage to carry out their work related goals as well as their families by adopting various ways and turn out to be successful in both the aspects

Solutions to the challenges of dual-worker living are as unique as the individuals who choose this lifestyle. There is no master blueprint to overcome the obstacles that face these couples. What works for one couple may not necessarily work for another, although other people's experiences may offer some insightful suggestions.

Those couples who have managed this lifestyle successfully recognize the importance of keeping an open mind when it comes to generating needed solutions.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bolger, N., DeLongis, A., Kessler, R.C., Wethington, E. (1989). The contagion of stress across multiple roles. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 51,pp 175-183.
- [2] Duxbury, L. E., Higgins, C. A., Irving, R. H., (1992).Work-family conflict in the dual-career family. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* Vol. 51,Issue 1, February 1992,pp.51-57
- [3] Rapoport , R. ,Rapoport,R.N.,(1969)"The Dual-Career Family," *Human Relations*, XXI I Vol. 1, pp3-30
- [4] Sekaran' Uma.,(1983) Factors influencing the quality of life in dual-Career Families. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, Vol 56, Issue 2, June 1983, pp 161–174