

The Paradox of Work and Mothering: The Experience of Transition to Motherhood of Employed Women

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Introduction

Mothering has always been one of the key roles of women in Iranian society. However in contemporary times, regarding changing attitudes and increasing social opportunities for women such as education and employment, motherhood is not only recognized as a definitive role for women, and they can choose alternative options. The transition to motherhood is a new and unique experience for employed women in the low fertility context. The fertility transition in Iran over the past few decades has been remarkably tangible. The total fertility rate (TFR) of seven children in the 1980s decreased to two children in 2000s. Thus, the purpose of this article was to explore the experiences of transition to motherhood in the context of work-mothering paradox. In this regard, two questions were raised: (1) what has changed the concept and status of mothering for employed women? And (2) what issues and problems are employed women faced to combine work and family life?

Material & Methods

The qualitative method was used in this study and the data were collected through deep interviews with 30 employed mothers aged at 20-40 years old in Tehran city, the capital of Iran. The average duration of the interviews was about an hour. Participants were chosen by snowball sampling procedure. In selecting the participants, efforts have been made to maximize the diversity of contributors, such as job categories and occupations. The average age of the percipients was 32 years old. The minimum work experience for respondents was 3 years and maximum 19 years, and participants in the study have an average of 9 years of work experience. 25 of them were fulltime and 5 of them part-time employees. Data analyzed using conventional content analysis method. Here, first, deep interviews were made in the form of text, and the text was converted into semantic summaries based on a meaningful unit (such as paragraph), and then the initial coding was done, followed by the initial coding of classification, the main sub-categories were identified.

Discussion of Results & Conclusions

The findings of the study indicated five sub-categories, namely, unique sense of mothering; mothering as a way of social acceptance and the release of infertility stigma; the meaning and value changes of motherhood during time; the paradoxical picture of the employed

woman as the ideal mother; and the paradox of work and mothering. And also, the results revealed that the meaning and concept of motherhood in the Iranian society have been changed and redefined according to the new social conditions and environments. Motherhood among employed women strongly affects their imagination and identity and emerge a new identity for them. The key component of this change is the encounter of employed women with multiple social roles. In this process, employed mothers in Iran face a paradox of work and mothering due to lack of family-friendly policies. In addition, the results showed the changing value of children and heightened emotional and social aspects of having children. In this context, childlessness is not good and easy option for employed women, because childbearing is considered as a social and cultural norms and values. In conclusion, the transition to motherhood among employed women can be as a natural or challenging process. Adding maternal identity to femininity and worker identities, job-related pressures, and cultural pressures associated with being a good mother can face many challenges for women during transition to motherhood. In contrast, suitable social and policy environments with a friendly and supportive approach to family life, work and life conditions and family affective support (especially from the spouse) can play a key role in the natural transition of motherhood for employed women.

Keywords: Women Employment, Value of Motherhood, Opportunity Cost, Work-Mothering Paradox, Family-Friendly Policies.

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