



Sociological Study on the Link Between Domestic Work and Mental Health of Women

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Abstract

The paper has particularly focused on the role of married women in household chores and how it impacts their mental health. Several factors have been taken into consideration; like verbal aggression, social isolation, and Internalization of blame, respectively. All these factors have hurt the mental health of women. The issue of women has been described with the help of ‘*labelling theory*’, where the person tries to withdraw from all the social events and activities due to consistent devaluation and rejection from people. The withdrawal has thereby resulted in constricting social networks with minimal attempts to seek jobs. This study examines the association between unpaid domestic work and the mental health of married women. Unpaid domestic labour, including cooking, cleaning, childcare, eldercare, and emotional management within the household, remains disproportionately performed by women across socio-economic groups. Despite variations in education, employment status, and income, domestic responsibilities continue to be structured around traditional gender norms, positioning women as primary caregivers and household managers. The study investigates how the intensity and distribution of unpaid domestic work influence psychological well-being, stress levels, and burnout risk among married women.

The paper has adhered to both primary and secondary data. The sampling technique is purposive, where participants have been selected deliberately.

The primary data has been collected through in-depth interviews, which have helped gain deeper insight into the problem. While the secondary data has been effective in gathering the existing problem, with giving shape and an idea about the problem. The findings reveal a significant positive association between hours spent on unpaid domestic work and elevated levels of perceived stress, emotional exhaustion, and reduced life satisfaction. Women engaging in longer hours of domestic labour reported chronic fatigue, irritability, sleep disturbances, and limited personal time. Employed women experienced role conflict and time-based stress due to balancing paid employment with household responsibilities, while unemployed women reported feelings of invisibility, dependency, and diminished self-worth

Keywords: Mental Health, Married Women, Social Isolation, Verbal aggression, Abandonment, Household Chores



Introduction

Women play an integral role in the process of economic-development. Along with this, women are seen to be contributing to the growth of our economy, they equally play important role in the household. In addition to carrying out a wide range of activities, they are engaged in routine domestic work. Women, on carrying out varying kind of jobs are not given recognition as a productive work (Kröner, 2025).

A section of women, who are housewives are usually labelled as, '*financial dependents*' with having no capital and income. In a society, their roles are confined to being a mother, wife and consumer. The perception of being an ideal housewife is to carry out domestic chores efficiently and to be attentive in fulfilling the needs of their husband. Failing to work often creates a disturbing environment, leading to domestic violence. Women in the British era were not given much importance (Molarius, A., & Metsini, A. (2023). Female education was the least prioritized. It was limited only to cultured and well-to-do families. Son was considered to be an important member of the family. Henceforth, the concept of gender difference was quite prevalent during that point in time. A son's importance lies in performing funeral rites, necessary for salvation. Along with this, a son is considered a potential wage earner and a support for his parents in their old-age. Historically, women in the primitive age were solely given training in housekeeping to prepare them for their married life. However, women have always been less prioritized in our society. It makes them feel neglected and unwanted by their family members (Rui Dias et al.,2024). Women categorically face the problem of abandonment. Filing for divorce is one of an issue for which the woman voluntarily gets emotionally detached from the person. Getting separated mentally creates a void, making the person feel deserted. A spouse not comfortable discussing the issue with their partner, as they feel unsafe, is a sign of constructive abandonment. Such a situation could often lead to an unhealthy environment, causing marital discord. Whereas, intentional abandonment is the one where the spouse is seen to be taking care of their partner.

Henceforth, marital abandonment has been one of the severe issues where women are insecure, giving rise to anxiety issues (Singh, P., & Pattanaik, 2020). Women who are abandoned have been unaware of the fact of being abandoned. Sudden death of husbands has also been one of the reason of abandoning the women, as their family members feel them to be an unwanted person. Certainly, it gives rise to mental-health issues amongst women. Emotional-damage, problems in a relationship and fear of abandonment are the issues commonly seen amongst women. A sense of emptiness creeps in, making the person develop depression, low self-esteem, sadness, and anxiety-related problems. Trust issues are also witnessed, leading to problems in relationships. Moreover, making the person feel abandoned might make the person anxious, instilling a sense of fear of losing someone special. It also invites the person to exhibit behaviours that might push others away. Similarly, continually making the person recognize their faulty-behaviour could create a negative impact on the same. A sense of self-blame, delayed healing, shame, and fear are likely to develop amongst women in these situations. Victim-blaming often restricts a person from opening up about their problems for the fear they have developed within themselves.

Materials and Methods

a. Research Design

The study adopted a **mixed-method research design**, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the relationship between unpaid domestic work and mental health among married women. A cross-sectional design was used to assess current patterns of workload, emotional stress, and psychological well-being.

b. Study area and Population

The study was conducted among married women residing in urban and semi-urban areas. The target population included married women aged 21–55 years, both employed and unemployed, who were engaged in unpaid domestic work such as cooking, cleaning, caregiving, and household management.



c. Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling method was used to select participants who met the inclusion criteria. Snowball sampling was also applied to reach respondents from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The final sample consisted of married women representing different educational levels, income groups, and family structures (nuclear and joint families).

d. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews after obtaining informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes.

Results

The findings of the study reveal a significant association between unpaid domestic work and the mental health of married women. The respondents represented diverse socio-economic and educational backgrounds, yet across categories, unpaid domestic responsibilities remained disproportionately assigned to women. Participants ranged between 23 and 52 years of age, with the majority situated in the 28–45 age group, a period characterized by active caregiving, marital responsibilities, and, for many, professional engagement. Both employed and unemployed married women were included to facilitate comparative understanding. While levels of education and income varied, the expectation that women bear primary responsibility for domestic tasks remained constant across social strata.

Time-use analysis demonstrated that unpaid domestic work consumed a substantial portion of respondents' daily lives. Women reported spending between four and ten hours per day performing household-related activities. These included cooking, cleaning, washing, childcare, eldercare, and managing daily household logistics. Beyond these visible tasks, respondents emphasized the emotional dimension of domestic responsibility. They described being responsible for maintaining family harmony, remembering social obligations, managing children's academic routines, and mediating interpersonal conflicts within the household. This emotional labour significantly extended the scope of unpaid work, making it both physically and psychologically demanding.

Women residing in joint family structures reported comparatively heavier burdens due to additional expectations related to caregiving for elderly in-laws and participation in extended family rituals. The presence of young children further intensified time commitments and reduced opportunities for rest. Although unemployed women spent relatively longer hours in domestic labour, employed women experienced greater time compression. After completing paid work, they continued with household tasks, reflecting what Arlie Hochschild describes as the "second shift." This dual burden produced persistent fatigue and limited opportunities for personal recovery.

Mental health assessments indicated elevated stress levels among women with higher domestic workloads. Respondents who reported spending more than six to seven hours daily on unpaid domestic work exhibited significantly higher perceived stress scores. Many described chronic exhaustion, irritability, sleep disturbances, and a persistent sense of being overwhelmed. Emotional strain was often normalized as part of marital duty, leading several women to internalize stress rather than articulate dissatisfaction openly.

Patterns of burnout corresponded closely with the dimensions identified by Christina Maslach, particularly emotional exhaustion and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. Employed women frequently reported difficulty balancing professional expectations with domestic obligations, resulting in feelings of inadequacy in both spheres. Unemployed women, although not subject to professional time pressures, expressed feelings of invisibility and lack of recognition for their domestic contributions. Many articulated a diminished sense of identity, particularly when their educational qualifications or prior aspirations remained unrealized within the confines of household labour.

Statistical analysis revealed a positive correlation between the number of hours devoted to unpaid domestic work and levels of psychological distress. As the intensity of domestic responsibilities increased, life satisfaction scores declined. Women who reported limited spousal support or rigid gender role expectations exhibited notably higher stress and anxiety levels. Conversely, respondents in households where responsibilities were shared more equitably demonstrated relatively lower psychological strain, suggesting that the distribution of labour significantly mediates mental health outcomes.



The qualitative narratives further highlighted the invisibility of emotional labour as a central contributor to mental strain. Women described suppressing personal frustrations to maintain family stability, absorbing criticism silently, and prioritizing the needs of other family members over their own well-being. This continuous emotional regulation created cumulative psychological fatigue. Several respondents reported that even when physical tasks were completed, the mental burden of planning and anticipating household needs persisted, preventing true psychological rest.

Comparative analysis between employed and unemployed women revealed distinct but interconnected forms of distress. Employed women experienced role conflict, time scarcity, and work–family tension. They reported guilt associated with perceived inadequacies in fulfilling domestic expectations despite financial contribution to the household. Unemployed women, in contrast, experienced distress rooted in financial dependence, limited autonomy, and lack of social recognition. However, both groups shared a common experience of undervaluation of unpaid labour and internalization of responsibility for family well-being.

Overall, the findings confirm a strong association between unpaid domestic work and adverse mental health outcomes among married women. The burden of unpaid labour operates not merely as a physical workload but as a deeply gendered structural expectation embedded within marital and familial norms. Increased domestic responsibility correlates with heightened stress, emotional exhaustion, and reduced life satisfaction. The absence of recognition and equitable distribution intensifies psychological strain. These results underscore that unpaid domestic labour is a critical determinant of women's mental health and cannot be understood outside broader patterns of gender inequality within household structures.

Discussion

The study has duly investigated an association between unpaid domestic work and mental health among women (Seedat, 2021). During the recent times of Covid-19 pandemic, married employed women reported a higher risk of depression, anxiety, and stress. The underlying reason has been due to the fact of work-overload. Having multiple roles and managing both professional and household chores almost doubled in nature. Comparatively, the men revealed minimal signs of stress to women. Statistically, women spent more than 30 hours per week on domestic work. Out of this, about 9.6% women showed depressive signs. In our society, unpaid work has never been acknowledged as a mainstream economic activity. Considering the opinion of classical and Neoclassical economists, unpaid work has been least regarded as an economic good or market good, thereby sidelining it from the productive unit. Since it has never been under the purview of national income, the work delivered by housewives has never gained much importance. Henceforth, as household chores do not denote any good to economic welfare, people give the least importance to them. In this way, a section of married unemployed women feels neglected and somewhat isolated.

The majority of the women's unpaid work goes unreported and unrecognized and underestimated by their family members (Ervin et al., 2022). The unpaid work has never been a choice for women. Rather due to patriarchal norms and constraints put forward by society; the women are hereby always are expectants to carry out household responsibilities. It compels to cut their option of employability and earning potential. Thereby, reducing women to curtail their interest in pursuing their job (Arendell, 2000).

Sexual Division of Labour has laid an immense important role in regard to unpaid work structured by society. It is due to which the women are pushed to perform domestic duties and paying less value to the household work. Certainly, such perspectives categorically marginalize the women with setting limits to their role within the household. Politically, the women are prohibited to enter into politics. Consequently, it makes them to exclude their existence out of productive work and property rights in society (Xue, B., & McMunn, 2021). The women in parliament have limited seats, with restricting to come up with any sort of protective labor legislation for unpaid workers. Along with this, societal norms has occupied a pivotal role in the work status of women. Additionally, it has also been responsible for restricting their entry into the labour market (Esteban-Gonzalo et al., 2018). Unpaid household work majorly focusses on three components; namely maintenance of household activities like cooking and cleaning, taking care of elderly people, rendering voluntary services to other households. Even after playing a crucial role in sustainance of society, unpaid household activity are regraded as non-accountable. The contribution of housewives, with not marking any significance in the official statistical systems. In many Indian households, as per the customs of society the women are bound to take care of their families. Hence as a customary ritual, most of the women adopt home-care as the sole



permanent unpaid job. Labelling a woman as a housewife in many Indian households, somewhat makes them to limit their decision-making power. Such a condition restricts them to make an entry into the economic activities involved in the labour market. Consecutively, making them feel destined to legitimize the duties of unpaid domestic work. Structural transformation and use of improved technologies in agriculture has made the women to make an exit from farm activities. Such activities made the women to engage themselves in unpaid household work (World Health Organization, 2013). Reportedly, women are majorly found to devote most of their time to household activities. A rapid surge in the unpaid work has been because of; as there are no other person in carrying out domestic duties. Secondly, domestic duties are sort of social or religious constraints which are put forward by the society. Thirdly, a domestic helper is not affordable all the time.

The Indian women living in our society are constrained by the institutions of the market and state. The institutions have not been able to create alternatives (Baek et al.,2024). Women failing to live up to the expectations of their families face abusive behaviour from their husbands. A woman has multiple tasks to perform in fulfilling the responsibilities of unpaid domestic work. Failing to perform one of the tasks makes them feel mentally isolated as they are neglected and treated badly by their family members. A section of women who have attained less educational qualification are highly engaged in unpaid domestic work. Likewise, the role of technical education plays an important part in the work status of a woman. The woman with no technical education is likely engaged in unpaid household work compared to the one who has one.

During the time of Covid -19, women were found to be losing jobs in comparison to men (Barnett, R. C., & Hyde, 2001). It built a sense of stress and anxiety among women as people were restricted from moving outside, limiting the spread of infection. COVID-19 has been a difficult time with pushing work to home and forcing families to combine work with childcare. All such activities took a toll on the mental health of women for working due to prolonged hours. Increased working hours, along with household chores, had been damaging both physical and mental health.

a. Social Isolation

Connecting individuals socially is one of the important aspects for survival. A disruptive social connection causes the individual to isolate themselves, affecting their emotional, social, and psychological well-being. To be isolated socially makes a person feel emotionally disconnected (Thakur, A., & Goyal, 2025). Moreover, social-isolation creates a higher risk of deteriorating medical conditions like high-blood pressure, weakened immunity, reduced longevity, heart problems, and many others. Psychological violence is one of the main manifestations where the partner, through their actions, tries to weaken their support system. Such a course of action makes the woman to withdraw from social life. By instilling a sense of fear, one tries to impair the entire development of actions, behaviours, beliefs, and decisions (Arlie R. Hochschild & Anne Machung , 1990).

Obligatory duties of women, like taking care of family members and household chores tends to isolate women. However, receiving the ongoing threats or even physical attacks makes them feel more isolated (Maeda et al., 2019). Violence could be isolating, leading to conflicting behaviour. Such an aspect gives rise to weak and discontinued links with their families and friends (Thakur, A., & Goyal, 2025). Certainly, all these factors lead to individualisation. By instilling a sense of individualisation, the women could not express their needs and issues. Apart from counselling, the women prefer not to speak about it and prefer to remain silent. It is mainly because they are afraid of its outcome and its repercussions on them.

Forced isolation is a form of social disconnection which tends to make women feel a sense of negative emotions such as anger and sadness. At the same time, it minimises one's psychological needs and cognitive abilities (Fernandes et al.,2020). Prolonged disconnection from people socially makes them experience an increased risk of depression, suicidal thoughts, and early death. Women who have been mothers experienced a sense of failure or inadequacy when not allowed to connect with others. The pressure of being a perfect mother has always been in existence (Patel, V., & Kleinman, 2023). The feeling of inadequacy among mothers could have made them avoid others, thereby leading to 'social loneliness'. Mothers who belonged to a minority background and were deprived were likely to experience a disadvantaged position. In the process, they could not have authentic interactions with others, dishonest in their approach. All of these built a sense of loneliness amongst the beliefs of the mother. Moreover, motherhood is a transitory period also marked certain changes in the relationship with family members. Certainly, these changes also



provoked difficulties among mothers (Daming, 2024). An increased sense of disconnection, lack of understanding from their partners created disturbances. Two underlying reasons for social isolation among women occur in two distinct ways. One is through limiting the freedom by their husbands, and the other is through the development of depressive symptoms due to the attitudes of their husbands (Molarius & Metsini, 2021). The reason for the occurrence of depression has been due to facing all manifestations of violence. Situations of domestic violence make the women distance themselves from their relatives, friends, or neighbours. Financial dependence upon their husbands makes the women have more difficulties in getting assistance on matters regarding health and legal. Moreover, women fear denouncing violence as they worry about their livelihood and the well-being of their children. Psychological violence is a kind of emotional damage that weakens the self-esteem of a person. As a result of which their development is impaired. In the process, their actions, beliefs, behaviour and decisions are controlled through threat, humiliation, isolation, abuse and exploitation respectively. Obligatory tasks of family care and household chores increase the risk of gradual isolation amongst women. The orientation of women are towards individualisation and being dependent on their needs. Individualisation is characterised by weak and discontinued links with their relatives, and the low-density of these social networks. Elements comprising of low-density fails to share a link between each other (Thoits et al.,2010).

b. Impact of Verbal aggression on the Mental Health

Verbal aggression is regarded as a form of emotional-abuse. It follows a pattern in behavioural approach with having long lasting impact upon their mental health. However, this section would be exploring the varying forms of verbal aggression in marriage and its consequences upon their relationships.

Name-calling is one of a form of verbal aggression where the partner is seemed to insult, belittle their partner with derogatory by lowering their self-esteem. In marriages, frequent conflicting situations cause a woman to go through mental disturbances. Shouting is one of the aggressive forms of behaviour in which women are dominated and controlled by their spouses. A disturbing marriage creates accusations, blame-shifting, and false allegations. Following these aspects routinely might give rise to the question of sanity. Threats are also one form of verbal aggression (Ajithra et al.,2024). It is a common way to control their partners. The threats are imposed on women through inflicting physical-harm, abandonment, respectively. As a partner, they often give silent treatment to their wives by withholding communication with others. It is how they are left isolated and unloved by their family members. A sense of fear makes the women withhold their emotions and confine themselves.

As a whole, the verbal-abuse makes the woman question on their self-worth. The outcome of it turns out to be low self-esteem with a diminishing sense of self. Verbal aggression creates a sense of shame and isolation for people living in a society (Seedat, S., & Rondon, 2021). Building up such emotions makes the victim withdraw from others, making them feel isolated and lonely. Issues like stress and anxiety resulting from verbal aggression increase the possibility of damage to physical health. Moreover, it has also been observed that abusing women could also create trouble in their marriages, leading to emotional detachment and ultimately to divorce.

Abusing a woman emotionally or psychologically tends to disrupt the self-worth, autonomy and emotional stability altogether. On a comparative note, the mental abuse is difficult to identify and address.

c. Role Strain

Household chores are usually the domestic work, which is often carried out by women at house. In our society, domestic work is often considered or labelled as a negative set of activities. Having multiple role responsibilities of a woman, the perspective of role-strain has been stressed effectively. The approach of role-strain explicitly focuses on the premise stating that the energy of human beings is limited, but the demands of multiple roles are never-ending. Henceforth, person performs multiple roles higher the chances of a woman experiencing strain. Such an experience likely increases the chances of inflicting negative effects on the mental health of women. However, as our society is patriarchal, women are bound to perform household work. Along with this, they are also scheduled to take care of their children. Certainly, this creates role-overload, combining with paid work, resulting in creating psychological tension among people.



d. Internalization of blame

Internalisation of blame is yet another form of emotional aggression. It is one of the manipulative techniques utilized by one own self convincing that the problem lies with the other person. Two key concepts, namely projection and Judgementalism, are quite effective in understanding the idea of blame internalisation. Projection takes place when one's characteristics are displaced onto another person. In case of victim-blaming, an abusive person usually tries to project their negative side to another. Victims get into fights with the abusers, as there are chances that the latter might cause problems in the first place by evoking a negative reaction in the other person. Victims thereby need to maintain mental strength from being triggered by the anger-provoking tactics created by the aggressor (IJRPR Research Team, 2023). Secondly, the moment when someone judges a person, it makes one feel disconnected. The connection is lost as the person becomes too conscious of their own being. During the instance of internalizing blame, the abuser gets to feel superior as they believe that their role is to judge the other person, i.e., the victim. Internalizing blame has a connection with the negative psychological outcomes, such as depression and anxiety, respectively.

Conclusion

Conclusively, the study found a large section of women to be vulnerable to mental health issues. The women are scheduled to carry out household tasks. Cognitive effort is an invisible dimension of household labour. The cognitive effort includes anticipating needs, organizing, planning, and delegating household activities. Majorly, these efforts are unnoticed and are not given recognition. Reportedly, women having a disproportionate share of cognitive household labour are found to be suffering from higher levels of stress, depression, and dissatisfaction in relationships. Moreover, the study has also investigated the impact of verbal-abuse, social-isolation, marriage abandonment, and Internalization of blame, respectively. All these aspects have been detrimental to the mental health of women, leading to issues like anxiety, depression, stress and many more. Family Dynamics have a major role to play in a society. Heavier cognitive load is also witnessed amongst women comparison to men. As a whole, women are the section of people who are expected to provide emotional support and manage family dynamics. The study has adhered to the **Interactionist Theory** which tends to perceive the behaviour of humans on having face-to-face interaction. In doing so, it enables the individuals to better understand the situation. Labelling theory, as postulated by theorists point out that if once a person is labelled as 'mentally unfit' a number of negative consequences are seemed to be getting attached with them. In accordance to research conducted by Erving Goffman (1968) it was quite evident that the people who are admitted to a psychiatric institution are somehow forced to conform with the label of 'mentally-ill'. It is through which the people lose their individuality. Isolating them from the normal routine, the mentally ill patients are forced to accept their identity as mentally unfit. It is for which they are seemed to lose their self-identity. As per the labelling theory, one proposes that the deviance is constructed socially through the reaction of people instead of action. No set of behaviour is deviant inherently, rather it occurs through the reaction of others. The stigma attached to labelled person results in low self-worth. As a matter of fact, these people might be seen to avoid social gatherings which the sane people might find no absolute reason to avoid.



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