

Understanding the Prevalence and Dynamics of Work-Family Conflict among Women Entrepreneurs in Central India

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ABSTRACT

Balancing professional and personal roles is a daily reality for many women entrepreneurs in India. This study explores how work-family dynamics—where the demands of business ownership and household responsibilities intersect—shape the experiences of women entrepreneurs in Central India. While such overlap can sometimes create positive synergies, more often it leads to strain and conflict, particularly when professional obligations intrude upon family life.

Focusing on the regions of Indore, Bhopal, Chhattisgarh, Rau, and Dewas, the study surveyed 294 women entrepreneurs using a structured questionnaire. The analysis revealed a significant presence of work-family conflict, with **work-to-family conflict** being more prevalent than **family-to-work conflict**. Chi-square tests and paired-sample t-tests confirmed that business demands more frequently interfere with personal life, contributing to heightened emotional exhaustion and lower work satisfaction. These effects were especially pronounced in cases involving time pressures and psychological strain.

Despite increasing interest in women's entrepreneurship, there remains a noticeable lack of research on how work-family conflict affects women in the Central Indian context. This study addresses that gap and highlights the urgent need for supportive measures—such as flexible work arrangements, affordable childcare, and emotional wellness resources—to create a more sustainable and empowering environment for women entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Work-Family Conflict, Women Entrepreneurship, Central India

INTRODUCTION

In India's dynamic economic environment, an increasing number of women are entering the entrepreneurial domain, thereby challenging entrenched gender

stereotypes. In India's rapidly evolving economy, women are increasingly stepping into entrepreneurship and breaking longstanding gender stereotypes. According to the *Economic Survey 2023–24*, female labour force participation nearly doubled—from 23.3% in 2017–18 to 41.7% in 2023–24—and women now helm nearly half of the startups recognized under the Startup India initiative (Government of India, 2024; Startup India, 2024). Additionally, a report by NITI Aayog (2024) highlights a 42% year-over-year increase in women borrowers and a rise to 35% in business loan disbursements by December 2024, indicating stronger financial inclusion and entrepreneurial engagement among women. Despite these progressive strides, balancing professional goals with family responsibilities remains a significant challenge. Indian society traditionally assigns women the primary roles of caregivers and homemakers. These cultural expectations continue to shape women's entrepreneurial journeys (Sinha & Gupta, 2021). Internalized social norms frequently compel women to prioritize family obligations over career ambitions, which leads to a complex environment where female entrepreneurs must constantly navigate dual responsibilities. Role theory, as articulated by Kahn et al. (1964), provides a framework for understanding the strain women face when attempting to meet conflicting role demands. Women are often expected to fulfill both business and domestic duties simultaneously, which can result in substantial emotional and time-related pressures.

This complexity is heightened in entrepreneurial settings, where work often spills into home life, especially in cultures where family involvement in business is common. The concept of Work-Family Conflict (WFC) captures this tension. WFC arises when involvement in one domain (work or family) get in the way of effective involvement in the other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The conflict is bidirectional: work may impede with family life (work-to-family conflict), or family responsibilities may disrupt professional duties (family-to-work conflict) (Michel et al., 2011).

Among women entrepreneurs, work-to-family conflict often stems from long hours, client obligations, and financial stressors that reduce the time and energy available for family engagements. Conversely, family-to-work conflict emerges when caregiving demands, domestic chores, or spousal expectations disrupt business activities. The intensity of such conflict is influenced by several factors including the number of dependents, business size, and the availability of support systems (Shelton, 2006). For women with fewer resources or less flexibility,

these challenges are even more pronounced, manifesting as time scarcity, emotional fatigue, or diminished business performance.

Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams (2000) categorized WFC into three forms:

- **Time-based conflict**, where the time required for one role limits involvement in another.
- **Strain-based conflict**, where stress in one domain weakens performance in the other.
- **Behavior-based conflict**, which arises from incompatible behavior patterns expected across work and family settings.

For instance, an important business meeting might coincide with a child's school function (time-based), or stress from business operations may carry over into family interactions (strain-based). These conflicts are further aggravated by the lack of institutional support structures, rigid societal norms, and limited access to family-friendly work policies (Powell & Eddleston, 2013). Additionally, the **spillover** (emotional or behavioral effects transferring from one domain to another) and **crossover** (emotional strain affecting other family members) dimensions of WFC exacerbate the work-life management difficulties women entrepreneurs face.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work-family conflict (WFC), as defined by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), arises when demands from work and family roles are mutually incompatible, leading to conflict. For women entrepreneurs, this dynamic is intensified due to the dual burden of business management and domestic caregiving responsibilities. WFC is bidirectional:

- **Work-to-family conflict (WFC-WF)** occurs when work obligations negatively impact family life (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).
- **Family-to-work conflict (WFC-FW)** arises when family responsibilities interfere with work demands (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992).

Research by Michel et al. (2011) emphasizes that both directions of conflict are shaped by factors such as role overload, time constraints, emotional demands, and support systems.

For women entrepreneurs, WFC-WF may manifest through long work hours, client commitments, or travel, all of which limit time and energy available for family. Conversely, WFC-FW may stem from caregiving duties, child-rearing, or

cultural expectations that women remain primary household caretakers, thus interrupting their business activities (Jennings & McDougald, 2007).

Role theory provides a foundational explanation for WFC by positing that individuals occupy multiple roles that may generate incompatible expectations (Kahn et al., 1964). Women entrepreneurs are expected to fulfill demanding roles both as business leaders and as homemakers or caregivers. When expectations from these roles collide, role conflict arises, leading to psychological and logistical stress. Shelton (2006) found that women entrepreneurs often suffer more from role conflict than men due to societal expectations and limited structural support.

In India, traditional gender roles still exert strong influence. Societal norms often dictate that women prioritize family over work, reinforcing internalized guilt and stress when business demands take precedence (Sinha & Gupta, 2021). This pressure magnifies both WFC-WF and WFC-FW among Indian women entrepreneurs. According to a study by Rajadhyaksha and Smita (2004), Indian women experience chronic guilt when balancing work with perceived family neglect, illustrating how deep-rooted cultural expectations shape the nature of family-to-work conflict.

Moreover the three dimensions (time, strain and behavior based conflict) are particularly pronounced in entrepreneurial settings, where the boundaries between work and family are often blurred. Powell and Eddleston (2013) report that the entrepreneurial environment—lacking formal structure and predictability—exacerbates all three conflict types, especially for women with caregiving responsibilities.

Several factors influence the intensity and experience of WFC such as **number of dependents** (Shelton, 2006), **size and nature of business** (Jennings & McDougald, 2007), **availability of social support** (Ruderman et al., 2002), **spousal involvement and egalitarian household roles** (Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001) but support systems, both formal (e.g., childcare, government support) and informal (e.g., family assistance), can mitigate both WFC-WF and WFC-FW. However, many Indian women entrepreneurs lack access to such mechanisms, increasing the strain. Work-family conflict can also produce spillover—when experiences in one domain affect performance or satisfaction in another—and crossover effects, where stress transfers to others, such as children or spouses (Michel et al., 2011). This holistic impact further underlines the

complexity of WFC among women entrepreneurs, particularly in cultures like India's, where family and business domains are deeply interconnected.

While significant research has examined WFC among women entrepreneurs in urban centers and developed regions (e.g., Delhi, Maharashtra, Karnataka), there is a **scarcity of empirical studies in Central India**—including states like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Eastern Maharashtra. For instance, in Madhya Pradesh, self-employment rates among rural women remain among the highest in the country, yet institutional support is minimal, increasing vulnerability to dual-role strain (NITI Aayog, 2024). These areas are marked by unique socio-cultural norms, lower literacy levels, weaker infrastructure, and limited access to institutional support—all of which can influence both the nature and intensity of WFC. Recent scholars also highlight how patriarchal attitudes and gendered expectations inhibit women's ability to separate professional and domestic roles (Deshpande & Sharma, 2022). Furthermore, studies show that flexible work environments and gender-sensitive policies significantly enhance women's ability to balance work and family obligations—benefits that are often lacking in Central Indian settings (UN Women India, 2025).

As Singh (2008) and Tambunan (2009) note, there is a strong regional imbalance in entrepreneurship research across India. Without localized studies, the experiences of women in Central India remain underrepresented in national discourse. Addressing this gap is critical for designing context-specific interventions that can effectively support women entrepreneurs in navigating work-family challenges.

Hence, Work-family conflict remains a significant barrier to the success and well-being of women entrepreneurs in India. The literature highlights both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict, driven by conflicting role expectations, rigid cultural norms, and inadequate support systems. The intersection of these factors produces a uniquely gendered form of strain. Furthermore, the **absence of regional research**, particularly in Central India, presents a major gap in understanding the full landscape of women's entrepreneurship and work-life dynamics. Future research must address this deficit to ensure a more inclusive and regionally balanced perspective on women's entrepreneurial experiences.

Existing literature on work-family conflict (WFC) has largely concentrated on urban and developed regions, often neglecting the distinctive socio-cultural dynamics of semi-urban and rural areas in Central India. Furthermore, while much attention has been given to work-to-family conflict (WFC-WF), less

empirical emphasis has been placed on the reciprocal influence of family-to-work conflict (WFC-FW) in entrepreneurial contexts.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Given these gaps, this study aims:

1. To study the existence of Work-family conflict among women business owners in Central India.
2. To identify the dominant direction – whether it is work-to-family conflict or family-to-work conflict – creating more pressure for women entrepreneurs.

METHODOLOGY AND HYPOTHESIS

A systematic questionnaire was circulated among 294 women entrepreneurs of central India particularly in Indore, Dewas, Rau, Ujjain and Bhopal. To assess the extent and nature of work-family conflict among women entrepreneurs, this study employs the Work-Family Conflict (WFC) scale, originally developed by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) and adapted in various studies on entrepreneurial and occupational stress (Carlson et al., 2000; Netemeyer et al., 1996). The scale is particularly relevant because it captures the bidirectional nature of work-family conflict, distinguishing between work-to-family conflict (WFC) and family-to-work conflict (FWC). The selected items comprehensively cover all aspects of work-family conflict:

- **Time-Based Conflict:** Items such as “I often have to reschedule family activities due to unexpected business demands” and “Family responsibilities sometimes prevent me from working as many hours” capture conflicts that arise when the time allocated to one role interferes with another.
- **Strain-Based Conflict:** Statements like “Stress from my business negatively affects my interactions with my family” address how stress and pressure from one role impair performance and well-being in another.
- **Behavior-Based Conflict:** Items such as “I struggle to mentally disconnect from my business when with my family” reflect behavioral spillover, where expectations or habits from one domain disrupt functioning in the other.

Given that women entrepreneurs often experience greater role overlap compared to employees (Jennings & McDougald, 2007), this scale is well-suited to capture the unique stressors they face, such as irregular work schedules, business

uncertainties, and high emotional demands. Additionally, the remaining four items on the scale:

- **Work-to-Family Conflict (WFC):** items such as *“My work demands interfere with my family responsibilities (e.g., late meetings, unexpected work deadlines)”* and *“I am often too stressed from work to engage fully in family activities”*
- **Family-to-Work Conflict (FWC):** *“Family obligations (e.g., childcare, household responsibilities) make it difficult for me to focus on work”* and *“I frequently have to take time off from work due to unexpected family responsibilities”*

They measure work-family conflict, focusing on work vs. family interference, while the other six items address psychological strain, emotional consequences, and behavioral spillover. The scale guarantees a comprehensive evaluation of work-family conflict by incorporating both work-to-family and family-to-work viewpoints, which makes it a suitable and verified instrument for this research. With high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.729$) across various occupational and entrepreneurial contexts, the scale offers a thorough assessment of work-family conflict, guaranteeing that it captures all aspects of conflict, including time-based and strain-based conflict as well as the wider psychological and behavioral effects of work-family conflict (Byron, 2005).

To further study these pressures in detail following hypothesis were formulated:

- **Overall Work-Family Conflict Hypothesis**
 - H0: Work-family conflict is not prevalent among women entrepreneurs.
 - H1: Work-family conflict is prevalent among women entrepreneurs.

Additionally, to study:

- **Time-Based Conflict:**
 - H1a: Time-based conflict significantly induces work-to-family conflict.
 - H1b: Time-based conflict significantly induces family-to-work conflict.
- **Strain-Based Conflict:**
 - H1c: Strain-based conflict significantly induces work-to-family conflict.
 - H1d: Strain-based conflict significantly induces family-to-work conflict.
- **Behavior-Based Conflict:**
 - H1e: Behavior-based conflict significantly induces work-to-family conflict.

- H1f: Behavior-based conflict significantly induces family-to-work conflict.

- **Direction of Conflict:**

- H2: Work-to-family conflict is more prevalent than family-to-work conflict.
- H3: Family-to-family conflict is more prevalent than work-to-family conflict.

To address the constraints on work-family balance it is necessary to understand them, which is why this study looks at work-family conflict among female entrepreneurs, with a particular emphasis on time-, strain-, and behavior-based disputes. The study investigates how these tensions show up as interferences between job and family. The study employs chi-square tests and paired t-test, to determine the significance and direction of these conflicts.

Table 1.1 – Descriptive: WFC of Women Entrepreneurs

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
I often have to reschedule family activities due to unexpected business demands.	294	2.46	.915	1	4
Family often responsibilities sometimes prevent me from working as many hours	294	1.78	.507	1	3
Stress from my business negatively affects my interactions with my family	294	2.15	.484	1	3
Stress from my family negatively affects my business	294	3.28	.836	2	5
Struggle to mentally disconnect from my business when with my family	294	2.29	.519	1	3
Think about my business and work-related issues when with my family	294	1.78	.503	1	3

My work demands interfere with my family responsibilities (e.g., late meetings, unexpected work deadlines)	294	2.46	.915	1	4
I am often too stressed from work to engage fully in family activities	294	1.78	.507	1	3
Family obligations (e.g., childcare, household responsibilities) make it difficult for me to focus on work	294	2.15	.484	1	3
I frequently have to take time off from work due to unexpected family responsibilities	294	2.46	.915	1	4

Frequencies:**Table 1.2 – Frequency Table: Time induced Conflict**

Statement	Response Category	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
I often have to reschedule family activities due to unexpected business demands (TimeBasedConflict_1)	Strongly Disagree	62	73.5	-11.5
	Disagree	58	73.5	-15.5
	Neutral	150	73.5	+76.5
	Agree	24	73.5	-49.5
	Total	294		
Family responsibilities sometimes prevent me from working as many hours as needed (TimeBasedConflict_2)	Strongly Disagree	78	98.0	-20.0
	Disagree	204	98.0	+106.0
	Neutral	12	98.0	-86.0
	Agree	—	—	—
	Total	294		

Table 1.3 – Frequency Table: Stress induced Conflict

Statement	Response Category	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Stress from my business negatively affects my interactions with my family (StrainBasedConflict_1)	Strongly Disagree	16	98.0	-82.0
	Disagree	219	98.0	+121.0
	Neutral	59	98.0	-39.0
	—	—	—	—
	Total	294		
Stress from my family negatively affects my business (StrainBasedConflict_2)	Disagree	60	73.5	-13.5
	Neutral	106	73.5	+32.5
	Agree	115	73.5	+41.5
	Strongly Agree	13	73.5	-60.5
	Total	294		

Table 1.4 – Frequency Table: Behavior induced Conflict

Statement	Response Category	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
I struggle to mentally disconnect from my business when with my family (BehaviourBasedConflict_1)	Strongly Disagree	9	98.0	-89.0
	Disagree	190	98.0	+92.0
	Neutral	95	98.0	-3.0
	—	—	—	—
	Total	294		
I think about my business and work-related issues when with my family (BehaviourBasedConflict_2)	Strongly Disagree	76	98.0	-22.0
	Disagree	206	98.0	+108.0
	Neutral	12	98.0	-86.0
	—	—	—	—
	Total	294		

Table 1.5 – Frequency Table: Work to Family Conflict

Statement	Response Category	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
My work demands interfere with my family responsibilities (WorkConflict1)	Strongly Disagree	62	73.5	-11.5
	Disagree	58	73.5	-15.5
	Neutral	150	73.5	+76.5
	Agree	24	73.5	-49.5
	Total	294		
I am often too stressed from work to engage fully in family activities (WorkConflict2)	Strongly Disagree	78	98.0	-20.0
	Disagree	204	98.0	+106.0
	Neutral	12	98.0	-86.0
	—	—	—	—
	Total	294		

Table 1.6 – Frequency Table: Family to Work Conflict

Statement	Response Category	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Family obligations make it difficult for me to focus on work (FamilyConflict1)	Strongly Disagree	16	98.0	-82.0
	Disagree	219	98.0	+121.0
	Neutral	59	98.0	-39.0
	—	—	—	—
	Total	294		
I frequently have to take time off from work due to unexpected family responsibilities (FamilyConflict2)	Strongly Disagree	62	73.5	-11.5
	Disagree	58	73.5	-15.5
	Neutral	150	73.5	+76.5
	Agree	24	73.5	-49.5
	Total	294		

Table 2 – Chi-square results: WFC**Test Statistics**

	I often have to reschedule family activities due to unexpected business demands.	Family often responsibilities sometimes prevent me from working as many hours	Stress from my business negatively affects my interactions with my family	Stress from my family negatively affects my business	Struggle to mentally disconnect from my business when with my family	Think about my business and work-related issues when with my family	My work demands interfere with my family responsibilities (e.g., late meetings, unexpected work deadlines)	I am often too stressed from work to engage fully in family activities	Family obligations (e.g., childcare, household responsibilities) make it difficult for me to focus on work	I frequently have to take time off from work due to unexpected family responsibilities
Chi-Square	118.027 ^a	194.204 ^b	233.531 ^b	90.082 ^a	167.286 ^b	199.429 ^b	118.027 ^a	194.204 ^b	233.531 ^b	118.027 ^a
df	3	2	2	3	2	2	3	2	2	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5.

The minimum expected cell frequency is 73.5.

b. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5.

The minimum expected cell frequency is 98.0.

Hypothesis Testing and Interpretation

This section evaluates the formulated hypotheses related to work-family conflict (WFC) among women entrepreneurs using chi-square and paired-samples t-tests. The results provide insights into the prevalence, types, and direction of work-family conflict.

Overall Work-Family Conflict Hypothesis

H₀: Work-family conflict is not prevalent among women entrepreneurs.

H₁: Work-family conflict is prevalent among women entrepreneurs.

Interpretation: The chi-square tests for all work-family conflict items show significant results ($p < .001$), rejecting the null hypothesis (H₀). This confirms that work-family conflict is prevalent among women entrepreneurs, validating H₁.

Time-Based Conflict Hypothesis

H_{1a}: Time-based conflict significantly induces work-to-family conflict.

H_{1b}: Time-based conflict significantly induces family-to-work conflict.

Interpretation:

Significant chi-square values ($p < .001$) for time-based conflict items indicate that unexpected business demands and work schedules frequently interfere with family responsibilities (work-to-family conflict). Similarly, family responsibilities often prevent entrepreneurs from working extended hours (family-to-work conflict). These findings support both H_{1a} and H_{1b}, confirming that time-based conflict significantly contributes to both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict.

Strain-Based Conflict Hypothesis

H_{1c}: Strain-based conflict significantly induces work-to-family conflict.

H_{1d}: Strain-based conflict significantly induces family-to-work conflict.

Interpretation:

Chi-square results ($p < .001$) show that stress from work negatively impacts family interactions (work-to-family conflict) and stress from family negatively affects business performance (family-to-work conflict). These results confirm H_{1c} and H_{1d}, demonstrating that emotional and psychological strain contributes significantly to both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict.

Behavior-Based Conflict Hypothesis

H_{1e}: Behavior-based conflict significantly induces work-to-family conflict.

H_{1f}: Behavior-based conflict significantly induces family-to-work conflict.

Interpretation:

The chi-square test ($p < .001$) indicates that women entrepreneurs struggle to mentally disconnect from work when with family and frequently think about business while at home, reinforcing work-to-family conflict. At the same time, family-related stress carries over to work performance, validating family-to-work conflict. These findings support H_{1e} and H_{1f}, confirming that behavior-based conflict is a significant contributor in both directions.

Direction of Conflict Hypothesis

H₂: Work-to-family conflict is more prevalent than family-to-work conflict.

H₃: Family-to-work conflict is more prevalent than work-to-family conflict.

Table 3 – Paired t-test to understand the direction of Conflict

Paired Samples Test									
Paired Differences									
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pressure to succeed in my business often prevents me from fulfilling family commitments - Work schedule makes it difficult to be emotionally available for my family	.687	1.004	.059	.572	.802	11.737	293	.000
Pair 2	Unexpected family responsibilities frequently disrupt my business activities - Caring for my family leaves me with less time and energy for my business	-.8316	1.004	.059	-.432	-.201	-5.400	293	.000

Interpretation: The paired-samples t-test results show a significantly higher mean score for the work-to-family conflict item (Pressure to succeed in business preventing family commitments) compared to the corresponding family-to-work conflict item (Work schedule making emotional availability difficult) ($t(293) = 11.737, p < .001$). This suggests that work demands interfere with family responsibilities **more strongly** than family responsibilities interfere with work, supporting H_2 and rejecting H_3 .

In contrast, family-to-work conflict comparisons show a **negative mean difference** ($t(293) = -5.400, p < .001$), indicating that "Caring for family leaving less time and energy for business" is perceived as a **greater challenge** than "Unexpected family responsibilities disrupting business." This suggests that,

while family responsibilities do affect work, their impact is **less disruptive overall** than work-to-family conflict, reinforcing support for H₂.

CONCLUSION

Women entrepreneurs frequently experience work-family conflict, which arises from **time constraints, emotional strain, and incompatible behaviors**, affecting both work and family life. However, the findings indicate that **work obligations tend to create a stronger conflict with family responsibilities than vice versa**, suggesting that managing work commitments poses a greater challenge for maintaining a healthy family life.

This study offers robust empirical evidence indicating the widespread presence and complex nature of work-family conflict (WFC) among women entrepreneurs. The statistical results demonstrate that work-to-family conflict (WFC) is more significant than family-to-work conflict (FWC), implying that professional responsibilities tend to disrupt family life more often than family demands interfere with work. These findings echo prior literature emphasizing the dual role challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, who are simultaneously engaged in business leadership and domestic responsibilities (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Michel et al., 2011).

Prevalence of WFC Among Women Entrepreneurs

Hypothesis testing reveals that WFC is a pervasive issue for women in entrepreneurial roles. Chi-square analysis across all WFC items shows that respondents consistently report conflicts stemming from time scarcity and psychological strain, both of which negatively affect their mental well-being and overall life satisfaction. Women entrepreneurs often lack the structural boundaries available to salaried employees, facing continuous involvement in their ventures without defined work hours. This constant engagement, combined with economic pressures and growth expectations, intensifies the risk of family interference and emotional fatigue (Shelton, 2006; Sehgal & Khandelwal, 2020).

Time-Based Conflict in WFC and FWC

Time-related conflicts significantly contribute to both directions of WFC. Paired sample t-tests indicate that women frequently reschedule family obligations due to unforeseen work demands. Simultaneously, family commitments such as caregiving often limit the time they can allocate to business operations. Narayanan and Barnabas (2020) observed that domestic duties frequently take precedence over business, limiting women's capacity to grow their ventures.

Rigid entrepreneurial demands—deadlines, client meetings, and administrative responsibilities—consume considerable time, leaving little room for family engagement. As a result, many women experience guilt, burnout, and relationship dissatisfaction, reinforcing findings from Powell and Greenhaus (2010).

Strain-Based Conflict: Stress and Emotional Exhaustion

Strain-based conflict is another crucial contributor to WFC, where emotional and mental stress from one domain spills over into the other. Business-related stress often affects family interactions, while domestic stress hampers professional performance. This bidirectional strain aligns with findings by Sehgal and Khandelwal (2020), who reported emotional exhaustion as a common outcome among women managing entrepreneurial and familial responsibilities. Emotional fatigue diminishes cognitive functioning and decision-making, adversely impacting both family dynamics and business outcomes (Karimi et al., 2021; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Behavior-Based Conflict and Role Blurring

Behavioral conflicts arise when individuals carry work-related behaviors into the family domain, making emotional disengagement difficult. The findings suggest that even in non-work settings, women entrepreneurs remain mentally preoccupied with business concerns. This supports the observations of Poulouse and Sharma (2024), who noted that persistent work-related behavior in personal contexts leads to diminished satisfaction and emotional well-being. Michel et al. (2011) also reported that women often struggle to adopt different behavioral scripts across roles, resulting in role overload and increased tension.

Directionality: Work-to-Family vs. Family-to-Work Conflict

The study clearly shows that work-related pressures intrude into family life more frequently than family duties disrupt business. This predominance of WFC over FWC corroborates findings from Syed (2022), emphasizing the disproportionate impact of entrepreneurial responsibilities on personal well-being. Clark's (2000) work-family border theory explains that poor segmentation between work and home domains escalates such conflict, especially in self-managed work environments like entrepreneurship.

While FWC is less frequent, it still poses challenges—particularly for women who manage caregiving and household responsibilities. These duties can interrupt business operations and decision-making processes, further compounding stress levels. These time-, strain-, and behavior-based issues are interdependent, which has a snowball impact on women's capacity to preserve work-life balance.

Structural and Cultural Context in India

Scarcity theory (Hobfoll, 1989) offers a useful framework to understand the trade-offs women entrepreneurs make when time and energy resources are limited. The Indian context further complicates these dynamics. According to the Sixth Economic Census of India, women account for only 13.76% of total entrepreneurs, primarily operating micro or home-based enterprises with minimal institutional support. Cultural expectations regarding women's domestic roles exacerbate WFC, limiting their ability to balance both spheres effectively.

This study provides micro-level insight into how WFC manifests within the lives of Indian women entrepreneurs. Despite the constraints, many continue to sustain and grow their businesses, contributing to the economic and social fabric of their communities. Addressing these results can help empower the women entrepreneurial ecosystem from inside out, ensuring that women entrepreneurial ventures flourish.

Practical Implications and Importance of Resolution

The dual responsibility is undoubtedly intensify for women in the Indian socio-cultural context, where patriarchal norms often place the obligation of household and familial duties inexplicably on women, regardless of their professional obligation (Sinha & Gupta, 2021). If left unaddressed, prolonged WFC can erode women's entrepreneurial motivation, hinder business growth, and lead to long-term burnout (Karimi et al., 2014; Brotheridge & Lee, 2005). However, mitigating WFC can yield significant benefits. Supporting women with flexible work arrangements, accessible childcare, and policy-level interventions can foster greater psychological well-being and enhance their productivity and business sustainability (Powell & Eddleston, 2013). Creating support ecosystems that acknowledge the dual roles of women entrepreneurs not only improves their personal and professional satisfaction but also contributes to broader socio-economic development, particularly in emerging economies like India. Furthermore, equipping women with coping strategies and encouraging family and community support can help reduce strain-based and time-based conflicts (Sehgal & Khandelwal, 2020; Michel et al., 2011). Thus, addressing WFC is not merely a matter of personal balance—it is an essential step toward building an inclusive and resilient entrepreneurial ecosystem.

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