Navigating Dual Roles: Work-Family Balance Strategies among Married Working Women in Kageshwori Manohara, Nepal

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Abstract
This study examines the dual responsibilities of married working women, focusing on their family and professional responsibilities in Ward No. 9 of Kageshwori Manohara Municipality in Kathmandu, Nepal. Adopting a quantitative descriptive design, the study employed purposive sampling to collect data from 80 married working women aged between 25- 45 years using a semi-structured survey questionnaire. The study explored the types and nature of women's responsibilities, challenges they faced, and strategies they adopted for maintaining work-family balance. Findings indicate that women continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of family responsibilities, particularly in caregiving and household management. Time constraints, limited family support, rigid workplace structures, societal expectations, and persistent gender norms significantly contribute to work-family conflict. To manage these challenges, respondents reported strategies such as flexible work arrangements, task prioritization, mentorship from female role models, and technology utilization. The study stresses the need for shared household responsibilities and gender-responsive workplace policies to promote work-family balance and advance gender equality, offering implications for both organizations and policymakers.
Keywords: women, dual responsibilities, work-family balance, strategies, Kageshwori Manohara

Introduction

Gender roles, shaped by the social norms and cultural expectations, have a significant influence on women's participation in both household and professional responsibilities (Gopalakrishnan et al., 2024). Although women's participation in the global labour market has increased, they continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid household and care work, which constrains their access to paid employment, career progression, and economic security (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2025). Work-family balance, as the effective integration of professional and family responsibilities, is a critical determinant of well-being, productivity, and job satisfaction. The nature of the organization and the length of working hours shape the work-life balance, as both long and irregular short hours compromise well-being by increasing time pressure, job insecurity, and limiting social protections (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022). These global evidences consistently demonstrate that such unequal distributions of labour are central to women's lived experiences of work-family imbalance.

In South Asia, persistent gender inequalities in labour markets continue to shape work-life balance, with legislative changes and pandemic-era shifts, such as increased maternity leave and remote work, producing both opportunities and challenges for women's professional and domestic roles (Strachan & Adikaram, 2023). In India specifically, organizational work-life interventions primarily target formal-sector employees and focus on flexibility, gender equality, and childcare; however, gaps remain in addressing elder care, commuting, and the needs of informal-sector workers, reflecting broader socio-cultural and economic inequalities (Rajadhyaksha, 2022). Consequently, persistent interference between work and family roles intensifies stress and conflict, undermining institutional support mechanisms designed to promote gender equality (Boakye et al., 2022).

Despite visible progress towards gender equality in Nepal, deep-rooted cultural expectations continue to label women as the primary household managers while men remain focused on external, income-generating activities (Arjyal et al., 2023). This cultural inertia, compounded by poor implementation of gender policies. It renders women vulnerable to persistent systematic discrimination and gender-based violence, notwithstanding documented progress in health, education, and political participation (Rana & Koirala, 2021). Consequently, women continue to handle the dual burden of simultaneous household and professional obligations, a dynamic that perpetuates significant gender inequalities. These inequalities are empirically reflected in the 2022 Global Gender Gap Index, where Nepal's parity score of 0.692 highlights a stagnation in economic participation driven by persistent structural barriers (Joshi, 2022).

Women in Nepal face multifaceted challenges in their daily lives due to the dual burden of managing household and professional roles, including family-related pressures, workplace discrimination, and limited institutional and social support (Ahmed et al., 2022; Amirkamali et al., 2024). Such conditions reinforce the gendered division of labour and intensify women's dual roles within both private and public spheres. Despite gradual shifts in social values and cultural norms, unequal household responsibilities of women remain largely persistent (Bianchi et al., 2000). These social norms and structural barriers constrain women's capacity to enhance personal well-being and advance professionally. The gender-based inequalities continue to shape both opportunities and burdens, compelling women to develop coping strategies to direct these intersecting responsibilities, thereby contributing to broader debates on gender roles and work-family balance (Sahni et al., 2025).

Literature Review

Gender roles are culturally and socially constructed, shaping persistent inequalities between men and women across societies (Gerson, 2004). Feminist scholars argue that

these gender norms are not neutral cultural practices but function as mechanisms that reproduce structural barriers and perpetuate gender inequality by limiting women's access to private and public resources, agency, and opportunities (Hooks, 2000; Walby, 1989). These constraints are particularly prominent in the context of Nepal, where patriarchal norms are deeply embedded in both institutions and everyday social practices (Nepal Economic Forum, 2023).

Extensive empirical researches show that women consistently perform an unequal share of unpaid household work. This persistence of inequality is noticeable in patterns of household responsibilities. A review of more than 200 studies on household labour conducted between 1989 and 1999 confirms the persistence of gender inequalities in household work (Coltrane, 2004). It revealed that women continue to perform at least twice as much routine household work, such as cleaning, cooking, and childcare. Partner's employment status and earnings, gender ideologies, and life-course stages consistently shape the division of household labour. Employed couples, those with democratic beliefs, and families with young children tend to share household work more equally. Equitable sharing of household work has also been associated with higher marital satisfaction and lower levels of depression among women.

These inequalities persist even as women increasingly take on dual roles, both professional and household, across the globe (Bartley et al., 2008). Hochschild and Machung (2012) categorize women into three types, namely traditional, transitional, and modern, reflecting diverse strategies for managing career and household responsibilities. Traditional women emphasize household responsibilities, transitional women adjust their domestic roles conditionally, and modern women advocate for shared responsibilities, indicating the variety of approaches to balancing work-family balance. Beyond measurable hours, invisible and cognitive labour, such as planning, organizing, and the mental load of household management, disproportionately falls on women. Women bear significantly more household burdens than men, contributing to stress and emotional pressure even when observable time use appears balanced (Barigozzi et al., 2025).

Work-family balance is a critical concern for women due to the intersection of professional and household responsibilities. The pressure associated with managing full-time employment alongside key roles for household work often results in stress, emotional tension, guilt, and compromised well-being (Zhou et al. 2018; Sinha, 2017; de Souza et al. 2015). Importantly, women's attainment of professional success does not necessarily translate into a reduction in domestic workloads, as rooted societal expectations continue to position women as primary caregivers and homemakers. These inequalities extend beyond into professional settings, where workplace discrimination, hierarchical organizational structures, and persistent gender stereotypes limit women's access to

advancement opportunities (Bhatti & Ali, 2021). Empirical studies further suggest that disproportionate household responsibilities significantly restrict women's career progress and performance, while men face such obstacles to a far lesser extent (Issack et al., 2024; Toffoletti & Starr, 2016). Married women, in particular, often place family compulsions as a priority over career goals due to social stigma, institutionalized gender norms, and limited family support (Stone, 2007). During emergencies and disasters, women's household responsibilities increase and create challenges to maintain work-family balance by worsening their conditions. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic further intensified women's challenges as increased unpaid care work worsens work-family conflicts and deepens existing gender inequalities (Giurge et al., 2021). In the Nepali context, women perform approximately 74.8% of the unpaid labour yet remain underrepresented in managerial positions, highlighting how structural gender norms continue to restrict women's career advancement despite their substantial participation in the labour force (UN Women, 2021).

International organizations have implemented a range of programs and policies aimed at addressing gender inequalities; however, patriarchal structures such as gendered labour divisions, hierarchies, rigid performance rules, and male-dominated processes continue to limit women's engagement and the transformative potential of gender-focused interventions (Njuki et al., 2025). While initiatives including paid maternity leave, childcare facilities, and gender-sensitive workplace policies have contributed to reducing work-family conflict and supporting women's professional development, their impacts remain uneven and often insufficient to challenge underlying structural norms (UN Women & UN DESA, 2020; Basharat & Alam, 2024). Empirical studies further demonstrate that in households where domestic responsibilities are more equally shared between spouses, women experience improved personal well-being and greater engagement in their careers, underscoring the importance of transforming both institutional and familial gender relations to achieve substantive gender equality (Bartley et al., 2008).

Statement of Problem
Existing researches indicate that married working women in Nepal experience substantial pressures due to concurrent demands of paid employment and traditionally assigned household responsibilities. For instance, Shahi (2023) reveals that women employed in the government sector face greater dual-role pressures due to persistent gender norms that continue to frame domestic work as the primary responsibility of women. While such studies admit the existence of work-family debates, they tend to address this issue broadly and offer limited in-depth analysis of how work and family roles interrelate in women's everyday lives.

Despite growing scholarly attention to women's employment in Nepal, there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding types, pattern, challenges, and strategies associated with married women's work-family balance. In particular, empirical studies rarely examine women's lived experiences, centring instead on general labour contribution or trends in policy-level discussions. Moreover, these studies are largely concentrated in national contexts, but local contexts are underexplored.

Specifically, there is a lack of empirical research examining the work-family experiences of married working women in Kageshwori Manohara, Kathmandu, where socio-cultural norms, household structures, and employment conditions shape the nature of the dual roles women shoulder. This underexplored localized and experience-based evidence limits a contextual understanding of how married working women balance and handle the household and professional responsibilities in their daily lives. To address this gap, this study aims to explore the nature and types of household and professional responsibilities of married working women in Kageshwori Manohara. It further examines the challenges they faced in balancing dual roles and analyses the strategies they adopted to manage both household and professional responsibilities. By focusing on women's experiences within a specific context, this study contributes to a more convincing, critical, and grounded understanding of work-family balance in Nepal.

Model, Data and Methodology

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to examine the types and patterns of household and professional responsibilities among married working women in Ward No. 9, Kandaghari of Kageshwori Manohara Municipality in Kathmandu, Nepal. This design was appropriate for capturing patterns, regularity, and variations in work-family roles, challenges, and coping strategies, as such designs are suitable for describing characteristics and trends without manipulating variables (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The study comprised married working women aged 25-45 years residing in Ward No. 9. A purposive sampling technique was adopted to select respondents who met the inclusion criteria, ensuring that no more than one respondent was selected from each household to avoid repetition of household-level experiences. A sample of 80 respondents was considered appropriate for this descriptive study as descriptive social research commonly employs moderate sample sizes, non-probability samples to identify patterns and trends within a defined population, particularly when the study is a context-specific study where statistical generalization is not the primary objective (Bryman, 2016; Neuman, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire administered through a survey. It covered types, nature, challenges, and strategies related to both household and professional roles of women. Variables were measured using categorical responses and Likert-scale statements, including open-ended questions, while the overall approach was predominantly quantitative. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software was used for data analysis. Ethical considerations were strictly maintained throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Respondents were chosen carefully based on their ability to provide relevant insights regarding the work-family responsibilities. The unit of analysis for this study was married working women.

Results and Discussion

Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (n=80) from Ward No. 9 of Kageshwori Manohara Municipality in Kathmandu, Nepal. All respondents were married working women aged between 25 and 45 years. The mean age of the respondents was 35 years (SD=5). An equal number of respondents were drawn from the two age groups: 25-35 years (50%, n=40) and 35-45 years (50%, n=40).

In terms of religious affiliation, the majority of respondents identified as Hindu (83.8%), followed by Buddhist (8.8%), Christian (5%), and Kirant (2.5%). This variation of religion provided a diverse cultural context to understand how gender norms shape patterns and the nature of the household and professional decisions and responsibilities. Regarding family structure, an equal proportion of respondents lived in joint families and nuclear families.

Table 1

Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Characteristics	F	%
Age		
25-35 years	40	50.0
35-45 years	40	50.0
Religion		
Buddhist	7	8.8
Christian	4	5.0
Hindu	67	83.8
Kirant	2	2.50
Family Type		
Joint	40	50.0
Nuclear	40	50.0

Gender Pattern of Work and Family Responsibilities of Women

The study examined the types and nature of household and professional responsibilities of the married working women in Kageshwori Manohara. All respondents reported involvement in multiple household responsibilities alongside their professional work. As per the survey, women's highest level of involvement was in childcare (32.5%), followed by cooking and washing (31.3%). Other reported household responsibilities included cleaning (15%), grocery and shopping (12.5%), and financial management (8.8%). These findings indicate that routine and care-related domestic work constituted the largest share of women's household responsibilities. In terms of professional responsibilities, respondents reported engagement in a range of occupational roles, including administrative, organizational, and managerial responsibilities varied depending on occupation and organizational position.

The results validate a persistent gendered pattern in the division of household labour, with married working women assuming principal obligation for routine household and caregiving tasks despite their involvement in full-time employment. As Hochschild and Machung (2012) argue in their 'second shift' thesis, that women disproportionately often perform a second, unpaid shift of unpaid household labour after completing paid work, the majority of women found to engage in unpaid domestic and care work in this study. The second shift does not include physical work only, but also emotional work, as women are expected to regulate their own and others' emotions to meet gendered expectations and maintain family harmony, frequently at high personal cost. It echoes the practice through which gender is systematically reproduced in everyday life (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

The results demonstrate that women have limited involvement in financial management, suggesting the persistence of traditional gender roles that restrict women's decision-making power within households. This pattern echoes the fact that, although women are engaging in professional work, household and care responsibilities have not been shared equally with men (Gornick & Meyers, 2003). Consequently, women experience increased time pressures as they attempt to balance work and family burdens. These findings also resonate strongly with work-family conflict theory (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), which focuses on the incompatible demands between work and family demands. It generates pressure and tension for women and degrades their agency and competency in performance as well. In the Nepali context, the patriarchal norms that assume women as responsible for household work, including kitchen, caring, and sanitation-related work, continue the inequality and intensify the family conflicts. Although married women's participation has increased in paid jobs, women remain largely responsible for household labour in Nepal (Sharma & Bista, 2025; Bartley et al., 2008). Female mentors and role models help other women to internalize high-achieving identities and develop resilience in the face of role conflict (Lockwood, 2006). Overall, the findings indicate that work-family balance among

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married women in the study area is determined by deeply embedded gender norms rather than individual choice.

Gendered Distribution of Work and Family Responsibilities of Women
The study explored the nature of sharing household responsibilities between male and female. The findings indicate that married working women continue to bear a substantial share of household responsibilities despite their full-time employment. A majority of respondents reported sharing domestic work with their partners collaboratively (53.1%). However, a considerable proportion of women reported performing all tasks themselves (37.0%). A smaller share indicated that household work was outsourced to paid helpers (7.4 %), while only 1.2% reported that their male partners handled domestic work alone. Regarding professional responsibilities, respondents were employed in five different occupational sectors. The largest proportion worked in the organizational sector, such as high-level administrative and managerial jobs of private and non-government organizations (32.5%), followed by the service sector in terms of teaching, healthcare, hospitality, and banking sector employees (30.0%), and professional occupations, such as specialized occupations as experts in education, engineering, information technology, finance and other areas of professional practices (27.5%). Smaller proportions were employed in government sectors (6.3%) and industrial sectors (3.8%).

Although half of the respondents reported sharing household work with their male partners, the findings demonstrate that married working women persist in shouldering primary responsibility for household labour, as more than one-third of the respondents managed household tasks themselves alone. This finding is consistent with the global evidence, as reported by the International Labour Organization [ILO] (2018) reported that the majority of unpaid household work despite those who are employed. This unequal division of household labour shows the weak practice of shared responsibility in which men's participation remains largely partial and symbolic. In particular, gender norms compel women to undertake time-intensive domestic work, including caring and household management (Craig & Mullan, 2011). In the Nepali context, patriarchal family structures and cultural norms remain deeply rooted, which limit women's agency to engage in professional areas rather than household work. The findings also suggest that Nepali society is undergoing a transitional phase, as women's participation in the organizational, service, and professional sectors is gradually increasing. Women's growing entry into these paid jobs indicates a gradual transformation in societal attitudes toward women's work roles (Kabeer, 2016). However, women's participation in the paid labour market does not ensure gender equality, as structural and cultural barriers continue to influence both household and professional roles (Charles & Grusky, 2004).

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Challenges in Managing Work and Family Responsibilities of Women

The results indicate that a substantial proportion of women experience difficulty in balancing household and professional responsibilities. 43.8% respondents reported managing dual roles of professional and household work as 'quite difficult', while 22.5% described it as 'very difficult'. Time management challenge is the biggest challenge reported by a majority of the respondents (53.7%), followed by work-related demands 22.5%, lack of family support by 13.8%, and communication barriers within the household by 10%. In addition, 43.6% respondents reported experiencing pressure to maintain work-life balance due to prevailing social expectations, 41.6% identified unequal distribution of responsibilities at home and work as a major constraint, and 15.4% described difficulties related to mental health and emotional well-being.

These findings indicate that women's ability to manage household and professional responsibilities remains significantly constrained by intersecting structural and normative factors. They are interconnected across domestic, professional, and social spheres. Time management difficulty as the major challenge to maintain work-family balance demonstrates the women's cumulative burden created by professional obligations combined with the primary household responsibilities. Furthermore, inflexible work demands and limited family support increase the challenges, leaving women with restricted capacity to negotiate or redistribute responsibilities.

From the theoretical perspective, these findings are closely linked to role strain theory and work-family conflict theory (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Time and resource insufficiency to meet all demands by women increases pressure and stress to complete their roles in both the public and household spheres. Such unequal division of labour elevates emotional exhaustion and reduces well-being (Allen et al., 2020), leading to mental health challenges. As a result, pressure to maintain an idealized work-life balance reflects socially constructed norms of femininity and respectability. It constrains women's autonomy and contributes to psychological distress (Chen, 2022).

Role of the State in Supporting Work and Family Responsibilities of Women

Respondents also suggested several roles of states for addressing the challenges of work-life balance experienced by married working women. Gender equality in institutional practice (30.6%) was the highly emphasized role, followed by education and awareness initiatives (27.0%). They also further reported that improved access to resources (22.0%) and economic empowerment measures (11.0%) are other alternative roles of the state to address the challenges of work-life balance. To make these roles effective, there is a need for structural and institutional interventions rather than individual-level coping strategies. Gender-responsive work environment should be made that enhances women's access to resources, facilitates career progress, and strengthens their economic participation in a

country (UNO, 2023). If the government can reduce the gender gaps in leadership and employment, it can have broader implications for national development, as women's increased participation in employment significantly contributes to national economic growth (Calvino, 2024). In low-income countries with cultural diversity, such as Nepal, addressing the work-life imbalance of married working women requires the transformation of gender norms and structural barriers. The improvement in gender policy and workplace flexibility is not sufficient to address gender gaps.

Strategies Adopted for Managing Work and Family Responsibilities of Women
The results indicate that married working women adopt a combination of individual, organizational, and structural strategies to manage the dual demands of household and professional roles. Among the respondents, 32.5% reported prioritizing quality family time and self-care as a principal strategy of managing household and professional responsibilities. 28.7 % respondents emphasize setting clear boundaries and identifying priorities themselves, while 18.8% manage time effectively. A small portion of the respondents, but interestingly, 17.5% reported that sharing household responsibilities has been used as a coping mechanism to manage the household and professional responsibilities.

They suggested some practical and institutional approaches to adopt for balancing household and professional responsibilities. Technology utilization, including mobile applications and online shopping strategy, is suggested by a large portion of the respondents (30.0%), followed by advocacy for policy change (22.5%). Other strategies include organizational support mechanisms (21.3%), flexible work arrangements (15.0%), and realist goal setting (11.3%). These findings demonstrate that married working women depend on both personal adjustments and external supports to mitigate work-family conflicts. Individuals who actively manage the boundary between work and family roles experience lower levels of conflict and improved well-being (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000). Self-regulating strategies such as prioritization and boundary setting enable women to allocate limited time and emotional resources more effectively, even though such practices are difficult to institutionalize (Gross, 2015). Similarly, the use of digital technologies shows the adaptive responses to time scarcity, as technology can ease household workloads and free time for both paid and caregiving labour (Eddleston & Mulki, 2015). Further, flexible scheduling significantly reduces work-family conflict and improves job satisfaction (McNall et al., 2010). However, in the context of Nepal, access to technological use is limited to urban areas only. There is relatively limited acceptance of flexible work arrangements in Nepal, indicating institutional constraints within Nepali workplaces.

Role of Media in Shaping Gender Norms and Work-Family Balance

The results further indicated the central role of media in determining societal perceptions of gender roles and supporting women's ability to balance household and professional responsibilities. More than two-thirds of respondents (92.0%) identified media as a powerful tool for promoting gender equality and social change. When asked how media could contribute to transforming gender norms and balancing household and professional responsibilities, 55.0% emphasized the importance of representing women in diverse and positive roles, while 18.8% highlighted greater coverage of gender-based issues and available support mechanisms. Additionally, 13.3% stressed the use of gender-sensitive language, and 12.0% advocated for greater representation of women in media and leadership-related content. These findings reveal that the media is not just a source of information but also a key agent of cultural transformation. It challenges the stereotypical portrayals and intensifies alternative narratives. It shapes normative expectations surrounding women's roles in both public and private spheres as well. As Bandura (1986) argues in her social cognitive theory, for observational learning and the influence of symbolic models in shaping the behaviour and attitudes of people, the role of the media is important. It significantly influences the gender norms and provides knowledge and awareness about household and professional responsibilities from a gender perspective. Stereotypical, objectified, and sexualized portrayals tend to reinforce sexism, whereas diverse and empowering representations contribute to greater gender equality and reduced discrimination (Santoniccolo et al., 2023). In the Nepali context, positive media portrayals of working women and shared domestic responsibilities can play a critical role in legitimizing alternative gender arrangements and reducing social resistance to women's professional advancement, as traditional gender norms are deeply embedded in Nepali society. Therefore, media-driven normative change is essential for addressing the deeper cultural roots of gender inequality through establishing a shared culture of household and professional responsibilities between men and women.

Conclusion and Implications

The study investigated how married working women in Kageshwori, Manohara, Kathmandu handle the dual roles, the challenges they face, and the strategies they adopt to maintain work-family balance of household and professional responsibilities. The findings reveal that, despite women's increased participation in paid jobs, gendered expectations within the household persist. While some families practice shared domestic responsibilities, a substantial proportion of women continue to shoulder household and caregiving duties largely on their own. The deeply rooted gender division of labour remains a major barrier to women's autonomy and significantly constrains their ability to balance work and family responsibilities.

The study further demonstrates that women experience noticeable work-family conflict, manifested through time pressure, caregiving demands, limited family and institutional support, and rigid workplace structures. These challenges restrict women's full participation in professional roles and hinder career advancement. In response, women adopt multiple coping strategies, including time management, task prioritization, flexible domestic arrangements, and the use of digital technologies. Technology and media-related tools were perceived as particularly effective in facilitating daily pressures. Respondents also emphasized the importance of female role models in challenging embedded social norms and supporting long-term gender transformation.

The findings provide empirical support for the work-family conflict theory (Greenhaus & Beutel, 1985), demonstrating that conflict among married working women is shaped not only by competing role demands but also by structural inequalities, inflexible gender norms, and insufficient institutional support systems. Emphasising the importance of media and female role models, the study provides critical insights into the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) that focuses on the role of symbolic representation and observational learning in shaping attitudes and behaviours related to gender roles. In addition, the study offers the practical implications of equitable sharing of household and caregiving responsibilities between men and women for reducing women's work-family burden and improving their well-being. Furthermore, organizations can implement flexible work arrangements, mentorship programs, and supportive workplace policies, including childcare services, to enable women to manage dual responsibilities more effectively. Gender sensitive labour regulations, promotion of digital inclusion for women, and diverse and positive media portrayals of women are policy-level implications of this study. Overall, addressing women's work-family challenges requires multidimensional interventions for managing household and professional responsibilities equitably between men and women.

Future research can employ longitudinal or comparative designs to examine how family dynamics evolve across different stages, sectors, or regions and how they shape the work-family roles of women. Future studies can also integrate media content analysis or experimental approaches to assess the direct influence of media representations on gender norms and work-family practices.

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