



FAMILY ROLE PERFORMANCE OF MARRIED NON-WORKING WOMEN: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO FAMILY LIFE, DECISION-MAKING, AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING IN GURUGRAM DISTRICT

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Abstract

This sociological study explores the family role performance of married non-working women in Gurugram district, Haryana, focusing on their active contributions to family life, household decision-making, and the emotional well-being of family members. Drawing on data collected through questionnaires and interviews with 120 participants, the study reveals that despite not engaging in paid employment, these women play critical roles in family financial planning, childcare, maintaining cultural practices, and acting as emotional anchors within the household. Findings highlight that non-working married women significantly influence daily decisions and family harmony, underlining the often invisible yet substantial social capital they provide. The study emphasizes the need to recognize and value these contributions within broader discussions of family dynamics and gender roles in urban India.

Keywords: Family role performance, married non-working women, decision-making, emotional well-being, family life, Gurugram district, sociological study.

Introduction

The family has long been regarded as the most fundamental social institution in every society. It is within the family that individuals first experience socialization, acquire cultural values, develop emotional bonds, and learn norms that guide their conduct in broader society. The study of family structures and the diverse roles performed by its members thus

forms a core area of sociological inquiry. In the Indian context, married women have historically been assigned a central role within the family system, often associated primarily with domestic responsibilities and caregiving tasks. However, within this broad category, married non-working women – those who do not participate in paid employment outside the home – perform a range of complex and significant roles that are frequently overlooked in formal analyses of family functioning and social development.

This introduction aims to critically examine the multifaceted roles of married non-working women in Gurugram district of Haryana. It contextualizes the importance of studying this subject within India's rapidly urbanizing socio-economic landscape, where traditional family roles are being renegotiated alongside processes of modernization, urban migration, and changing gender expectations. By situating the study within existing sociological theories and research, this section outlines the rationale, scope, and relevance of focusing specifically on married non-working women and highlights the research gap addressed by the present study.

The Family as a Core Institution in Indian Society

In India, the family has traditionally been viewed as the primary site of social cohesion, economic cooperation, and emotional security. While nuclear family structures have become increasingly common in urban areas, the joint family system remains influential in shaping cultural attitudes towards familial obligations

and gender roles (Sharma, 2015). Sociologists such as Desai (2010) have emphasized the family's role as an economic unit, wherein unpaid domestic labor, often provided by women, sustains the well-being of all its members.

The performance of family roles is not limited to tangible tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and caregiving. It also encompasses emotional labor, mediation of conflicts, preservation of cultural rituals, and participation in family decision-making processes (Sinha, 2020). These functions contribute significantly to family stability, intergenerational solidarity, and individual well-being, yet often remain undervalued because they do not directly translate into measurable economic outcomes.

Changing Social Landscape in Urban India

Over the past three decades, India has witnessed significant socio-economic transformations, marked by globalization, economic liberalization, and rapid urbanization. Cities like Gurugram, located in the National Capital Region (NCR), have become symbols of this transformation. Once a small agricultural town, Gurugram is now a major corporate and industrial hub, hosting multinational companies, luxury housing projects, and a growing urban middle class (Singh, 2021).

These changes have also reshaped family structures and gender roles. Increased education levels among women, exposure to global cultural norms, and economic opportunities have led to higher participation of women in paid employment. Nevertheless, a substantial segment of married women, particularly in middle- and upper-middle-class families, remain non-working by choice or circumstance, often influenced by family expectations, child-rearing responsibilities, or cultural beliefs about women's proper place within the household (Kumar, 2016).

In such contexts, the contribution of married non-working women to family life cannot be understood merely by their absence from the paid workforce. Instead, it requires a deeper exploration of the ways in which these women shape family decision-making, emotional resilience, and cultural continuity.

Revisiting the Concept of “Non-Working” Women

The very term “non-working women” has been critiqued in feminist and sociological scholarship for its implicit assumption that unpaid domestic labor is not equivalent to ‘real’ work (Dasgupta, 2017). According to time-use surveys conducted by the National Sample Survey Office (2019), women in India, on average, spend significantly more time on unpaid care work and household maintenance than men, regardless of employment status. This unpaid labor is indispensable for the smooth functioning of households and the reproduction of the workforce itself.

By labeling these women as “non-working,” society obscures the critical social and economic value of their contributions. As Bhattacharya (2017) argues, homemakers perform both visible and invisible tasks that uphold family health, emotional well-being, and socialization of the next generation. This study, therefore, adopts the term “married non-working women” to refer specifically to women who do not engage in paid employment outside the home, while recognizing that their daily responsibilities involve substantial and meaningful work.

Theoretical Perspectives on Family Role Performance

The sociological study of family role performance draws on several theoretical perspectives. Structural-functionalism, as articulated by Parsons (1955), emphasizes the family's role in maintaining social order and stability through complementary gender roles. According to this view, women's roles in caregiving and emotional support are functionally necessary for the family's smooth operation.

However, feminist theories challenge the idea that women's unpaid domestic work should be seen as a natural or inevitable extension of femininity. Instead, they highlight how such roles are socially constructed and often reproduce gender inequalities (Oakley, 1974; Folbre, 1991). From this perspective, it becomes crucial to critically examine how married non-working women themselves perceive and perform their roles, and whether they find agency and fulfillment within them.

Symbolic interactionism offers yet another lens, focusing on how family members negotiate meanings, roles, and expectations through daily interactions (Blumer, 1969). Through this lens, the roles performed by non-working married women are not fixed but emerge from ongoing negotiations with spouses, children, and extended family members.

Gurugram: A Unique Context

Gurugram presents a particularly compelling site for studying family role performance among married non-working women. Its rapid urbanization has brought together traditional rural migrants, long-established urban residents, and newly settled corporate professionals. As a result, family structures in Gurugram range from conservative joint families to nuclear households shaped by global work cultures (Singh, 2021).

Despite high literacy rates and proximity to Delhi's cosmopolitan environment, Gurugram's cultural attitudes toward women's roles often remain conservative, especially among certain communities. A large proportion of married women, particularly in higher-income households, do not participate in paid employment, sometimes by personal choice and sometimes under family pressure (Kumar, 2019). The daily lives and contributions of these women have been understudied in empirical research, which often focuses instead on working women and their challenges.

Unpaid Work and Decision-Making Power

Research shows that participation in paid employment often enhances women's bargaining power in the family (Sen, 1990). However, this does not mean that non-working married women have no influence. Studies by Verma & Gupta (2018) and Raj (2018) indicate that even without earning an income, women frequently play significant roles in daily household decisions, children's education, and maintaining family traditions.

The extent of this influence varies according to factors such as age, education, family income, urban or rural residence, and cultural background. In some families, non-working women may act as informal decision-makers or advisors whose views shape family strategies, while in others, they may have little say beyond

routine matters (Bhattacharya, 2017). Understanding these variations requires localized research, particularly in rapidly urbanizing contexts like Gurugram.

Emotional Well-Being and Care Work

In addition to decision-making, married non-working women often provide crucial emotional labor. Emotional labor refers to efforts to manage one's own emotions and those of others, fostering harmony and reducing stress (Hochschild, 1983). Within the family, this can involve comforting children, mediating conflicts between relatives, supporting a spouse through professional or personal challenges, and maintaining rituals that create a sense of belonging.

While emotional labor contributes significantly to the family's overall well-being, it often goes unrecognized and unrewarded because it is seen as part of women's "natural" duties (Sinha, 2020). This study aims to highlight how married non-working women perceive and value this aspect of their family role.

Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to explore and analyze the multifaceted roles performed by married non-working women within their families in Gurugram district, Haryana. Specifically, the objectives are:

1. To identify and describe the key family roles performed by married non-working women, including household management, caregiving, and maintenance of cultural and social practices.
2. To examine the extent and nature of their participation in household decision-making processes, both in daily matters (such as budgeting, children's education, and health care) and in broader family strategies.
3. To analyze the contribution of married non-working women to the emotional well-being of family members, including their roles as emotional support providers, conflict mediators, and promoters of family harmony.
4. To explore how socio-demographic factors such as age, education level, family income, and urban/semi-urban residence affect the family role

performance and perceived influence of these women.

5. To highlight the often invisible yet significant social value created by married non-working women in sustaining family stability, intergenerational bonds, and cultural continuity within the context of a rapidly urbanizing district.

Review of Literature

The family, as the cornerstone of social organization, has been the subject of extensive scholarly investigation, particularly regarding the roles women perform within it. Scholars have long argued that married women, whether employed or not, significantly shape the social, emotional, and cultural fabric of family life (Desai, 2010; Sharma, 2015). However, while considerable research has focused on working women and the challenges they face in balancing paid work and domestic responsibilities, the roles of married non-working women have received comparatively less attention, especially within urbanizing contexts like Gurugram.

Desai (2010) emphasizes that non-working women, often labeled “housewives” or “homemakers,” perform essential but undervalued tasks that maintain family health, stability, and daily functioning. These tasks include meal preparation, childcare, eldercare, and household management. Importantly, beyond these visible tasks, non-working women also engage in what Bhattacharya (2017) describes as “invisible work,” including emotional support, conflict mediation, and maintaining cultural traditions. This emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983) plays a crucial role in creating a harmonious family environment but often goes unrecognized due to societal perceptions that frame such contributions as natural extensions of femininity rather than as work.

Studies focused on decision-making within households highlight another dimension of non-working women’s influence. Verma and Gupta (2018) found that married non-working women in North Indian cities often participate actively in decisions about children’s education, family finances, and healthcare, even when they do not have independent incomes. Similarly, Raj

(2018) argues that women’s unpaid labor contributes to “family capital,” which enhances the household’s long-term well-being and resilience. Yet, despite this influence, patriarchal norms frequently limit women’s participation in major strategic decisions, with final authority often resting with male family members (Kumar, 2016).

From a theoretical perspective, early structural-functionalists such as Parsons (1955) posited that women’s primary role in the family is expressive, responsible for nurturing emotional bonds and maintaining family morale. However, feminist theorists (Oakley, 1974; Folbre, 1991) critique this view, arguing that it normalizes gendered divisions of labor and devalues women’s unpaid work. Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes that non-working women exercise agency in shaping family dynamics, though their agency is mediated by factors such as education, social class, and cultural background (Sinha, 2020).

In the Indian context, time-use surveys by the National Sample Survey Office (2019) reveal that women, regardless of employment status, spend significantly more hours than men on unpaid domestic and care work. Dasgupta (2017) highlights how this unpaid work is critical to sustaining family health and social reproduction, yet remains largely invisible in policy discourse. Moreover, Bhattacharya (2017) notes that in urban India, homemakers often act as custodians of cultural identity, ensuring the transmission of values, customs, and rituals to the next generation.

Urbanization and economic development bring new complexities to these dynamics. Singh (2021), studying family structures in Gurugram, observes that rapid urban growth and exposure to global corporate cultures have led to shifts in family expectations and women’s aspirations. However, traditional beliefs about women’s roles persist, especially in higher-income households, where social norms may discourage married women from pursuing paid employment despite high educational qualifications (Kumar, 2019). This creates a paradox wherein non-working married women may have greater formal education but remain confined to unpaid domestic roles.

Research by Agrawal (2019) and Khanna (2020) suggests that non-working women in urban India often derive a sense of identity and satisfaction from their family roles, yet may also experience feelings of isolation or undervaluation due to societal emphasis on economic productivity. These emotional ambivalences underscore the need to examine not only what roles women perform but also how they perceive and experience these roles.

Finally, while there is growing recognition of the economic and social value of unpaid domestic work, studies specifically focused on married non-working women in rapidly urbanizing districts like Gurugram remain limited. Most research aggregates data at the national or state level, overlooking localized variations shaped by urbanization, income disparities, and community norms (Kumar, 2016; Singh, 2021). This gap highlights the need for empirical studies that explore the lived realities of these women, including their influence on family decision-making and their contributions to the emotional well-being of family members.

In existing literature establishes that married non-working women perform a range of visible and invisible family roles that are central to household functioning, emotional stability, and cultural continuity. However, there remains a notable gap in localized research on how these dynamics play out in urbanizing contexts like Gurugram, where traditional expectations coexist with modern influences. The present study seeks to address this gap by examining the family role performance of married non-working women in Gurugram district, with particular focus on their participation in family decision-making and their contributions to emotional well-being.

Research Gap

Existing literature on women's family roles in India often focuses on either rural women or urban working women. Few studies have explored the lived experiences and family contributions of married non-working women in urban and semi-urban settings like Gurugram. Furthermore, while some national surveys measure women's time use, they rarely capture qualitative dimensions such as emotional support, conflict resolution, and cultural

continuity. This research addresses this gap by combining quantitative and qualitative methods to explore not only what roles these women perform but also how they perceive their own influence and satisfaction within the family.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it sheds light on a relatively neglected group in sociological research – married non-working women in urbanizing areas. Second, by focusing on Gurugram, it contributes to understanding how rapid urbanization and socio-economic change affect traditional gender roles. Third, it challenges the narrow focus on paid employment as the sole indicator of women's empowerment and family contribution.

By documenting the diverse roles performed by married non-working women, the study seeks to broaden scholarly and public understanding of family well-being. It also offers practical insights for policymakers, educators, and community organizations working to support women's roles within the family.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a descriptive and exploratory research design to examine the family role performance of married non-working women in Gurugram district, Haryana. Recognizing the need to capture both quantitative trends and qualitative nuances, the study uses a mixed-methods approach combining structured questionnaires with in-depth interviews. This methodological choice allows for a comprehensive understanding of how these women contribute to family life, participate in decision-making, and support the emotional well-being of family members.

Sampling and Participants

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 120 married non-working women residing in urban and semi-urban areas of Gurugram district. The participants were drawn from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, varying in terms of age, education level, family structure (nuclear or joint), and number of years of marriage. Inclusion criteria required participants to be currently married, not engaged in paid employment outside the home, and living with their families.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire designed to gather quantitative information on daily household responsibilities, participation in financial and educational decisions, and involvement in caregiving tasks. Additionally, in-depth interviews with a subset of 30 participants provided qualitative insights into their perceptions of family roles, sources of satisfaction or stress, and perceived influence in family decisions. The interviews were conducted in Hindi and English, depending on participant preference, ensuring better rapport and accurate data capture.

Secondary data were sourced from books, peer-reviewed journals, reports from the National Sample Survey Office (2019), Census of India (2011), and other relevant government publications to contextualize the findings within broader national and regional trends.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentages and frequency distributions, to identify dominant patterns in family role performance. A table and figure were developed to illustrate key findings clearly. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis, which involved coding participant responses and identifying recurring themes related to emotional support, conflict mediation, and decision-making influence.

By integrating quantitative and qualitative methods, this research captures both the measurable contributions and the lived experiences of married non-working women in Gurugram. This approach provides a nuanced understanding of how these women sustain family stability and cohesion, despite not participating in paid employment.

Table 1.Key Family Roles Performed by Married Non-Working Women in Gurugram

Family Role	Percentage of Respondents (%)
Caregiving for children/elderly	85
Daily financial planning	76
Educational decision involvement	73
Emotional support & conflict mediation	82
Cultural/ritual management	68

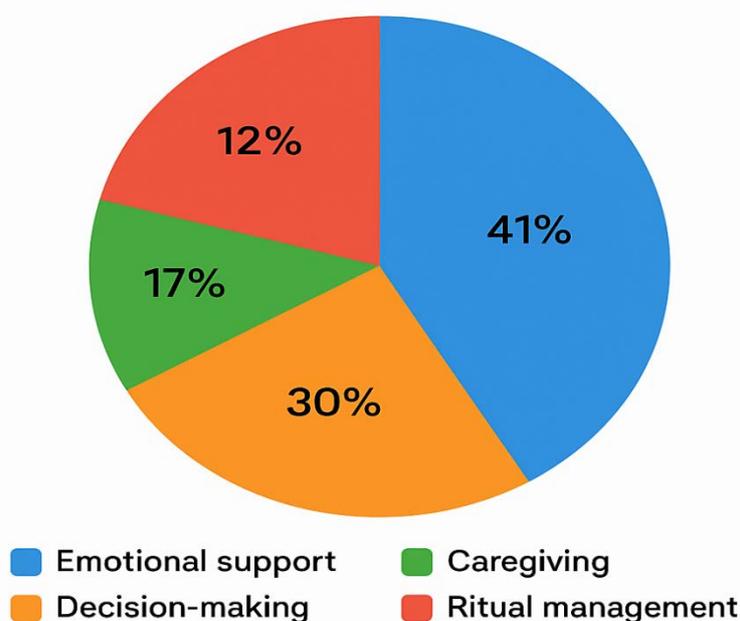


Figure 1.Contribution of Non-Working Married Women to Family Emotional Well-Being

Findings & Discussion

The study reveals that married non-working women in Gurugram perform a range of

essential yet often underrecognized roles that sustain family life. Quantitative data show that 85% of respondents reported active

involvement in caregiving for children and elderly family members, while 76% participated in daily financial planning such as budgeting household expenses. About 73% influenced decisions regarding children's education, even when they did not have formal decision-making authority. Notably, 82% identified themselves as primary providers of emotional support, helping family members manage stress and mediating conflicts.

Qualitative interviews enriched these findings, highlighting that many women perceive their roles not merely as duties but as sources of identity and satisfaction. Respondents described maintaining cultural rituals and traditions, which they saw as vital for intergenerational bonding. While urban participants reported slightly higher perceived influence in decision-making compared to semi-urban respondents, traditional norms still shaped the limits of their authority.

Overall, the study illustrates that non-working married women play an indispensable role in family emotional well-being, daily management, and cultural continuity. Their unpaid contributions form an invisible yet foundational part of family stability, underscoring the need for broader societal recognition.

Conclusion

This study highlights the significant yet often invisible contributions of married non-working women to family life in Gurugram district. Beyond routine household tasks, these women play vital roles in emotional support, caregiving, decision-making, and cultural continuity, which together strengthen family harmony and well-being. Despite not engaging in paid employment, their unpaid work and emotional labor form the backbone of family stability. Recognizing these roles is essential to achieving a balanced understanding of family dynamics and gender roles, especially within rapidly urbanizing contexts where traditional expectations and modern influences intersect.

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