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WORKING MOTHERS AND THE EMOTIONAL BURDEN OF CARE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract
Paid work offers mothers a way to earn income, have a purpose and to be recognised without altering the expectations about their availability as mothers. This article explores the emotional impacts of juggling work and care that working mothers in urban Sargodha, Pakistan, articulate. It is based on a qualitative thesis reporting on semi-structured interviews with 16 mothers between 29 and 45 years old. The article provides a summary of the interview extracts, the participant descriptions and the thematic findings of the thesis, and does not pretend to offer a new analysis of the not available transcripts. The account is structured around five themes: juggling schedules and available time; feeling guilty as a mother, feeling judged; maintaining composure at work and home; practical support and conditional relief; and coping while holding on to valued professional roles. Participants reported that they missed children's activities, that they were still concerned about childcare while they were working and that they were not sufficiently 'emotionally available' after work. Spousal, familial, work and childcare support proved to be a relief, but such descriptions were not mutually exclusive of the continued demand of maternal responsibility. Work also provided satisfaction and identity outside of caring. These findings, in conjunction with recent studies on cognitive household labour, indicate that emotional labour is about responsibility for care, rather than necessarily about the number of tasks that are performed. Flexibility at work and support at home may thus be most effective when it is combined with secure care settings and joint responsibility. The findings do not have statistical generalizability but they are contextually informative. There are inconsistencies in the underlying report and documentation of recruitment, translation and ethical review is incomplete, and thus needs to be addressed prior to the journal submission.

Keywords
Working mothers; emotional burden; maternal guilt; unpaid care; work–family conflict; Pakistan

Introduction

In part, the "work/motherhood balance" relies on the ability to identify and trust in a "plan B. A mother can end her paid day of work and still expect to be "available" for the kids, to arrange for someone else to take care of them, and to assess her own "availability." This cannot be reflected in the number of working hours or completed household chores. They also include self-assessment based on the expectations of good motherhood. Knowing about this combination is important because employment-enabling policies may have little impact on the organization and emotional aspects of care.

Based on recent empirical studies, one can differentiate between the practical organization of care and the cognitive organization of care. Aviv et al. (2025) examined planning and execution in 322 mothers on thirty household activities. Mothers thought that they bore the disproportionate burden of doing cognitive tasks and this impacted on their psychological functioning. These results refer to relationships between household planning in the study sample; they do not indicate cause-and-effect

between household planning and mental illness. However, they make clear the reasons for an incomplete account of the experiences of domestic responsibilities in the light of visible contributions. This worry has been extended by evidence published in 2026. Jungmann et al. (2026) analysed invisible household and care work through two online studies with 368 women and 1,891 mothers. Failing to complete tasks was a significant source of perceived burden. Vettoretto et al. (2026) examined a sample of 2,309 Italian mothers with one child, with a separation between cognitive, managerial and emotional aspects of mental work. Such research brings the problem to life in an empirical sense, and simultaneously poses inquiries on the workings of responsibility in contexts of varying family dynamics, work conditions and maternal care expectations.

Pakistan is a significant context for the study of those relationships from the point of view of mothers' story. Rehman et al. (2025) conducted a survey of 188 health care workers with young children and found an increased family guilt among mothers as compared to fathers affecting their work. Access to childcare and working hours were pertinent correlates. But professional surveys cannot capture the meaning of guilt in everyday exchanges, mamas' understanding of help or the significance of jobs despite the emotional and health toll. Narratives of various professions can shed light on these processes and should not be presumed to be the same for all working women.

The distress of mothers cannot only be blamed on paid work. Qayyum et al. (2026) investigated intensive parenting, guilt, shame and wellbeing among 200 mothers not working outside the home in Punjab. They found that the emotional aspects of intensive parenting were related to maternal wellbeing. This, combined with evidence from employed parents, means explanations need to focus on the norms of motherhood and work. Staying home doesn't necessarily create pressure to show good parenting and working doesn't automatically make bad parenting.

The current paper discusses the description and negotiation of the emotional burden associated with caring by working mothers in the City of Sargodha. It is based on the original qualitative data reported in a MPhil Thesis conducted at University of Sargodha in 2026. The work is a targeted analysis of the relationships between time pressure, perceived maternal responsibility, support, and professional identity. The article does not attempt to suggest a prevalence of distress and is not necessarily representative of working mothers in Pakistan. Rather, it wonders what mothers are saying when they are still emotionally strained despite having meaningful work and the offer of help.

Literature and conceptual framework

The work and family as competing demands

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) distinguish conflict due to time, strain and incompatible behavioural requirements. This is helpful, as mothers could get fatigued even if schedules don't directly overlap, for example if she is working late that could make her less attentive to her family at home. It also discourages you from assuming that all problems are a lack of organization. Even with the best of intentions and planning, a fixed shift and an unexpected care requirement can clash. In this case, the framework is more sensitive to various types of interference than providing pre-established categories to where all accounts must fall.

COVID-19 research has shed light on how disruption of care can affect the labour market. The authors of this study, Collins et al. (2021), reported that there were increasing disparities between the working hours of mothers and fathers in the United States during the first year of the pandemic. Shockley et al. (2021) explored working and childcare arrangements of dual earner couples when their lives were disrupted. These studies are not direct evidence regarding the Sargodha of today. Their relevance is that they demonstrate how work and family arrangements are negotiated within the limitations of institutions, and how apparently private negotiations can be quite inequitable in assigning the costs of employment between parents.

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There are also some things to consider in interpreting working from home. Lyttelton et al. (2022) explored the relationship between telecommuting and gender gap across paid and unpaid work before and during the pandemic. They argue that the commute isn't necessarily a driver of inequality, and that eradicating it doesn't necessarily create equality. Availability at home can raise the simultaneous demands or bring in interruptions to the paid working time. The definition of flexibility is thus, for purposes of the present study, one that actually involves the ability to change or maintain time, rather than merely place of work.

Cognitive labour and responsibility for care

There are different aspects of cognitive household labour: anticipation, recognising options, decision-making, and monitoring (Daminger 2019). This separation gives an appreciation of the difference between doing something that has been asked to be done and taking responsibility for it to occur. A brother, sister, aunt, uncle, or other relative may pick up a child, but the mother is still responsible for ensuring the collection is made, that it was successful, and to address issues. Although these components were not measured directly in the current study the framework provides a way of interpreting statements of worry and coordination without assuming this as physical doing of care.

According to Dean et al. (2022), mental load is invisible, transcends borders, and lasts over time. Their conceptual account aids the explanation of how employment/rest can deal with family concerns being present. According to Reich-Stiebert et al.'s (2023) systematic review, the focus on cognitive responsibilities highlights unequal cognition, while definitions and measurement also show significant variation. These documents collectively help to separate cognitive activity from affective reactions to cognitive activity. Recalling an appointment at school is an activity, and fear of being judged for missing it is an emotional and relational experience.

More recent evidence has cast doubt on the extent to which extra employment resources shift cognitive responsibility. In the United States, Weeks et al. (2025) identified 2,133 partnered heterosexual parents and found that there were differential relationships between mom's work and earnings and physical household labor and cognitive burden. Their story of ongoing gendered distribution indicates that responsibilities may be "stubborn" and hard to renegotiate in the face of changing practical conditions. This is a good comparative proposition, but one that is not necessarily applicable to households in Pakistan.

Perceived fairness also plays a role in emotional consequences. Ervin et al. (2025) examined Australian panel data spanning 18 waves, covering 8,734 working-age adults, connecting the dots between the experiences of dissatisfaction and perceived unfairness in unpaid work arrangements and poorer mental health. Bennett et al. (2024) examined two hundred and thirteen mothers, and found a relationship between household labour and perceived shifts in mothers' contributions and wellbeing. These data indicate that the same amount of practical activities can have different meanings in terms of recognition, reciprocity and expectations. Both studies are indirect in answering the question of clinical mental health of participants from Sargodha.

Mother expectations and emotional regulation

Emotional burden, the work of being suitably calm, patient and caring. The vocabulary for discussing socially organised expectations of feeling is offered by Hochschild's (1979) theory of emotion work and feeling rules. In this article emotion work is defined as regulating the feelings and their display in the relationship. Emotional burden is the umbrella term and comprises of reported guilt, worry, exhaustion and regulation work. These differences make it difficult for emotionally charged work to be automatically equated with emotional labour, or for emotional labour to be automatically equated with a household responsibility.

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Meeussen and Van Laar (2018) connected perceived pressure towards becoming a perfect mother with parental burnout and career goals. Their work highlights the "needs" of mothers which have potential employment implications. Recently, evidence from Pakistan by Qayyum et al. (2026) supports the importance of guilt and shame outside of employed samples. The question is not so much whether mothers care for their children as how the expectations of mothers' unlimited availability become the unavoidable limits which are transformed into evaluations of mothers' adequacy.

Wellbeing doesn't have to be burden. Nomaguchi and Milkie (2020) put attention on social and institutional environments in regards to the demands and rewards of parenting. In a comparable way, Petts and Carlson (2023) investigate cognitive household labour and parents' psychological wellbeing and employment. These views will help to focus on competing processes, employment can provide scheduling constraints as well as meaning, social connection and resources. A sufficient interpretation of the right must not assume that work has a negative impact on family life.

Analytical focus

The article synthesizes these views by introducing the notion of maternal accountability, which includes the perceived responsibility for providing sufficient care, and for providing an explanation for inadequate care. This is not a validated measure, a newly created theory but an interpretive focus created for the present account. It focuses attention on the practical needs that are turned into an emotional evaluation and how help can have the effect of lightening the load without changing the responsibility. The main question is how the experiences reported relate to working hours and timetables, expectations of care, emotional regulation and supports.

Methods

Study design

This study is of qualitative nature and is related to 'Working Mothers in Urban Sargodha'. The findings of the semi-structured interviews with sixteen participants is reported and demographic information, participant-level coding tables, interview extracts and thematic discussion are presented. The material in this article is a shortened summary and overview of the reported study from a thesis available. For the preparation of the manuscript, original audio recordings, full interview transcripts, and a separately documented coding archive were not available. As such this article does not make any claims to independent transcript verification, fresh interviews or a new full-corpus analysis.

The thesis is described as interpretivist and phenomenological but also utilizes descriptive phenomenology, thematic analysis and Colaizzi's approach. These labels are not interchangeable and do not imply that a specific procedure has been carried out. A slightly more restricted description of a qualitative interview study with thematic reporting is therefore used in the present account. This retains the focus on participants' meanings as described in the record without implying methodological accuracy beyond what can be supported. Braun and Clarke (2021) highlight the need for congruence between analytical claims and their practice.

Setting and participants

The table is a demographic of the participants who are in the age group of twenty-nine to forty-five and are working in education, health care, administration, banking and nongovernmental sector. There are 12 nuclear household dwellings, three joint household dwellings and one extended household dwelling. As educational and occupational descriptions suggest, the sample is professionally concentrated, and does not cover all types of women's work. It does not separately report on mothers who work in informal, agricultural and domestic jobs.

Details of the sampling method (purposive sampling) are clearly identified in the thesis, but the sampling process, cases of refusal, and the specific selection criteria are not fully described. Saturation was not achieved with this sample size, but can be examined at a later time. Hennink and Kaiser

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(2022) demonstrate sample sufficiency is dependent on study purposes, population features, and the sort of saturation that is used. No retrospective claims of saturation are made in this article as the source does not give a clear record of iterative recruitment nor does it give a stopping decision.

Data collection

Interview evidence relates to daily work and care needs, guilt, anxieties, perceived social expectations, sources of support, coping and job satisfaction. The thesis says the interviews were transcribed. Interviews dates, duration, setting, recording processes, language and translators, however, are not always reported. References to focus groups can be found throughout the design discussion, but not a separate focus-group data set in the findings. The empirical description here will thus be confined to the 16 interviews reported.

Quotations include verbatim language used in the thesis and keep in place identifiers as well as not using participant's names. These are extracts from theses and not independently verified transcripts. Where possible, shorter complete sentences are used to avoid silently editing participants' reported speech. The quotation is differentiated between what the participants stated and what the interpretation of the researcher (thesis author) is. This is needed in order to accommodate some instances of changes in POV (first person vs third person) in passages presented as participant material and some occupational and demographic descriptions vary from section to section.

Thematic consolidation

The themes in the thesis were grouped into five related areas for this article. Competing schedules and depleted availability were treated as a single construct – work–family balance and work related anxiety. As moral evaluations of care, parental guilt, cultural expectations and ideal motherhood were examined. Fatigue concealing statements to inform emotional composure. Support systems were explored in terms of both their practical and emotional roles, and coping, resilience and career fulfilment were discussed as a whole, without being conflated. The consolidation realigns the reported findings; no new frequencies, or previously unreported participant experiences are created.

Interpretation has been carefully undertaken in the cases where evidence was not clear. The participant table was utilized when providing a broad description of the sample, with no assumptions made for ambiguous child counts, employment descriptions, or relationship classifications. A numerical comparison between the various household types and the various occupations was not attempted. Experiences of support and positive descriptions of work were also left in as a counterpoint to the strain stories. The resulting themes are explanatory groupings and are not mutually exclusive categories, nor do they necessarily represent order or prevalence by sequence.

Ethics and reporting limits.

The thesis outlines the concept of voluntary consent, the right to withdraw, coded identities and protected data storage. It does not identify a decision or approval number from an ethics committee. The information must be confirmed by the author and may not be assumed on the basis that the work has been carried out for a university thesis. The public article does not include the participants' names and/or irrelevant details. There are reporting checks in COREQ and the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research, especially with regards to researcher characteristics, consent, data collection and analytic transparency (Tong et al., 2007; O'Brien et al., 2014). Being cited does not mean that all of the necessary requirements are fulfilled.

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Findings

Demographics of Respondents

ID	AGE	NUMBER OF CHILDREN	OCCUPATION	EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND	FAMILY SYSTEM
P1	35	2	School Teacher	M.A. in Education	Nuclear
P2	30	3	Healthcare Worker	B.S. in Nursing	Extended
P3	38	2	Principal	M.A. in English, B.Ed.	Nuclear
P4	45	4	Program Manager (NGO)	Msc In Social Work	Joint
P5	43	2	Branch Manager Bank	Graduation in Mass Communication	Joint
P6	32	2	School Teacher	B.A. in Education	Nuclear
P7	36	2	Nurse	Nursing Diploma, Additional Certifications in Emergency Care	Nuclear
P8	34	2	Teacher (Middle School)	B.Ed., M.A. in English Literature	Nuclear
P9	42	5	High School Teacher (Mathematics)	M.A. in Mathematics, B.Ed.	Nuclear
P10	38	2	Government Primary School Teacher (English)	B.Ed., M.A. in English Literature	Nuclear
P11	35	2	Registered Nurse	B.Sc. in Nursing, Postgraduate Certificate in Intensive Care Nursing	Nuclear
P12	32	2	Administrative Coordinator	B.A. in Education	Nuclear
P13	34	2	College Receptionist	M.A. in English Literature	Nuclear
P14	32	3	College Teacher	M.Sc. in Botany	Nuclear
P15	29	2	Government School Teacher	M.Sc. in Chemistry	Nuclear
P16	30	2	Nurse	Nursing Diploma	Joint

The demographic information shows that the sample of the participants is a heterogeneous group of people mainly married women with a significant presence of nuclear and extended families. The age of the participants is 29-45 years which means that there is a wide range of life experiences and career stages. The majority of the participants work in the professional field of education, healthcare and administration with different educational levels such as bachelors and master degrees in education, nursing, English literature and botany. Many of the participants are mothers who have to balance between the roles of motherhood and demanding work, which reflects their difficulties with work-life balance. Most of the participants are married and This family composition, age, occupation, and educational attainment offer a good background of understanding the different experiences, stresses and coping skills of working mothers in various professional sector

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Competing schedules and depleted availability

Participants described paid work and caregiving as competing claims on time that could not always be reconciled through individual planning. P5's reported account connected evening and weekend work with missing family time. P2 described long shifts and attempts to alter schedules around children's needs. These accounts locate difficulty within the arrangement of work and care rather than simply within mothers' ability to organize themselves. The conflict was especially visible when children required attention that could not be postponed until employment commitments ended.

P1 described the emotional significance of missed events: "I feel guilty when I can't attend school performances or sports days because I have to work." Such events represented more than appointments. In the participant's account, attendance appeared to signify involvement in children's lives. Missing them therefore generated concern about maternal presence even where the reason was a legitimate work obligation. The extract does not establish that the children experienced neglect; it demonstrates how the mother interpreted the absence.

Availability also had an emotional dimension. P3's account described wanting to give children more attention after investing substantial time and energy at work. P6 associated insufficient rest with difficulty managing employment and family responsibilities. Together, these descriptions indicate that being physically at home did not necessarily mean feeling emotionally restored. The working day could continue to shape family interaction through fatigue, worry, or depleted patience. The material does not include sleep measurements or clinical assessments, so these experiences remain self-reported forms of strain.

P4 provides an important contrasting case. The participant described flexible hours as helpful when children were ill or required particular attention. This suggests that work demands were not experienced identically and that perceived control over time mattered. However, the account does not establish the contractual basis of flexibility or whether comparable arrangements were available to colleagues. Its significance is experiential: some capacity to respond to care needs made the relationship between work and family feel more manageable.

Maternal guilt and perceived judgement

Guilt involved evaluating professional commitments against expectations of maternal care. Participants' accounts described concern about missing events, failing to meet emotional needs, or being insufficiently attentive after work. These experiences connected practical constraints with self-assessment. A mother could recognize the importance of employment and still interpret a missed caregiving opportunity as a personal shortcoming. The apparent contradiction is central to the findings: acceptance of employment did not remove the feeling that maternal availability should be greater.

P10's reported statement made the wider expectation explicit: "The fact that women are expected to be caregivers first and foremost, makes it hard to balance my work and family life." The wording places pressure beyond the immediate household timetable. It describes a hierarchy in which caregiving is understood as the primary obligation against which other commitments are assessed. The extract supports an interpretation of perceived gendered expectations, but it cannot establish how all family or community members actually evaluated the participant.

P12 described feeling stigmatized because full-time employment was interpreted as insufficient concern for children. P6 similarly described tension between being a good mother and achieving professional success. These accounts show how mothers experienced judgement, whether through explicit interactions, anticipated reactions, or internalized standards. The available material does not consistently separate these sources. Accordingly, the analysis treats social judgement as reported perception rather than assuming that every instance involved directly observed criticism.

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Self-criticism could persist without a specific external confrontation. P10 described comparison with other mothers, while P5 discussed pressure to perform perfectly in both work and family roles. Such accounts suggest that evaluation travelled with participants rather than remaining confined to particular encounters. Yet the evidence does not support treating all mothers as equally committed to perfection. Some reported developing self-acceptance, indicating that maternal standards could be questioned and negotiated rather than merely reproduced.

Emotional composure across work and home

The burden of care also involved regulating emotional expression. P12 stated: "At work, I have to be calm and professional, and the same at home." The participant's longer account linked these expectations to exhaustion and the feeling of needing to remain supportive despite fatigue. This connects employment and caregiving through a common demand for composure. Distress had to be managed while other responsibilities continued, potentially making the effort involved less visible to colleagues and relatives.

The accounts do not justify assuming that professional and family emotion work were identical. Workplace calm could support competent service or collegial interaction, whereas calm at home could be associated with patience and reassurance. Nevertheless, the expectation of moving between these settings without displaying accumulated strain was experienced as demanding. Emotional regulation therefore appears both as a means of sustaining relationships and as an additional effort required under pressure. Its value to others did not prevent it from being tiring.

This theme should also be distinguished from diagnosis. References to anxiety, worry, exhaustion, and emotional control describe participants' language and the thesis's thematic interpretation. They do not demonstrate an anxiety disorder, parental burnout syndrome, or impaired caregiving. The importance of the finding lies in recognizing an often concealed dimension of everyday work and care. A household may appear to function successfully while the person sustaining its emotional continuity experiences substantial difficulty.

Practical support and conditional relief

Participants identified spouses and relatives as sources of practical and emotional assistance. P6 described a husband's contribution to childcare and housework, and P11 described support when employment required a long shift. These accounts challenge a uniform portrayal of men or families as unsupportive. They also show that assistance mattered through concrete actions, not only through approval of women's employment. Someone taking responsibility for children during a difficult shift could make continued employment more feasible.

Childcare services provided another form of reassurance. P12 described using local daycare and experiencing greater peace of mind at work. The account connects practical provision with reduced worry about children's immediate care. However, it does not establish affordability, quality, opening hours, or long-term reliability. The article therefore treats daycare as a reported resource in this case, not as evidence that adequate childcare was generally accessible to the sample or available throughout Sargodha.

Peers offered recognition that differed from practical substitution. P15 described friendship with other working mothers as enabling discussion and exchange of coping ideas. Such relationships could make difficult experiences feel shared rather than exceptional. Emotional recognition may matter even when peers cannot change schedules or provide childcare. It helps explain why support cannot be measured solely by the number of tasks transferred to another person: being understood and having duties covered serve related but distinct functions.

Nevertheless, supportive accounts coexisted with guilt and worry. This coexistence does not prove that assistance was ineffective. It suggests that relief from particular tasks may not remove broader

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expectations of maternal responsibility. The distinction between receiving help and sharing accountability is therefore a plausible interpretation of the material. The interviews as reported did not systematically ask who initiated arrangements or monitored their completion, so claims about the distribution of cognitive labour remain provisional rather than measured findings.

Coping alongside valued professional identities

Participants described strategies for recovering time, emotional steadiness, and a sense of control. These included reading, taking breaks, managing stress, sharing tasks, and limiting work intrusions into family time. P14 stated: "I make it a point not to check work emails after dinner." This is a concrete attempt to establish a boundary rather than an abstract aspiration to achieve balance. Its feasibility, however, may depend on occupational expectations and the consequences of being unavailable.

P3's reported account connected hobbies with emotional replenishment, while other participants described adapting schedules and becoming less self-critical. These strategies indicate agency within constraints. They should not be interpreted as evidence that the underlying burden was resolved or that all mothers had equal access to recovery time. The source does not report standardized before-and-after measures or longitudinal follow-up. Consequently, the accounts establish perceived usefulness, not tested effectiveness or sustained improvements in mental health.

Employment itself was a source of value. P2 stated: "I feel fulfilled in my work, especially in healthcare, where I can directly make a difference in people's lives." P4 described professional identity beyond motherhood, and P8 associated teaching with purpose and achievement. These accounts complicate any reading in which paid work is merely an external pressure. Participants valued contributions that could coexist with, rather than cancel, commitment to their children.

The resulting picture is not a simple choice between career and care. Mothers described attempts to sustain both meaningful identities while coping with arrangements that made doing so emotionally demanding. Adaptation could involve negotiating help, protecting time, or revising expectations of perfection. The findings therefore locate resilience within relationships and opportunities as well as individual effort. Celebrating persistence without examining the conditions requiring it would obscure the organizational and household changes suggested by participants' experiences.

Discussion

Interpretations should also differentiate between mothers' descriptions and judgements about the quality of parenting. Notions of guilt do not prove that children received poor care and feelings of professional satisfaction do not demonstrate that there were no pressures. Maintaining these distinctions explicitly helps preserve the analytical value of the interviews and to avoid emotional testimony being an unsustained evaluation of families or children.

Results indicate that emotional burden is partly a function of constrained availability and perceived responsibility to care. An absence from school or an empty evening can take on significance as proof of maternal insufficiency. This approach goes further than just a busy schedule – it can also help to explain why emotional feelings may remain even when the scheduling issue has been resolved. Maternal accountability can be helpful in this regard as it helps focus on who feels responsible when work and care cannot be attended to simultaneously.

An account consistent with cognitive labour, but not a direct measure of it. Daminger's (2019) distinctions and Dean et al.'s (2022) conceptualization help to clarify potential processes behind repeated worriery. The Sargodha material provides contextual descriptions of the experience of expectations in the work, home, and community settings. What it adds in terms of evidence are the meaning(s) that the participants report. To determine the actual distribution of anticipation,

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monitoring and decision making, one would need direct questions, more complete transcripts or household data that complemented the data presented here.

The difference also aids in the interpretation of the assistance. Transfer of a task without the emotional aspect from the mother can be done. However, reliable support can bring peace of mind due to the decreased uncertainty of care. The current evidence is inconclusive as to which mechanism was the more dominant mechanism, but it does raise a question that should be more clearly raised in studies of support: is the support provided to just complete the work, or does the support provided help mothers to cease to monitor, anticipate, and personally feel responsible about everything that happens?

The explanations that reduce maternal employment to the problem to be solved are inadequate to describe the professional fulfilment as participants describe it. Caregivers were also provided with other opportunities for purpose and identity - teaching, healthcare and managerial work. In parallel, these jobs came with schedules and emotional requirements that also might conflict with family requirements. Value and strain are analytically important and relate to each other. It implies a target of support to enhance conditions for maintaining selected roles, not assuming that withdrawal from work is a sign of wellbeing.

Ervin et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review and found a relationship between the gendered division of unpaid work and mental health of employed adults. The Sargodha findings add to this evidence by providing descriptions of demands and relief as they were given by the participants. But causal relationships and comparisons between employed and non-employed mothers cannot be drawn from interview reports. The study has practical relevance in that it identifies situations that participants deem challenging or facilitating, and theoretical relevance in that it addresses the issue of the valued identity that is still here, still operating within unequal expectations.

The results suggest that families were able to offer support and they could also be part of the negotiation of maternal standards. It is inaccurate to view extended or joint households as always protective or nuclear households as always isolating. Household labels are used to show composition and not availability, quality or level of support. They don't show you who does care, who is overseeing the care, or if there is any obligation or criticism involved in getting help. These relationships need to be examined more closely empirically.

Recent research in Pakistan provides helpful points of comparison, but not at the exclusion of contextual differences. Rehman et al. (2025) studied health care professionals while the sample of the current study consist of several occupational settings. That maternal guilt is not an exclusive phenomenon of employment conflicts was made clear by Qayyum et al. (2026) in their study of mothers outside paid work. These sources stimulate research which distinguishes occupational limitations from broader perceptions of care. They do not warrant generalisation of the findings of the study to all families, regions or socioeconomic groups in Pakistan.

The participant's accounts can be used to discuss predictable schedules, provision for family emergencies and childcare that reflects the actual working hours. These are suggested solutions to issues reported, rather than solutions that were tested by this study. Employers might consider if nominal flexibility can be adopted without informal negative impacts and if employees can unplug outside of agreed hours. These evaluations should include workers who need to be physically in the workplace – benefits aimed at the office environment won't necessarily apply to nurses, teachers or service workers.

At home, conversations could go beyond “helping out” to explicitly delegating responsibility for regular care giving. This could involve arranging for needs, identifying, and replying to changes in plans. It would be for the purpose of shared ownership, not mothers to be responsible for everyone

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else's sharing. Peer support and opportunities for rest may continue to be valuable, but should be added as a supplement to the material changes rather than as a replacement. The results indicate that need to be taken into account together: recognition, reliable supports, and work expectations that are manageable.

There is another implication about the timing of support. Help provided only when distress is obvious may come at the end of a lot of effort made by mothers to maintain normal routines. It has been reported that the focus is on calmness, so the presence of outward competence does not necessarily mean that the demands are manageable. Therefore, organisations and households could talk beforehand about foreseeable pressure points such as alterations in shifts, school timetables and children's illness. This is a proposal logically arising out of the reported difficulties; the study is not able to determine if anticipatory arrangements would decrease distress in practice.

Variation must also be considered. A functional boundary may not exist for a teacher in an emergency situation, and a trustworthy family member may be able to offer assistance that is not available to everyone in the family. Such differences suggest that no one model of successful balancing can be presented. Future interviews to ask what were the occasions when the arrangements worked and when the same arrangements did not work. Comparing such incidents might help to make sense of the importance of control over time, trust in substitute carers, fairness and/or freedom from expected criticism as factors in relief. This would highlight explanation, whilst maintaining the complexity of what is seen in the current accounts.

The study's limitations and future research.

This study has a small sample of professionals in an urban setting and was based on self-reported experiences. It is not based on a comparison group, household observation, employer policies, or clinical assessment. In the cases of the participants, access to meanings is gained but not independent confirmation of others' actions. Also, the lack of complete transcripts in the preparation of the article makes a full assessment of context, variation and contradictory cases impossible. Themes should thus be viewed as a streamlined rendering of reported evidence, rather than as a comprehensive portrayal of the original interviews.

There are also inconsistencies in the details of the participants and inadequate reporting of the methodological aspects of the thesis. Confidence in occupational comparisons and reconstruction of procedures is impacted by these issues. Before submitting records, the authors must verify the accuracy of the content. Future research might integrate detailed interviews with time diaries, and questions that differentiate who was doing the task from who had responsibility for the task, and one partner could do both. The changes in guilt and recovery after childcare, employment transitions and negotiated household arrangements could be of interest to examine in a longitudinal design. More widespread recruitment would enhance knowledge of mothers whose working lives are insecure, informal or less receptive to institutional support.

Conclusion

In this study conducted in Sargodha, working mothers reported emotional burden as a result of balancing work and family life commitments, feelings of inadequacy as mothers, maintaining calm demeanor and lack of equal opportunities for respite. They also reported supportive relationships, intentional coping, and a high level of commitment to their profession. The key interpretive message is that help and flexibility can provide relief from the pressures, but that the mother's responsibility is still expected. Hence, there's a need to consider who provides care, who can continue to work, and who has emotional healing to be preserved, when making employment and care compatible. The conclusions provide a sound foundation for further research and discussion within the organization,

subject to verification of the data gathered in the study and for the completion of reporting information.

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