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Impact of household chores on mental health of women

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Abstract

The paper has particularly focussed upon the role of married women in household chores and how it impacts their mental health. A number of factors has been taken into consideration; like verbal abuse, social isolation and victim blaming respectively. All these factors have placed a negative impact upon the mental health of women. The issue of women has been described with the help of 'labelling theory', where the person tries to withdraw from all the social events and activities for facing consistent devaluation and rejection from people. The withdrawal has thereby resulted in constricting social networks with having minimal attempts for seeking jobs.

Keywords: Mental health, married women, social isolating, verbal abuse, abandonment, household chores

Introduction

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

A section of women, who are housewives are usually labelled as, 'financial dependents' with having no capital and income. In a society, their roles are confined to being a mother, wife and consumer. The perception of being an ideal housewife is to carry out domestic chores efficiently and to be attentive in fulfilling the needs of their husband. Failing to work, often creates a disturbing environment leading to domestic violence. Women in British era were not given much importance. Female-education was least prioritized. It was only limited to cultured and well-to-do-families, Son, was considered to be an important member of the family. Henceforth, the concept of gender-difference was quite prevalent during that point of time. A son's importance lies in performing funeral rites, necessary for salvation. Along with this, a son is considered as a potential wage earner and a support for his parents in their old-age. Historically, women in primitive age were solely given training in housekeeping to prepare them for their married life (Aviv *et al.*, 2024) ^[1]. However, women has always been less prioritized in our society. It makes them feel to be neglected, unwanted by their family members. Women, categorically face the problem of abandonment. Filing divorce is one of an issue for which the women voluntarily gets emotionally detached from the person. Getting separated mentally creates a void, making the person feel deserted. A spouse not comfortable in discussing the issue with their partner as they feel unsafe is a sign of constructive abandonment. Such a situation could often lead to an unhealthy environment causing marital discord. Whereas, intentional abandonment is the one where the spouse is seen to be taking care of their partners. Henceforth, marital abandonment has been one of a severe issue where the women are insecure, giving rise to anxiety issues. Women who are abandoned have been unaware of the fact of being abandoned. Sudden death of husbands, has also been one of the reason of abandoning the women, as their family members feels them to be an unwanted person. Certainly, it gives rise to mental-health issues amongst women. Emotional-damage, problems in a relationship and fear of abandonment are the issues commonly seen amongst women. A sense of emptiness creeps in, making the person to develop depression, low self-esteem, sadness and anxiety related problems.

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Trust issues are also witnessed, leading to problems in relationships. Moreover, making the person feel abandoned might make the person anxious with instilling a sense of fear of losing someone special. It also invokes the person to exhibit behaviours that might push others away (Maqbool, Shrivastava & Pandey, 2014) ^[6]. Similarly, continually making the person recognize their faulty-behaviour could create a negative impact upon the same. A sense of self-blame, delayed healing, shame and fear are likely seemed to develop amongst women in these situations. Victim-blaming often restricts a person to open up with their problems for the fear they have developed within themselves.

Research Methodology

The study has primarily collected data through both primary and secondary method. The primary data has helped to gain an understanding of the real world. While, the secondary data has been helpful at providing a detailed insight of the prevailing problem.

Discussion

Association of Unpaid Domestic Work and Mental Health

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

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

Sexual Division of Labour has laid an immense important role in regard to unpaid work structured by society. It is due to which the women are pushed to perform domestic duties and paying less value to the household work. Certainly, such perspectives categorically marginalize the women with setting limits to their role within the household. Politically, the women are prohibited to enter into politics. Consequently, it makes them to exclude their existence out of productive work and property rights in society. The women in parliament have limited seats, with restricting to

come up with any sort of protective labor legislation for unpaid workers. Along with this, societal norms has occupied a pivotal role in the work status of women. Additionally, it has also been responsible for restricting their entry into the labour market. Unpaid household work majorly focusses on three components; namely maintenance of household activities like cooking and cleaning, taking care of elderly people, rendering voluntary services to other households. Even after playing a crucial role in sustenance of society, unpaid household activity are regraded as non-accountable. The contribution of housewives, with not marking any significance in the official statistical systems. In many Indian households, as per the customs of society the women are bound to take care of their families. Hence as a customary ritual, most of the women adopt home-care as the sole permanent unpaid job. Labelling a woman as a housewife in many Indian households, somewhat makes them to limit their decision-making power. Such a condition restricts them to make an entry into the economic activities involved in the labour market. Consecutively, making them feel destined to legitimize the duties of unpaid domestic work. Structural transformation and use of improved technologies in agriculture has made the women to make an exit from farm activities. Such activities made the women to engage themselves in unpaid household work. Reportedly, women are majorly found to devote most of their time to household activities (Wang & Lu, 2023) ^[13]. A rapid surge in the unpaid work has been because of; as there are no other person in carrying out domestic duties. Secondly, domestic duties are sort of social or religious constraints which are put forward by the society. Thirdly, a domestic helper is not affordable all the time.

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

During the time of Covid -19, the women were highly found to be losing jobs in comparison to men. It built a sense of stress, anxiety among women as people were restricted to move outside; limiting the spread of infection. Covid-19 has been a difficult time with pushing work to home and forcing families to combine work with childcare. All such activities took a toll on the mental health of women for working due to prolonged hours (Zhou *et al.*, 2024) ^[14]. Increased working hours along with household chores had been damaging both physical and mental health.

Social Isolation

Connecting individuals socially is one of an important aspect for survival. A disruptive social connection makes the individual to isolate themselves with affecting the emotional, social and psychological well-being. To be isolated socially makes a person to feel emotionally

disconnected (Tuncer *et al.*, 2024) ^[12]. Moreover, social-isolation creates higher risk with deteriorating medical conditions like high-blood pressure, weakened immunity, reduced longevity, heart problems and many others. Psychological violence is one of the main manifestations where the partner through their actions tries to weaken their support system. Such a course of action makes the woman to withdraw themselves from the social life. With instilling a sense of fear, one tries to impair the entire development of actions, behaviours, beliefs and decisions.

Obligatory duties of women, like taking care of family members and household chores tends to isolate women (Molarius & Metsini, 2023) ^[9]. However, with receiving the ongoing threats or even physical attacks makes them feel more isolated. Violence could be isolating leading to conflicting behaviour. Such an aspect gives rise to a weak and discontinued links with their families and friends. Certainly all these factors leads to individualisation. With instilling a sense of individualisation, the women could not express their needs and issues (Torre *et al.*, 2019) ^[11]. Apart from counselling, the women prefer not to speak about it and prefers to remain silent. It is mainly because, they are afraid about its outcome and its repercussions on them.

Forced isolation is a form of social disconnection which tends to make women instill with a sense of negative emotions such as anger and sadness. At the same time, it minimises one's psychological needs and cognitive abilities. Prolonged disconnection from people socially makes them experience with an increased risk of depression, suicidal thoughts and early death. Women, who have been mothers experienced a sense of failure or inadequacy with not allowing them to connect with others. The pressure of being a perfect mother has always been into existence. The feel of inadequacy among mothers could have made them to avoid others, thereby leading to 'social- loneliness'. Mothers who belonged to minority background and were deprived were likely seemed to experience a disadvantageous position. In the process, they could not have authentic interaction with others, dishonest in their approach. All of these built a sense of loneliness amongst the beliefs of mother (Sharma & Vaish, 2020) ^[10]. Moreover, motherhood a transitory period also marked certain changes in the relationship with family-members. Certainly these changes also provoked difficulties among mothers. An increased sense of disconnection, lack of understanding from their partners created disturbances. Two underlying reasons of social isolation among women occurs in two distinct ways. One is through limiting the freedom by their husbands, and other is through the development of depressive symptoms due to the attitudes of their husbands. The reason for the occurrence of depression has been because of facing all manifestations of violence. Situations of domestic violence makes the women to distance themselves from the relatives, friends or neighbours. Financially dependent upon their husbands makes the women to have more difficulties in getting assistance on matters regarding health and legal. Moreover, women fear to denounce violence as they worry about their livelihood and the well-being of their children. Psychological violence is a kind of emotional damage which weakens the self-esteem of a person. As a result of which their development is impaired. In the process, their actions, beliefs, behaviour and decisions are controlled through threat, humiliation, isolation, abuse and exploitation respectively. Obligatory tasks of family care and household

chores increases the risk of gradual isolation amongst women. The orientation of women are towards individualisation and being dependent on their needs. Individualisation is characterised by weak and discontinued links with their relatives, and the low-density of these social networks. Elements comprising of low-density fails to share a link between each other.

Impact of Verbal-Abuse on the Mental Health

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

Name-calling is one of a form of verbal abuse where the partner is seemed to insult, belittle their partners with derogatory by lowering one's self-esteem. In marriages, frequent conflicting situations make a woman to go through mental disturbances. Shouting is one of an aggressive form of behaviour in which the women are dominated and controlled by their spouses. A disturbing marriage creates accusations, blame-shifting and false allegations. Following these aspects routinely might give rise to the question of sanity. Threats are also one form of a verbal abuse (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018) ^[4]. It is a common way to control their partners (Bulog, Pepur & Smiljanić, 2022) ^[2]. The threats are imposed on women through inflicting physical-harm, abandonment respectively. As a partner, they often give silent treatment to their wives by withholding communication with others. It is how, they are left isolated and unloved by their family members. A sense of fear makes the women to withhold their emotions and confine themselves.

As a whole, the verbal-abuse makes the woman to question on their self-worth. The outcome of it turns out to be of low-self esteem with diminishing their sense of self. Verbal-abuse creates a sense of shame and isolation for people living in a society (McClain & Gerstenschlager, 2022). Building up of such emotions makes the victim to withdraw from others, making them feel isolated and lonely. Issues like stress and anxiety resulting out of verbal abuse increases the possibility of damage to physical health. Moreover, it has also been observed that abusing women could also create trouble in their marriages leading to emotional detachment and ultimately to divorce.

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

Role Strain

Household chores are usually the domestic work, which are often carried out by women at house. In our society, the domestic work is often considered or labelled as a negative set of activity (Carneiro *et al.*, 2023) ^[3]. Having multiple role responsibilities of a woman, the perspective of role-strain has been stressed effectively. The approach of role-strain explicitly focusses on the premise stating that the energy of human-beings is limited, but the demands of multiple-roles are never-ending. Henceforth, person performs multiple roles higher the chances of a woman to experience strain. Such an experience likely increases the chances of inflicting negative effects on the mental health of

women. However, as our society is patriarchal the women are bound to perform household work. Along with this, they are also scheduled to take care of their children. Certainly, this creates role-overload, combining with paid work, resulting in creating psychological tension among people (Froberg, Gjerdingen & Preston, 1986) [5].

Victim-Blaming

Victim-Blaming is a form of emotional abuse (McBride, 1990) [7]. It is one of a manipulative technique utilized by one own self convincing that the problem lies with the other person. Two key concepts, namely projection and Judgementalism are quite effective to understand the idea of victim-blaming. Projection takes place when one's characteristics are displaced onto another person. In case of victim-blaming, an abusive person usually tries to project their negative side to another. Victims get into fights with the abusers, as there are chances that the latter might cause problem in the first place by evoking a negative reaction in the other person. Victims thereby need to maintain mental strength from being triggered by the anger-provoking tactics created by the abusive person. Secondly, the moment when someone judges a person, it makes feel disconnected. The connection is lost as the person becomes too conscious of one's own being. During the instance of victim-blaming the abuser gets to feel superior as they believe that their role is to judge the other person; i.e. the victim. Victim blaming has a connection with the negative psychological outcomes such as depression, anxiety respectively.

Theoretical Framework

Marxist and Feminist Political Economy of Housework

From a Marxist-feminist perspective, household chores are not just routine tasks but a structural device that supports capitalism while perpetuating patriarchal structures of dominance. The political economy perspective interprets women's unpaid domestic work as the core of the operation of the system, since without it, the male laborer would be unable to reproduce his labor power. Following Marxists such as Engels, family is an economic production unit, and feminists such as Silvia Federici, Christine Delphy, and Mariarosa Dalla Costa developed this to the argument that housework represents an "invisible wage-less contract."

For women in Kolkata, especially unemployed married women, domestic work is their primary contribution to the household. But this work is not simply unrecognized but actually undervalued. Work such as cooking, cleaning, and caregiving is viewed as "natural" expressions of femininity rather than productive labor. This undervaluing has serious implications for mental health. When women's labor is assumed, they are alienated and lose their sense of personal identity. Respondents describe themselves as "being like machines," performing the same routine every day without praise or reward. This creates boredom, resentment, and a sense of emptiness, which in psychological language could be equated with depression and low self-esteem.

In the case of working women, the political economy of housework generates the "double burden" or "second shift." A working woman doing a full day in an office in Kolkata comes home to another cycle of unpaid work - cooking, watching over children's homework, housekeeping, or nursing elderly in-laws. In contrast to her male peers, who can retire from work, she keeps on working late at night. The fatigue is not just physical but also mental: she might be

caught in the middle of professional and domestic duties, feeling guilty about not delivering adequately in either aspect. Such constant pressure leads to chronic stress, temper, and in most instances, psychosomatic diseases such as migraines or gastrointestinal disorders.

Furthermore, the political economy approach identifies the ways in which women's unpaid domestic work makes them economically vulnerable. Without salaries, they do not have economic independence, and this perpetuates power inequality within marriage. In the middle-class and lower-class families of Kolkata, where the management of money is usually controlled by men, the dependence of women aggravates the risk of neglect, control, or even domestic violence. The feeling of being economically powerless despite working tirelessly at home heightens helplessness.

A case illustration: One participant, a 36-year-old unemployed woman from South Kolkata, recounted waking up at 5 a.m., preparing meals for the family, overseeing children's school readiness, and then cleaning all day while taking care of elderly parents-in-law. However, when she complained of exhaustion, her husband brushed her aside with, "You don't work, you stay at home." This denial of her labor made her feel irrelevant, leading to anxiety and recurrent crying fits.

As such, under the Marxist-feminist perspective, domestic work impacts mental health in a direct manner because it is an exploitative mechanism - women's work is unpaid and keeps both the family alive and the wider economy functioning, but it is at the expense of their own emotional and psychological health.

Goffman's Dramaturgical Theory

Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory, expounded in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), accounts for social life as a performance wherein actors deal with impressions in various arenas. He introduces the stages of frontstage and backstage, whereby frontstage describes how individuals present themselves to the public in order to sustain social expectations and backstage is where they are free to be themselves. Translating this to the context of domestic work, women's domestic labor is a perpetual performance where they are obliged to be the "ideal homemaker" regardless of their own physical and emotional well-being.

For most women in many Indian homes, especially in Kolkata, women's dignity still remains intimately tied to their capacity to have a clean, tidy, and welcoming home. The sweeping of floors, cooking of fresh meals, tidying up children's schoolwork, or serving in-laws is not only functional work but a performative act demonstrating their dedication to family life. Visitors to a home tend to instinctively assess women on these performances: Is the house tidy? Is the food good? Are the children well-behaved? Such judgments find their place in the symbolic representation of the woman as a "good wife" or "good mother."

Here, domestic work is integrated into a public script that women must perform perfectly on the frontstage. One failure - either serving warmed-up meals, drying clothes without folding them, or failing to receive relatives well - is likely to incur social blame. Social scrutiny of this nature renders women sensitive to their domestic image, thus putting pressure and stress on them.

The frontstage for married women who are unemployed tends to be putting on a show of being happy homemakers. They smile at visitors, nicely cook meals, and act the part of loving caregiver. But their backstage life might be exhaustion, drudgery, and invisibility. The discrepancy between backstage feelings and frontstage performance is an emotional dissonance, which can have destructive implications for psychological health. Women can suppress frustration with damaging psychological consequences, such as anxiety, irritability, or psychosomatic symptoms.

Dramaturgical expectations are doubled for working women. They play the part of capable professionals during the day at work. As soon as they get home, they have to change masks to that of effective homemaker, providing for children, monitoring homework, and keeping house in order. Little room exists for actual relaxation or expression of self. The performance of incessantly wearing different masks - from professional competence to family caregiving - creates psychological exhaustion and identity stress.

Hochschild's theory of emotional labor, an extension of Goffman, applies here. Women are not only performing physical work but also regulating emotions to maintain the atmosphere of the family. They have to show warmth, patience, and concern even when they are tired. For example, a woman might serve food smiling even though she has spent a tiring day at the workplace. This affective control, necessitated to preserve the frontstage facade of a well-adjusted home, also depletes mental resources. For women in Kolkata, it is common for them to feel that they must conceal their distress from in-laws or husbands. Crying alone behind closed kitchen doors or silently tolerating fatigue becomes their backstage experience. This ongoing repression over time leads to depression, anxiety disorders, and emotional isolation.

Dramaturgical tension is compounded in societies in which women's home performance becomes intensely monitored. Middle-class families in Kolkata are under constant surveillance by extended family members, neighbors, and kinship networks. A daughter-in-law can be criticized for not keeping up with traditional methods of cooking or for not keeping her house "guest-ready." Even social media have penetrated this space, as women increasingly feel pressure to post constructed pictures of domesticity on the web.

This culture of surveillance turns domestic work into a performative experience not only within the family unit but also in social settings in the community. The threat of critique forces women to be perfect at all costs, usually at the expense of their mental health.

The dramaturgical lens also helps explain why many women experience identity fragmentation. They oscillate between multiple selves - the professional, the homemaker, the mother, the dutiful daughter-in-law - without a stable space for authentic selfhood. This fragmentation creates a psychological burden. Women often describe themselves as "different people in different places," unable to reconcile their private desires with public expectations.

The outcome is increased susceptibility to mental health disorders like generalized anxiety disorder, depression, and burnout. Most women experience feeling "trapped" in roles that have minimal room for self-care, hobbies, or autonomous identity development.

In Kolkata, cultural norms of domesticity are supported by long-standing traditions. Even among urban, educated

communities, the norm that women must keep the household in peace and order holds strong. Bengali culture tends to idealize the figure of the "ghorer bou" (housewife), whose honor is defined by how well she keeps the house together. Women are socialized to perform these roles from an early age, believing that dignity lies in domestic perfection.

Concurrently, modernization in urban areas provokes women to pursue work and autonomy. This tension - tradition vs. modernity - heightens dramaturgical tension, as women are compelled to enact several scripts at once. Unresolved tension enforces greater psychological stress and identity conflict.

Durkheim's Theory of Anomie

Émile Durkheim, in his late nineteenth-century classics *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893) and *Suicide* (1897), developed the concept of anomie to refer to a condition of normlessness or erosion of social control. Anomie results when prevailing norms and values no longer guide individual conduct, causing individuals to feel lost, disconnected, and open to mental anguish. While Durkheim extended the idea universally to social revolutions, economic crises, and modernity, it also provides a strong tool to examine women's lives within the domestic sphere of the home.

Housework for women, particularly wives in cities such as Kolkata, is a paradox: necessary for family life *yet also* under-appreciated, unseen, and cyclical. Women, whether they work or not, tend to get conflicting expectations-there is the new talk of independence and empowerment, yet the old cultural structures locate their value in household work. This conflict of values begets an instance of domestic anomie, where women feel disoriented and tension because there are no stable, confirming norms about their roles.

This section uses Durkheim's anomie theory to explore the way household work, and the social meanings given to it, affects the mental health of women.

Durkheim suggested that when norms do not give people a clear framework of purpose and respect, anomie arises. Family work illustrates this situation. Though absolutely vital to the survival and well-being of families, this work is invisible on the social level and infrequently recognized, respected, or paid.

In the context of Kolkata, most unemployed women explain that they feel "useless" or "unproductive" even when they have worked day and night at home. Their work is not viewed as labor but as a natural obligation. For working women, the devaluation of domestic labor leaves them in a double bind: they are successful professionally but are guilty or inadequate if domestic work is not maintained to perfection.

This failure to validate is a normative vacuum. Women are in a social world that requires their domestic service but does not give them respect, creating the very type of confusion Durkheim described as anomie. Mental health effect: Worthlessness, low self-esteem, and depressive feelings frequently arise when women internalize the notion that their labor is "normal" and not of value. The never-ending, unseen quality of domestic work exacerbates this feeling of uselessness.

Durkheim viewed anomie as particularly acute during social transitions when traditional norms erode but new ones have not fully stabilized. This insight is highly relevant to

women's experiences in contemporary Kolkata, where rapid urbanization, education, and employment opportunities have opened up new possibilities for women, yet cultural expectations of domesticity remain deeply entrenched.

Traditional Norms: The "ideal wife" or "shongshar-rani" (queen of the household) is still valorized. Women are expected to ensure cleanliness, prepare fresh meals, and manage family rituals with devotion. **Modern Norms:** Education and economic independence encourage women to pursue professional careers, individuality, and self-actualization.

The clash between these contradictory expectations generates normative confusion. Women do not know whether to prioritize their professional ambitions or domestic obligations. For many employed women, the expectation to excel in both spheres becomes overwhelming. For unemployed women, the modern discourse of empowerment makes them feel marginalized or inadequate for being confined to domestic spaces.

Mental health impact: This conflict produces chronic stress, guilt, and anxiety. Women often report feeling "torn between two worlds," embodying Durkheim's description of anomie as a state of constant dissatisfaction and instability.

Durkheim associated anomie with the collapse of meaningful regulation in people's lives. Household chores often produce a similar condition of existential monotony. Cooking, cleaning, and caregiving tasks are repetitive and cyclical, with no tangible endpoint. Unlike professional labor, which offers promotions, salaries, and recognition, domestic work rarely provides upward mobility or external rewards. Unemployed women in Kolkata frequently describe their days as "endless cycles"—cleaning in the morning, cooking in the afternoon, and repeating the same tasks in the evening. This lack of progress or closure creates a sense of stagnation. Employed women, too, report that after completing challenging professional work, they must return home to routine chores, which feel thankless and draining. Durkheim noted that anomie leads to dissatisfaction because desires become unregulated and unattainable. In the household, women's desire for meaning, recognition, or personal growth is systematically blocked by the futility of chores.

Mental health impact: The monotony fosters boredom, emotional numbness, and in some cases, clinical depression. The absence of growth-oriented structures makes women vulnerable to burnout and hopelessness. Durkheim also linked anomie to weakened social solidarity. In many cases, women performing household chores feel socially isolated. Their labor takes place in private, behind closed doors, away from collective acknowledgment.

In Kolkata's joint families, women may share chores with mothers-in-law or sisters-in-law, yet this does not always create solidarity; instead, it often generates competition or surveillance. Women are judged on the quality of their domestic performance, leading to moral policing rather than companionship. For employed women, returning home late or outsourcing chores may invite criticism from relatives, further deepening isolation.

This lack of supportive solidarity intensifies the anomic condition. Instead of being integrated into meaningful collective norms, women feel alienated from both family and society. **Mental health impact:** Social isolation increases risks of loneliness, emotional withdrawal, and suicidal ideation. Durkheim himself demonstrated how suicide rates

rise when social bonds weaken, a finding that resonates with women's experiences of domestic alienation.

Symbolic Interactionism

Introduction: Symbolic Interactionism and Domesticity in Everyday Life

Symbolic Interactionism, as introduced by George Herbert Mead and developed further by Herbert Blumer, suggests that society is built in everyday interactions and the meaning people give to them. In contrast to structural theory, which is concerned with broad institutions, symbolic interactionism concerns itself with the micro-level: how people make sense of, negotiate, and internalize meanings in everyday life.

Household work, however frequently considered to be routine and banal, is filled with symbolic meaning. Cooking, cleaning, and care work are not physical acts but social ones by which identities, relationships, and hierarchies are constantly negotiated. For women, these tasks can become arenas of identity performance, emotional labor, and struggles over power. When these interactions are framed by unbalanced expectations or disrespect, they can have profoundly negative impacts on women's mental health.

The Symbolic Value of Household Work

Chores are not just work from a symbolic interactionist point of view; they are symbols of care, duty, and femininity. A tidy home is a sign of a woman's ability to be a good wife and mother. Homemade food represents love, commitment, and domestic peace. Child and elder care demonstrates moral value and unselfishness. Such symbolic meanings turn domestic work into much more than mundane functions. They turn into identity and social worth markers. **Psychological implication:** When women do not live up to these symbolic expectations (because they are tired, ill, or working), they can experience guilt, shame, or inadequacy. Internalizing these meanings makes them more susceptible to anxiety and depression.

Role-Taking and Identity Construction

George Herbert Mead's theory of role-taking assists us in understanding how women internalize domestic roles. Through encountering family, neighbors, and kin, women come to "see themselves" from the other's point of view. To illustrate, a daughter-in-law in Kolkata might picture how her mother-in-law views her domestic performance. If she is not cooking on time, she expects disapproval and makes an adjustment. These expectations gradually form her sense of self.

For jobless women, domestic work tends to be the sole source of identity. Their value lies in being an effective homemaker. For working women, several roles have to be balanced simultaneously: corporate executive, mother, wife, daughter-in-law. The tension between these roles tends to generate psychological tension. **Psychological implication:** The ongoing tension of role-taking promotes fragmentation of identity. Women tend to feel they are "never enough," as employees or homemakers, and experience chronic stress and self-doubt.

Stigma and Labeling in Domestic Situations

Symbolic interactionists further underscore labeling as a process by which identities are socially constructed. In domestic situations, labeling occurs when women's domestic

performances are evaluated and classified. A woman who doesn't keep her house pristine may be labeled as "lazy" or "careless." A woman who is away from home for more time may be labeled as a "bad mother."

In contrast, a woman who specializes in only chores can be termed "traditional" or "dependent."

Labels influence self-concept and mental health. Women who take on negative labels usually experience stigma-related stress, with ramifications of low self-esteem and depressive symptoms. In Kolkata, these labels are especially potent in joint families where mothers-in-law or relatives watch and judge domestic work. The social policing of women's work provides a stigmatizing context, which fuels mental health problems.

The "Definition of the Situation" and Domestic Negotiations

W.I. Thomas, one of the early symbolic interactionists, claimed that situations are real if they have been defined as real. This applies directly to domestic work. If the family defines cooking as women's work, then her inability to cook becomes a moral failure. If family work is defined as family tasks, then women will feel less stress. Social definition of chores in the family decides women's mental health outcomes. In Kolkata, the majority of families still define family work as a woman's natural role. This definition reinforces inequality and mental stress.

Mental health implication: Women are perpetually under stress when their individual concept of fairness conflicts with the family's sense of responsibilities. Such conflict tends to create frustration, resentment, and feelings of being trapped.

Emotional Labor and Symbolic Interaction

Arlie Hochschild, while extending interactionist theory, highlights emotional labor-the management of emotions in order to conform to social demands. Household tasks are closely associated with emotional performances.

They are not only expected to cook but also to do so lovingly. Cleaning needs to be done with a happy disposition, not bitterness. Taking care of children or in-laws needs to look altruistic and effortless. This requirement to tag positive feelings to chores means women need to keep exhaustion, resentment, or monotony at bay. In interactionist language, they need to "perform" feelings that conform to symbolic notions of femininity.

Mental health implication: Ongoing emotional repression causes emotional dissonance, resulting in psychological fatigue, irritability, and burnout.

Daily Interactions and the Reinforcement of Masculinity and Femininity

Symbolic interactionism draws attention to how everyday micro-interactions reinforce masculinity and femininity. Simple comments, gestures, or silences about household chores reinforce inequity.

A husband who nonchalantly says, "What's for dinner?" reinforces the expectation that it is his wife's responsibility to cook.

In-laws who object to the tidiness of the home police the daughter-in-law's labor.

Children crying out, "Ma, where's my school uniform?" reinforce maternal duty.

Despite appearing small, such repeated interactions add up to a formidable system of gendered norms. Psychological implication: The aggregate burden of micro-interactions becomes a psychological load. Women internalize the notion that their value exists in perpetual service, dismantling their sense of agency and leading to stress disorders.

Conclusion

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

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