

Work Life Balance Among working Women and Housewives in Madhesh Province

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Abstract

In Madhesh Province, Nepal, where sociocultural traditions, patriarchal norms, caste practices, purdah customs, child marriage, and joint family arrangements have a significant impact on women's everyday lives, this qualitative study investigates work-life balance among working women and housewives. Through in-depth interviews, observation, and a review of secondary literature, the study investigates how women face dual loads from professional job, childcare, domestic duties, and agricultural labor. The study concludes that shared household responsibilities, supportive institutional policies, women's education, entrepreneurship, political participation, and gender-sensitive social transformation are essential to improve women's wellbeing and work-life balance in Madhesh Province, even though women's autonomy and participation in education and employment have gradually increased. Government office schedules, unequal domestic labor, insufficient rest, and social expectations contribute to stress, fatigue, and health-related challenges. Stress, exhaustion, and health-related issues are exacerbated by government office schedules, unequal home work, lack of sleep, and social expectations. While joint family systems help with childcare, they can also lead to conflict between family members. The study comes to the conclusion that improving women's well-being and work-life balance in Madhesh Province requires shared home responsibilities, supportive institutional policies, women's education, entrepreneurship, political engagement, and gender-sensitive societal reform.

Keywords: patriarchal culture, work- life balance, Madhesh Province, gender role, women empowerment

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Introduction

The purdah system, casteism, joint family responsibilities, and strict gender norms are just a few of the deeply rooted socio-cultural systems in Madhesh Province that significantly limit women's mobility, autonomy, and participation in both paid and domestic fields. According to McCleary-Sills et al. (2015), child marriage is a widespread regional

tradition that further restricts women's agency and maintains the double burden of labor, creating unequal work-life dynamics for both housewives and working women.

The growing number of married women pursuing professional professions has made juggling work and home obligations more difficult. In Nepalese society, women are still burdened physically, emotionally, and professionally by traditional gender-based home tasks (Rawat, 2025). A comprehensive analysis of the literature on work-life balance reveals its dynamic character, the methodological predominance of quantitative studies, and the ongoing gaps in knowledge across industries (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2021). Workplace stress, family obligations, and social support networks all have a significant impact on working women's work-life balance, which has an impact on their general wellbeing and productivity (Joshi, 2024). Despite Nepal's constitutional provisions for women's employment, public sector women continue to bear the twin responsibilities of household and professional tasks, which has a substantial impact on their performance and work-life balance (Shahi, 2023). Cafés in Birgunj are examples of urban employment and leisure spaces that reflect shifting work-life patterns, where everyday experiences and happiness are influenced by service quality, cost, and atmosphere (Karn et al., 2025).

A safe work culture in Madhesh is essential for sustainable institutional and infrastructural development. Research by Lama et al. (2019) emphasizes that identifying occupational hazards and conducting proper risk assessments are critical for minimizing accidents and improving worker safety in construction projects. Similarly, studies on Green Human Resource Management by Mishra and collaborators highlight the importance of environmentally responsible

workplace practices, employee well-being, and institutional sustainability in creating healthy organizational environments.

Recent research further suggests that digital transformation, human-AI collaboration, and quality institutional support can strengthen workplace efficiency and safety culture in Nepalese institutions. In the context of Madhesh, universities and organizations can play a transformative role by promoting occupational safety awareness, ethical work behavior, green workplace policies, and skill development to harness the demographic dividend and ensure long-term social and economic progress (Tamang & Mishra, 2022; Mishra, 2024).

Women's Work-Life Balance in Madhesh Province: Socio-Cultural, Institutional, and Psychological Aspects

In Madhesh Province, women's work-life balance is influenced by institutional and cultural factors, such as set government office hours, social expectations that prioritize the home, and women's primary role in providing care for their families. Issues like intra-family jealousy and unequal workload continue despite joint family support in childcare. Due to their simultaneous responsibilities at home and at work, women have less time for rest and sleep, which can result in health issues, stress, and exhaustion. These difficulties emphasize the necessity of shared family obligations and supporting policies. Similar structural and experience gaps in organizational life also influence women's work-life balance and dual-role pressures, and Madhesh's management education exhibits theory-practice gaps (Karn, 2026). In Nepal, women's dual roles and general well-being are impacted by sociocultural and economic limitations that limit their ability to fulfill their demands (Karn et al., 2025a). Madheshi women experience many forms of discrimination that

impact their social and economic roles, making it more difficult for them to maintain a work-life balance and limiting their prospects for fair participation (Yadav, 2024a). Work-life balance is greatly impacted by emotional intelligence and stress management because emotional control improves wellbeing and interpersonal harmony by assisting people in managing professional and family demands (Karn, 2024). In Madhesh Province, women's responsibilities in family, education, and socioeconomic growth are influenced by sociocultural norms, customs, and philosophical ideas that also determine work-life balance (Karn, 2025b).

Patriarchal Structures, Domestic Burden, and Women's Constrained Autonomy in Madhesh

The research emphasizes how gender norms and sociocultural customs serve as deeply ingrained processes that legitimate and maintain patriarchal dominance in Madheshi society. The socially imposed subordinate placing of women limits their life prospects, mobility, and autonomy in both personal and public realms, making gender inequality and violence mutually reinforcing occurrences (Dahal et al., 2022). In addition to creating and maintaining inequality, a widespread power struggle that operates at the interpersonal and sociocultural levels exposes women to violence as a tool of control. Understanding Terai-Madhesh women's work-life balance in this environment requires placing their experiences within these overlapping forces of gendered subordination, power, and tradition. In accordance with the literature, gender roles and sociocultural customs in Madheshi culture function as structural forces which constrain women's autonomy in both private and public domains and normalize patriarchal power (Dahal et al., 2022). Social expectations associated with women's duties as mothers and household members continue to significantly restrict their

involvement in the labor force, even though personal opinions may not necessarily be outwardly obstructive (Alaref et al., 2024). The conditions in which women balance paid employment with household duties are shaped by this power-laden gender hierarchy, which is upheld by internalized norms and sociocultural practices. Therefore, it is necessary to place the experiences of women in Terai-Madhesh within this larger context of gendered inequality and normative constraint in order to fully understand work-life balance.

Madheshi women's views and concerns continue to be marginalized in popular discourse despite their active involvement in feminist groups. According to Yadav (2024b), Madheshi women still use a variety of tactics to fight against traditional patriarchal systems, although they are severely limited in their freedom and mobility due to sociocultural norms. Women's public participation in Madhesh is still heavily influenced by restricted gender norms, especially purdah-related behaviors, as seen by the diversity of their involvement across historical contexts (Yadav, 2024a). A significantly high prevalence rate of 49.6% was found when Bhattarai et al. (2022) evaluated the prevalence of early marriage and its underlying reasons among 1,350 Nepali families. The study found that religion, home headship, and schooling levels were important factors affecting the likelihood for early marriage. Because early marriage accelerates women's entry into domestic duties, extending their household responsibilities and reducing personal autonomy, these findings are especially pertinent to understanding joint family dynamics. Such early role entrenchment strengthens the unequal distribution of domestic work among women in mixed family setups.

The unequal allocation of care work between men and women is closely linked to

the ongoing gender disparities in homes and the labor market (Addati et al., 2018). Women are disproportionately responsible for both paid labor and unpaid caregiving, which puts a double load on their wellbeing and limits their ability to engage in decent employment. In places like Terai-Madhesh, this gendered division of care labor remains to be a major structural barrier influencing women's work-life balance. Based on UNICEF South Asia (2023), child brides in South Asian nations, including Nepal, are four times more likely to be out of school than their unmarried peers, which severely restricts girls' opportunities for education and future employment possibilities. Girls who marry young are further cut off from social networks and community involvement, which has a negative impact on their mental health and general wellbeing. Women's limited life opportunities are strengthened by these compounding disadvantages, which have a direct impact on their ability to manage work-life balance as adults.

Although previous studies have examined gender inequality, sociocultural customs, and their impacts on women in Nepal in general (Dahal et al., 2022; Alaref et al., 2024; Yadav, 2024a), there remains a significant lack of context-specific empirical research focused on the Terai-Madhesh region. Macro-level studies on care work and child marriage (Addati et al., 2018; UNICEF South Asia, 2023; Bhattarai et al., 2022) inadequately capture the lived realities of Madheshi women at the micro level. In particular, there is limited qualitative research documenting the experiences of housewives and working women as they navigate employment responsibilities alongside deeply rooted sociocultural expectations.

Research Objective

Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by exploring the everyday experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of Madheshi women in balancing professional and domestic roles within the sociocultural context of Terai-Madhesh.

Theoretical Framework

The framework aids in analyzing how sociocultural structures and institutional practices jointly influence women's lived experiences of work and family integration. In Madhesh Province, patriarchal norms, purdah practices, and joint family systems reinforce unequal gender roles, creating role conflict and strain among married women. These overlapping roles generate a "double burden" of paid and unpaid work, affecting work-life balance, wellbeing, and autonomy. Married women in Madhesh Province experience role conflict and tension as a result of patriarchal norms, purdah customs, and joint family arrangements that perpetuate unequal gender roles. The "double burden" of paid and unpaid labor created by these overlapping positions has an impact on autonomy, wellbeing, and work-life balance. The paradigm facilitates the analysis of how women's lived experiences of work and family integration are influenced by both institutional practices and sociocultural institutions. This framework also analyzes the role and cooperation of male family members to overcome women worklife and housewife dual burden.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative methodology to investigate women's lived experiences of work-life balance through in-depth interviews and close observation carried out in Madhesh Province. While direct observation recorded common domestic and professional realities

within sociocultural settings, in-depth interviews collected the personal narratives of working women and housewives. Additionally, the study has a solid foundation in secondary source review, utilizing peer-reviewed journals, national and international publications, and policy papers. When combined, these three techniques allowed for thorough triangulation, guaranteeing reliable and contextually rich results about the twofold burden faced by Madheshi women.

Results & Discussion

Social, Cultural, and Family Factors Affecting Madhesh Province Women's Work-Life Balance

Madhesh Province is one of the most densely populated provinces in Nepal, a federal democratic republic with seven provinces. As of right now, Madhesh does not have an impressive literacy rate or higher education index, and it faces difficulties with economic and industrial growth. Among them, Madhesh Province has one of Nepal's densest populations. Madhesh still lacks a noteworthy higher education index and literacy rate, and the country's industrial and economic development is extremely difficult.

Employing in-depth interviews, observations, and a thorough analysis of secondary research sources, this study examined various social, cultural, and familial factors affecting the work-life balance of women in Nepal's Madhesh Province. These factors included the practice of Purdah, women's freedom to move outside the home, social values and cultural beliefs, the caste system, women's participation in agriculture, the joint family structure, division of family labor, career decisions while taking childcare into account, and freedom of expression. Based on these factors, the state of work-life balance for women working both inside and outside the home. This

study examined numerous social, cultural, and familial aspects influencing women's work-life balance in Madhesh Province, Nepal, through in-depth interviews, observations, and a thorough analysis of secondary research sources. The practice of Purdah, women's freedom to live away from home, social values and cultural beliefs, the caste system, women's involvement in agriculture, the joint family structure, the division of family labor, career decisions that take childcare into consideration, and freedom of expression were all important components of the study. The situation of work-life balance for women who work both inside and outside the home was examined based on these factors.

Purdah Customs and Patriarchal Decision-Making Continue in Rural Madhesh

Madhesi women now have more independence than they did in the past, according to observations of current situations and in-depth interviews with housewives and women who work outside the home in Madhesh Province. In addition to having more freedom to voice their opinions, the practice of purdah has decreased significantly.

Despite Madhesh province's patriarchal society and relatively low literacy rate give men's opinions more weight in family and social decisions due to their greater experience in the home and outside world, women's opinions are not entirely disregarded; rather, a thorough consideration of family decisions is observed. The study specifically noted that newly married women in rural areas still observe purdah towards their elders, but freedom of expression has significantly increased. Despite Madhesh Province's patriarchal culture and very low literacy rate, men's opinions are given more weight in family and social decisions because they have more life experience both inside and outside the home. However, women's

perspectives are not entirely disregarded; instead, a thorough analysis of family choices is noted.

The study also found that the social structure of the Madhesh region is deeply rooted in its cultural beliefs, values, and traditional faiths. Newly married women here follow the tradition of wearing a veil or purdah in front of their husband's elder brother, father-in-law, and other elder family members. Women who follow these cultural practices are considered polite, cultured, and dignified in society.

Women's Work-Life Challenges, Government Work Schedules, and Dual Responsibilities

The study found that the biggest challenge facing housewives and working women in Nepal's Madhesh region is maintaining a work-life balance. Whether women work outside the home or not, the primary responsibility for household labor was found to rest with women, both in family and social settings. Completing household chores on time and thoroughly was considered extremely important for women.

Due to the Nepali government's 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. office hours, the study discovered that women who work in government offices have incredibly hectic schedules. They have to get up very early, get their kids ready, send them to school, respect and care for family members, prepare breakfast for everyone, do kitchen chores, clean the house, and, depending on the distance to the office, leave home early. Many of the women in the study acknowledged that these dual responsibilities cause many challenges and stresses in their personal and professional lives. They have to get up very early, prepare their kids, send them to school, treat family members with respect and care, make breakfast for everyone, clean the house, do kitchen chores, and, depending on how far it is to the office, leave the house early. Numerous women in the

research acknowledged that these dual duties lead to a number of challenges and stressors in their personal and professional life.

The Effects of Family Structure and Household Duties on Women's Health and Work-Life Balance

It was also found that women not only have to perform daily household chores but are also primarily responsible for entertaining guests. Whether women are employed outside the home or not, completing household responsibilities in a timely and systematic manner is seen as a social expectation. As a result, women working both at home and outside the home experience greater fatigue, insufficient sleep, and mental stress. The study also indicated that constant mental and physical stress increases the risk of women developing various physical and mental health problems prematurely.

Family structure was also found to be an important determinant of women's work-life balance. In joint family structures, if in-laws or other elder family members are available to care for children, women face relatively less difficulty working outside the home. In contrast, women in nuclear families found it more challenging to balance office work with childcare. Consequently, many women postponed their careers until their children were older or opted for extended family planning. In-depth interviews and observations during the study also revealed that women face various physical and health-related problems due to becoming mothers at an older age.

Caste, Child Marriage, Domestic Work, and Cultural Expectations Affecting Madhesh Province Women's Work-Life Balance

In addition, caste was also considered an important social factor in the study of "Work-Life Balance among Working Women and Housewives in Madhesh Province." The study

found that conservative practices had a lesser impact among those considered higher castes, while conservative beliefs and traditions were more prevalent among those considered lower castes. As a result, many women did not have complete freedom to work outside the home, or they were permitted to work only to a limited extent.

Due to the relatively low number of previously published studies related to housewives and women working outside the home in Madhesh, this research also included international studies as references. The study found that child marriage still exists as a serious social problem in Madhesh. Due to early marriage, many girls are not fully physically and mentally mature, yet they are burdened with household chores, agricultural work, and family responsibilities.

The study found that after marriage, women are expected to labor in the fields, take care of the home, and share family responsibilities equally, while their age and health are not given adequate consideration. As a result, the risk of various physical and mental illnesses among women increased. Although this study primarily focuses on women's work-life balance, it clearly reveals that in the social context of Madhesh Pradesh, women's domestic work is considered more important than outside work.

The study also found that the safety and care of children, both present and future, play a crucial role in the career decisions of women in Madhesh Pradesh. Before marriage, women have relatively little freedom to travel outside the home or work outside. Similarly, even immediately after marriage, women are not easily permitted to work outside the home in offices. According to the study, most women are not permitted outside employment until their children reach school-going age or are sufficiently secure for the family.

However, due to the relatively low literacy rate of women in Madhesh Pradesh, their participation in the agricultural sector was found to be high. The study found that, both before and immediately after marriage, women are required to contribute to household chores as well as agricultural labor, a nearly mandatory social obligation. Thus, women's contributions are not limited to domestic responsibilities, but also serve as a vital foundation for agriculture and the family economy.

Considering Nepal's current precarious economic situation and rising inflation, working has become practically necessary for both men and women to meet the family's financial needs. However, this situation is more difficult for women because they must manage all household responsibilities while working outside the home in offices, agriculture, or other workplaces. The study specifically revealed that women do not receive even a single day off from household chores; during in-depth interviews and observations, the most common issues women reported were insufficient sleep, persistent fatigue, and mental stress, which can increase irritability and marital tensions. However, it was discovered that this condition is more difficult for women because they must successfully manage all household duties while working outside the home in offices, farms, or other occupations.

In particular, the survey found that women are not given a single day off from domestic duties. The most frequent issues that women mentioned during in-depth interviews and observations were mental stress, chronic exhaustion, and inadequate sleep. The study also discovered that marital conflicts and irritation might be exacerbated by ongoing physical and mental stress.

According to the study's findings, women in the Madhesi region can better manage their

outside work and domestic responsibilities, consistent with their educational qualifications and capabilities, if male household members play a balanced and supportive role in household tasks. This could reduce women's mental stress, improve their work-life balance, and lead healthier and more balanced lives. In most cases, women were found to be primarily responsible for household tasks, making it difficult for them to balance their professional and family responsibilities. Women were found to be mostly in charge of household chores, which made it challenging for them to juggle their obligations to their families and careers.

The results of the study show that women in the Madhesi region may better manage their outside employment and domestic responsibilities in accordance with their educational credentials and talents if male household members play a balanced and supportive role in household tasks. Women may experience less mental stress, have better work-life balance, and live healthier, more balanced lives as a result.

Based on the study, Madhesh Province takes its culture, festivals, traditions, social values, and beliefs very seriously. Because women are seen as symbols of family honor, dignity, and lineage within this socio-cultural structure, women are primarily responsible for maintaining family prestige, taking care of the household, respecting social and cultural values, and upholding traditional norms. The study also found that women play a crucial role in observing and managing festivals, rituals, fasting practices, and religious ceremonies. Women are frequently considered the "Lakshmi" of the household. Women are seen as representations of family honor, dignity, and ancestry under this sociocultural framework. As a result, it was discovered that women were primarily responsible for upholding traditional norms,

taking care of the home, following social and cultural values, and sustaining family reputation.

The study also showed how important it is for women to observe and oversee religious events, fasting customs, festivals, and rituals. Because women are frequently seen as the "Lakshmi" of the home, they bear a substantial portion of the burden of upholding social, religious, and cultural customs.

During the in-depth interviews, many women mentioned that even during menstruation—a natural biological process occurring every month—they are still expected to manage both household responsibilities and outside work simultaneously. The study indicated that although the male-dominated social structure cannot be considered entirely authoritarian, the unequal distribution of household responsibilities and duties places additional physical and psychological pressure on women.

Consequently, women were found to experience higher levels of physical discomfort, fatigue, and mental stress. The findings suggest that if household responsibilities and duties were shared more equally within families, women in Madhesh Province could achieve a healthier work-life balance and experience improvements in both their physical and mental well-being.

Conclusion

The study concludes that patriarchal norms, unequal domestic responsibilities, child marriage, cultural expectations, and limited autonomy continue to pose serious work-life balance challenges for women in Madhesh Province. While women's participation in education and employment has gradually increased, household labor and caregiving remain primarily female responsibilities. These dual burdens contribute to stress, fatigue, and health-related issues among both working women and housewives.

The findings highlight the significance of supportive family structures, shared household responsibilities, women's empowerment, and gender-sensitive institutional policies to improve women's wellbeing and work-life balance. Household work and childcare continue to be predominantly female tasks, notwithstanding a progressive increase in women's participation in school and employment. Both working women and housewives experience stress, exhaustion, and health issues as a result of these combined duties. In order to enhance women's wellbeing and work-life balance in Madhesh Province, the results highlight the significance of supportive family structures, shared home tasks, women's empowerment, and gender-sensitive institutional policies.

Recommendation

Women's health, entrepreneurship, education, and autonomous social participation should be prioritized; joint families should provide supportive childcare environments while minimizing intra-family conflicts; Madhesh Province should encourage equal participation of women in household, social, political, and professional activities; family members, especially men, should share domestic responsibilities to reduce women's stress, sleep deprivation, and health problems; flexible government office policies and supportive workplace practices are needed to improve work-life balance; and awareness campaigns led by Madheshi women. To lessen women's stress, lack of sleep, and health issues, family members—especially men—should divide household chores. To enhance work-life balance, flexible government office policies and encouraging working practices are required. Priorities should be given to women's health, business, education, and independent social engagement. Joint families should minimize intrafamily disputes

while offering nurturing childcare settings. It is highly advised that Madheshi women lead awareness campaigns that support gender sensitivity, equality, and cultural growth.

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