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The Well-Being of Executive-Level Working Women in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Society, in general, recognizes men as breadwinners and women as housewives. The traditional role of women has changed because of education and work, providing women with more responsibilities. Within these dual roles, women undergo more pressure that negatively affects their well-being which hinders positive and meaningful outcomes of their physical, mental, and social development. Currently, the 'well-being of women' has become a debatable theme in the world community. Literature draws more attention to poor, rural, and less educated women. As women's roles have extended throughout every sector of society, it is important to identify the well-being of women who represent educated employees. This study used mixed research methods with a convenience sampling method adopted among 100 working women at the executive level. Data was collected via a survey, in-depth interviews, and discussions, and was analyzed critically. The study found that most informants who earn a considerable salary have been deprived of their well-being. Because of their very busy lives, they face role conflicts in fulfilling their responsibilities. Higher workload, lack of relaxation and recreation opportunities, negligence of personal health and other basic needs, as well as sexual harassment and social attitudes, etc., negatively affect their social, physical, and mental well-being. All in all, most women have been unable to utilize their education to achieve successful, healthy, and happy lives by improving their well-being. Taking more productive actions for the improvement of women's well-being in all aspects would be highly beneficial to women, families, and the entire society.

1. Introduction

According to the statistics of the United Nations World Population Prospects (2022) 3.97 billion males represent 50.42% of the world population, while 49.58% are females. In Sri Lanka, the male population is reported as 49.3%, while the female population is reported as 50.7% of the total population in 2023 (Population Division - Sri Lanka population, 2023).

Even though women represent half of the current world population, in many aspects, compared to men, women do not have the same opportunities. Throughout the whole of human history, women have played a significant and crucial role in the existence of human beings. She gives birth and life to every human being. She bears the major responsibilities of each society in the world throughout the whole of history as a mother, housewife, and competent worker. Women are considered the core of every culture because of their multiple duties. The significant factor for women is their multiple capacities caring for children, old people, sick people, and other members of the family. Helping neighbors, relatives, friends, community organizations, religious groups, etc. are common social activities in women's roles.

In some regions of the world, women are discriminated against, and their existence is ignored. Women have had to live as slaves for many decades, preventing them from achieving both personal and professional development. The contribution of women to the transformation of society cannot be denied. Throughout history, women have been the foundation of society. Accordingly, the well-being of women determines the well-being of the entire society. Even though women have always been a part of the development process since the human evolution process, when implementing policies related to development, they focused solely on men's labor based on the gender arrangements in that society. Society

generally considers men as breadwinners and women as housewives. As per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article No. 25,

"Everyone has a right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control" (United Nations, 2022).

However, even within the 21st century, women hold 'secondary status' in some specific fields that offer them fewer opportunities, particularly in the political field. For instance, less than 25% of parliamentarians were women as of 2019 all over the world, while only about 5.4% of women represented the parliament in Sri Lanka in 2020.

Within the concept of 'equity', women are still far behind men. The world has made unprecedented advances, but, in the practical context, no country has achieved equality between both sexes in sociocultural, economic, and political fields. However, many countries in the Western and European regions have had success in minimizing gender inequality.

Even though 'having education' is a basic human right, in some countries, access to education for girls is highly restricted. Girl children face many obstacles in enjoying the 'right to have an education'. In some Asian, African, and Middle Eastern countries, they are preventing girls from having an education and are forcing them to get married at a young age. As such nearly two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults are women. At the same time, a higher percentage of women represent the extremely poor in the world because of illiteracy. On the other hand, illiteracy negatively affects women's access to information and opportunities. However,

engaging in economic activities is a common feature of gender equality in a democratic society. Lack of education prevents women from engaging in economic activities, particularly in formal sector occupations. It is a known fact that 'investing in women's economic empowerment opens a direct path towards reducing gaps in gender equality, minimizing poverty, increasing economic growth, and decreasing gender discrimination'.

Gender-related discrimination should not be practiced in a civilized society (United Nations, 2022). as it often increases feelings of insecurity, low-wage jobs, and being disproportionately affected by poverty and issues such as discrimination and exploitation.

In most cultures around the world, men are considered the primary carers, while women are traditionally expected to be involved in household chores. Even in current society, this stereotyping of gender roles is highly accepted by many societies around the world without any differentiation. Particularly if a woman fails to fulfill family needs and societal expectations, she is labeled 'unsuccessful'.

However, public perceptions of gender have been changing for several decades, and there is an increasing awareness of the need to change the subordinate position of women, such as:

- justifying the equal status of women without considering inferiority or subordination.
- Gender roles are changing without rigid practice, as in conventional socio-cultural settings.
- Rules defining masculinity and femininity are increasingly questioned by various social groups in society.
- Inequalities between women and men are reducing and women are being empowered by practicing human rights.

A higher number of women worldwide represent the poor due to established cultural norms and values, the division of assets, and power relations between men and women. Accordingly, women have to bear an unequal burden of unpaid domestic responsibilities and engage in informal and temporary jobs. At the same time, women are in more disadvantageous positions when implementing poverty reduction programs. Policymakers intervene in development processes with ideas such as men being breadwinners and women being dependents.

Since the 1950s, scholars of society, such as social scientists and feminists, have drawn attention to gender-related issues in society and openly criticized the gender arrangements, roles, and responsibilities of people, such as economic activities outside the home for males and domestic roles for women, and the assignment of gender roles for males as breadwinners and women as caregivers. At the same time, when implementing policies of development, men were targeted as leaders of gender relations. 1970 was considered one of the most important landmarks in women's development. During this era, many actions were taken to increase the status and acceptance of women and secure their rights. The year 1975 was announced as the International Year of Women, while the period 1975–1985 was announced as the International Decade of Women. At the same time, the United Nations organized four world conferences on women held in Mexico in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985, and Beijing in 1995, which highly influenced the improvement of the status of women (United Nations, 2022).

Pressure groups, international organizations, women's organizations, etc. spoke more about women's freedom. Open discussions were held on the roles and rights of women and the challenges they have to face in a male-dominated society. Research was conducted and discussions were held on women and the reality of their lives, especially drawing

attention to the practices in the world from the beginning of human history up to today, such as violations of human rights, restrictions to freedom and equity, discrimination against women, etc.

The real situation of the traditional and current roles of women worldwide was widely discussed through books, newspapers, periodicals, and feminist theories. Scholars in various disciplines, such as gender, sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, etc., raised their voices against the oppression of women. Feminists emphasized the importance of the emancipation of women while educating the public on the matter. All parts of socio-economic, political, religious, and audio-visual media discussed women's status through the feminist view. Women's organizations actively worked against rape, violence, and all types of harassment of women. Within this context, international organizations as well as the governments of many countries had to give more attention to protecting women's rights by imposing new laws, regulations, policies, etc.

Traditionally, the role assigned to females is to marry and bear children. Women are mostly devoted to their family's welfare, being loving, compassionate, caring, nurturing, and sympathetic, while the male's stereotypical role is to be the provider with the characteristics of being competitive, independent, courageous, and career-focused, and holding his emotions in control. Such conventional thoughts negatively affect women's well-being, and it is accepted that men are active, independent, organized, rational, intellectual, and imaginative, while women are projected as passive, timid, emotional, illogical, and dependent.

Well-being can generally be defined as feeling good and functioning well, experiencing positive emotions such as happiness and contentment, while developing an individual's potential control over the lives of

others by improving a sense of purpose and experiencing positive relationships (Ruggeri, 2020). It is a sustainable condition that allows an individual or population to develop and thrive. The term subjective well-being is synonymous with positive mental health. According to the World Health Organization's definition of well-being, positive mental health is a 'state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and can contribute to his or her community' (Ruggeri, 2020).

Biological and gender-related differences have a significant impact on the well-being of women. The well-being of women and girls is given more attention in some societies, as they are disadvantaged by discrimination rooted in different sociocultural settings. It is generally noticed through public news, etc. that in some communities or social groups, women and girls are not given opportunities to have some facilities for health services to attain adequate levels of health. The reasons seem to be:

- unequal power relationships between men and women in some sociocultural settings
- negative influence of norms, values, and customs followed for girls and women regarding education and economic activities of women outside the homes
- drawing special attention to women's marriage life and reproductive roles

Some practices positively affect the well-being of people, such as sharing physical resources as well as emotions, pleasure, sadness, victory and loss, problems in personal and official life, etc. For example, the norms and values of Eastern societies give less value to girls than boys and admire women's obedience to their husbands. Social norms often determine the expected behaviors of society based on gender aspects and family relationships. This impacts

women's bargaining power and decision-making power within families (United Nations, 2021).

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Men's status is higher than women's even in developed societies as women's work in the household is generally not counted as a contribution to the industrial economy. Housework is different from other occupations in several aspects as it is not paid

for domestic work and is usually carried out by women (Garrett, 1987). The absence of the word 'house husband' in the vocabulary in society shows the extent to which housework is generally viewed as a female activity (Garrett, 1987). At the same time, the understanding of some communities is that girls and young women are supposed to engage mainly in 'reproductive activities. Generally, women are involved in political and economic activities less than men, and they perform essential domestic work for which they are neither paid salaries nor fully recognized.

Indian writer Uma (1997) stated that,

"...father protects the woman during childhood, the husband during her youth, and the son during her old age; a woman does not deserve freedom. Female and male workers differ in their interest in performing some jobs or meeting some job requirements. They differ, on average, in their education, experience, and number of hours worked".

Everything in a woman's life, it seems, was shaped to please a man. But what does she do for her happiness? This is a question throughout human history. Literature reveals that women in many societies are devoted to their families. In Eastern culture, women devote their lives to their families completely without considering their well-being. As the United Nations mentions, 'more than 2/3rd of the work in the world is done by women. She works more than 17 or 18 hours per day. But she has ownership for the properties is less than 10%'.

Generally, people work for themselves and others, sometimes to earn or to satisfy material needs and other wants. Karl Marx points out that 'work is an activity through which people can express their talents and find self-fulfillment' (Garrett, 1987). Many women worldwide, work for others particularly, for their families, and less for themselves. However, engaging in more and

more work during their whole lives within the dual role of women in a post-industrial society where women don't have adequate opportunities for their well-being is a grave concern that has not been given adequate attention. Taking into consideration all these factors, this study focuses on educated women who are engaging in executive-level employment and their well-being.

1.1 Theoretical Framework of the Study

Feminism is a philosophy that emphasizes the patriarchal roots of inequality between men and women, or the social domination of women by men. Feminism views patriarchy as dividing societal rights, privileges, and power primarily along the lines of sex, and as a result, oppressing women while privileging men. Feminist theories generally attempt to analyze the women's and men's lives that link personal and collective experiences to an understanding of the structure of gender relationships in society and culture (Andersen, 2003). This study draws attention to feminist approaches such as Liberal Feminism, Marxist feminism, and Feminist Critical Theory in analyzing the data and information gathered. Liberal feminism assumes that because housewives are more financially dependent on men as providers of necessities, within the traditional domestic division of labor, men are the providers and the women are homemakers. accordingly, they accept that the sexual division of labor is caused by a housewife's reliance on her spouse rather than by her gender. This theory implies that gender equality in the home will prevail on its own if women attain economic dependence (Ackerly, 2001).

A particular form of feminist theory known as Marxist feminism bases its viewpoint on Karl Marx's writings about capitalism. It makes the case that the system of private property and the gendered features of capitalism are related to the oppression of women. The foundation of women's inequality in a patriarchal society is divided labour which

can be categorized into two categories; reproductive labour, which is performed by women as unpaid domestic labour, and productive labour, which is mostly performed by men (Gabriele, 2017).

The feminist critical theory emphasizes that patriarchy is a societal structure in which women are routinely marginalized and men have a disproportionate higher authority. According to feminist critics, the most dominating experience is always the default in any power imbalance; within this context, women in society struggle with erroneous divisions that dictate their lives (Griffin, 2018). In this research using these theories, women's well-being is studied from a feminist perspective.

1.2 Research Problem and Objectives

The well-being of women is more important as they play a significant and effective role in the human development process. Women should be physically, mentally, and socially strong enough to fulfill the human responsibility of giving birth to the nation and to ensure its existence. In modern industrialized society, women hold dual roles as housewives and mothers, as well as contributing to the family economy by working outside the home as workers or officers. At the same time, society should give adequate attention to the self-health and well-being of the individual as well as the family and society. As the health of the nation depends on women, they should have sound health physically as well as mentally. If women have to suffer from difficulties such as malnutrition, hard work, childbirth-related issues, lack of opportunities for relaxation and recreation, unhappiness, victimization to discrimination or harassment, violence, and various types of cultural and social issues, etc., it may negatively affect not only their wellbeing but also the well-being of the nation. Therefore, the well-being of women should be a matter that should draw adequate

attention in the discussions of gender-related matters.

While reviewing the literature on women's well-being, it was identified that more attention has been given to women of rural, poor families representing the grassroots level and less attention to the well-being of educated women in Sri Lanka. However, in the practical context, not only poor and uneducated women but also women who belong to well-educated families and have a steady income have to suffer from deprivation in various ways due to gender-specific characteristics. On the other hand, well-being is not impacted only by economic conditions. Economically stable women also have had to face negative effects on their well-being in a global society due to various types of deprivations. Within this context, it is important to identify the personal, socioeconomic, and psychological well-being of women who work at the executive level. Accordingly, this study attempts to conduct a sociological analysis of the well-being of women who are working at the executive level in Sri Lanka by investigating the undermentioned questions.

- Why is the well-being of women important?
- What are the aspects that affect the well-being of executive-level working women?
- How does their social and economic background influence their well-being?
- How does women's well-being affect their personal, family, and working lives?

The main objective of the study is to identify the factors that affect the well-being of women.

Specific Objectives are;

- To explore the factors that affect executive-level working women's well-being referring to aspects such as physical well-being, mental well-being, and economic and social well-being.

- To analyze the impact of the well-being of executive-level working women' on their personal, working, and family lives.

2. Materials and Methods

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used for the study. The convenience sampling method was adopted among 100 working women at the executive level in the government sector (40), the private sector (35), and self-employed women (25). Techniques used for the primary data collection were surveys, in-depth interviews, and discussions. The survey was conducted among the entire sample; 50 of them were selected for the discussions, and from them, 25 were selected for the interviews. Following simple statistical methods with relevant secondary sources and drawing special attention to theories such as feminist critical theory, Marxist and socialist feminism, and liberal feminism theories, the gathered data and information were analyzed to reach conclusions.

3. Results and Discussion

Respondents' socio-economic and demographic information was collected using some general demographic variables such as age, marital status, education level, occupation, monthly income, and family type to analyze the background of the informants. Even though the number of extended families is decreasing in Sri Lankan society, 60% of the respondents included in the study sample are from extended families. Out of the total sample, 52% belong to the 25-34 age range. This age range is the period in which people have the maximum labor capacity in life and actively participate in income-generating activities. 17% of the respondents mentioned that they earn more than Rs 110000 per month, while 16% of them earn 70,000-90,000. None of the respondents received less than 30,000 rupees per month. The major

reason for their higher income is their educational qualifications. The sample consisted of educated, working women. Significantly, among the informants, 57% have higher education qualifications, such as masters-level degrees. Education is the strength that helps fight against the life-threatening situations of conventional lifestyles. It encourages a sense of security of in individual lives. Education allows women to advance beyond the limitations of the roles of housewife and mother. The advancement of women's and girls' education may delay their marriage and it may negatively impact to decrease in the future population. Education is a key indicator of development. Well-being is one of the indicators of women's development. Theoretically, educated women know the importance of education, and they know how the knowledge gained through education can be applied to personal, social, economic, and psychological development, as well as to the betterment of the lives of family members. However, in the practical context, it seems that the advantages that they receive through education are not utilized fruitfully by educated women, at least to have better health and social well-being in their lives.

As per Giddens (1992), gender equality has led to significant changes in family life. It is also described that relationships are categorized by freedom, and people are free to enter relationships on their terms rather than being bound by tradition or family expectations. Family relationships are very dynamic in today's complex social systems. The breakdown of relationships such as marriage significantly and negatively influenced family members in various ways. This study found that 21% of the women were separated from their marriages. Because of the separation from the husband, most women have to bear the socio-economic burdens of family members, including children, while facing complex issues. Despite being single mothers, they have to be economically active and struggle to provide

for the family's basic needs. In addition, these women have to face psychosocial problems as well. Clearly understanding this situation, Murray (1996) criticizes single-parent families, pointing out the lack of a male role model that can cause deviant behavior and deviant values especially in children, leading to the creation of an underclass.

Many single mothers have more courage and confidence in fulfilling the dual responsibilities of the mother as well as the father to the children of the family. However, this situation has a profound effect on women's well-being.

This study tries to explore women's well-being in three aspects.

- Physical well-being
- Mental well-being
- Social well-being

3.1 Physical Well-being

Health condition is the main index used in measuring Physical well-being. Physical well-being is extremely important for living creatures, as life depends on the physical health of a person. Particularly, women's physical health is very important for a nation, as its future relies on women with sound physical health to give birth to children. Therefore, it is important to draw attention to a girl's physical well-being by fulfilling all the requirements, including nutritious food and beverages, not after she is born into the world but from the time she is in her mother's womb as a fetus. However, this important fact is not taken into consideration by responsible members of society. It is not a wonder that some women are very weak in physical health due to their socio-economic background (insufficient income, lack of education, etc.). Even though the women who are included in the sample of this study are well educated, have a better income, and are exposed to the external world as officers, they are not very concerned about their physical well-being.

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a person's weight in kilograms (or pounds) divided by the square of their height in meters or feet (Centre for Disease Prevention and Control). In considering the awareness of BMI among the informants, nearly 50% of them are not concerned about their BMI. Even though 59% of the respondents mentioned their health status for the last 6 months as good, it was also found that most of them have long-term illnesses such as eye diseases, diabetes, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure. When comparing their level of physical fitness with other respondents of the sample in their age, 60% of respondents admitted that their physical fitness is not very good, while 66% stated that they are suffering from long-term diseases.

The other important factor that should be mentioned here is that, according to the socio-cultural situation in Sri Lanka, most women are not tempted to expose their physical ailments directly. However, it was observed while interviewing them that they were tired, stressed, and looked older than their age. One of the weaknesses in the approach to women's health at the national level in Sri Lanka related to young children, and pregnant and lactating mothers is the lack of adequate attention given to the whole life cycle of women. As a result, adolescent girls, the occupational health of women workers in garment factories, and the growing aging population group are at risk (Asian Development Bank, 1999).

The other important factor that should be mentioned here is that many working women believe that they do not want extra physical activities because of their dual role; they have to engage in work within the home as well as work outside of the home for a larger part of the day. However, they don't think that they need more physical health as they spend physical strength for their routine work for many hours per day. In the meantime, some of the respondents revealed that they are engaging in different activities to improve

their physical health conditions to maintain a healthy lifestyle, as mentioned below in figure 1.

As per the figure, the highest number of respondents (32%) had followed dieting to lose weight as a strategy for maintaining physical health. Meanwhile, 25% of them are more concerned with their nutritional level of food and take a balanced diet. Except that 22% of the respondents mentioned engaging in physical exercise regularly. Accordingly, less than half of all respondents mentioned that they were engaging in some activities to maintain their physical health. The significant factor is, that many respondents are not engaged in any kind of activity in maintaining a healthy life.

Further, the findings of the study clearly show that, although these women spend more time on their occupation and earning money as well as family activities, they give less attention to their well-being. It is implied that a lack of physical activity and monotonous lifestyles have negative effects on women's well-being. Australia's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines recommend that at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days are required for good health (Department of Health Australia, 2022). By engaging in physical activities to continue a healthy lifestyle, a woman's self-efficacy and physical activity, as well as her mental status, would be positively improved.

3.2 Psychological Wellbeing

One of the common issues in modern industrial society is that a lot of people without differentiation by age, sex, socio-economic level, etc. are suffering from mental unrest and psychological disorders. Working women with higher responsibilities and busy work schedules due to their dual roles particularly suffer from higher stress. However, many people including working women, even though they have given attention to their physical health to a certain

extent, neglect their psychological well-being. They do not consider that their lifestyle, including their routine work directly and

indirectly affects their psychological well-being.

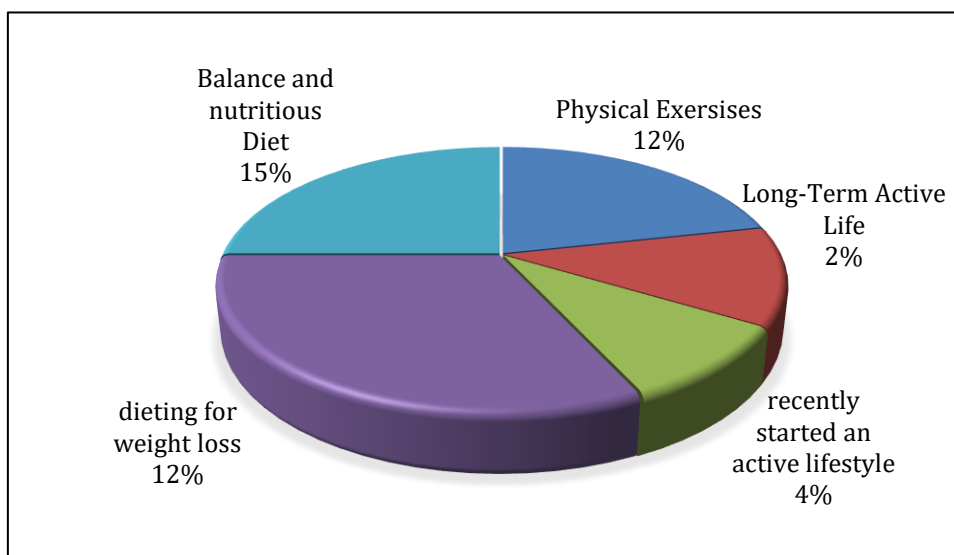


Figure 1. Activities for continuing a healthy lifestyle.

Table No. 1 below shows the stress-related factors and the actions taken by the respondents to get relief from stress. As revealed by the respondents, more than 1/3 (35.5%) of them are suffering from stress because of higher workloads and responsibilities (21.9%), financial matters (18.8%), and other issues related to work

(14.6%). A study done by the World Health Organization (2022) identified that 'young' women (22-28 years old) have nearly the same level of pressure as women in midlife who are struggling to balance family and work lives. These issues directly or indirectly affect their relationships negatively, which is one of the causes of increased stress levels.

Table 1. Psychological wellbeing

Statement	Percentage
Identified factors related to stress	
Higher workload/responsibilities	21.9
Work-Related issues	14.6
Financial issues	18.8
Relationship Problems	11.8
Actions taken to manage the stress level	
Taking Holidays	15.8
Reducing working Hours	8.3
Taking sick leave	3.3
Engaging in relaxation and recreation	8.3
Taking regular exercises	4.2
Other	11.7
None of above	41.7

All in all, in the attempt to identify the satisfaction level of the psychological or emotional well-being of the respondents, it was found that 64% of them were at a satisfactory level. As the findings of this study, the State of the Global Workplace (2021) reported a similar level of stress among working women. Accordingly, on average, 46% of working women reported a higher stress level than male workers (42%), in 2020. It was 62% in America and 52% in Canada, respectively. Meanwhile, it has been identified that well-being declines faster among employed women who have children than among women who don't have children. It was further stated that there is no place in the world where female workers' stress levels are lower than their counterparts (Gandhi & Robison, 2020).

When inquiring about the activities taken by the respondents to reduce or manage stress levels, it was found that 41.7% of them did not do anything to manage or reduce their stress levels. The remarkable fact identified in this study is that 27% of respondents think having stress is normal and therefore, continue their day-to-day lives amidst the stress. However, it was noticed that nearly 16% take leave to rest while only a very small percentage, i.e., 8.3%, engage in recreation and relaxation to have mental relief.

The study, which was on Women's Wellbeing and Burden of Unpaid Work (2021) reveals that women are spending an uneven amount of their time carrying out three-quarters of the world's unpaid work, or 11 billion hours per day.

This study further reveals that globally women undertake three times more caring for others and engage in domestic work than men. Further, women in low and middle-income countries spend more time with unpaid work than women in high-income countries (Seedat & Rondon, 2021) For women compared to men, there was a larger correlation between more unpaid labor hours and higher symptoms of depression.

Additionally, there was a correlation between increased total work hours and 'highly stable' depression among women. These are connected to worse outcomes, highlighting requirements for focused measures to particularly cut back on women's unpaid work.

Even though women bear a high workload within their dual roles, basically as housewives and as working women, many respondents stated that they are satisfied with their current lives and work. Satisfied is the most common verbal answer, but compared to other factors, whether these women are truly satisfied with their lives is somewhat problematic. Satisfaction correlates with age, education, economic status, positive personal relationships, fulfillment of life goals, etc., and an altogether higher level of happiness is the major index of satisfaction. If a person has positive feelings of personal, social, economic, and psychological status in life, that means he or she is leading a satisfied life.

In general, most women have a neutral satisfaction level in their day-to-day lives. Even though they are suffering from physical illnesses or mental disorders such as stress, depression, etc., as well as leading very busy and tired lives, according to Eastern cultural values and particularly the nature of women, they tend to devote their lives to the betterment of their family, especially on behalf of their children. Therefore, without taking rest, they work; without having adequate sleep, food and beverages, relaxation, and recreation, as well as giving up routine work even in moments of suffering from sickness, etc., they devote their lives to the success of their family members. Within this background, they are motivated to do the work assigned to them somehow or other to ensure the economic stability of the family. Also, many women are highly motivated and target oriented. This attitude compels them to bear any difficulties and face life positively. That may be the reason for the higher number

of replies from respondents who mentioned that 'they are leading satisfactory lives.

When considering the satisfaction level of social relationships, according to a 5-point Likert scale, it was at a neutral level. Everyone faces a variety of social experiences while engaging in an occupation. This is a common condition for women as well. Some women mentioned that maintaining social relationships is extremely stressful for maintaining a balanced relationship among society, work, and family. In considering participation in social, political, or religious organizations, except for 22 respondents, all the others are not participating in social, political, or religious activities. As per the reasons found by this study for not being able to participate in any kind of social, political, or religious activities, 52% of respondents said that 'they don't have enough time for engaging in social, cultural, or political activities in addition to their homework and official work'.

Work and family relationships have a major impact on women's lives because they have to spend more hours in a day with their family or workplace. As a result of this, opportunities for social activities are reduced. Most women are accustomed to living isolated lives between work and family. However, these habits adversely affect their social well-being. In considering the satisfaction level of economic stability of the family, most of the informants do not have a clear idea about economic stability. Except for 30% of women, all others were not satisfied with the economic stability of their families. It can be guessed that one of the reasons for the economic instability of the family is debts. As mentioned by the respondents 70 % of them have got loans. Meanwhile, nearly half of the total respondents mentioned that they have to bear the expenses of the family members. Wives' socioeconomic contributions to their families are a necessity as the family is the unit of all members. Every family member is

responsible for leading a better family. However, as revealed in this study, even if women earn money equally or less or more than men, in many families, the whole economic expenses are borne by the women as more family responsibilities are mostly assigned to them.

3.3 Sexual Harassments

Sexual harassment is another important aspect of understanding women's well-being. The United Nations Organization defines sexual harassment as any unwelcome sexual advance, a request for sexual favor, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behavior of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offense or humiliation to another person (United Nations, 2022). The Council of Europe defines Sexual harassment as unwanted conduct related to the sex of a person that occurs with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment. Harassment and abuse, especially against women, occur with great frequency worldwide (Seedat & Rondon, 2021). According to the Sri Lanka National Survey on Violence against Women (2019), 2 in 5 (39.8%) women have been experiencing physical, sexual, emotional, and/or economic violence and/or controlling behaviors by one known or unknown within their lifetime.

This study also found that a higher number of women have been victimized by sexual harassment more than once during their lifetime. As shown in the below-mentioned table No.02, 33.3% of them had to face unwanted attention, while 32.2% of respondents faced sexually suggestive comments or jokes. And 31% had to face inappropriate invitations to go out. In considering the places where they have to face the harassment, the data shows that 33% of participants were harassed on their way home or to their workplace while walking alone on the roads and streets, and 32.2% of

respondents were harassed on public transport. Meanwhile, the most significant factor identified here is that some women are abused or have been victimized by sexual

harassment in their own homes. Except for strangers, mostly they are being harassed by their partners, officers, or coworkers in their workplaces.

Table 2. Sexual Harassments against the working women

Statement	Percentages (%)
Types of harassment	
Unwanted Attention	33.3
Inappropriate invitations to go outside	31.2
Sexually suggestive comments or jokes	32.2
Unwelcome touching, hugging, or kissing	3.3
Actions were taken against violence	
Tolerated the incidence	37.9
Avoided contact with the harasser	21.5
Talked to a counselor	2.1
Talked to a Friend or Family Member	11.3
Didn't want a third party to know	2.1
Took no further action	19.5
Consequences of violence	
Depression	11.1
Loss of Self-Confidence	17
Feeling of Vulnerability	20.1
Difficulty in Sleeping	15.5
Concentration Difficulties	16.5
Difficulties in Relationship	13.5
Other	6.4

It is noteworthy to mention that 2/5 of victims of sexual harassment tolerated the incident. A considerable number of respondents (21.5%) had avoided contact with the harassers. 1/4 of them mentioned that they did not take any action against the harassers. Women who have been victimized by sexual harassment are exposed to other forms of consequences due to the previous incident. It affects their well-being in many aspects. As revealed by the study, some women had a sense of vulnerability (20%) after being victimized by harassment. About 17% of informants had lost their self-confidence. 16% of informants mentioned that they faced difficulties in concentration because of the harassment. Department of Census and Statistics (2019) indicated that workplace abuse and stress are related to

poorer mental health, including sleep disorders, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorders and symptoms, and psychosocial distress. Further, as the private sector in Sri Lanka does not mostly abide by the provisions relating to women's employment, a substantial proportion of women are not protected as workers. The Constitution of Sri Lanka [Act. 12(1) and 12(2), 1978] seeks to guarantee gender equality as a fundamental right by imposing nondiscriminatory new legislation. However, it is not easy to change the societal attitudes that violate women's rights.

Women included in this sample are well-educated and engaged in executive-level jobs. At the same time, it was revealed that most of them have dedicated their youth to achieving

higher jobs in the occupation structure with attractive salaries and more privileges and benefits. A higher number of respondents (52%) expect to achieve promotions or better jobs as their future career goals furthermore. However, many women could not have achieved their career goals for various reasons. Among those reasons, family responsibility is the major factor (29.2%) within their dual role. This is a common feature of Eastern women's lives. Confirming this, Halpern & Cheung (2008) noted that women in Asia still gave priority to their children and/or family.

The dual role that women play in focusing on family and work ends with retirement. In Sri Lanka, the retirement age for public sector employees is 60 (compulsory retirement), whereas 55 is the retirement age for private sector employees (for female employees, the retirement age is 50). However, there are considerable exemptions for this retirement age margin. Proper management of retirement life is a factor that can directly affect the well-being of the elderly. In the discussions, it was further identified that more than half of the interviewees (76%) had no idea of a retirement plan. This implies that women sacrifice a considerable portion of their lives including the later part of life for the betterment of their families.

Engaging in earning activities, women contribute to the family economy while fulfilling the responsibilities of the role of housewife and mother, facing numerous difficulties, disadvantages, discrimination, harassment, etc. that negatively impact their personal, social, economic, and psychological well-being. As education is considered the most powerful weapon that can be used to change the lives of people, women, in their attempt to empower themselves to enjoy their basic rights, freedom, equity, and finally emancipation, try to achieve it through education. However, as revealed by this study, even women who are educated and have better jobs do not have more

opportunities to improve their well-being, the major reason being their inadequate attention to improving their well-being.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

As argued by feminists, within a male-dominated society, women are not given equal opportunities as men (Garrett, 1987). Due to biological and gender-related differences, being a woman may have a significant impact on their well-being. Women give birth to human beings and, accordingly, contribute to the generation of the world. Therefore, it is highly important to protect them by ensuring their ability to enjoy basic human rights to improve their well-being.

According to Marx's point of view, because of the lack of wealth among women in capitalist society, they have to be powerless economically as well as socially. To have economic and social power, women in current society can use "the right to have education". In the practical context, wealth can be earned by engaging in a privileged occupation that is at the higher level of the occupation hierarchy. To have a better life, it is essential to have higher education qualifications for executive-level jobs, which helps to improve the well-being of life in many aspects.

Even though the sample of this study consisted of educated women who are engaged in upper-level jobs such as executives, etc., most of them have been deprived of the well-being of life. Even though they are educated, they do not give much attention to their well-being. This is mainly because of their very busy lives with the dual roles of housewives and working women. On the other hand, the social attitudes of a patriarchal and male-dominated society unfavorably affect their well-being. Even though they earn a considerable salary, they are not given more opportunities to improve their physical and mental well-being. At the same time, the sexual harassment they have

to face negatively affects their physical as well as mental well-being.

Within this context, it seems that these women are not utilizing their education to achieve successful lives and to be healthy and happy people by improving their well-being. Unequal power relations are reflected in male-dominated societies through sexual harassment, domestic violence against women, etc. As the study reveals, the education process does not seem to have adequately empowered women to challenge existing sociocultural practices by promoting equality between women and men. The right to well-being for women must be considered in the context of women's growth and advancement. Therefore, to have a healthy nation, women's well-being is critical in any society. Through awareness programs, media programs, teachings in education institutions, implementing favorable laws and regulations, and taking actions to positively improve the attitudes of people in many sectors, women's well-being can be achieved. At the same time, it is important to identify the barriers that negatively affect women's well-being and address the issues relating to women's well-being.

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