

Research Article

Stress, Coping, and Problems Faced by Working Mothers Involved in Child-Rearing: A Comparison of Nuclear vs. Joint Families

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A B S T R A C T

Introduction: Working mothers in India face many problems as they balance their professional and family responsibilities, residing in both nuclear and joint families. Stress impacts their health, relationships, and well-being; effective coping strategies are crucial. However, the effectiveness of these strategies may vary depending on family structure. The present study aimed to assess the stress level, coping strategies, and problems of working mothers and to seek a correlation between the stress levels and coping strategies of working mothers involved in child rearing in nuclear versus joint families in a selected residential area of New Delhi.

Methods: A comparative survey design was adopted for the study, involving 100 working mothers from an urban residential area, New Delhi, comprising 50 mothers from nuclear families and 50 from joint families. Stress levels and coping strategies were assessed using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) and the Brief COPE Inventory, respectively. The problems faced by working mothers were identified through a self-structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods to compare stress, coping strategies, and problems experienced by working mothers in nuclear and joint family settings.

Results: Among working mothers in nuclear families, 76% experienced a moderate level of stress, while 16% reported severe stress. In contrast, 90% of working mothers in joint families experienced moderate stress, and none reported severe stress. Working mothers in both family types demonstrated moderately effective coping strategies. However, mothers living in nuclear families reported a higher level of problems compared to those in joint families, who experienced a moderate level of problems. Furthermore, a weak negative correlation was found between stress levels and coping strategies among working mothers in nuclear families, indicating that higher coping ability was associated with slightly lower stress levels. In joint families, no statistically significant correlation was observed between stress levels and coping strategies.

Conclusion: The study concluded that working mothers in nuclear families experience higher stress levels and more severe problems compared to those in joint families. Despite using moderate coping strategies, a lack of support systems in nuclear families leads to increased stress and problems.

Keywords: Stress Level, Coping Strategies, Working Women's Problems, Nuclear Family, Joint Family

Introduction

The traditional Indian family structure is undergoing a significant transformation, with a shift from joint families to nuclear families, leading to changes in family dynamics and support systems. This change has significant implications for working mothers, who navigate childcare responsibilities within limited support.

According to the latest findings from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023–24, women's participation in the workforce in India has shown a significant increase over recent years. The Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) for women aged 15 years and above increased from 23.3% in 2017–18 to 41.7% in 2023–24, indicating a growing involvement of women in economic activities. This rising participation of women in diverse occupations has led to a substantial increase in the number of working mothers, who often face the dual responsibility of managing professional commitments and family roles.¹

Furthermore, the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019–21) reported that 32% of married women aged 15–49 years were employed, reflecting a gradual increase in women's employment across the country.² Working mothers in India face unique challenges as they balance their professional and family responsibilities.³ Working mothers are those women who engage in paid employment outside the home while also being responsible for the care and upbringing of their children.⁴ Working mothers play a vital role in balancing their professional and family responsibilities. Child rearing, in particular, poses significant challenges for working mothers, affecting their physical, emotional, and mental well-being. The family structure, whether nuclear or joint, can significantly influence the experiences of working mothers. Stress among working mothers can impact their mental and physical health, relationships, and overall well-being.⁵

Working mothers face numerous challenges that can impact their mental and physical health. Stress among working mothers can lead to mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, which can have long-term consequences for individuals and families. The shift from joint to nuclear families in India necessitates an exploration of the impact on working mothers' stress levels and coping strategies.^{5,6,7}

Coping strategies, such as social support systems and time management, play a crucial role and can help mitigate

stress and promote well-being among working mothers. However, the effectiveness of these strategies may vary depending on family structure.^{8,9} The growing participation of mothers in the workforce worldwide underscores the importance of understanding their unique experiences and challenges. Furthermore, limited studies have examined and compared the experiences of working mothers living in nuclear and joint families, indicating a significant gap in the existing literature that warrants further exploration. So, the researcher thought to explore the problems faced by working mothers along with the level of stress and the coping strategies they adopt in nuclear and joint families so as to provide valuable insights for promoting their well-being and work–family balance. The findings of this study may contribute to the development of targeted interventions and support systems for working mothers, ultimately enhancing their well-being and quality of life.

Materials and Methods

The researcher employed a quantitative research approach using a non-experimental comparative survey design. The setting for the present study was a home in the urban residential area, New Delhi. Prior permission was obtained from the concerned authorities to conduct the study. The study sample consisted of 100 working mothers selected from a residential area of New Delhi, of whom 50 belonged to nuclear families and 50 belonged to joint families. The sample was selected through a convenience sampling technique, and data were collected using a paper and pencil method. The data collection tool was divided into four parts: Part A consisted of items pertaining to the demographic data of the subjects; Part B included the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), a standardised tool to measure the stress level in working mothers involved in child rearing; Part C included the Brief Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced (Brief COPE), a standardised tool to assess the coping strategies of working mothers; and Part D was a self-structured questionnaire to assess the problems faced by working mothers. Validation of Part A and Part D of the tool was done by 9 experts in the field of psychiatric nursing and community health nursing. Reliability of Part D was also calculated using Cronbach's alpha, and it was found to be 0.923, indicating excellent reliability of the questionnaire. A pilot study was conducted in a different residential area in New Delhi. Final data was collected in the month of February 2025. Measures were taken to safeguard the participants' rights. Ethical permission was sought from the Jamia Hamdard Institutional Ethical Committee. Formal permission to use the standardised tool was obtained. A written informed consent was taken from each study subject. The collected data was analysed using inferential and descriptive statistics.

Results

Section I-Demographic Profile of Working Mothers in Nuclear versus Joint Families.

This section describes the characteristics of the study subjects. Frequency and percentage computation were done to describe the sample characteristics. A summary of the sample characteristics is presented in the figures below.

Section 2- Findings related to Stress Level of Working mothers involved in Child Rearing in Nuclear versus Joint Families

Data presented in table no. 1 shows the comparison of stress scores between mothers from nuclear families (n = 50) and joint families (n = 50). Mothers from nuclear families obtained stress scores ranging from 13 to 30, with a mean score of 21.60 ± 4.29 , whereas mothers from joint families obtained scores ranging from 10 to 22, with a mean score of 17.50 ± 2.81 . The mean stress score of mothers from nuclear families was 4.10 points higher than that of mothers from joint families. The calculated t-value was 5.65, and the p-value was 0.000015, which is highly significant ($p < 0.05$).

Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference in stress levels between participants from nuclear and joint families, indicating that participants belonging to nuclear families experienced higher levels of stress compared to those from joint families.

Section 3- Findings related to Coping Strategies of Working Mothers involved in Child Rearing in Nuclear versus Joint Families.

Data presented in table no. 2 shows that the mean coping strategy score among working mothers from nuclear families was 64.24 ± 9.11 , while the mean score among working mothers from joint families was 66.64 ± 8.53 . The mean difference between the two groups was 2.40. The calculated t-value was 1.360, and the p-value was 0.1770, which is greater than the level of significance ($p > 0.05$). This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in the coping strategy scores of working mothers from nuclear and joint families. This data demonstrates that family structure does not significantly impact mothers' overall capacity to cope with stress.

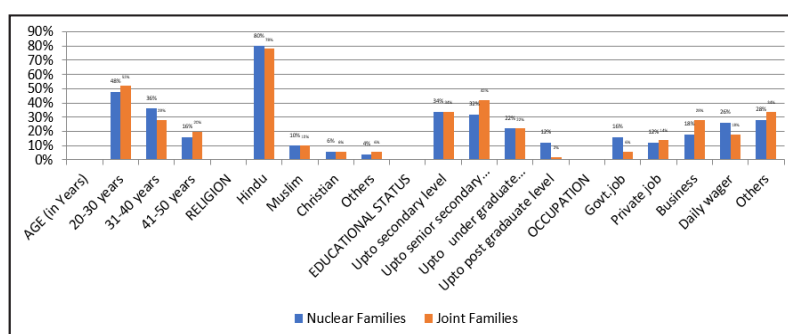


Figure 1. Bar Diagram depicting the Percentage wise Distribution of Working Mothers by their Age, Religion, Educational Status and Occupation

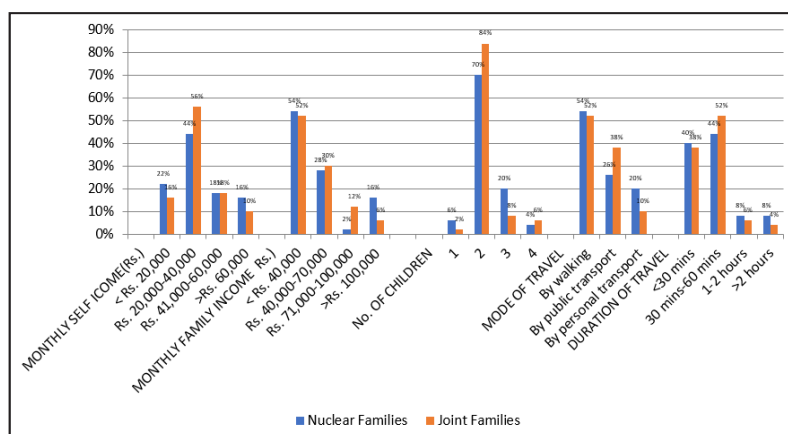


Figure 2. Bar Diagram depicting the Percentage wise Distribution of Working Mothers by their Monthly Self Income, Monthly Family Income, No. of Children, Mode of travel and Duration of Travel

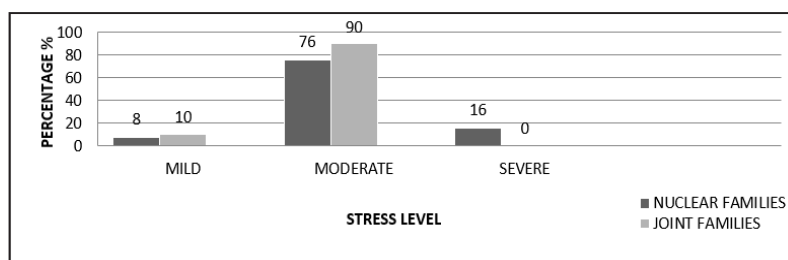


Figure 3. Bar Diagram depicting the Percentage wise Distribution of Working Mothers in Nuclear versus Joint Families by their Level of Stress

Table 1. Mean, Standard Deviation, Mean Difference, 't' value and p value of Stress Scores among Working Mothers involved in Child Rearing

	Possible Range of Scores	Obtained Range of Scores	Mean± SD	Mean Diff	't' value	p value
Nuclear families (n1=50)	0-40	13-30	21.60± 4.29	4.10	5.65	0.000015*
Joint families (n2=50)		10-22	17.50±2.81			

n1+n2=100

p≤0.05, significant*

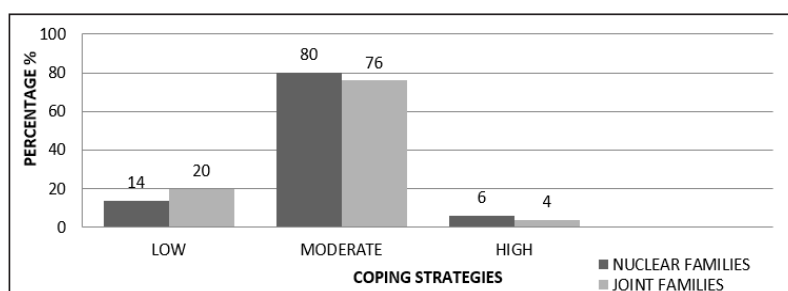


Figure 4. Bar diagram depicting the percentage distribution of coping strategies among working mothers

Table 2. Mean, Standard deviation, Mean Difference, 't' value and p value of Coping Strategies scores in Working Mothers

	Possible Range of Scores	Obtained Range of Scores	Mean± SD	Mean D	't' value	p value
Nuclear families (n1=50)	28-112	52-74	64.24± 9.11	2.4	1.360	0.1770
Joint families (n2=50)		47-79	66.64±8.53			

n1+n2=100

p≤0.05, not significant*

Section 4- Findings related to problems faced by Working Mothers involved in Child Rearing in Nuclear versus Joint Families.

Data presented in the table no.3 shows that the mean score for problems faced by working mothers in nuclear families was 32.70 ± 2.74 , whereas the mean score for working mothers in joint families was 22.98 ± 2.49 . The mean difference between the two groups was 9.72. The calculated t-value was 3.72 and the p-value was 0.0003, which is less than the level of significance ($p < 0.05$). This

indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in the problems faced by working mothers in nuclear and joint families. The findings suggest that working mothers residing in nuclear families experience significantly more problems than those residing in joint families.

Data presented in Table 4 indicate that among working mothers in nuclear families, physical and mental health-related problems emerged as the most critical concern, with a modified mean of 0.89. Within this domain, item-wise trends show that a significant majority of mothers reported

chronic mental and emotional exhaustion symptoms due to managing childcare responsibilities-related stress or worry and excessive work obligations, such as feeling anxious or overwhelmed, frustration, irritability, anger, fear, worry, or hopelessness; feeling sad or depressed; feeling restless; trouble concentrating; feeling more emotional than usual; low energy; unfocused or cloudy thinking; change in appetite; change in emotional responses to others; followed by experiencing physical fatigue symptoms due to managing childcare responsibilities-related stress or worry and excessive work obligations, such as headache, body ache, muscle tension, dizziness, tiredness or fatigue, sleep disturbances or insomnia, rapid heartbeat or high blood pressure, inflammation, gastric problems, heartburn, ulcer, diarrhea, or constipation.

Child-rearing and family dynamics-related problems ranked second, yielding a modified mean of 0.64. Within this domain, majority mothers experienced parenting stress or conflict with their partners about childcare decisions or parenting styles due to managing childcare responsibilities, such as feeling angry when childcare responsibilities are not shared by their spouse; feeling a lack of emotional support from their partner; having the duration of marriage affect childcare responsibilities; and having a lack of partner involvement in childcare decisions followed by having conflict with family members regarding childcare responsibilities due to inadequate childcare support, such as lack of family support, worrying about their child's safety, worrying about their child's health and well-being, and worrying about their child's studies.

Time management and work-related problems ranked third with a modified mean of 0.58. Within this domain, most of the mothers reported that they struggle to balance work and life due to challenges in managing time, such as managing work schedules; long work hours; workload; missed deadlines; reduced productivity; worry about job security or career advancement; workplace stress or pressure; difficulty meeting job expectations; lack of time to build strong bonds with colleagues due to busy lives; number of years of working experience influencing handling of workload; and working in different shifts, like morning, evening, night, or general shifts, affecting work-life balance, followed by struggle with self-care and

childcare responsibilities due to lack of time management, such as time spent at childcare pick-ups and time given to household activities; wishing that there was more time at their disposal for childcare; managing children's behavior; balancing discipline and nurturing; not being able to give time to engage in relaxation techniques, meditation, or exercise; and not seeking professional help, therapy, or counseling when needed. ranked third (Modified Mean = 0.58), social support-related problems ranked fourth (Modified Mean = 0.20), while finance-related problems were the least reported (Modified Mean = 0.17).

In contrast, among working mothers in joint families, child-rearing and family dynamics-related problems ranked first (modified mean = 0.82), indicating that issues related to parenting practices and family interactions were the most prominent concerns. Physical and mental health-related problems ranked second (modified mean = 0.69), followed by time management and work-related problems (modified mean = 0.56). Finance-related problems ranked fourth (Modified Mean = 0.49), whereas social support-related problems were the least reported (Modified Mean = 0.40).

Overall, the results suggest that working mothers in nuclear families faced greater physical and psychological burdens, whereas those in joint families experienced more challenges related to child-rearing and family dynamics. Time management and work-related issues were common concerns in both family structures.

Section 5- Findings Related to the Correlation between the Stress Levels and Coping Strategies of Working Mothers involved in Child Rearing in Nuclear and Joint Families.

Data presented in the table 5 indicate a weak negative correlation between stress level and coping strategies among working mothers in nuclear families ($r = -0.33$, $p = 0.024$), which was statistically significant. This indicates that higher use of coping strategies was associated with lower stress levels. In joint families, a weak negative correlation was also observed ($r = -0.19$, $p = 0.176$), but it was not statistically significant. Thus, effective coping strategies were significantly associated with reduced stress among working mothers in nuclear families, whereas no significant relationship was found among those in joint families.

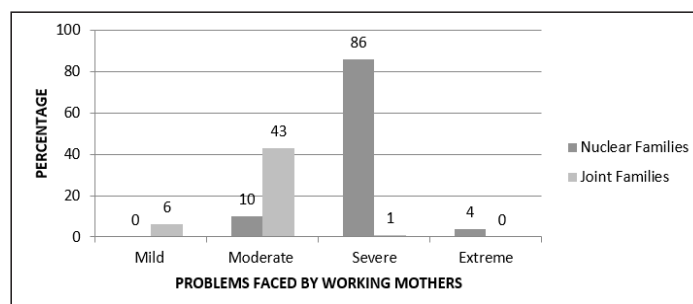


Figure 5. Bar Diagram depicting the Percentage Distribution of Problems faced by Working Mothers in Nuclear versus Joint Families

Table 3. Mean, Standard deviation, Mean Difference, 't' value and p value of Working Mothers involved in Child Rearing in Nuclear vs. Joint Families according to their Problems faced

	Possible Range of Scores	Obtained Range of Scores	Mean± SD	Mean Diff.	't' value	p value
Nuclear families (n1=50)	10-50	25-38	32.7± 2.74	9.72	3.72*	0.0003*
Joint families (n2=50)		23-25	22.98±2.49			

p≤0.05, not significant*

Table 4. Rank Distribution of Working Mothers involved in Child Rearing in Nuclear vs. Joint Families according to the Problems faced by them

	Nuclear families (n1=50)			Joint Families (n2=50)		
Domain	Domain Mean	Modified mean	Rank	Domain Mean	Modified mean	Rank
Physical and mental health related problems	3.78	0.89	I	2.66	0.69	II
Child rearing and family dynamics related problems	3.73	0.64	II	2.77	0.82	I
Time management and work-related problems	3.34	0.58	III	2.68	0.56	III
Finance related problems	2.31	0.17	V	1.92	0.49	IV
Social support related problems	2.99	0.20	IV	1.49	0.40	V

Table 5. Correlation between Stress Level and Coping Strategies of Working Mothers involved in Child rearing in Nuclear and Joint Families

	Variables	Mean ± SD	Pearson's 'r' value	p Value
Nuclear families (n1=50)	Stress level	19.96± 5.01	-0.33	0.024*
	Coping strategies	64.24± 9.11		
Joint families (n2=50)	Stress level	16.98±2.91	-0.19	0.176
	Coping strategies	66.64±8.53		

p≤0.05, not significant*

Discussion

The present study found that 76% of working mothers from nuclear families and 90% of working mothers from joint families experienced a moderate level of stress. These findings are consistent with those of Ghattannavar T. R., Nagammanavar Y. R., and Natekar S. D.,¹² who reported that 90% of working women experienced a moderate level of stress, and Dey B. K., Roy K., and Reshmi H. T.¹³ reported in their study that the mean score of nuclear families was 321.51 and joint families' was 189.31. According to parenting stress, this means parenting stress is higher among nuclear families than joint families. Both studies suggest that working mothers, particularly those in nuclear families, experience higher levels of stress, indicating conformity between the two studies.

However, the present study findings revealed that 80% of working mothers from nuclear families and 76% of working mothers from joint families demonstrated a moderate level of coping strategies. These findings differ from those

reported by Ghattannavar et al., who found that 88% of working women exhibited good coping strategies.

The present study's findings regarding the challenges faced by working mothers are consistent with those reported by Ravindranath, Singh K, Arumugam, and Kularajasingam¹⁴ as well as Wijayanto, Novitasari, and Dewi.¹⁵ Both studies highlighted the multiple challenges encountered by working mothers, including discrimination, cultural and socioeconomic barriers, limited career advancement opportunities, difficulties in time management, emotional strain, health-related problems, and family conflicts. Similarly, the present study found that working mothers in nuclear families face more severe problems compared to those in joint families, particularly in the areas of physical and mental health, child-rearing, and social support. Both studies highlight the significant problems faced by working mothers in managing their responsibilities as a mother and an employee. The consistency between the two studies suggests that working mothers, regardless of their family

structure, experience a range of problems that can impact their well-being and quality of life.

However, findings indicate that the availability of support from other family members in joint families may help reduce the burden of childcare, household responsibilities, and work–family conflict, thereby decreasing the problems experienced by working mothers. Therefore, family structure appears to play an important role in influencing the challenges faced by working mothers.

Conclusion

The study highlights the influence of family structure on the stress experiences, coping mechanisms, and problems faced by working mothers. The findings emphasize the need for targeted support systems, stress management interventions, and family-friendly policies to promote the well-being of working mothers and enhance their ability to manage work and child-rearing responsibilities effectively.

Declaration

Conflict of interest: None

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