

# Journeying through Motherhood: Balancing Personal Identity and Parenting

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## Abstract

*Motherhood is a transformative journey that significantly impacts a woman's identity. This research paper explores the experiences of 117 mothers from India, aged 25 to 50 and above, in balancing their identities with their roles as parents. The study reveals the complexities and challenges faced by mothers in maintaining a sense of self while fulfilling their caregiving responsibilities. The findings highlight the influence of cultural expectations, social norms, and professional roles on their parenting styles and personal identities. Strategies for managing these challenges and suggestions for supporting mothers in this journey are discussed. The purpose of this research is to provide insights into the lived experiences of mothers and to offer practical advice for achieving a balanced approach to parenting and personal identity.*

**Key Words:** Motherhood, Personal Identity, Parenting, Cultural Expectations, Social Norms, Work-Life Balance, Self-Care, Gender Roles, Professional Life, Emotional Demands, Support Networks, Mental Well-being, Coping Strategies, Egalitarian Parenting, Community Support, Professional Identity, Parenting Styles, Cultural Influences, Family Dynamics, Mindfulness Practices

Motherhood is often depicted as a rewarding yet challenging experience that demands a delicate balance between nurturing children and maintaining a sense of personal identity.

This research aims to delve into the intricate dynamics of motherhood, focusing on how Indian mothers navigate this balance. With a diverse sample of 117 mothers, this study sheds light on their perceptions, challenges, and coping strategies, offering valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of modern parenting.

In the cultural context of India, where traditional gender roles and societal expectations are deeply ingrained, the journey of motherhood presents unique challenges. This study aims to understand how these factors interplay and influence the personal and parenting experiences of Indian mothers.

## Methodology

The research utilized a quantitative approach, gathering data from 117 mothers across India through a structured survey. Participants, aged between 25 to over 50, provided insights into their employment status, age distribution, and responses to various questions related to motherhood and personal identity. The survey included both multiple-choice and open-ended questions to capture a comprehensive understanding of their experiences.

## Survey Design and Implementation

The survey was designed to elicit both quantitative and qualitative data. Multiple-choice questions provided structured responses, while open-ended questions allowed participants to express their experiences in their own words. The survey was distributed online to reach a diverse group of mothers across various regions in India.

## Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using statistical methods to identify trends and correlations. Qualitative responses were coded and categorized to extract common themes and insights. This dual approach allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the mothers' experiences, capturing both the breadth and depth of their perspectives.

## Data Interpretation:

### Demographic Breakdown

The sample size consisted of 117 mothers with varied employment statuses: 10.4% were part-time employed, 20% were self-employed, 52.2% were full-time employed, and 17.4% were homemakers. The age distribution was predominantly in the 36-45 range, constituting 63.5% of the respondents, while 19.1% were aged 25-35, 10.4% were aged 45-50, and 7% were aged 51 and above.

**Interpretation:** The demographic breakdown indicates a diverse sample representing different employment statuses and age groups. The majority of respondents belong to the 36-45 age group, reflecting a crucial life stage associated with significant personal and professional challenges.

## Perceptions of Self and Cultural Expectations

When asked how motherhood influenced their perception of themselves, a majority (56.3%) indicated that it both strengthened their sense of identity and challenged their preconceptions.

About 25.3% felt it strengthened their identity and purpose, and 13.6% found it challenged their preconceptions. Interestingly, cultural expectations played a significant role in shaping their parenting styles, with 33% of mothers stating these expectations strongly influenced their decisions, while 43.5% reported occasional influence.

**Interpretation:** The perception of self among mothers reflects a complex interplay of personal growth and challenges. While most mothers experienced a strengthening of their identity through motherhood, cultural expectations posed significant influences on their parenting decisions, indicating the societal pressures faced by mothers in adhering to traditional norms.

## Balancing Identity and Parenting

Balancing personal identity with parenting responsibilities was a notable challenge, with 53.9% of mothers find it difficult. A smaller group, 11.3%, found it rewarding to maintain their sense of self amidst caregiving responsibilities. Social norms also impacted their experiences, with 20% feeling conflicted and 28.7% occasionally feeling conflicted.

**Interpretation:** The struggle to balance personal identity with parenting highlights the significant emotional and mental effort required by mothers. Social norms and expectations contribute to this complexity, creating internal conflicts for mothers as they navigate their roles.

## Self-Care and Emotional Demands

A significant number of mothers (33.9%) struggled to prioritize self-care, and 24.3% both struggled and sought support. Despite these challenges, 30.4% made time for hobbies, and 66.1% managed emotional demands through mindfulness practices. However, 32.2% did not manage these demands effectively, highlighting a critical area for support.

**Interpretation:** The findings underscore the importance of self-care practices for mothers, as well as the prevalence of challenges in prioritizing self-care. Mindfulness emerged as a key coping mechanism, indicating the significance of mental well-being in managing the emotional demands of parenting.

## Challenging Gender Roles and Maintaining Individuality

When addressing traditional gender roles, 40% of mothers encouraged their children to explore diverse interests regardless of gender, and 43.5% did both this and shared caregiving roles equally with their partner. To maintain individuality, 27% pursued personal interests outside of parenting, while 37.4% prioritized their children's needs over their own identity.

**Interpretation:** The strategies employed by mothers to challenge traditional gender roles and maintain individuality reflect a progressive shift towards egalitarian parenting practices.

Encouraging children to explore diverse interests regardless of gender and sharing caregiving responsibilities equally with partners are steps towards breaking traditional gender norms in parenting.

## Influence of Profession and Community Support

Professional life significantly impacted the parenting styles of 31.3% of mothers, while 39.1% felt it occasionally influenced their decisions. Community support was sought by 37.4% of mothers through engagement with other parents, although 47.8% preferred handling challenges independently.

**Interpretation:** The findings highlight the intersection of personal and professional identities for mothers, with many reporting that their careers influence their parenting styles. While community support remains valuable, a significant portion of mothers prefer to navigate challenges independently, underscoring the need for diverse support options tailored to individual preferences.

## Satisfaction with Balance

On a satisfaction scale of 1 to 5, 36.5% of mothers were satisfied with their balance between personal identity and parenting, while 34.8% remained neutral. A smaller portion, 16.5%, reported being very satisfied.

**Interpretation:** The varying levels of satisfaction with balance indicate that achieving harmony between personal identity and parenting is a subjective experience. While a significant portion of mothers express satisfaction, others remain neutral or dissatisfied, suggesting the need for personalized support mechanisms to address individual needs and challenges.

## Key Findings

The findings reveal that the journey of motherhood is a complex interplay of personal growth, cultural influences, and societal expectations. Most mothers found that motherhood both strengthened their sense of identity and challenged their preconceptions. Cultural expectations significantly influenced their parenting styles, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of how cultural contexts shape motherhood (Arendell; Banerjee).

Balancing personal identity with parenting responsibilities emerged as a significant challenge for many mothers. The struggle to prioritize self-care and manage emotional demands underscores the need for better support systems and resources for mothers. Mindfulness emerged as a key strategy for coping with the emotional demands of parenting, indicating the importance of mental well-being in the parenting journey (Miller; Desai).

The role of the profession in influencing parenting styles and priorities was notable, with many mothers reporting that their professional lives occasionally or significantly affected their approach to parenting. This highlights the intersection of professional and personal identities and the need for policies that support work-life balance for mothers (Kumar; Sethi).

The strategies employed by mothers to challenge traditional gender roles and maintain individuality reflect a shift towards more egalitarian parenting practices. Encouraging children to explore diverse interests regardless of gender and sharing caregiving responsibilities equally with partners are steps towards breaking traditional gender norms in parenting (Banerjee).

### **Influence of Age and Life Stage**

The majority of respondents were in the 36-45 age group, a period often associated with significant personal and professional challenges. This life stage is typically marked by a balancing act between advancing careers and managing growing children's needs. Mothers in this group highlighted the intensifying struggle to maintain their identity while meeting the increasing demands of both their professional and family lives. This age group reported the highest levels of stress related to balancing personal and parental roles, underscoring the need for targeted support for mothers in this life stage.

### **Cultural and Social Influences**

Cultural expectations were a recurring theme in the responses, with many mothers feeling pressured to conform to traditional gender roles. These expectations often dictated their parenting styles and personal choices, creating a conflict between societal norms and individual desires. Mothers who actively sought to challenge these norms by sharing caregiving

responsibilities with their partners or encouraging their children to defy gender stereotypes reported a greater sense of personal fulfillment and identity preservation.

### **Professional Identity and Parenting**

Mothers in full-time employment faced unique challenges in balancing their professional and parental identities. Many reported that their careers significantly influenced their parenting styles, often dictating their availability and engagement levels with their children. However, these mothers also emphasized the importance of their professional roles in shaping their identities, providing a sense of purpose and accomplishment beyond their parenting responsibilities. The data suggests that professional fulfillment can enhance a mother's sense of self, though it requires effective management of work-life boundaries.

### **Community and Support Networks**

Community support emerged as a vital resource for mothers, although it was not universally utilized. Mothers who engaged with parent support groups or maintained active social networks reported better-coping mechanisms and a stronger sense of community. These networks provided emotional support, practical advice, and a sense of belonging, which were particularly beneficial for mothers who struggled with feelings of isolation and overwhelming responsibilities.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **For Supporting Mothers**

**Prioritize Self-Care:** Encourage mothers to engage in self-care activities, such as hobbies, exercise, and mental well-being practices. Self-care should not be seen as a luxury but as a necessary component of effective parenting.

**Seek Support:** Foster a supportive environment where mothers feel comfortable seeking help from family, friends, and professionals. Support groups, counselling services, and community resources can provide valuable assistance and a sense of solidarity among mothers facing similar challenges.

**Balance Responsibilities:** Promote a balanced approach to parenting and personal pursuits, emphasizing the importance of career goals and hobbies. This balance can lead to a more fulfilling and less stressful parenting experience.



**Encourage Open Communication:** Facilitate open communication within families to understand needs and maintain healthy boundaries. Open dialogue can help address conflicts and ensure that mothers feel heard and supported in their roles.

**Set Clear Priorities:** Help mothers establish clear priorities and boundaries to manage time effectively. Prioritizing tasks can reduce stress and ensure that both personal and parenting responsibilities are met.

**Avoid Comparisons:** Encourage mothers to focus on their unique parenting journey rather than comparing themselves to others. Each family's circumstances are different, and comparisons can lead to unnecessary pressure and dissatisfaction.

**Build a Support Network:** Support the creation and maintenance of support networks among mothers. These networks can provide emotional support, share experiences, and offer practical advice on managing motherhood challenges.

### **For Policymakers and Organizations**

**Implement Family-Friendly Policies:** Advocate for policies that support work-life balance, such as flexible working hours, parental leave, and childcare facilities. These policies can help mothers manage their professional and personal responsibilities more effectively.

**Provide Mental Health Support:** Ensure that mental health resources are readily available for mothers. Counselling services, stress management programs, and mindfulness workshops can provide crucial support for managing the emotional demands of motherhood.

**Promote Gender Equality:** Encourage gender equality in caregiving responsibilities by supporting initiatives that involve fathers in parenting roles. This can alleviate some of the pressures on mothers and promote a more balanced family dynamic.

**Support Educational Programs:** Develop and promote educational programs that provide mothers with the skills and knowledge needed to balance personal identity and parenting. Workshops on time management, self-care, and stress management can be particularly beneficial.

**Enhance Community Resources:** Invest in community resources such as support groups, parenting classes, and family-friendly recreational activities. These resources can provide mothers with the support they need to manage the challenges of motherhood.

### **Conclusion**

The journey of motherhood is a complex and multifaceted experience that significantly impacts a woman's identity. This research highlights the diverse challenges faced by Indian mothers in balancing their identities with their parenting roles. Cultural expectations, social norms, professional responsibilities, and the need for self-care all play crucial roles in shaping their experiences. The findings underscore the importance of providing targeted support for mothers to help them navigate the intricate balance between personal fulfillment and parenting responsibilities. Strategies such as prioritizing self-care, seeking support, and maintaining open communication within families can significantly enhance a mother's ability to manage these dual roles effectively.

Furthermore, the role of policymakers and organizations in creating a supportive environment for mothers cannot be overstated. Family-friendly policies, mental health support, and initiatives promoting gender equality are essential in helping mothers achieve a harmonious balance between their personal and parenting identities.

Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to a better understanding of the motherhood experience and to offer practical recommendations for supporting mothers in their journey. By addressing the challenges identified in this study, we can work towards a more supportive and inclusive environment for mothers, enabling them to thrive both as individuals and as parents.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

- **Demographic Information:**

Age: 25-35 / 36-45 / 45-50 / 50+

- Employment Status: Part-time / Full-time / Self-employed / Homemaker

- **Perception of Motherhood:**

- How has motherhood influenced your perception of yourself? (Multiple Choice)
- To what extent do cultural expectations influence your parenting style? (Multiple Choice)

- **Balancing Personal Identity and Parenting:**

- How challenging do you find balancing personal identity with parenting responsibilities? (Multiple Choice)
- How do social norms impact your experience as a mother? (Multiple Choice)

- **Self-Care and Emotional Demands:**

- How often do you prioritize self-care? (Multiple Choice)
- How do you manage the emotional demands of parenting? (Multiple Choice)

- **Challenging Gender Roles and Maintaining Individuality:**

- How do you address traditional gender roles in your parenting? (Multiple Choice)
- How do you maintain your individuality while being a parent? (Multiple Choice)

- **Influence of Profession and Community Support:**

- To what extent does your professional life influence your parenting style? (Multiple Choice)
- How do you seek community support as a mother? (Multiple Choice)

- **Satisfaction with Balance:**



- On a scale of 1 to 5, how satisfied are you with your balance between personal identity and parenting? (Scale)

- **Appendix B: Detailed Statistical Analysis**

A comprehensive breakdown of the statistical analysis performed on the quantitative data, including correlations, trends, and significance testing, is available upon request.

- **Appendix C: Qualitative Responses**

Selected qualitative responses from participants, highlighting personal stories and insights into the challenges and strategies employed by mothers in balancing personal identity and parenting, are included to provide a deeper understanding of the survey results.