
Marital and Parental Status and Quality of Life of Female Clerical Workers

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Abstract

This study examines marital and parental status in relation to perceptions of the quality of work and family roles (psychological well-being, job satisfaction, work involvement, non-occupational environment, and role demands) in 148 female clerical workers. Discriminate function analysis was used to identify variables which discriminate among married and single women and women with and without children. Results showed that income differentiates married and unmarried women and the presence of school-age children relates to greater role demands. No differences were found among other variables. These results are discussed in relation to employed women's multiple roles and vocational counselling issues.

Résumé

Cette étude examine les status maritaux et parentaux en relation avec les perceptions de la qualité de travail et les rôles familiaux (bien-être psychologique, satisfaction face au travail, implication au travail, environnement extérieur au travail, demandes provenant du rôle) auprès de 148 femmes effectuant un travail de bureau. Une analyse des fonctions discriminatives a été utilisée pour identifier les variables qui discriminent les femmes mariées et célibataires et les femmes avec ou sans enfant. Les résultats démontrent que le revenu différencie les femmes mariées des femmes célibataires et que la présence d'enfants d'âge scolaire est reliée à la complexité du rôle que la femme a à jouer. Aucune différence n'a été trouvée parmi les autres variables. Ces résultats sont discutés en relation avec les rôles multiples de la femme au travail et en counseling d'orientation.

Recently, Labour Canada (1983) projected that by 1990 a full 75% of Canadian women aged 24-54 will be in the paid labour force. The 1981 Canadian census revealed that the largest population of female employees is concentrated in the clerical sector (Labour Canada, 1983). Both the percentage of working women and the composition of the labour force are significant to vocational researchers and counsellors interested in the impact of paid employment on women's psychological well-being.

Much of the research undertaken to date, however, has failed to take into account factors such as marital and parental status and occupational level which differentiate working women. The example of the dual career couple or professional career woman is frequently discussed (Burke & Weir, 1976; Faver, 1984; Holahan & Gilbert, 1979a; Hunt & Hunt, 1978; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1976; Yogev, 1983), but is neither representative of most working women nor adequate for explaining their experiences.

To the extent that access to jobs is unequal among women, so too are the qualities of physical and psychosocial work environments which may affect stress, choice of coping strategies, and health (LaCroix &

Haynes, 1987). Specific sources of stress for working women appear to derive from home-career conflicts and from jobs of low pay and prestige (D'Arcy, Syrotnik, & Siddique, 1984). Colligan, Smith, and Hurrell (1977), in a study of 130 occupations, found secretaries had the second highest incidence of stress-related diseases. The Framingham Heart Study (Haynes & Feinleib, 1980) revealed that women who held clerical jobs had coronary-heart disease rates twice as high as full-time homemakers.

Kandel, Davies, and Raveis (1985) found that the overall level of family distress reported by women was lower than their reported level of work distress; yet family distress was more strongly related to mental health problems. While men's reactions to work have typically been explained by characteristics of the job (Feldberg & Glenn, 1979), women's psychological well-being may be better predicted by a combination of job factors, personal characteristics, and family situations (Amaro, Russo, & Johnson, 1987; Baruch, Biener, & Barnett, 1987; Kessler & McRae, 1982; Pietromonaco, Manis, & Frohardt-Lane, 1986; Warr & Parry, 1982).

Baruch and her colleagues (1987) challenged the assumption that combining the roles of wife, mother and employee increase a woman's risk for stress. They concluded that it is the quality of the experience in a role, rather than the role itself, which predicts psychological well-being. Studies have shown that differences in the psychological effects of employment on women are mediated by marital status (Amaro et al., 1987; Baruch & Barnett, 1986), the presence of preschool-aged children (Barnett & Baruch, 1985; Cleary & Mechanic, 1983; Gore & Mangione, 1983; Kandel et al., 1985), and attitudes toward occupational involvement (Agassi, 1982; Holahan & Gilbert, 1979b; Parry 1987; Pietromonaco, Manis, & Markus, 1987; Yogev, 1982). In their examination of more than 30 studies of employed women, Warr and Parry (1982) present a multifaceted conceptual framework of employed women's psychological well-being which includes a woman's occupational involvement, the quality of her non-occupational environment, as well as the quality of her employment relationship.

In designing the present study of female clerical workers and quality of life, the authors used an integrated approach that addresses both marital and parental status, as well as perceptions or cognitive appraisals of the quality of work and family roles. Clerical workers within the same organization were sampled in order to control organizational policy and structure. The job strain model developed by Karasek, Russell, and Theorell (1982) which focuses on attributes of the job environment (specifically a combination of high demand and low control), depicts both the work environment of clerical workers and the home environment of employed mothers. Counsellors know that the subjective aspects of clients' stress, the ways in which individuals experience the balance

between demands and resources to meet the demands, are critical to understanding and bringing about changes.

The purpose of the study was to investigate quality of life with the variables of occupational involvement, job satisfaction, non-occupational environment (including role demand), and psychological well-being in regard to marital and parental status. These issues were investigated in the group of women most underrepresented in the research literature and most overrepresented in the workplace: the female clerical worker.

METHOD

Subjects

Respondents for this study were female clerical workers within a large western Canadian university. The women's average age was 35 years. Over one-half (55%) of the women were married or living with a partner. The largest group of single women were those who had never been married, 28%. Eighteen percent were divorced, separated, or widowed. The majority of the women had no children (66%), 33% had children, and 18% had preschool-aged children. Eighteen percent of these women had completed grade twelve. Thirty-nine percent of the women had some university education and 25% were university graduates. Of the married women, 77% had a household income above \$25,000 per annum. Of these married women, 48% had a family income in excess of \$40,000 per annum.

Questionnaires were distributed to a random sample of female clerical workers throughout the campus. A total of 180 questionnaires were sent and 163 questionnaires were returned, giving a response rate of 90.5%. However, due to missing data, usable data was available for only 154 subjects. Six subjects' data was eliminated because they were not working full-time. In the covering letter which accompanied the questionnaire, respondents were told that the purpose of this research was to investigate the influence of paid employment on women's overall life satisfaction. At the same time, respondents were assured that their individual responses were anonymous and completely confidential.

Questionnaires

Index of Well-Being (Cambell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976) was used as a measure of psychological well-being. Eight bi-polar scales, in the format of the semantic differential, list adjectives which depict a sense of gratification or disappointment in life. The respondent indicates her perceived position in one of the seven spaces along the continuum measuring pleasurable and disappointing experiences in life. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to be .89.

Work Involvement Scale (Warr, Cook, & Wall, 1979) was used to measure the importance of work to a woman's sense of worth. Six items

TABLE 1
Intercorrelation Among Predictor Variables (n=148)

	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Age	.29	.05	-.16	.11	-.01	.23
2 Income		.07	-.16	.12	-.08	.12
3 Well-being			-.04	.48	.03	.58
4 Work Involvement				-.02	-.12	.12
5 Nonoccup. Environment					.26	.48
6 Role Demands						.13
7 Job Satisfaction						

are scored on a seven-point Likert-type scale, from "No, I strongly disagree" (1) to "Yes, I strongly agree" (7). The alpha coefficient for the scale is .64.

Quality of the Non-occupational Environment Scale consists of eight items adapted from the Life Satisfaction Scale developed by Warr, Cook, & Wall (1979). The items reflect satisfaction with lifestyle and with personal life and are answered on a seven-point, Likert-type scale from "I am extremely dissatisfied" (1) to "I am extremely satisfied" (7). Examples of items are "The way you spend your leisure time," and "Your social life." Coefficient alpha has been calculated at .60.

Demand Scale (Gove, 1972) was used to assess role demands. Five items relating to demands from others are scored on a seven-point, Likert-type scale from "All of the time" (1) to "Never" (7). Internal reliability using the Lertap program (Nelson, 1974) indicated a Hoyt's estimate of reliability coefficient of .75.

Hoppock Job Satisfaction Scale (Hoppock, 1935) was used to assess the subjects' satisfaction with their present job. The four items are rated on a scale from extreme dissatisfaction (1) to extreme satisfaction (7). A recent validation study by McNichols, Stahl, & Manley (1978) normed the scale over a range of occupational categories including clerical workers. The scale has an internal consistency of .89.

Data Analysis

Discriminant function analysis was used to control for intercorrelations among variables and to identify the best linear combination of variables which discriminate among the marital and parental status groups.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the intercorrelations among the predictor variables. Only three correlations were higher than .30. Overall, the intercorrelations were quite low.

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations for women who were married with children, married without children, and unmarried. Since the unmarried with children group consisted of only 10 subjects, this data was not used in further analyses. Chi-square analyses indicated that the distribution of the variables age and household income differed within marital and parental status groups, whereas education did not differ significantly. In general, women with no children were younger, and married women had higher household incomes.

A hierarchical discriminant function analysis was used to test for differences among the three groups. Age and income were forced to enter first, then the set of five predictor variables were freed to enter in a stepwise manner. Overall differences among the three groups were found ($F(4,260)=28.8, p < .001$) with income and role demand being the only two variables to enter and remain in the discriminant function. Age, which was forced in as the first variable, was removed after income had entered the function (the F value for age dropped from an entry level of 3.5 to 0.6) due to its relatively small initial F -to-enter value ($F=3.48$), and the strong income-age relationship ($r=.29$). After the effects of income had been accounted for, one predictor variable (role demand) significantly discriminated among the groups. Using the jackknife procedure that reduces bias in classification with the two variables income and role demand, rates of correct classification were 86%, 58%, and 61% for unmarried women, married women without children, and married women with children, respectively. Table 3 shows the results of this analysis. The discriminant function maximally separates married women with children from unmarried women. Married women without children fall between these two groups.

TABLE 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Predictor Variables by Group (n=138)

Variables	Married with Children (n=36)		Married without Children (n=45)		Not Married (n=57)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Age	38.5	9.3	35.4	12.2	32.2	11.6
Income	3.2	.9	3.1	.7	2.0	.6
Well-being	32.9	4.1	32.2	3.0	33.6	4.3
Work Involvement	31.8	4.7	30.2	6.7	32.5	6.1
Nonoccup. Environment	42.8	5.9	44.2	5.4	42.2	6.0
Role Demands	20.1	4.7	24.6	4.1	25.2	4.0
Job Satisfaction	18.4	3.7	17.9	4.6	17.1	3.9

Note: Data was not analyzed for Not Married with Children subjects (n=10).

An examination of the means indicates that married women with children are older, have greater household incomes, and score significantly lower on role demand (i.e., greater demand) than married women without children, who similarly are older, have greater household incomes, and have greater demands than unmarried women. Additionally, an examination of the classification coefficients reveals that income differentiates between married and unmarried groups, whereas role demands differentiate between women with children and women who don't have children.

For clerical workers, there is a strong relationship between marital and parental status and income. After income is accounted for, the extent of perceived role demands adds discriminating power. No relationships among other variables—psychological well-being, work involvement, non-work environment, job satisfaction—and marital and parental status were found.

DISCUSSION

After income is accounted for, self-reports of female clerical workers' increased role demands concern the combination of the wife and mother role. Women with three roles (worker, wife, and mother) report greater role demands than women with two roles (worker and wife), and the latter report more role demands than women with one role (worker). That women with husbands and children do not report differences in their overall well-being, job satisfaction, or work involvement compared to married women without children or single women supports a self-relation theory of women's development (Jack, 1987). The social intimacy in relationships such as wife and mother may be important aspects

TABLE 3

Results of Discriminant Analysis of Predictor Variables Related to Quality of Life of Female Clerical Worker

	<i>F-to-Enter</i>	<i>Classification Function Coefficients</i>		
		<i>Married with Children</i>	<i>Married without Children</i>	<i>Not Married</i>
Income	38.6*	5.80	5.50	3.36
Demands	16.5*	1.07	1.32	1.38
Constant	—	-21.18	-26.00	-21.96
% Correct Classification		61.1	57.8	89.5

* $p < .001$.

of a woman's experience and do not necessarily detract from involvement and satisfaction in employment or well-being.

The data in this study supports neither an expansion nor an interactive, gender-role formulation of multiple roles. The addition of each and any role did not affect the women's quality of life. Neither did the demanding nature of the mother role affect the women's job satisfaction, work involvement, or psychological well-being.

Gerson (1985) challenged the empirical evidence and theoretical support for role strain as a consequence of role accumulation. She proposed that role accumulation may result in net gain. Yogevev (1982) in a study of professional working women found that mothers reported working more hours than women without children but did not report feeling burdened with overwork. Yogevev concluded that mothers may not perceive time they devote to childcare as work. Indeed, Yogevev went on to speculate, the primary socialization for women is the combined wife and mother role; therefore, these working wives and mothers may experience some positive benefit from their role demands.

Gore and Mangione (1983) suggest that work may play a protective role for mothers. Perhaps employment outside the home buffers the stresses of childrearing or acts as a compensation for the increased demands of childrearing.

As Yogevev (1982) reported in her study, there was not a large enough sample of unmarried women with children in the present study for data analysis. In Canada 36% of widowed, divorced or separated women and almost half of all women with children under three years of age are presently employed (Labour Canada, 1983). More studies are needed on the quality of various life roles, specifically investigations which examine the characteristics and role patterns of employed, single mothers. It would be interesting to see whether the addition of roles, or in their case, the subtraction of the wife role, decreases role demands; or how the nature of the mother role and the nontraditional role of unmarried mother relate to quality of life.

As more married women enter the labour force, the social climate of the work environment may reinforce both the social desirability and economic reality of marriage (Cox, Thirlaway, & Cox, 1984). The single women in this study reported significantly lower household incomes than the married women. In 1982, in the clerical sector, a full-time female employee earned only 66.9% of the salary earned by a full-time male employee (Abella, 1984). This study highlights the economic difficulties single women may have and alerts counsellors to the economic consequences of the single life for women.

Although self-reported data was collected at a single point in time for this study, the independent and dependent measures are relatively objective, independent, and reliable. Spector, Dwyer, and Jex (1988), in a study of convergent and discriminant validities for job stressors, found

they could rely on self-reported data of university secretaries. The intercorrelations of the present measures reveal little contamination among measures. The present results do not seem to be due to shared-method variance or to measures tapping the same factor. An individual's appraisal of her work and home environments are immediate antecedents of her behavioural responses and are essential to a counsellor's understanding of role demands and personal resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The present findings that household income differentiates married and unmarried women and that the presence of young children increases role demands but does not necessarily affect the quality of women's lives may be helpful in counselling employed women.

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Note:

The data for this study was collected by the third author in partial fulfillment of the M.A. requirements.

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