



Mental Health and Life Satisfaction among Women in Context of their Working Status and Sex-role Orientation

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted on 100 androgynous and 100 sex-typed women respondents of rural Patna to examine the effect of sex role orientation on mental health as well as on life satisfaction of the respondents. It was hypothesized that the androgynous respondents would differ significantly from one another in terms of mental health and life satisfaction. For the purpose, Bem's Sex Role Orientation Inventory, Kumar and Thakur's Mental Health Scale and Alam's & Srivastava's LS Scale were used to measure sex role orientation, mental health and life satisfaction of respondents. Besides, a PDS was used to get other necessary information about the respondents. The data were obtained in accordance with their manuals and analysed using chi-square test. The result confirmed the hypotheses. It was concluded that androgynity is conducive to sound mental health and high life satisfaction. The androgynous women respondents excelled over their sex-typed women respondents in terms of mental health and life satisfaction.

KEY WORDS

Mental Health, Satisfaction, Women, Work, Sex-role.

INTRODUCTION

The intersection of mental health, life satisfaction, working status, and sex role orientation among women is a multidimensional topic that highlights how social, cultural, and economic factors interact to shape the well-being of women across different life stages. Mental health and life satisfaction are crucial indicators of overall well-being, and examining how they correlate with working status and sex role orientation

offers insight into gender roles, work-life balance, and social expectations.

Mental health encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being, influencing how individuals cope with stress, relate to others, and make decisions. Life satisfaction, on the other hand, is a broader concept that reflects an individual's overall contentment with their life, which can be influenced by personal goals, societal expectations, and individual circumstances.

The working status of women and their alignment with or deviation from traditional sex role orientations play a central role in determining mental health and life satisfaction. Women's roles, both in the home and in the workplace, have undergone significant transformation in recent decades. However, lingering societal expectations about "appropriate" roles for women often conflict with modern aspirations, creating challenges that affect well-being. These challenges are further compounded by race, class, and socioeconomic status, which add additional layers of complexity.

The concept of working status can be understood in various ways. For some women, employment is a means of financial independence and personal fulfillment, while for others, it may represent stress and the burden of balancing family responsibilities. Women who participate in the workforce face unique challenges, such as gender discrimination, unequal pay, and the "second shift" — the dual burden of managing both a career and domestic responsibilities. The working status of women thus has a profound impact on their mental health and overall life satisfaction.

Research has shown that women who are employed may experience greater financial autonomy, which can positively impact their mental health and life satisfaction. However, the pressure to excel both in the workplace and at home can lead to heightened stress and lower life satisfaction. In contrast, women who are not employed, or who are in part-time or precarious employment, may face financial instability or a sense of diminished self-worth, which can negatively affect their mental health.

Work-related stress and job satisfaction are key factors in understanding the impact of working status. Women employed in occupations with high stress and low support often report poorer mental health and lower life satisfaction. Furthermore, the presence of work-family conflict and gendered expectations about the division of labor at home often influences how women experience their working status.

Sex role orientation refers to the expectations and behaviors considered appropriate for individuals based on their gender. Traditional sex role orientations expect women to be primarily responsible for domestic tasks and caregiving, while men are often expected to be the breadwinners. However, societal shifts in recent decades have led to greater flexibility in these roles, with many women embracing careers and professional success, while men increasingly take on caregiving responsibilities.

Women's alignment with traditional or non-traditional sex roles has a profound impact on their mental health. Women who strongly adhere to traditional gender roles may experience heightened stress and dissatisfaction if they feel that their personal aspirations conflict with societal expectations. In contrast, women who embrace more egalitarian or non-traditional roles often report higher life satisfaction and better mental health, as they may experience greater freedom to pursue personal and professional goals without the pressure of conforming to outdated gender norms.

Sex role orientation is also linked to personal identity and self-esteem. Women who internalize traditional gender expectations may experience a diminished sense of self-worth if they are unable to meet the high standards set for them. Conversely, women who reject or redefine these roles may enjoy greater psychological well-being due to their sense of autonomy and self-determination.

The relationship between working status and sex role orientation is not linear, as both are influenced by a range of personal, cultural, and economic factors. For instance, women with non-traditional sex role orientations may be more likely to pursue careers outside the home, challenging conventional gender norms

and experiencing greater job satisfaction and mental health benefits. On the other hand, women who are employed in traditional or gendered occupations may experience role strain due to the pressure of fitting into both the professional and domestic spheres.

Moreover, the impact of working status and sex role orientation on mental health and life satisfaction is shaped by intersectionality — the idea that social categories such as race, class, and marital status intersect and create complex, layered experiences of privilege and oppression. For example, a woman of color or a low-income woman may face different barriers and stresses in her workplace or family life compared to a white, middle-class woman. The intersection of these factors further complicates the ways in which working status and sex role orientation affect mental health and life satisfaction.

Mental health challenges among women are influenced by both working status and sex role orientation. Women are more likely than men to experience certain mental health conditions, such as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders. Research suggests that these conditions are often exacerbated by gendered expectations and role strain. For example, the pressure to balance work and family life can result in stress, burnout, and mental health struggles.

Additionally, women's socialization into caregiving roles may impact their own mental health. Caregiving, whether for children or elderly family members, is often emotionally demanding and time-consuming, leading to stress, anxiety, and depression. For women in the workforce, the “second shift” — the expectation that they will perform domestic tasks after working hours — can significantly affect their mental health and life satisfaction.

Life satisfaction is shaped not only by personal achievements but also by societal standards and expectations. Women's roles as caregivers, homemakers, and professionals are constantly scrutinized, and these external pressures can influence how women perceive their lives. Women who feel empowered to challenge traditional roles and redefine their identities on their own terms tend to report higher levels of life satisfaction. In contrast, women who are constrained by rigid gender expectations may struggle to achieve a sense of personal fulfillment.

The complexity of life satisfaction also includes factors such as financial security, physical health, and social support. Employment can provide financial stability, which in turn boosts life satisfaction, while a lack of employment or a high-stress job may lead to lower satisfaction levels. Additionally, women's social support networks — friends, family, and colleagues — can play a critical role in mediating the effects of work-related stress and gendered expectations.

The mental health and life satisfaction of women are intricately tied to their working status and sex role orientation. As society continues to evolve, women are navigating complex challenges related to balancing career ambitions with societal expectations, often leading to mixed outcomes for their mental health and overall life satisfaction. Understanding the impact of working status and sex role orientation on women's well-being requires a nuanced approach that considers individual experiences, cultural norms, and broader societal structures.

Ultimately, creating a more supportive environment for women, where they can pursue career opportunities without sacrificing personal fulfillment or mental health, requires systemic change. This includes addressing gender inequality in the workplace, redefining societal roles, and offering greater support for work-life balance.

Review of Literature

Emslie et al.¹⁰ (2005), Rice¹⁹ (2009) explored how adherence to traditional gender roles impacts mental health outcomes in women. Studies show that women who adhere strongly to traditional gender norms (e.g., prioritizing family over career) tend to experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.

Conversely, women who adopt more egalitarian gender role orientations (balancing work and personal life) report better psychological well-being. The review suggests that rigid gender expectations can limit women's emotional expression and self-realization, thus affecting their mental health. Women in non-traditional roles experience lower stress and better overall mental health. Greenhaus & Beutell¹² (1985), Allen et al.¹ (2014) investigated the relationship between work-family conflict and mental health outcomes in women. It emphasizes the dual burden women often experience when they juggle professional and domestic responsibilities. The literature suggests that work-family conflict is a significant predictor of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and burnout. However, some studies indicate that supportive work environments and flexible job policies can mitigate these effects. Work-family conflict is linked to mental health struggles, but supportive work environments buffer negative outcomes. Diener et al.⁷ (1999), Clark et al.⁵ (2008) reviewed focuses on the long-term effects of employment on women's life satisfaction. Several longitudinal studies are analyzed, revealing that women's satisfaction with life is higher when they have steady employment, particularly when the job is fulfilling and provides financial independence. However, the study also highlights the potential negative impact of job stress, particularly in lower-income or underemployed women, where dissatisfaction and mental health issues are prevalent. Employment increases life satisfaction for women, especially when it provides economic security and personal fulfillment. Bem⁴ (1974), Spence²² (1984), Hofstede¹⁵ (2001) examined the relationship between sex role orientation (i.e., traditional versus non-traditional roles) and psychological adjustment in women. It concludes that women who possess more androgynous sex role orientations (i.e., integrating both masculine and feminine traits) tend to have better mental health outcomes and higher life satisfaction compared to those who strictly adhere to traditional roles. Androgyny allows greater flexibility in coping with life's challenges and reduces the stress of role conflicts. Androgynous women show better psychological adjustment than those with traditional sex role orientations. Ross & Mirowsky²⁰ (1995), Wadsworth et al.²³ (2003) focused on empirical studies investigating the relationship between women's employment status (employed vs. unemployed) and their mental health outcomes. It suggests that employed women generally report better mental health compared to their unemployed counterparts, due to the sense of purpose, financial independence, and social interaction employment provides. However, the review also notes that the quality of employment (job satisfaction, autonomy, etc.) plays a crucial role in determining mental health outcomes. Employment is positively associated with mental health, but job quality matters. Hochschild & Machung¹⁴ (1989), Gerson¹¹ (2009) delved into the concept of the "second shift," where women, after a full day of paid employment, return home to take on household responsibilities. Studies show that this dual burden significantly affects women's mental health, leading to stress, fatigue, and lower life satisfaction. However, the review highlights that supportive partners and shared domestic responsibilities can alleviate these negative effects. The "second shift" contributes to mental health challenges for women, but shared responsibilities help alleviate stress. Sauter et al.²¹ (1990), Cortina et al.⁶ (2013) focused on the impact of workplace discrimination, gender bias, and harassment on the mental health of women in the workforce. It suggests that women who experience discrimination are more likely to report mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and burnout. The review calls for systemic changes in workplace culture to reduce gender inequality and improve women's mental health outcomes. Workplace discrimination contributes significantly to mental health problems in women. Diener & Biswas-Diener⁸ (2002), McLoyd¹⁷ (1998) examined how socioeconomic status (SES) interacts with work and family roles to affect women's life satisfaction. Women from higher SES backgrounds tend to experience higher life satisfaction, especially when they are able to balance both career and family. In contrast, women from lower SES backgrounds often face higher levels of stress due to financial instability and the lack of social support networks. Higher SES leads to greater life satisfaction, especially when women can balance family and career. Eagly & Karau⁹ (2002), Powell & Graves¹⁸ (2003) explored how sex role orientation influences women's career choices and job satisfaction. Women with non-traditional orientations tend to pursue careers in male-dominated fields and report higher job satisfaction and career success. In contrast, women adhering to traditional gender roles are more likely to be employed in caregiving or administrative

roles, which may offer lower job satisfaction due to limited autonomy or growth opportunities. Non-traditional sex role orientations are linked to higher career satisfaction and success. Barnett & Hyde³ (2001), Allen² (2011) examined how work-life balance influences mental health in female professionals, focusing on high-stress occupations. The literature suggests that women in demanding careers experience higher rates of stress and burnout, particularly if they are also balancing family responsibilities. Effective coping strategies, such as social support, time management, and relaxation techniques, can help mitigate stress and improve mental well-being. Work-life balance challenges contribute to stress and burnout in professional women, but effective coping mechanisms can improve outcomes. Hill et al.¹³ (2008), Kossek et al.¹⁶ (2011) explored the effect of flexible work arrangements (such as remote work, flexible hours, and part-time positions) on women's mental health and life satisfaction. The review suggests that flexible work arrangements are generally beneficial, particularly for women who are caregivers or have family obligations. These arrangements reduce stress, improve work-life balance, and increase overall life satisfaction. Flexible work arrangements improve life satisfaction and reduce stress, particularly for women with caregiving responsibilities.

These literature reviews provide a rich foundation for understanding the complex relationship between working status, sex role orientation, mental health, and life satisfaction among women. They collectively highlight the importance of addressing societal gender norms, work-family conflict, workplace policies, and personal coping mechanisms to improve women's overall well-being.

Objectives

- i. To compare androgynous and sex-typed women respondents in terms of their mental health.
- ii. To make a comparison between androgynous and sex-typed women respondents in terms of their life satisfaction

Hypotheses

- H₁** Androgynous and sex-typed women respondents will differ significantly from one another in terms of mental health.
- H₂** Androgynous and sex-typed women respondents will differ significantly in terms of their life satisfaction.

Method of Study

Sample Used

The study was conducted on an incidental-cum-purposive sample of 200 women respondents selected from among 200 women respondents. They were equal in number (N = 100) in respect of androgynous as well as sex-typed (N = 100) traits. In other respect they were matched so far as practiced.

Research Tools

1. A Personal Data Sheet was employed for collecting necessary information about the respondents.
2. Masculinity-femininity Check List by Sinha T.N. was used to measure androgyny and sex-typed traits.
3. Mithila Mental Health Status Inventory (MMHSI) by Kumar & Thakur was employed to measure the various dimension of mental health of the respondents.
4. Life Satisfaction Scale by Alam and Srivastava was used to measure the life satisfaction of the respondents.

Procedure

Sinha's Masculinity-Femininity Check List along with PDS was employed on the respondents. The scoring was made as per the direction of the manual concerned. The subjects were grouped into androgynous and sex-typed groups as per manuals direction. Then 160 respondents were subjected to Mental Health Status Inventory and Life Satisfaction Scale. The scoring was made according to its manual. The obtained data were analysed using chi-square.

Results and Interpretation

Table 01: Chi-square showing the association of sex-role orientation with mental health of the respondents

Sex-role Orientation	Mental Health		t ²	df	p
	Sound	Poor			
Androgynous	70% (N = 70)	30% (N = 30)	18.37	1	<.01
Sex-typed	40% (N = 40)	60% (N = 60)			

It is obvious from the table that sex-role orientation has significant impact on mental health of the respondents. Respondents belonging to androgynous group excel over their counterparts belonging to sex-typed group of respondents in terms of mental health ($\chi^2 = 18.37$; $df = 1$; $p < .01$).

Interpretation: Androgynous women, who integrate both traditionally masculine and feminine traits, demonstrate greater psychological flexibility and adaptability, which contributes to better mental health compared to sex-typed women. Unlike sex-typed individuals, whose behaviors and identities are constrained by rigid gender roles, androgynous women can respond more effectively to diverse life demands. This flexibility reduces role conflict, enhances self-esteem, and strengthens coping mechanisms against stress. Furthermore, androgyny fosters balanced interpersonal relationships, autonomy, and resilience. As a result, women with androgynous sex role orientation manifest sounder mental health, while sex-typed women may face higher vulnerability to stress and psychological maladjustment.

Table 02: Chi-square showing the association of sex-role orientation with life satisfaction of the respondents

Sex-role Orientation	Life Satisfaction		t ²	df	p
	High	Low			
Androgynous	72% (N = 72)	28% (N = 28)	29.17	1	<.01
Sex-typed	34% (N = 34)	66% (N = 66)			

It is clear from the result table that life satisfaction of respondents of androgynous male group of respondents is very high 72% (N = 72) whereas for their counterparts respondents of sex-typed group it is only 34% (N = 34). The chi-square is found significant ($\chi^2 = 29.17$; $df = 1$; $p < .01$). Thus, it is concluded that androgynous is conducive to high level of life satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

- (i) Androgynous sex role orientation is conducive to sound mental health whereas sex typed trait is associated with poor mental health. Thus, mental health is a function of sex role orientation.
- (ii) Androgynous group of adolescents show their dominance over sex typed group of adolescents in terms of their life satisfaction. Therefore, life-satisfaction is a function of sex role orientation.

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