

A Comparative Analysis of Emotional Regulation and Well-Being in Adults Raised by Working and Non-Working Mothers in Karachi

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Abstract

Maternal influence, particularly the availability of the mothers, significantly shapes an individual’s personality. In Pakistan, where cultural and societal expectations are traditional regarding maternal employment, it is imperative to study how these differences influence children’s emotional regulation and well-being into adulthood. For the purpose, the present research aimed to explore the differences in emotional processing and well-being in adults of working and non-working mothers in Karachi, Pakistan. The investigation was a cross-sectional comparative study which employed non-probability, convenience sampling. A sample of 200 individuals were included i.e., 100 with working mothers and 100 with non-working mothers. Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale (DERS) and The Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) were used along with a demographic form to measure emotional regulation and psychological well-being respectively. All the ethical considerations were followed, participants were informed about the confidentiality and voluntary consent was taken. The data was analyzed through SPSS 21 where correlation and independent T-test were applied. The results indicate a positive and significant results of adults raised by working mothers in terms of cognitive appraisal and experienced support whereas no significant difference was observed in regards to well-being. The influence of maternal employment on children’s psychological outcome has been a topic of considerable interest in recent research. Findings from the current study could provide insights into family dynamics and contribute to better support systems for mothers in the workforce.

**Keywords:** Emotional Regulation, Well-being, Working and Non-working Mothers

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## INTRODUCTION

Research have indicated that children raised by working mothers exhibit distinct psychological and cognitive outcomes compared to those raised by stay-at-home mothers (Iriani et al., 2023). Some research suggests that adults with working mothers may demonstrate resilience, better self-esteem, and more democratic gender attitudes (McGinn et al., 2019). On the other hand, stay-at-home mothers, by being more present in child-rearing, potentially create a different but also structured environment encouraging strong emotional association (Kopp et al., 2023). McGinn et al. (2015) conducted a study including 50,000 adults from 25 countries and found out that daughters raised by working mothers had better probability of getting employed, securing supervisory positions and earn better salaries as compared to the daughters of non-working mothers Khan, Khan & Shehzad, 2024; Kousar, Khan & Alam, 2024; Khan, Ann & Kahtoon, 2022). Additionally, Findings from research conducted during Covid-19 reported that working mothers were more effective in implementing cognitive appraisal strategies promoting greater emotional regulation in their children (Rahmania et al., 2022).

Literature has indicated many positive outcomes for adults raised by working mothers. Lenehan (2016) indicated that children with working mothers were happier, more successful and reported to be proud of their mothers as compared to non-working mothers after surveying over 1000 participants (Chohan & Haq, 2025; Qazi, et al., 2025; Malik, Muzaffar & Haq, 2025). Another longitudinal study with 1364 US mothers suggests that part-time working mothers exhibit fewer depression symptoms and better mental health outcomes as compared to stay-at-home mothers which can be due to contentment and resilience they learned from their careers (Buehler & O'Brien, 2011). However, studies have indicated mixed results i.e., overprotective parenting may lead to emotional dysregulation and anxiety (Akhtar et al., 2019). It is assumed that children raised by non-working mothers may have better psychological well-being due to availability of the mother figure leading to a positive emotional bond and reliability.

Pakistan being a collectivistic culture with traditional family structures emphasis greatly on maternal availability on children's upbringing. As a result, the influence of maternal employment has been a complex issue within the cultural context (Rana, et al., 2022; Rana, et al., 2021; Rana, 2015). Khan and Hassan (2012) reported in their investigation conducted in Kashmir Valley that children with non-working mothers had better emotional intelligence as compared to non-working mothers. Another study from Gujranwala, Punjab indicate that children of working mothers had better emotional regulation and social integration as compared to the children of stay-at-home mothers (Akhtar et al., 2021).

On the other hand, many Pakistani researches report the contrary. Shakil et al (2020) investigated different parenting styles and family dynamics which outlined that non-working mothers provided more structure and stability leading to positive well-being of children. However, gender stereotypes and traditional expectation often lead to mothers choosing between their careers and family life due to which there is lack of support and societal pressure (Imran & Akhtar, 2023). Such cultural expectations and pressure to give up careers for motherhood leads to negative psychological outcomes which further impacts well-being of the children. A Karachi based comparative study reported that working mothers indicated lower levels of depressions as compared to housewives (Zeab & Ali, 2018). The present research specifically addresses how adults' emotional well-being and regulation strategies differ based on their mother's employment status during their

upbringing, aiming to highlight the need for greater support from families and employers to promote child development, recommending reforms to recognize women's multifaceted roles and provide better employment benefits for working mothers.

**RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

1. To compare the emotional regulation skills of adults raised by working and non-working mothers.
2. To assess the subjective well-being of adults raised by working and non-working mothers.
3. To explore correlations between emotional regulation and overall well-being in the context of maternal employment status.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT**

Maternal Employment has always been a critical issue in Pakistani society due to its collectivist culture. The debate on the psychological well-being of the mothers and its influence on the children has garnered much attention, especially in recent times. Existing literature has been found on both sides of the spectrum however limited research is found in Pakistan. Maqsood et al. (2019) conducted comparative research in the city of Lahore and reported that working mothers indicated higher levels of depression, which can have a negative impact on children's upbringing. On the other hand, another study reports that mothers who started working a year after postpartum indicated less anxiety and stress, which led to reduced internalizing in children and encouraged more prosocial behavior (Kurz et al., 2023).

**EMOTIONAL REGULATIONS AND WELL-BEING IN ADULTS RAISED BY WORKING MOTHERS**

Olivieri et al. (2024) found in their study with 218 working mothers in Italy that employed mothers who were able to maintain a good work-life balance reported a lower level of psychological distress in their children. A longitudinal research study including 7524 children outlined that children with employed mothers exhibited better social and emotional well-being and emotional regulation in their adulthood as compared to the children with stay-at-home mothers (Salimiha et al., 2018).

**EMOTIONAL REGULATION AND WELL-BEING IN ADULTS RAISED BY NON-WORKING MOTHERS**

An investigation conducted on 5000 UK adults raised by non-working mothers suggests that such adults depicted greater stability in terms of emotions and better social adjustment (Hoang Bui et al., 2022). Adding on, analysis done on 101 mothers and children in regions of the US indicated that maternal availability was a protective factor against psychological distress and concerns in children (Martin et al., 2018). Research including 200 Pakistani students from Islamabad and Lahore showed that non-working mothers are more emotionally involved, developing better self-esteem and emotional control in children (Jabeen & Anis-ul-Haque, 2013).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 represents the conceptual work which was designed with the help of literature:

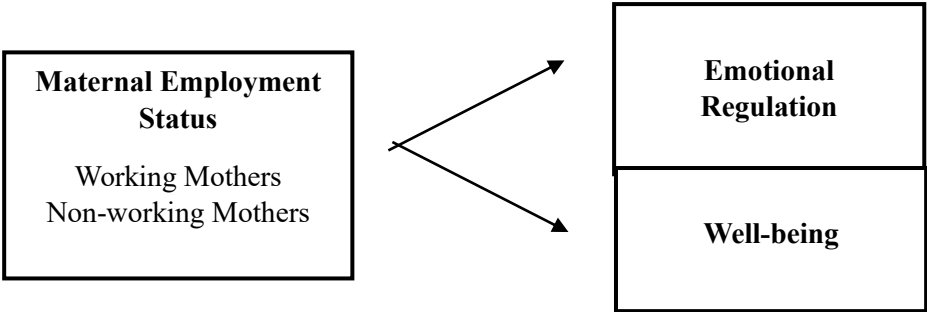


FIG. 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research is a cross-sectional, comparative study which was conducted in different universities of Karachi, Pakistan. A sample of 200 individuals were included i.e., 100 adults raised by working mothers and 100 raised by non-working mothers. Non-probability, convenience sampling was used. Adults between the ages of 18-25 years old raised by working or non-working mothers until the age of 18 and currently living in Pakistan were included. Individuals diagnosed with severe psychological disorders, raised in single-parent households and with mothers’ inconsistent pattern of work history before the age of 18 were excluded from the study. A demographic form which consisted of participants’ age, gender, education, socio-economic background and family dynamics was included to gather basic information. Following with Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale (DERS) by Gratz and Roemer (2004) to measure emotional regulation. It consists of 36 items with a Likert scale of 1-5 (almost never to almost always). The scale measures six dimensions of emotional regulation i.e., nonacceptance of emotional responses, difficulties engaging in goal-directed behavior, impulse control difficulties, lack of emotional awareness, limited access to emotion regulation strategies and lack of emotional clarity. A higher score indicates greater difficulty in emotional regulation. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) by Tennant et al, (2007) was employed to measure well-being of the participants. The scale includes 14 items which are rated on 5-point Likert scale (None of the time to All of the time). The items are divided into psychological functioning and subjective well-being. The higher the scores, the greater the well-being of an individual. The data was collected after approval from the ethical review board of Baqai Medical University. Individuals from different universities and colleges of Karachi were reached out and consent was obtained. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences. The data was then analyzed by SPSS 21. The Pearson’s correlation and independent t-tests were applied and descriptive statistics were summarized.

TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS

A total of 200 individuals were included in the study. The results were evaluated through SPSS software. Table 1 displays the distribution of participants across two categories of maternal work status: housewives (non-working) and working mothers. For each of the three assessed variables — cognitive appraisal, experienced support, and mental well-being — the sample was evenly divided, with 100 participants in each group. Table 2 presents independent samples t-tests comparing participants based on their mothers’ work status (working vs. non-working). Significant differences were found in Cognitive Appraisal (p

= .004) and Experienced Support ( $p < .001$ ), with adults of working mothers scoring higher. However, no significant difference was observed in Mental Well-being ( $p = .247$ ). These findings suggest that maternal employment may influence cognitive perceptions and perceived support, but not overall mental well-being in this sample. Table 3 presents Pearson correlation coefficients among cognitive appraisal, experienced support, and mental well-being. All correlations were positive and statistically significant at the .01 level. Cognitive appraisal was moderately correlated with both experienced support ( $r = .31$ ) and mental well-being ( $r = .43$ ). Similarly, experienced support showed a moderate positive correlation with mental well-being ( $r = .43$ ). These results indicate meaningful associations among the three constructs, suggesting that higher cognitive appraisal and perceived support are linked with greater mental well-being.

TABLE 1

Variable	Mother's Work Status	Alpha	N	Percentage (%)
Cognitive Appraisal	Housewife (non-working)	.821	100	100.0%
	Working		100	100.0%
Experienced Support	Housewife (non-working)	.620	100	100.0%
	Working		100	100.0%
Mental Well-being	Housewife (non-working)	.852	100	100.0%
	Working		100	100.0%

TABLE 2: INDEPENDENT SAMPLES T-TEST COMPARING COGNITIVE APPRAISAL, EXPERIENCED SUPPORT, AND MENTAL WELL-BEING BY MOTHER'S WORK STATUS

Variable	t	Df	p (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI of the Difference (Lower-Upper)
Cognitive Appraisal	2.88	198	.004	2.54	0.88	0.80 – 4.28
Experienced Support	3.86	198	< .001	2.27	0.59	1.11 – 3.43
Mental Well-being	-1.16	198	.247	-1.29	1.11	-3.48 – 0.90

TABLE 3: PEARSON CORRELATIONS AMONG COGNITIVE APPRAISAL, EXPERIENCED SUPPORT, AND MENTAL WELL-BEING

Variable	1	2	3
1. Cognitive Appraisal	—	.31**	.43**
2. Experienced Support	.31**	—	.43**
3. Mental Well-being	.43**	.43**	—

Note. N = 100.  $p < .01$  (2-tailed). Pearson correlations are reported. Values are rounded to two decimal places for clarity.

## DISCUSSION

The present research included 200 participants to study the comparison of emotional regulation and psychological well-being in adults raised by working and non-working women. The results show that adults raised by employed mothers indicate higher levels of cognitive appraisal and experienced support as compared to stay-at-home mothers. Also, a significant correlation was observed in all three variables i.e., cognitive appraisal, experienced support and mental well-being suggesting that cognitive appraisal and experienced support leads to a better psychological well-being. These findings are consistent with the research available as well. As stated by a study, mothers who are working but are able to provide care and appropriate responsiveness encourage better processing of emotions and cognitive appraisal strategies (Martin et al., 2018). A UK based qualitative study reported that children of working mothers experienced a greater level of social experiences encouraging better social adjustment and emotional processing (Ren et al., 2021).

Similar results have been observed in Pakistani researches as well. Tahir and Jabeen (2022) outlined in their research that children with working mothers were able to perform better in emotional intelligence which is a core aspect of cognitive appraisal and stress supervision. A North American meta-analysis including 45 studies findings suggests that long-term working mothers significantly predicted fewer behavioral concerns and indicated better emotional processing in children (Russell et al., 2019). However, no significant difference was observed in the well-being of adults raised by working and non-working mothers in current research. This is supportive by research which reviews 69 studies through 50 years of timeframe which reported that maternal employment was not a significant factor in influencing children's behavior and academic success (Hsin & Felfe, 2014).

On the contrary, some literature suggests that stay-at-home mothers are better able to provide stability and structure due to their availability and immediate responsiveness to their children's need. Brooks-Gunn et al. (2016) stated that mothers who are working spend less time as compared to non-working mothers with their children which may affect their emotional bonding and responsiveness. Additionally, Barnett (2013) reported that mothers who work more than 45 hours indicated lower emotional regulation in their male offspring. Study reported by Oerlemans et al. (2015) stated that offspring of non-working mothers showed better executive functioning in their adulthood due to greater stability and responsiveness provided by the presence of the mother. Maternal availability of non-working mothers greatly predicts cognitive flexibility in children due to better problem-solving skills facilitated by the presence of the mother (Del Boca et al., 2016). Avan et al. (2007) also elaborated that in collectivistic culture like in Pakistan, non-working mothers are able to provide better structure which ensure greater cognitive and academic outcomes in adulthood.

Consequently, the present research indicated better cognitive appraisal and experienced support in the adults raised by working mothers. However, as stated by Hsin and Felfe (2014) spending quality time is much more important than quantity. It is safe to say that both working and non-working mothers has its impact, more important is the quality of the motherhood.

## CONCLUSION

Research from the past decade has consistently supported that notion that children raised by working mothers develop and exhibit better cognitive and emotional processing in their

adulthood. However, maternal employment has been a major concern in Pakistan due to its traditions and societal pressure. Findings also suggests that maternal employment cultivates resilience and fulfillment in mothers themselves which leads to better parenting strategies. Most of the mothers cannot work because of lack of support and family expectations despite their own wish. The present research highlights the positive influence of maternal employment on children and outlines that mothers with support can manage both effectively. The findings from the research can be a foundation for awareness campaigns and targeted interventions to promote maternal employment and normalize it in the Pakistani family systems.

## IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The positive outcomes of maternal employment found in this study in children's upbringing challenges that traditional stereotypes of mothers staying at home and their availability. The research mentions the positive impact of employment on mothers' mental health which eventually leads to a better psychological well-being in their children as well. The findings is important to raise awareness and organize family seminars to change traditional believes. It is also important for organizations so that they promote work life balance through supportive maternal policies and flexibility.

Further research is recommended on the current topic for greater impact. The future studies should increase the sample size and include diverse population for the generalizability of the results. A longitudinal study design can help understand long-term impact of maternal employment and provide rich data for challenging traditional believes of the country. Inclusion of rural populations can be helpful for further comparison.

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