

**‘SHE WHO COOKS ALSO TIES UP HER HAIR’- REALITY OR A DISTANT DREAM?:  
RATIONALIZING THE IMBALANCE IN ‘WORK’-‘LIFE’**

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**ABSTRACT:**

We still see gender differences in work-life balance. Most domestic tasks, including unpaid care giving, are still performed by working women. Many studies in this field are based on western contexts and concentrate on the aspect seen from the perspective of organizations. We present here the results of a qualitative study that involved multiple interviews with women in the Eastern Region of India. Although they did not have a healthy work-life balance, women used similar justifications and even offered similar answers for their silence. Household chores and unpaid labor were frequently identified as being performed by women. Unspoken presumptions about gender roles underlay seemingly gender-neutral arguments like care for the health of the family and the wish to lessen conflict within the family. It could be more difficult to refute these implicit gender presumptions.

**Key-words:** Gender; Women; Work-life balance; India; Under Privileged.

**INTRODUCTION:**

According to studies conducted by Baxter<sup>1</sup>, Blair and Johnson<sup>2</sup>, Nordenmark and Nyman<sup>3</sup>, and others, most women believe that their disproportionate share of foodwork and other household chores is fair. Over these years, women's time investment dropped from 1.1 hours to 0.9 hours per day, but men's participation remained stable at 0.4 hours per day. According to studies on the domestic division of labor, women are disproportionately involved in foodwork and other household chores even though their participation in paid work has increased.<sup>4,5</sup> Women have historically been held in high regard and depicted in many cultures as the goddesses of wealth, power, knowledge, wisdom, and peace<sup>6</sup>. According to Miller and Borgida<sup>7</sup>, women's primary responsibilities in society were restricted to home services, which remained their only avenue of employment. Despite their enormous contribution to the global economy, women—who make up approximately half of the population—are frequently portrayed as inferior to men<sup>8,9</sup>. Sharma<sup>10</sup> noted that issues may arise if a woman works for money. The majority of studies on married women who are employed in India have found that economic need is the main driver of employment<sup>11, 12, 13</sup>. Under those circumstances, a woman must exercise caution to avoid bringing her anger and dissatisfaction home, as this may have an impact on family dynamics. A woman's roles are restricted while she is a daughter living with her parents. However, when she marries and joins her husband's family, she gains a new status that calls for playing quite different kinds of roles. As a wife, she is expected to have obligations and relationships with her husband and other family members that roughly align with the norms of traditional female relationships. It is customary for her to meet the expectations of each family member and to further earn their appreciation through her actions and behavior. As Tagore had rightfully said that ‘je radhe se chul o bandhe’ (one who cooks also ties up her hair) women are always multitasking. A woman's role as a daughter is restricted while she resides with her parents. However, when she marries and joins her husband's family, she gains a new status that calls for her to fulfill a variety of roles. Her duties and relationships as a wife are supposed to roughly align with the expectations of traditional women's relationships with her husband and other family members. In the past, she was expected to meet the expectations of her husband and all other family members. She also needed to gain the respect and approval of her husband's family through her actions and behavior. If she works, the woman must balance new responsibilities outside the family with her traditional role in the family, which she cannot completely ignore<sup>14</sup>. The demands of juggling work and personal obligations as a wife or mother can be physically and psychologically taxing for women, especially those who are married. The concept of role overload was coined by Higgins, Duxbury, and Lyons<sup>15</sup> to characterize the process of balancing work and personal obligations. Anxiety, exhaustion, low mental clarity, stress, and ultimately poor physical health are all consequences of role overload. Key structural conditions shaping work-life balance (WLB), particularly economic inequality, have received insufficient

attention in the existing research on organizational features and job characteristics. According to Chancel L, Piketty T, Saez E, and Zucman G<sup>16</sup>, inequality is growing throughout society. In order to advance theory and possibly create more successful organizational interventions (e.g., 2022), more empirical research is required to explore the potential interactions between inequality and the psychological processes that underlie WLB. Therefore, WLB literature acknowledges the significance of looking into the WLB requirements of various social groups<sup>17, 18, 19</sup>. The research behind this article, which examines married women's perceptions and justifications for their work-life imbalance, was conducted in India. The investigation of labor division in economically disadvantaged families in Eastern India was one of the main goals of this study. We recognize the justifications married women provided for why, despite their inability to maintain a work-life balance, they do not voice similar complaints. Despite being rarely mentioned directly as a justification, gender roles nevertheless functioned intricately within other, ostensibly gender-neutral justifications.

### **EXPLAINING WHY WORK LIFE BALANCE IS STILL A GENDERED PROBLEM:**

Recently, work-life balance has become more important, especially in emerging economies. Both sexes are impacted by work-life balance. The issue of work-life balance particularly affects married women because they have to juggle multiple responsibilities and find it difficult to find the right work-family balance. Work-life balance has become more important for female employees as times have changed and men and women are now equally accountable for earning more money to enhance their family lives. Adults who manage their work and family responsibilities generally have important roles in their lives<sup>20</sup>. Given the current environment and the growing number of dual-career families, this is particularly true<sup>21</sup>. Because of this, and in spite of their advancements in paid employment, women are more likely than men to experience work-family conflict as a result of traditional gender role socialization, which places additional family responsibilities (like domestic chores) on them. Greenhaus and Butell<sup>23, 24</sup> claim that it will be harder to strike a balance between work and family if the roles of each are not balanced. The study's components on work-family conflict depend on variables like leadership relationships, working environment, working distance, and workload<sup>25</sup>. Apart from conceptualizing shifts throughout the family life cycle and their connections to shifts in gender roles, a significant area of scholarly focus has been the structuring of family life. Research on families and the allocation of labor within them reveals that family members gender the household chores and child care<sup>26, 27</sup>. Based on the idea of "doing gender," the "doing family" approach considers the social habits that are repeated through daily interactions and examines practices that lead to gender differences<sup>28, 29, 30</sup>. For every adult, becoming a parent is an amazing milestone in their life. Parenthood brings with it an abundance of new duties, including childcare, as well as an increase in housework. According to Smullen et al.<sup>31</sup>, many parents, particularly those of small children, experience high levels of stress. Traditionally, women have been assigned the role of parents. In contrast, men have historically been largely excused from these obligations<sup>32</sup>. Even though dual-earning families are becoming more common in today's society, gender norms still primarily assign parenting duties to women, particularly in the Middle East<sup>33-37</sup>. Finding a good balance between work and life is therefore a challenge for many working mothers. Researchers clarify that women's work-life balance is more complicated than it first appears.

The relationship between various female employee cadres' attitudes toward the competing demands of work and personal life is like two sides of the same coin. Furthermore, it is asserted that the gendered nature of the motherhood norm and the idea of the ideal worker norm are both products of expectations that women should prioritize raising their families and providing the majority of unpaid care, especially for children, in the home<sup>38</sup>.

A gendered division of labor is most commonly explained by the idea that participation in domestic work is shaped by gender ideologies. Because more education is associated with egalitarian gender ideologies, highly educated men are more likely to be involved in domestic tasks and food preparation, which helps to balance the roles of women in society<sup>39</sup>. Traditional ideologists might view housework as belonging to men, and outdoor chores to women, and activities like cooking, cleaning, shopping, and dishwashing as belonging to women<sup>40, 41</sup>.

The "lagged adaptation" theory proposed by Gershuny and colleagues<sup>42</sup> points out that although men exhibit egalitarian views regarding the division of domestic work, they still make far less contribution than women. This is because men have not been socialized to be competent or skilled

enough for the partner and father roles that are currently expected of them; however, they will eventually adjust.

The intersections of education, social class, and gender ideology impact domestic work<sup>43</sup>. Thus, work-life balance remains a gendered issue, particularly for the poor, where education levels are low and traditional ideologies are still strongly held. Baxter contends that a better understanding of the meanings associated with domestic work across various social structures is necessary in order to comprehend why the division of domestic labor varies so little overtime.

### **FAIRNESS AND GENDERED DIVISION OF WORK :**

Research reveals that women rationalize an unequal distribution of labor based on their perceptions of appropriate gender roles, gender-specific abilities, time constraints, and relative economic resources (c. g. Lupton<sup>44</sup> stated. According to Thompson<sup>45</sup>, the outcomes of relationships are more important to women in domestic work than task outcomes. Any desire for a fair distribution of domestic work may be outweighed by the need to maintain an orderly home and make sure family members feel taken care of. The seminal work by De Vault<sup>46</sup> highlighted how providing for one's family can become a means of creating both the family and the woman/mother identity. Unfairness in the family may come to light when one pays close attention to how much work goes into this construction, which is typically hidden because it seems so simple and natural<sup>47</sup>. Since admitting unfairness may be "tantamount to admitting that one's relationship as a whole is unfair or unsatisfactory," women have a stake in seeing the domestic division of labor as equitable, according to Baxter. Research conducted by Erickson revealed that while men typically view it as just another aspect of interpersonal relationships, many women view giving emotional support to their families as work. According to Heikkinen<sup>48</sup>, married men have a supplementary resource in the form of their wives, particularly those who are not employed, who can manage household responsibilities like childcare and help husband with any work-related issue. Spousal support theory proposed by Kanter<sup>49</sup> suggests that women recognized that they are held accountable for the performance of this work in ways that men are not. The same theory, however, contends that married women will not advance in their careers to the same extent as single women do because they will have domestic responsibilities and receive less support than married men<sup>50</sup>. It's interesting to note that although women who are unemployed or work part-time devote more time to domestic work, men who work fewer hours than their partners do not increase their share<sup>1,40,41,51</sup>, especially when it comes to activities that are typically performed by women, like cleaning and cooking. Domestic work is supposedly divided between the less powerful or lower earning partner by the couple. In general, men are less likely to participate in housework when their income levels are higher than those of their female partners<sup>52</sup>. According to Hoffman LW, Nye FI<sup>53, 54</sup>, if a wife's income is either equal to or higher than her husband's, which is not the norm; her employment may become a source of conflict due to her better financial standing. Additional research revealed no correlation between the income levels of women and their contribution to domestic work. Cooking, cleaning, raising children and other household chores were traditionally the responsibilities of women. They couldn't leave the house because they were treated like housekeepers or caregivers. In every industry nowadays, women have left their mark. Women are willing to take on challenges in any field—literature, the arts, politics, sports, business, or more. These days, it's not uncommon for the husband to work while the wife stays at home; instead, it's more common for both of them to work. But the wife continues to manage the household and prepare meals. Thus, women nowadays are always working toward a work-life balance. Compared to their counterparts in other regions of the world, Indian working women face a great deal more obstacles. Most domestic tasks in India are performed by women; they include cooking, cleaning, dishwashing, getting kids ready for school, and other household duties that men do not share. Just a few tasks that needed to be done outside the home are done by men. Hence, women bear the majority of the responsibility for managing the household. Doing all the household chores was acceptable for women as long as they were homemakers. Should they find themselves working in a highly stressful setting, they will undoubtedly carry their work home with them, resulting in fewer hours of sleep. Not only does this lead to less sleep, but this kind of lifestyle also increase stress. The family feels the brunt of this stress and becomes increasingly irritated. Relationship issues result from this. Women are more affected by domestic challenges in their careers because they feel they are compromising their social obligations and that others around them are taking advantage of their work. According to UV Kiran<sup>55</sup>, power and authority in Indian families are passed down from the father to the oldest son. This means that women are expected to be subservient to men at all times—fathers when they are young, husbands when they get married, and sons

when they get older and their husband dies<sup>56</sup>. The historical hierarchy between men and women also held sway in the Indian context. The philosophers Smriti, Kautilya, and Manu, for instance, advocated complete subservience of women to their husbands in ancient India. These attitudes persist in India despite social progress made in the area of gender equality and gender roles. According to the Indian National Family Health Survey, for example, fewer than two-thirds, or 63 percent, of married women took part in making decisions about significant household decisions, and fewer than 41 percent were permitted to go alone to places like the market, a medical facility, or visit relatives (National Family Health Survey, 2017). In this conservative setting, Indian social norms discourage women from working, which leads to a higher abuse rate for employed women than for unemployed ones. The current study details the type and scope of spousal violence against married employed women across job categories and is based on data from the National Family Health Survey. According to the study, most working women are either skilled or unskilled manual laborers, and the majority of them experience domestic abuse.<sup>57</sup>

According to Adhikari<sup>58</sup>, women's roles have evolved beyond being homemakers in modern times, and their unofficial contributions to society should be recognized. Singh and Jonjua<sup>59</sup> argue that instead of being recognized for their care giving role, they should be recognized for their financial and social security contributions to the household<sup>60</sup>. The gender revolution won't be fully realized until men's contribution to care giving and household duties equals that of women in paid work<sup>61,62</sup>.

Despite the global trend toward a decrease in overt gender stereotypes<sup>63</sup>, people continue to associate fathers with work and mothers with family<sup>64</sup>. It's interesting to note that even people who adamantly declare their commitment to gender equality frequently link men to the role of provider and women to that of breadwinner<sup>65</sup>. Implicit stereotypes are explained by the fact that people form them more from what they observe in their immediate surroundings and in society at large than from their explicit attitudes, which accounts for this paradox<sup>66</sup>. When people judge themselves negatively for their own deeds, they feel guilty, which is a moral feeling<sup>67</sup>.

To summarize, although women still handle the majority of cooking and other household chores, they seem to think this is reasonable. Certain evidence suggests that women's obligation to tend to family emotions may limit their capacity or willingness to recognize injustices. Research on how family members perceive justice, how many different family members are perceived, and how family members explain this imbalance are all subjects of relatively few studies. Several women from disadvantaged\* socioeconomic classes in Eastern India were interviewed for this qualitative study, the results of which are presented in this article. We concentrate on the ways in which women justified the unequal distribution of work at home, which resulted in a decline in work-life equilibrium. Traditional gender expectations continued to exist, albeit in new ways, hidden behind discourses about personal choices and preferences. Gender roles were rarely used directly as justification for unequal distributions of domestic duties and food preparation.

### **THE RESEARCH:**

10 under privileged married women were interviewed using semi-structured guide. The researcher participated in a meal with each family. Taped interviews and the researchers' observation notes were transcribed and analysed using qualitative data analysis software, ATLAS/ti. Themes were generated in an in-depth examination of the transcripts by sorting, clustering and comparing segments of transcribed text to describe, organize and interpret participants' rationales<sup>68</sup>. As mentioned in Table 1 all the respondents were married women with single child. Among the 10 participants 5 of them work as helpers in retail shops; 2 of them work as nursemaid; 1 work as a security guard; 2 work as cook. 6 participants reside in registered slums 3 participants live in rented house (1 room and common bathroom) and 1 of the participant live in her own house. All the participants wake up early in the morning for preparing meals and tiffin for husband and child and finishes household chores before leaving for workplace. On returning in the late evening they again prepare dinner and finishes household chores including collecting water from corporation tanks before resting. 4 participants even do not have separate kitchen. All participants agreed that they have taken up job due to financial stringency. Mother's guilt is very high among the participants. The participants are not happy with their condition but they do not complain. Presence of high guilt, stress, frustration agony and unhappiness shows the level of imbalance among the participants.

Table 1 Participant socio-demographic information

SEX	FEMALE
AGE	25-30

EDUCATION	HIGHER SECONDARY
FAMILY STRUCTURE	ADULTMALEANDFEMALE+1 CHILD
ANNUAL FAMILY INCOME	BELOW INR 8L

*\*we define 'underprivileged socio-economic class' as persons whose family has gross annual income below Rs. 8L and whose source of income may include agriculture, business, and other professions but the person under this category must have less than 5 acres of agricultural land; his residential flat should not be 200 square metres or more and if a residential flat is more than 200 square metres, it should not come under the municipality.*

### TIME AVAILABILITY: 'I-AM-ALWAYS ON A RUN MUM':

An unequal distribution of domestic work based on gender is caused by relative time availability<sup>1, 40, 41, 51</sup> was a defense put forth by men, but this is only applicable to housewives. Full-time working women rarely have enough time for relaxation. Health issues arise from sleep deprivation. 'I wake up at 4 and go to bed around 12-12.30 after doing the dishes' says the participant and this is a common response given by all. 'Except sleeping, watching TV during dinner is my leisure' / I-am-always on a run mum. Works are scheduled one after the other...How can mothers of young kids rest?' / 'On weekends we have more works to do, more clothes to clean, favourite dishes to cook' says the participants. Men appear to work longer hours and participate in more irregular work schedules than women, according to certain research<sup>69, 70</sup>, however, a substantial amount of evidence disputes this, demonstrating that women perform more household and family chores and work just as long as men<sup>69-74</sup>. Economic necessity is the primary driver behind women's employment decisions, according to Vora<sup>75</sup> and Singh<sup>76</sup>. A significant rise in female labor force participation has occurred over time, coinciding with changes in family patterns, particularly the fall in fertility rates to (far) below the replacement level<sup>77, 78</sup>. 'My spouse works as a temporary laborer at a shipbuilding company, so we had to take our first child after three years of marriage due to this constraint. Now that I work, I can provide for my child's food and education.' 'He is constantly stressed out from being unemployed, so I don't burden him with household chores.' 'My husband's only source of happiness is playing cards with friends. He has some snacks before heading back home to be with them. Consequently, it is evident that he cannot assist me. Meals must be served at the appropriate time; that is my responsibility as a wife. In addition, men will obviously not cook or serve, so I must do it. The participants said, "He puts in enough effort throughout the day; he shouldn't be overworked." Collectively, these trends indicate that the new female gender role has pushed a redistribution of financial responsibilities between men and women for families, and it has progressively included aspects of economic independence and support roles that were, until recently, exclusively associated with the male gender. But given the relatively small changes in how men and women share unpaid labor in most countries, this transformation hasn't exactly been followed by new patterns in the gender distribution of housework and care giving<sup>79</sup>. The majority of the time, women continue to devote a disproportionate amount of their working hours to providing care and other unpaid work, which has been the main cause of the differences in working patterns between men and women<sup>80</sup>. Activities related to work, family, education, and community are performed by women than working men, even though women's labor force participation has increased significantly since 1986 and men's has decreased in proportion<sup>81</sup>.<sup>82</sup> For women who work full-time, Pocock et al.<sup>82</sup> emphasize how serious this issue is and show that when working more than 35 hours a week, women report more work-life interference per hour worked, more dissatisfaction than men, and a stronger desire to cut back on work hours. According to studies,<sup>83, 84</sup> women employees are more likely to experience conflict between their work and family role when they work a strict schedule, require a lot of overtime, and have an unwelcoming workplace culture. An employee's ability to perform their job duties are hampered by high levels of family responsibility, which result in more time demands and strain on the family<sup>85</sup>. Inter-role conflict<sup>86</sup> and family roles<sup>87</sup> can result from the obligation to care for children and elderly family members who require more care. This can lead to family conflict. Additionally, studies<sup>88, 89</sup> revealed that women with younger children face more role conflicts<sup>85</sup>. Mothers with children under five years old faced obstacles to employment due to child care. Mothers who are young, single, have low levels of education, and have low incomes appear to be the most likely to face childcare constraints<sup>90</sup>. Compared to women working regular hours, those working irregular hours experienced more problems<sup>91</sup>. If working mothers receive family support at this juncture, their psychological well-being can be maintained and even enhanced. Working mothers tend to experience stress from time constraints and an excessive workload more often than unemployed mothers. The employed

mother had less free time than the non-employed mothers in terms of their marital status and how household chores were divided. Furthermore discovered was the fact that even with the working mother.

'I love to sew but after taking up job I do not get time.' / 'I was better when I was a house-wife. I had time to spend for my family.... Now I have become unsocial. I do not get leave for participating in religious occasions or marriages'/ 'We cannot afford to keep maids so I keep my child in my mother's place'/ 'After my operation I have been asked to take rest in the afternoon and not to lift anything heavy but is it possible? Household demands so many regular commitments. Time is a factor. For going to toilet also there is fixed time. For collecting water there is a particular time. Who will do all work within time? We are not rich people. We do not have servants' said the participants.

Sharma along with others<sup>92</sup> found that, in comparison to the low or high stress groups, part-time working women (the moderate job stress group) had better mental health, showed fewer symptoms of neurotic disorders, and were less likely to experience psychological depression. Work-life balance perceptions are negatively impacted by economic inequality and hours worked are increased<sup>93</sup>. According to Sandhu and Mehrotra<sup>94</sup>, the participants' primary time management factors included heavy workloads, extended workdays, insufficient support from family members, and a lack of servants. Despite the fact that both men had full-time jobs, men's paid work excused him from household duties. The time/schedule rationale appears to be somewhat implausible, as women were still responsible for most food preparation and cleanup in all of the families, even on weekends. The underlying assumptions seem to be that women should not always be excused from household chores because paid work is a sign of superiority for men and that women should always be responsible for taking care of the home. Put another way, the time availability justification could be supported by established gender roles.

### **GUILT: 'WORKING MOTHERS ARE SINNERS' :**

Women tend to prioritize their families over their careers when making this decision<sup>95</sup>. The dilemma faced by working mothers is summed up by author and journalist Amy Westervelt in her book *Forget Having It All*: "We expect women to work like they don't have children, and raise children as if they don't work." Women feel guilty for working and guilty for not working as a result. The dual aspects of motherhood, maternal guilt and maternal responsibility, are experienced by all working women at some point during their childrearing journey<sup>96</sup>. 25% of first-time Indian mothers resigned from their jobs to raise their children, according to the Social Development Foundation of Assocham<sup>97</sup> a societal norm that implies a woman must forgo earning potential and career advancement in order to raise a child is reflected in the motherhood conundrum. When men and women become parents, gender differences in how they balance work and family frequently emerge or get worse. For instance, mothers frequently reduce their paid work hours after giving birth and devote more of their time to taking care of their children at home<sup>98</sup>.<sup>99</sup> In contrast, fathers rarely adjust how much time they spend with their children or even lengthen their workdays<sup>100, 101</sup>. The stigma, stereotype content, social role, and role congruity theories are the four main theories proposed by literature to explain this<sup>102</sup>. These theories contend that the discrimination that working mothers experience stems from the inevitable demands of motherhood. The role stress and job satisfaction of working mothers were found to be negatively correlated by Singh and Surti and Sarupria<sup>103, 104</sup>. Additionally, it has been discovered that the presence of children in the home, household income, welfare utilization, egalitarian and traditional marital attitudes, and religiosity all positively correlate with marital happiness<sup>105</sup>. Remarks from society that suggest a good mother should take care of her child at home also contribute to the guilt feelings. If a child misbehaves, the mother is solely to blame<sup>106</sup>.

'Working mothers are sinners' / 'I remembered Babu's face very much while cooking delicious food for Ranju's (owner's son) birthday'. / 'Bunches of fruits are bought every day for the old man, if I take a banana or 2-3 pieces of apple for my child, where is the fault?' (This participant even justified stealing out of mother's guilt.) / 'You have to get up early in the morning to come to school, at that time the child does not get breast milk, she cries...then it will be more difficult.. Mother has to be there when a child is getting ready for school' / 'the whole day is spent in the shop. I don't get the time to see what the boy is doing. He roams with a band of hooligans. His school teacher has caught time smoking and has complained, says the participant. All the participants feel guilty for working; they believe that they alone should be responsible for the child's care. This is because women are frequently held responsible for managing the home (but not men) and are stigmatized as "cold" and "selfish" if they do not prioritize their care giving responsibilities<sup>107</sup>.

<sup>108</sup>. Parents and those in their immediate vicinity frequently characterize their gendered work-family decision as a "free choice," despite the obvious disparities in the treatment, assessments, and results of working fathers and mothers <sup>109</sup>.

Moreover, a study conducted in 2017 by Borelli <sup>110</sup> revealed that mothers feel greater guilt than fathers do when their work impacts their family, and that this guilt then influences the gendered choices parents make regarding work and family <sup>111</sup>. I now have a better job. The work was a little distance from my house, so I wouldn't be able to pick up and drop off my child at school then. Who would do it for me? Despite their higher salary offer, I declined. I resigned from my position at the school and applied to be a cook. I am able to save time with this. In addition to being a full-time job, my child was in pain. They were ignoring him. It is recommended that mothers keep an eye on their children while they eat. For this reason, working mothers who choose a career path that allows them to have more job flexibility and less work hours at the expense of a slowed or stopped career advancement are known as being on the "mommy track," a term coined by Schwartz <sup>112</sup>, Budhapriya <sup>113</sup>. Some also go down the "daughter track," quitting their jobs later in life to take care of their dependent parents <sup>114</sup>. Additionally, because of rigid work schedules and inadequate childcare options, working mothers in India experience a great deal of stress and strain both before and after work <sup>115,116</sup>.

### **HEALTH MATTERS: 'MOTHERS ARE ALWAYS HAPPY AND HEALTHY':**

'What is there in our life to feel Happy about? Life started in this slum and life will end in this slum.' Participants expressed frustration and agony. Prior joining work they said they had more happiness though now they are financially better. 'It used to be a life then, now I go to Work early in the morning by train and at night I return by the train Then after cooking eating's and cleaning stuffs I barely get 3-4hrs rest.' 'If the body is throbbing in two places both outside and inside the house, then fatigue will come, sometimes I do not feel like getting up in the morning but the body has to run, have to supply oil to the body & no rk no money.'/'Mothers are always happy and healthy; they have to be.' They do not have choice so they work even when they are not in good health.

For women, juggling the dual responsibilities of motherhood and work is a challenging task. According to Finn <sup>117</sup>, Beuchert et al. <sup>118</sup>, Chatterji and Markowitz <sup>119</sup>, it strains their physical and mental well-being as well as Butikofer and colleagues <sup>120</sup>. Depression and psychological disorders are even issues that some working women deal with. In comparison to men, women report higher levels of stress at work, family conflicts, gender stereotypes, and barriers to career advancement <sup>121</sup>. Because they feel as though their motherly responsibilities have been neglected, working mothers often feel pressured to feel guilty about it <sup>122</sup>. Because of their dual roles, working mothers also face additional stress and sometimes even sleep disturbances <sup>123</sup>. Nonetheless, some research has indicated that paid work can benefit working mothers in certain ways <sup>124</sup>. Rigid patriarchal norms affect Indian women both inside and outside the home. In the majority of Indian homes, men are given preference over women when it comes to food and education, and they also hold more authority in practically all family-related decisions. Male-biased homes are linked to better mental health for men and worse mental health for women <sup>125</sup>. According to earlier research <sup>126</sup>, women may thus find it difficult to take charge of their own lives in a strict patriarchal setting, which may therefore indicate a lower level of life satisfaction. Indian families are facing increasing financial pressure on a daily basis. Due to the country's exorbitant cost of living, rising child-education costs, and rising housing costs, every Indian family is forced to explore for ways to raise their household income. India's women, who were traditionally viewed as homemakers, are consequently compelled to pursue employment and careers. Many Indian families still live together with their parents and in-laws <sup>55</sup>. They are under even more pressure to please her husband's family, which increases their stress levels. Pay attention to their grievances directed at her, disregard them, and so forth. She is also almost always required to take care of the household chores <sup>127</sup> Nonetheless, research has demonstrated that balancing many responsibilities can have detrimental effects on women's mental and physical health, including appetite loss, sleeplessness, overindulgence in food, and back pain. <sup>128</sup> Chassin <sup>129</sup> found that women with pre-school children experience different types of conflicts and concluded that self-role congruence in women leads to better mental health. While some researchers used factors like family demand to predict WFC, others used parental overload <sup>130</sup>, which included the number of children. Saxena <sup>131</sup> investigated how women's employment and family structure affected their life satisfaction and perceived happiness. The findings showed that women who were not employed had higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction than women who were employed. There are many ways to define work-life balance, but one well-known commentator called it a complete misnomer because, for the majority of us, work is a very important aspect of life. Work-life balance can be

broadly defined as the harmonious coexistence of an employee's personal and professional obligations. While work is still necessary in today's world, it should also bring personal fulfillment. The relationship between the responsibilities in your personal life and your work is known as work-life balance. According to Clark<sup>132</sup> and Ungerson Yeandle<sup>133</sup>, work-life balance is the belief held by employees that various spheres of personal time, family care, and work are preserved and integrated with the least amount of role conflict. A person's orientation toward various life roles is reflected in their work-family balance, which is an inter-role phenomenon<sup>134</sup>. Carlson and others<sup>135</sup> investigated working mothers' postpartum health and turnover. They looked at things like physiological needs, non-standard work schedules, poverty, race, having a first child, skill discretion, job security, work-family conflict, and physical health, among other things. In order to achieve this. Additional research<sup>136-140</sup> also touches on the topic of infant care and feeding as well as the impact of a mother's employment and subsequent return to work. According to Han et al.<sup>138</sup>, women with higher educational backgrounds are more likely to be eligible for maternity leave than those without. According to the study, women who had fewer resources had a higher propensity to start working again sooner. Romito along with others<sup>141</sup> highlighted in their paper the significant influence that social injustices had on women's decisions to take long leaves of absence and go back to work. In her analysis of women returning to work part-time, Schott discovered that socio-cultural background played a significant role in the decision to return to work, with full-time working women being more likely to do so. All the participants belong to underprivileged class and except the one who works in a school as maid nurse no one got the maternity leave. Even two of the participant joined back when the kid was 3months old. 3 of the participant had C-section but did not get the adequate care as no care giver was there at home. One of the respondent said that she did not get any care during pregnancy and suffered a lot continuing both job and household chores as there was no more female candidate in the family. Respondents whose parents' house was close by got the maximum support and are better in physical and mental health.

### **‘NO MATTER HOW MUCH WE EARN, WE ARE LOOKED DOWN UPON’: IT HURTS SOMETIMES**

‘After spending the whole day outside, you will be slapped if you say you are suffering from it in the afternoon.’/ ‘Earning a few coins does not guarantee ones independence. These concepts are for people educated like you who are doing govt. jobs. We still obey our husbands or else we are slapped’./‘There is no alternative so our husbands allow us to work outside with male colleagues or else they would have slapped us if we wanted to spend the whole day outside.’/ ‘What is unusual about a man returning home to eat and slapping his wife if she does not offer him food and water on time?’ / ‘I am slapped if I am not ready to go to bed with him. I feel exhausted but I do not have choice after all he is my husband but next day at work I feel breathless’/ ‘No matter how much we earn, we are looked down upon’: it hurts sometimes .This shows there exists IPV mostly in the form of ‘slap’ and IPV effects mental health which in turn effect WLB.

Research on women's empowerment did not show a statistically significant decrease in overall IPV. On the other hand, it pinpoints aspects of empowerment linked to intimate partner violence. Reducing risk factors include owning a mobile phone, making decisions as a household, and maintaining hygienic menstrual practices. The risk rose, however, when one owned property. According to research, there may be a greater risk of IPV if women work more frequently. There aren't many studies to support this conclusion, but it's probable that men who reside in areas where women work more often face more threats to patriarchal gender norms. Men who have working wives may view their wives' jobs as particularly dangerous in areas where women are more likely to be employed because they are a sign of greater female empowerment rather than an abnormality. Men may be more likely to use violence to claim dominance and control.<sup>142</sup> Employment status (or stability) and IPV (i.e. E. among the most often researched subjects in the IPV and work literature is, its incidence, prevalence, type, or severity)<sup>143</sup> But the situation is complicated; some research indicates that employment may be protective, while other studies show that it may also be a risk factor.<sup>144-148</sup>

According to Pal<sup>149</sup>, women from marginalised groups face the harshest forms of discrimination, stigma, and deprivation because they are at the bottom of caste, class, and gender hierarchies. According to research, Indian women struggle to balance meeting social expectations with forging an identity separate from that of mothers, wives, or daughters<sup>150</sup>. Studies have indicated that those from lower castes suffer from higher levels of depression<sup>151</sup> and, in comparison to affluent upper caste members, have the highest odds of hypertension<sup>36</sup>. The upper castes are happier than the lower and middle castes in terms of life



satisfaction<sup>152,153</sup>. In addition, those who belong to marginalized gender and caste groups face even greater challenges in a patriarchal and caste-ridden society. Lower caste women suffer from "double discrimination" and double the effects of marginalization due to the hierarchy of caste and gender<sup>154</sup>. Based on women's intersecting caste and gender identities, research indicates that violence and discrimination against them persist<sup>155, 156</sup>. In addition to experiencing various forms of discrimination, women with marginalized identities—such as low caste and low economic status—are more likely to be denied access to opportunities, resources, and fundamental human rights.

According to this study, women were more likely to be abused or under control by their male partners if they thought that their partners accepted prescriptive gender roles, justified male authority in public and private settings, thought that women were inherently inferior to men, and thought that using violence to enforce gender roles was acceptable. The results of this study align with the few research works that have shown a connection between male patriarchal beliefs and domestic violence (DV) in three different nations, including the US. This implies that patriarchal views can endure in spite of systemic advancements in women's empowerment or as a result of moving to more egalitarian areas<sup>157-161</sup>. Working and non-working women's mental health differed significantly, according to a study by Dudhathra and Jogsan<sup>162</sup>. The findings show that working women are less likely to have poor mental health than non-working women. IPV is one factor among them. Women's struggles in this situation are exacerbated by discrimination and gender insensitivity. A 1999 study by Patel revealed a strong correlation between poverty and low levels of education and common mental illnesses in women. Undiagnosed and untreated mental health issues persist in their early stages<sup>163</sup>. As one of the world's poorest regions, South-East Asia is also the most populous. In addition to widespread inequality, violence, unstable political conditions, and a high rate of illness, it faces significant social, economic, and health challenges. Women in South Asia now face significant discrimination based on their gender, making them socially inferior. The male members of a patriarchal society appear to have a determining influence on their identity, mobility, work, self-worth, and self-image. The limitations on women's self-expression and life choices stem from their emotional and financial dependence as well as their lack of empowerment. According to Niaz and Hassan<sup>164</sup>, this has a discernible effect on women's mental health in addition to pressures from their families, friends, and workplaces. There is a correlation between mental health and marital quality. The health and well-being of older adults are greatly impacted by marital quality. Carer, Boerner, and Moorman<sup>165</sup> note that higher marital quality keeps people psychologically healthy and indirectly supports WLB. Bookwala<sup>166</sup> notes that marriage quality is a well-documented buffer against the health-depleting effects of later life stressors like care giving. Marital quality also plays a crucial role in helping couples manage difficult decisions regarding their end-of-life health care. A married working woman's level of role conflict is positively correlated with her husband's support and involvement, according to Sharma<sup>167</sup>.

#### **‘THEY ARE FORGETFUL AND DIRTY’: STANDARD:**

Numerous women expressed dissatisfaction with their male partners' cleaning skills and noted that men tend to forget things and make mistakes when comparing labels and prices at the grocery store. Many participants identified as the controller of their households, which is connected to the idea that women have high standards and that husbands can't "do it right." They claimed that "they are dirty and forgetful." The participants came to the conclusion that women end up doing more household work because of their strict standards and need for control. The traditional markers of femininity include feeding the family well, preparing a "proper," wholesome meal that the family enjoys, and keeping the kitchen clean<sup>46, 47</sup>. A common theme is that women handle most of the household chores because of their high standards<sup>168</sup>. It is conceivable to believe that husbands choose not to acquire the necessary skills to maintain the home, and that women are restricted by social expectations. In these families, a gendered division of labor is justified by the implicit application of the concept of "choice."

#### **RATIONALIZING THE IMBALANCE IN WORK & LIFE**

‘Because we are working together, the family has survived after covid, but survival and well-being are not the same....Our family has given us independence to Work outside now after returning home if we say we are tired we cannot work at home it will be shameful....Girls are working and studying, everything is fine, but

girls are the mother's too, don't forget that, can the father ever raise the child properly?'/ 'It is natural that household chores will be the responsibility of the daughter. It doesn't matter whether you like it or not. Today I am doing what my daughter will do tomorrow. This is the norms of the society which we all abide by / 'My 1st priority is my family. I am working for them so I have to keep them happy.' The first priority of the participants is their family. Working women's satisfaction with their home role performance was primarily influenced by factors such as small family size, good health, adequate family income, and adult children<sup>169</sup>. They wish to keep leading happy married lives. According to Dort-Wortes PB<sup>170</sup>, women who play multiple roles value their sense of control, physical stamina, bursts of energy, self-esteem, and ego and motivational stimulation. "That is like it has always been," women remarked, summarizing the standard in Indian families. Regarding their current family dynamics, the participants described them as traditional, stating that gender roles played a major role in determining how household chores were divided. All of the participants acknowledged that they had learned gendered food roles from their mothers.

According to research, some women still take on the role of primary caregiver for their families even though cultural norms regarding this role and family structures differ<sup>171</sup>. In the midst of juggling work and family obligations, working mothers must make decisions about childcare on a regular basis. These decisions are greatly influenced by the support of their families and organizational systems<sup>172</sup>. According to Behera and Padhi<sup>173</sup>, the most challenging aspect of life is not making decisions; rather, it's navigating them in the face of constant guilt, criticism, and chaos. Therefore, there is a growing global trend of working mothers quitting their jobs to care for their families<sup>174</sup>. Several studies have shown that motherhood and family care have an impact on women's continued participation in paid work<sup>175</sup>. Men are more dedicated to their work than women are in India, according to research, and gender norms cause men to identify with "work roles" and women with "family roles"<sup>176</sup>. Women are expected to understand the importance of family and responsibility. According to Bulanda<sup>177</sup>, some academics contend that because women have historically held lower status and power in marriages than men, they have a stronger emotional stake in keeping their relationships strong. Just 28.2% of working women worldwide are effectively protected by benefits during pregnancy due to issues with rights awareness, implementation, informality, social exclusion, and discriminatory practices; of these, half reside in developed economies (ILO, 2017). Unlike the theory put forth by researchers that mothers experience greater guilt than fathers, or the claims made by the media that mothers possess a "guilt gene," these theories are based on the belief that a mother's primary function should be providing care for others. G. The research on explicit gender beliefs and work-family guilt is summarized in Korabik<sup>178</sup>. Based on this research, we demonstrate how internalized gender stereotypes explain why work-family guilt is gendered. Implicit associations are influenced by people's surroundings, as suggested by our findings, which suggest that gender differences in work-family guilt are partly a function of the environment<sup>179</sup>. Men and women alike have strong mental attachments to the ideas surrounding conventional gender norms. Following an established socio-cultural norm adds value to an individual's life as well as the lives of those in other groups; deviating from such a norm lowers the value of one's life for everyone involved. A husband might use violence against his wife in an attempt to maintain his authority or usefulness in the marriage after a woman enters the paid labour. This is particularly common in societies where marriage is seen as a lifetime commitment and where it is expected that the woman will bear the entire burden of making the marriage work. Women who work for a living experience "female guilt" in these circumstances, believing that they are unable to fully perform their traditional roles and that their actions are the cause of domestic violence.

Gender role attitudes or gender stereotypes are a society's views about what roles men and women should play<sup>180-187</sup>. Emotion work is perceived as predominantly a female domain, according to Erickson<sup>47</sup>. In addition, it is dismissed as a spontaneous display of love rather than labor at all, with the argument that "the illusion of effortlessness is part of doing the work well"<sup>47</sup>. Opting to perform household chores alongside a paid job is not a straightforward decision. Instead, they must decide between fulfilling emotional needs or performing housework in order to settle any disputes that might arise from attempting to create a more equal division of labor. They need to get work done in either case. Whether or not it increases work-life imbalance, doing household chores yourself can help prevent arguments over the role of women in maintaining family harmony.

**GENDER IS NOT TO BE TALKED ABOUT: IT IS ALL ABOUT REDUCING IMBALANCE:**

The justifications provided by the participants for the reason that women were performing a disproportionate amount of household chores seem reasonable and personal choices that fit well within their families' circumstances. Participant discussion of gender expectations influencing household decisions was rare, with the exception of the impoverished families. Gender inequality; however, seems to be functioning beneath the surface under the pretexts of time, schedules, health, standards, and conflict avoidance. It is evident that women have the autonomy to choose whether or not to comply with gender norms, but these expectations also impose limitations that lead to an unfair distribution of labor. It is probably especially hard for women to resist the implicit operation of gender norms, which frames gender expectations in terms of personal responsibilities and choices.

Recognizing that the family is a dynamic entity with increasing complexity in decision-making processes regarding transitions over the family life course and organization of family life is essential to understanding the day-to-day realities of contemporary societies. As Morgan<sup>188</sup> notes, the modern family is not merely a collection of clearly defined roles; rather, it is a dynamic entity that is shaped by daily negotiations, micro-level interactions between partners, and the larger political and economic structures.

In contrast, the field of sociology has posited that shifts in ideation, such as the emergence of individualism and its consequent emphasis on self-realization, in conjunction with evolving goals for waged employment, are the primary catalysts for the delay of family formation, including marriage and childbearing, as well as the growing vulnerability of couple relationships in contemporary societies<sup>189</sup>. The Second Demographic Transition (SDT) theory is particularly significant in this regard<sup>190,191</sup>.

To succeed in their careers, full-time working women are also compelled by the gender gap to engage in bias avoidance behavior, which involves hiding or minimising family obligations<sup>192,193</sup>. They accomplish this in a variety of ways, such as by choosing not to use the current Work-Life Benefits (WLB) options, delaying having children, limiting the number of children they have, or separating their personal and professional lives and shifting their focus to work after having children<sup>194</sup>. In living with their mother-in-law, families around the world vary greatly, according to this paper. Splitting the variations by age and rates reveals that rates are shifting across age groups rather than the age structure of married women being the primary driver of co-residence changes.

One important source of support for the women's careers is their parents. The interviewed subjects discussed their upbringing, the role models their parents provided, the priceless counsel they gave, and how they instilled in their kids the idea that anything was possible.<sup>195</sup>

Family support is now a crucial source of social support in western nations<sup>196</sup>. According to what Kalliath et al.<sup>197</sup>, the formation of emotions like love, care, etc. is greatly aided by family support. An employee can more effectively transfer resources from the family domain to the work domain when they are positive. Additionally, it may serve as an extrinsic motivator by offering important guidance and persuasive materials that help employees achieve their professional objectives. Pluut et al.<sup>198</sup> found similar results, suggesting that workers, especially those from collectivistic societies, are motivated to work harder by family support. According to Marcinkus et al.<sup>199</sup>, social support is thought to be an essential resource for their success in juggling the demands of work and family. Adapting from Thoits<sup>200</sup>, social support is characterized as the positive, emotionally sustaining aspect of a relationship that usually entails getting support, material assistance, and encouragement from others when things are tough. The employee's children, siblings, spouse or partner, and other family members provide personal (non-work) social support.

Amin and associates<sup>201</sup> have looked at how work-life balance and career dedication relate to spousal support and success in the subjective field. The study's theoretical framework was derived from the conservation of resources (COR) theory, which posited a positive correlation between work-life balance and spousal support. Wives' assistance would enable working mothers to maintain much greater levels of composure and relaxation while performing their necessary tasks at work and at home<sup>202</sup>.

In a married couple, the partner is typically regarded as the primary social support system and the first to seek assistance when things get tough. Reducing work-family conflict and family-work conflict for working women is influenced by the support of one's spouse and family. Personal and behavioral support is the two forms of support systems that a spouse can offer. Personal support is when a woman confides in her partner about her issues, both personal and professional, and the partner listens and offers guidance as needed. It is easier to deal with challenging circumstances and work-family conflict when one has a partner's perspective, insights, and sense of acceptance and respect for his spouse.

When it comes to mitigating work-family conflict, behavioral support—that is, tangible or practical support—is not as effective as personal support. Sharing household chores with spouses has a big impact, relieves

women of some of their burdens, and improves the physical and emotional well-being of women. Through encouraging the sharing of childcare and housework in dual-earner couples, marital intimacy—a byproduct of marital interaction—has been demonstrated in numerous studies to lessen stress related to the family and the workplace. The efforts made by double-earner husbands to maintain a balance between work and family are thought to have a positive impact on marital intimacy because they provide comfort to working women. Working mothers benefit from this family support because it helps them feel loved and cared for, which helps them find solutions to issues that arise in the home and at work. Griggs, Casper, and Eby's (T.) research supports this.<sup>203</sup> They found a negative correlation between work-family conflict and family support. Mothers who face work-family conflicts can receive support from their families based on their social relationships. In line with Fiske<sup>204</sup> sharing among the community is one type of social interaction. Working women experience reduced role anxieties and is better able to manage role conflicts when they receive timely support from their husbands and families<sup>205-208</sup>. Their contribution to household expenses further motivates those<sup>209</sup>, and this boosts their self-confidence to better survive in the context of their family and workplace. When it comes to encouraging women to work, personality traits are just as important as financial incentives<sup>210</sup>. When their paid jobs meet their family's needs as well as their own goals, working mothers are content<sup>211-214</sup>. All international agendas now center on gender equality and women's empowerment. Women have long been the targets of emancipation movements and campaigns to eradicate gender inequality. Discrimination against women, the Convention on Political Rights of Women, and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women have been adopted to end gender discrimination (International conventions on women, 2020). Furthermore, women's empowerment is seen as a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development (UNFPA, 2021). According to several definitions<sup>215-217</sup>, women's empowerment is when they are given the tools and freedom to make decisions in life that will help them become independent and feel valued. It is possible to improve child development, nutrition, and decrease domestic violence by advancing gender equality and women's emancipation<sup>218</sup>. Women are treated as active participants rather than as passive recipients, and their autonomy in decision-making is greatly emphasized. According to Collins, Muyoyeta, Siddgowda, and Shunmuga et al. Valimaa; Tasli<sup>219-224</sup> One process that transforms is the economic empowerment of women. The process of transforming women and girls from having few options at home and in the economy to having the abilities, resources, and opportunities that act as a catalyst for both economic development and the addition of a sense of self-worth is known as economic empowerment of women and girls<sup>225-226</sup>. However, this transformational process is in vain when there is poor WLB. Social support is one element that affects one's subjective well-being. Social support, according to Sarafino<sup>227</sup>, is the consolation, acknowledgement, support, and help that people receive from other people or groups. The negative effects of working mothers, such as little personal time and marital stress, can be lessened and mothers will feel more content with their lives with their husbands' support<sup>228</sup>. Therefore, support is necessary to lessen the imbalance.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Almost all of the families in this study had women as the primary caregivers, which nobody felt was especially unfair. The impoverished families used conventional gender roles as a direct means of explaining differences in household chore distribution. However, it seemed that gender expectations were only operating at the surface level, even in situations where they were not stated explicitly. Even in situations where the paid work schedules of men and women were similar, the time allocation argument was used, indicating that it is based on implicit gender stereotypes regarding paid and unpaid labor. Women asserted that their families would fail if they did not perform the majority of household chores and felt accountable for the wellbeing of their families. Even when women are expected to be in charge of upholding family harmony, they face pressure to decide between taking care of the home and engaging in emotional support to settle disputes that arise from calling for a more equitable division of labor<sup>47</sup>.

An investigation into stress, depression, and marital adjustment was conducted among married women who work and those who do not. The findings showed that married women who do not work are more content in their marriages than married women who work. When it comes to their married lives, non-working women experience less stress and depression than married women who work. According to the study, married working women with degrees experience fewer challenges and depression in their lives than married working women without advanced degrees. According to the study, women who are depressed find it difficult to carry out their responsibilities and work productively. Additionally impacted is the marriage<sup>229</sup>. The

majority of respondents named their family as a source of happiness, citing their thoughts, feelings, and actions in support of this claim. The responses also disclosed additional determinants, including friendships (and aspects associated with them), romantic relationships (and behaviors, thoughts, and emotions toward a significant other), social gatherings (and interactions with people in small and large groups), and interpersonal relationships (relationships in general without specifying nature of relation). Family-related stressors, such as low levels of spousal support, the amount of time spent on family activities each week, and the number and ages of children, are the antecedents of work that interferes with family life<sup>230-231</sup>. The primary factor related to the family that disrupts expectations for work behavior is the quantity of children living in the household<sup>232</sup>. Given that women are typically responsible for providing child care, working wives who have larger families are likely to face more interference from their families at work<sup>233</sup>. According to Voyandoff and Kelly<sup>234</sup>, women who have young children at home often experience role strain and time constraints. A housewife's role will bring happiness to her own, as she will devote more time to her family and won't miss out on significant moments in their development. However, stay-at-home mothers frequently struggle with emotional issues like feeling as though they have lost their identity, independence, and self-worth<sup>235</sup>. There are certain benefits for working mothers, like increased success and financial security<sup>236-237</sup>. However, there is conflict when it comes to finding the time to balance the roles of a housewife and a worker, which raises stress levels and lowers contentment with life<sup>238</sup>. Studies should focus on creating culturally-tailored education strategies targeted at challenging men's enactment of their investment in patriarchy, regardless of their social situation, given the documented correlations between partners' patriarchal attitudes as well as domineering and abusive actions. .

The most important way to measure the impact of policies is probably well-being. Based on the data from this study, each distinct dimension of well-being stands for a factor associated with critical facets of life, including physical health, financial decision-making, and academic achievement.

Scholars studying domestic labor have long believed that as time goes on, gender disparities will decrease, but this does not seem to be the case. Instead, it seems that conventional gender roles keep evolving into new forms. Even though it is no longer acceptable in many socio-cultural groups to believe that domestic work is exclusively the domain of women, gender expectations nevertheless exist in more complicated ways, expressed in terms of personal preferences, standards, and choices. For the purpose of policy, this article provides a strong framework at the macro and micro levels. This helps to make interventions that directly improve population well-being outcomes easier to implement and evaluate.

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