

Impact of Coping Strategies on Role strain among Dual-earner Couples

¹Sameshta, ²Dr. Sunita Agarwal

¹ Ph. D. Scholar. (F.R.M.) Department of Home Science, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur,

² Associate Professor. (F.R.M.) Department of Home Science, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur

ABSTRACT

Today's dual-earner couples experience high role strain due to multiple responsibilities at work and home. Dual-earner couples should be free from strain and they should enjoy carrying out their responsibilities both at job and home. It can only be achieved by reducing role strain through the adoption of coping strategies. Coping strategies may prevent, reduce, divert, avoid or control role strain. Thus keeping the above facts in mind the present study was conducted on dual-earner couples of Jaipur city to find out the relationship between role strain and coping strategies among dual earner couples. Total 200 couples (200 wives and 200 husbands) were selected for the study. Data were analysed using SPSS 16.0 statistical tools. Bivariate analysis and Pearson correlation coefficient result shows that a negative correlation was found between role strain and coping strategies among dual-earner couples. This clarifies that an increase in the use of coping strategies tends to reduce role strain among dual-earner couples. The correlation value was $r = -0.228$ between overall role strain and overall coping strategies among wives, which was significant at 0.01 level. This indicates that an effective use of coping strategies may reduce role strain among wives. The correlation value was $r = -0.129$ between overall role strain and overall coping strategies among husbands, which was not significantly correlated because husbands experienced low overall role strain as compare to their wives.

Keywords: Coping Strategies, Role strain, Dual-earner couples

INTRODUCTION

An increasing number of married women have entered the work force during the last several decades. One consequence of this change in employment patterns is that many married women and men combine substantial work and family obligations. Role strain from increased roles and incongruent role expectations have been identified as common concerns among dual-earner couples. Role theory suggests that the maintenance of multiple roles across work and family institutions is a source of strain (Voydonoff, 1987) [22]. Role strain has been defined as "a transactional process reflecting an imbalance between demands and the resources available to cope with those demands" (Scharlach, 2001) [19]. This role strain is a direct result of taking on a number of responsibilities and not being able to successfully balance them.

Role strain exists when the numbers of roles a person occupies cannot be handled adequately or comfortably because of finite amounts of time and energy. Two competing perspectives within role theory have been proposed to explain the effects of multiple roles on role strain. The role-strain perspective, also referred to as the scarcity hypothesis, which proposes that an increased number of roles leads to overload and strain (Chrouser & Ryff, 2006) [3]. The scarcity theory postulates that individuals have a limited amount of time, energy and attention. Therefore multiple roles could easily and quickly deplete an individual's resources if not allocated appropriately (Marks, 1977) [11]. The role enhancement perspective, suggests that multiple-role engagement enhances an individual's resources, social connections, power, prestige and emotional gratification (Sieber, 1974; Thoits, 1983) [20, 21]. The Enrichment Hypothesis suggests that multiple roles can actually serve as a buffer against stress (Rothbard, 2001) [18], and that feelings of well-

being generated in one role can positively influence experiences in other roles (Barn, 2008) [1]. This hypothesis shows that engagement in multiple roles such as caregiver (of a parent), mother, wife and employee, is associated with better psychological well-being and reduced stress (Martire, 2000) [12]. When dual earner couples perceived high role strain then it becomes necessary to know about their coping strategies with the role strain they experience within both the work role and the home and family role and their attempt to integrate these roles. Coping is successful if the source of the problem has been dealt with or the results show that the experience of strain has been directly reduced. Consequently, it is important to study coping strategies in dual-earner families that may diffuse or prevent potential deleterious effects of role strain. Coping strategies may prevent, reduce, divert, avoid or control role strain. Coping strategies are the specific cognitive and behavioral strategies that individuals use to deal the stressful event/ role strain (Werner & Frost, 2000) [23]. Folkman and Lazarus (1988) [6] identified eight categories of coping strategies that depict a broad range of cognitive and behavioral strategies people used to manage the demands of stressful encounters/ role strain. These categories were further grouped into two forms: problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. *Problem-focused coping* strategies are similar to problem-solving tactics. These strategies encompass efforts to define the problem, generate alternative solutions, weigh the costs and benefits of various actions, take actions to change what is changeable, and, if necessary, learn new skills. *Emotion-focused coping* strategies are directed toward decreasing emotional distress. These tactics include such efforts as distancing, avoiding, selective attention, blaming, minimizing, wishful thinking, venting emotions, exercising, and meditating.

METHODOLOGY

Locale of the study

The present study was conducted in Jaipur city of Rajasthan state.

Sample

Total 40 organisations were selected for data collection. Those organisations were selected for the study purpose, which are expected to meet out the objectives of the study i.e. such organisations 1) where a good number of females are working, 2) work has to be done as per the MNCs or large organisation management system, 3) where the employee is supposed to work hard meet out their targeted work in stipulated time and 4) minimum working hours being 8 hrs. Five female respondents and their husbands were randomly selected from each organisation after acquiring the list of workers from the organisation. Those female respondents were selected who fulfill the study criteria. The study criteria was (1) nuclear family (2) husband-wife and at least one child living together (3) youngest child below 12 years of age and (4) husband – wife each having at least eight hours job period. Total 200 dual earner couples (200 wives and 200 husbands) were selected for the study.

Instruments

Role Strain: To assess role strain of the female spouses 'Women's Role strain Inventory' developed by Lengacher and Sellers in 2003^[9] was used. To assess role strain of the male spouses' aforesaid inventory was used after suitable gender effect modification. The questionnaires were divided in three sub-scales: i.e. 1) Role Distress, 2) Role Enhancement and 3) Role Support.

Coping Strategies: Coping strategies were measured by using the Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WCQ) developed by Folkman and Lazarus in 1988 after suitable modification. WCQ was developed in order to measure coping in terms of the person- environment relationship and measures how people cope or manage with the role strain of everyday life. Folkman and Lazarus (1988)^[6] identified eight categories of coping strategies that depict a broad range of cognitive and behavioral strategies people used to manage the demands of stressful encounters/ role strain. The eight sub-scales of WCQ are: Confrontive Coping, Distancing, Self-controlling, Seeking Social Support, Accepting Responsibility, Escape-Avoidance, Planful Problem Solving and Positive Reappraisal.

Problem-focused coping strategies: It refers to a person's efforts to change the conflict situation by defining the problem and finding alternatives and is an objective, analytical process (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)^[10]. Problem-focused coping strategies include categories of confrontive coping, seeking social support, planful problem solving and positive reappraisal.

Emotion-focused coping strategies: It involves regulating emotional reactions to stressful events in order to alleviate emotional stress. Through emotion-focused strategies, the person changes the meaning of the situation without actually changing behaviours or events or avoids the emotions brought up by the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)^[10]. Emotion-focused coping strategies include categories of distancing, accepting responsibility and escape-avoidance. The category of self-control is a coping mechanism outside of these two main forms (Problem focused and emotion focused) of coping styles.

Research Design

Descriptive cross-sectional study with survey method was used. Survey method is organized attempt to analyze, interpret and report the present status of a social institution, group or area.

Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed to the female respondents in their working places after the permission of their managing director along with written and verbal instruction that explained the nature and scope of the study. Two sets of the questionnaire were distributed to each respondent, one to be filled by female respondents and other by male respondents i.e. their spouses. Respondents were requested to complete the questionnaire without discussing their responses with others. After few days questionnaire were collected by investigator.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS 16.0 statistical tools. To analyze the relationship between role expectation and role strain among dual-earner couples, Bivariate analysis and Pearson correlation coefficient test was used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The relationship between role strain and coping strategies among dual-earner couples were analyzed. The results in this respect are presented in following tables.

Relationship between coping strategies and role distress among respondents were analyzed using *Bivariate* analysis and *Pearson* correlation coefficient. Table- 1 indicates a significant negative relationship between females' role distress and five coping strategies i.e. confrontive coping, distancing, seeking social support, escape-avoidance and planful problem solving. It was significant at 0.05 and 0.01 level. A significant negative relationship was observed between males' role distress and four coping strategies i.e. confrontive coping, planful problem solving, positive reappraisal and escape avoidance. It was significant at 0.05 and 0.01 level. Problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping and overall coping strategies were also found to be negatively correlated with role distress among both spouses. It was significant at 0.01 level. The net effect is that an increase in the use of these strategies tends to reduce role distress among dual earner couples.

Table 1: Pearson correlation value (Bivariate Analysis) depicting relationship between Coping strategies and Role Distress (Aspect of Role Strain) based on gender

N= 400 (200+200)

| S. No. | Coping Strategies | Wife (Female) Role Distress | Level of Significance | Husband (Male) Role Distress | Level of Significance |
|--------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Confrontive Coping | -0.170 | 0.05 | -0.176 | 0.05 |
| 2 | Distancing | -0.220 | 0.01 | -0.117 | NS |
| 3 | Self-controlling | -0.138 | NS | -0.048 | NS |
| 4 | Seeking Social Support | -0.253 | 0.01 | -0.129 | NS |
| 5 | Accepting Responsibility | 0.070 | NS | -0.131 | NS |
| 6 | Escape-Avoidance | -0.311 | 0.01 | -0.241 | 0.01 |
| 7 | Planful Problem-Solving | -0.186 | 0.01 | -0.156 | 0.05 |
| 8 | Positive Reappraisal | -0.118 | NS | -0.147 | 0.05 |
| 9 | Problem Focused Coping | -0.229 | 0.01 | -0.188 | 0.01 |
| 10 | Emotion Focused Coping | -0.282 | 0.01 | -0.235 | 0.01 |
| 11 | Overall Coping Str. | -0.255 | 0.01 | -0.222 | 0.01 |

Both groups indicate that confrontive coping, planful problem solving, and escape avoidance are the coping strategies used most often for reducing role distress. Two strategies i.e. distancing and seeking social support strategies were highly used by female spouses to cope with role distress. This indicates that female respondents use a wide range of coping strategies. This could be due to the fact that in dual-earner families' females experienced higher level of role distress due to multiple roles as compared to their husbands. Similar findings were also made by Karanci *et al.* (1999) ^[8], who revealed that women reported greater distress as compared to men. There were gender differences in reported coping strategies. Problem solving/optimistic approach was the most frequently used

coping strategy for men, whereas for women fatalistic approach was the most frequently employed coping strategy. Perceived social support did not differ for women and men. Both groups perceived highest support from the family and spouse. Wijndaele *et al.* (2007) ^[24] explored the relationship between emotion-focused coping and psychological distress in their general population study and found that individuals had lower anxiety and depressive symptoms when they regularly received social support. Seeking social support is also negatively associated with stress, anxiety and depression in university students. Neill (2007) ^[15] also found in his study that the best predictor of psychological distress was the use of avoidant coping strategies.

Table 2: Pearson correlation value (Bivariate Analysis) depicting relationship between Coping strategies and Role Enhancement (Aspect of Role Strain) based on gender

N= 400 (200+200)

| S. No. | Coping Strategies | Wife (Female) Role Enhancement | Level of Significance | Husband (Male) Role Enhancement | Level of Significance |
|--------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Confrontive Coping | 0.060 | NS | 0.039 | NS |
| 2 | Distancing | 0.027 | NS | 0.050 | NS |
| 3 | Self-controlling | 0.069 | NS | -0.098 | NS |
| 4 | Seeking Social Support | 0.031 | NS | -0.067 | NS |
| 5 | Accepting Responsibility | -0.134 | NS | -0.001 | NS |
| 6 | Escape-Avoidance | 0.002 | NS | -0.035 | NS |
| 7 | Planful Problem-Solving | 0.136 | NS | 0.032 | NS |
| 8 | Positive reappraisal | 0.108 | NS | 0.071 | NS |
| 9 | Problem Focused Coping | 0.105 | NS | 0.020 | NS |
| 10 | Emotion Focused Coping | -0.034 | NS | -0.006 | NS |
| 11 | Overall Coping Str. | 0.056 | NS | -0.013 | NS |

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between role enhancement and coping strategies among respondents. The results are shown in Table- 2, which clarifies that there is no significant correlation (either negative or positive) between role enhancement and coping strategies among both groups because the value is not significant. The aspect of role enhancement is based upon Sieber's (1974) ^[20] role accumulation (expansion) hypothesis, which proposes that multiple roles contribute to better health and focus on the rewards or privileges associated with multiple role involvement.

According to Nordenmark (2002) ^[16], the role expansion hypothesis, states that the manifold resources provided by multiple roles, compensate for any negative effects of multiple demands on well-being, and that multiple roles therefore have positive effects overall on psychological well-being and physical health. An individual with multiple social roles is assumed to be able to compensate for difficulties in one domain by seeking support and satisfaction in another. Role enhancement refers to a positive response to multiple roles where an individual enjoys his/her life roles without experiencing role strain. Thus the individual is not experiencing role strain therefore need to use of coping strategies does not arise.

Table 3: Pearson correlation value (Bivariate Analysis) depicting relationship between Coping strategies and Role Support (Aspect of Role Strain) based on gender

N= 400 (200+200)

| S. No. | Coping Strategies | Wife (Female) Role Support | Level of Significance | Husband (Male) Role Support | Level of Significance |
|--------|--------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Confrontive Coping | -0.153 | 0.05 | -0.111 | NS |
| 2 | Distancing | -0.162 | 0.05 | -0.049 | NS |
| 3 | Self-controlling | -0.120 | NS | 0.056 | NS |
| 4 | Seeking Social Support | -0.164 | 0.05 | -0.041 | NS |
| 5 | Accepting Responsibility | -0.016 | NS | -0.007 | NS |
| 6 | Escape-Avoidance | -0.246 | 0.01 | -0.164 | 0.05 |
| 7 | Planful Problem-Solving | -0.153 | 0.05 | -0.084 | NS |
| 8 | Positive reappraisal | -0.072 | NS | -0.094 | NS |
| 9 | Problem Focused Coping | -0.170 | 0.05 | -0.102 | NS |
| 10 | Emotion Focused Coping | -0.242 | 0.01 | -0.121 | NS |
| 11 | Overall Coping Strategy. | -0.207 | 0.01 | -0.100 | NS |

Table- 3 highlights that significant negative relationship between females' role support (aspect of role strain) and five coping strategies i.e. confrontive coping, distancing, seeking social support, planful problem solving and escape-avoidance among female spouses. It was significant at 0.05 and 0.01 level respectively. Role support (aspect of role strain) was also found to be negatively correlated with problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping and overall coping strategies among female spouses. It was significant at 0.05 and 0.01 level. Males spouses role support was also found to be negatively correlated with only one strategy i.e. escape-avoidance. It was significant at 0.05 level. It indicates that an increase in the use of these strategies tends to reduce role strain in the aspects of role support among both spouses.

One of the striking features of this table is that males' role support is significantly correlated with only one strategy. This could be due to the fact that male spouses experienced low level of role strain in the aspect of role support because they receive more support from their spouses and family members as compared to female spouses. Daalen *et al.* (2005) [4] concluded that as for the non-work related sources of social support, men receive more social support from their spouse, while women receive more social support from relatives and friends. Dakhli *et al.* (2013) [5] found that both genders use various coping strategies as a mechanism to deal with stressful situations. The most frequently used strategy was Assimilation (instrumental social support, positive reinterpretation, and planning strategy).

Table 4: Pearson correlation value (Bivariate Analysis) depicting relationship between Coping strategies and Overall Role Strain based on gender

N= 400 (200+200)

| S. No. | Coping Strategies | Wife (Female) Overall Role Strain | Level of Significance | Husband (Male) Overall Role Strain | Level of Significance |
|--------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Confrontive Coping | -0.167 | 0.05 | -0.133 | NS |
| 2 | Distancing | -0.182 | 0.01 | -0.089 | NS |
| 3 | Self-controlling | -0.144 | 0.05 | 0.040 | NS |
| 4 | Seeking Social Support | -0.202 | 0.01 | -0.045 | NS |
| 5 | Accepting Responsibility | 0.093 | NS | -0.058 | NS |
| 6 | Escape-Avoidance | -0.246 | 0.01 | -0.153 | 0.05 |
| 7 | Planful Problem-Solving | -0.210 | 0.01 | -0.112 | NS |
| 8 | Positive reappraisal | -0.135 | NS | -0.127 | NS |
| 9 | Problem Focused Coping | -0.224 | 0.01 | -0.128 | NS |
| 10 | Emotion Focused Coping | -0.213 | 0.01 | -0.145 | 0.05 |
| 11 | Overall Coping Str. | -0.228 | 0.01 | -0.129 | NS |

One of the prominent findings of table- 4 is that a significant negative relationship between overall role strain and almost all strategies (except two strategies i.e. accepting responsibility and positive reappraisal) among female subjects. It was significant at 0.05 and 0.01 level. As the above table also highlights that males' overall role strain is significantly correlated with escape avoidance and emotion focused coping strategies. It was significant at 0.05 level. This indicates that an increase in the use of these strategies tends to reduce role strain among respondents.

The correlation value was -0.129 between overall role strain and overall coping strategies among husbands, which was not significantly correlated, while the value obtained for wives was -0.228 between overall role strain and overall coping strategies.

It was significant at 0.01 level. This indicates that an effective use of coping strategies may reduce role strain among wives.

One of the interesting findings of the table is that males' role strain is significantly correlated with only two strategies. This indicates that male subjects used coping strategies less frequently than do female subjects because male spouses experienced a lower level of role strain compared to their female spouses. Thus, if the individual is not experiencing role strain therefore need to use coping strategies does not arise. Judkins (2001) [7] revealed that mid-level nurse managers experienced stress at work and coped by using strategies that either reduced (self-controlling, accepting responsibility, escape avoidance) or resolved (confrontive) stress. Muhonen & Torkelson (2006) [13] revealed that the participants, both women

and men, used a wide range of strategies, e.g. active strategies, seeking instrumental and emotional social support, acceptance, and resignation to cope with the stress at work. Similar findings were also reported by Mutad (2004) [14], who concluded that women scored significantly higher than the men on somatic symptoms and psychological distress. The women scored significantly higher than the men on the emotional and avoidance coping styles and lower on rational and detachment coping. The men were found to have more emotional inhibition than the women. Women have been described as reporting more distress, using more emotion responses, and engaging in fewer problem-solving coping strategies (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Billings & Moos, 1981) [17, 2].

Conclusion

It can be concluded that six coping strategies i.e. confrontive coping, distancing, seeking social support, escape avoidance, planful problem solving and positive reappraisal were effective for reducing role strain among respondents. In which five strategies i.e. confrontive coping, distancing, seeking social support, escape avoidance and planful problem solving were effective for reducing role strain among wives and four strategies i.e. confrontive coping, escape avoidance, planful problem solving and positive reappraisal were effective for reducing role strain among husbands. It was also observed wives' overall role strain was significantly correlated with their overall coping strategies but husbands' overall role strain was not significantly correlated with their overall coping strategies. It shows that male subjects use coping strategies relatively less frequently than female subjects. Female respondents use a wide range of coping strategies because female respondents experience higher level of role strain as compared to their male counterparts.

References

1. Barn R. Ethnicity, gender and mental health: Social worker perspectives. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*. 2008; 54:69-82.
2. Billings AJ, Moos RH. The role of coping responses and sound resources in attributing the stress of life events. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*. 1981; 4:139-157.
3. Chrouser CJ, Ryff CD. Multiple roles and well-being: Sociodemographic and psychological moderators. *Sex Roles*, 2006; 55:801-815.
4. Daalen GV, Sanders K, Willemsen TM. Sources of social support as predictors of health, psychological well-being and life satisfaction among Dutch male and female dual-earners. *Journal of Women & Health*. 2005; 41(2):43-62.
5. Dakhli M, Dinkha J, Matta M, Aboul-Hosn N. The effects of gender and culture on coping strategies: An extension study. *The International Journal of Social Sciences*. 2013; 8(1):87-98.
6. Folkman S, Lazarus RS. *Ways of Coping Questionnaire*. Published by Mind garden. Inc., 1690 Woodside Road, Suite 202, Redwood City, CA 94061, USA, 1988, (650-261-3500).
7. Judkins SK. *Hardiness, Stress, and Coping Strategies among Mid-Level Nurse Managers: Implications For Continuing Higher Education* (Ph. D. Thesis). University of North Texas., 2001. Retrieved from: http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc2799/m2/1/high_res_d/dissertation.pdf
8. Karanci NA, Alkan N, Aksit B, Sucuoglu H, Balta E. Gender differences in psychological distress, coping, social support and related variables following the 1995 Dinar (Turkey) earthquake. *North American Journal of Psychology*. 1999; 1(2):189-204.
9. Lengacher CA, Sellers E. *Women's Role strain Inventory*. In: Strickland, O. L. & Dilorio, C. *Measurement of Nursing Outcomes: Self Care and Coping*, 2nd Edition, 2003; 3:109-127. Springer Publishing Company.
10. Lazarus RS, Folkman S. *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. Springer Publishing Company, New York., 1984.
11. Marks SR. Multiple roles and role strain: Some notes on human energy, time and commitment. *American Sociological Review*, 1977; 41:921-936.
12. Martire L, Stephens M, Townsend A. Centrality of women's multiple roles: Beneficial and detrimental consequences for psychological well-being. *Psychology of Aging*, 2000; 15(1):148-156.
13. Muhonen T, Torkelson E. *Exploring stress and coping at work: Critical incidents among women and men in equivalent positions*, 2006. Retrieved from: <https://dspace.mah.se/handle/2043/5201>
14. Mutad MP. Gender differences in stress and coping styles. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 2004; 37(7):1401-1415.
15. Neill J. *Use of Non-Productive Coping Strategies Predicts Adolescents' Psychological Distress during Outdoor Education Programs*. Centre for Applied Psychology, University of Canberra, 2007.
16. Nordenmark M. Multiple social roles – a resource or a burden: Is it possible for men and women to combine paid work with family life in a satisfactory way? *Gender, Work and Organization*, 2002; 9(2):125-145.
17. Pearlin LI, Schooler C. The structure of coping. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. 1978; 19:2-21.
18. Rothbard N. Enriching or depleting? The dynamics of engagement in work and family roles. *Admin Sci Quart*. 2001; 46(4):655-684.
19. Scharlach AE. Role strain among working parents: Implications for workplace and community, 2001. In: Humphrey, AK, Brown S, Bell J, Lee D, Lokken-Worthy S. *Investigating role strain and stress in dual-earner and single-earner families*. Undergraduate Research Journal for the Human Sciences, 2006.
20. Sieber SD. Toward a theory of role accumulation. *American Sociological Review*, 1974; 39:567-578.
21. Thoits PA. Multiple identities and psychological well-being: A reformulation and test of the social isolation hypothesis. *American Sociological Review*, 1983; 48:174-187.
22. Voydanoff P. *Work and family life*, 1987. In: Humphrey AK, Brown S, Bell J, Lee D, Lokken-Worthy S. *Investigating role strain and stress in dual-earner and single-earner families*. Undergraduate Research Journal for the Human Sciences, 2006.
23. Werner JS, Frost MH. (Eds.). *Stress and coping: State of the science and implications for nursing theory, research, and practice 1991-1995*, 2000. In: Judkins SK. *Hardiness, Stress, and Coping Strategies among Mid-Level Nurse Managers: Implications For Continuing Higher Education* (Ph. D. Thesis). University of North Texas, 2001. Retrieved from:

http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc2799/m2/1/high_res_d/dissertation.pdf

24. Wijndaele K, Matton L, Duvigneaud N, Lefevre J, De Bourdeaudhuij I, Duquet W. Association between leisure time physical activity and stress, social support and coping: A cluster-analytical approach. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 2007; 8(4):425-440.