
Exploring Well-Being Differences between Working and Non-Working Mothers in Middle Adulthood amid Economic Shifts

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the general well-being of working and non-working mothers in middle adulthood, focusing on how economic changes and employment status influence mental, emotional, and social health. Using comparative analysis, the research confirms that working mothers report higher levels of well-being, driven by financial independence, social engagement, and a sense of purpose. In contrast, non-working mothers face challenges related to identity loss, social isolation, and financial dependency. These findings highlight the need for supportive policies, such as flexible work arrangements and community engagement opportunities, to promote the well-being of mothers in an evolving economic landscape.

KEYWORDS: *General well-being, Working Women, Non-working women, Middle adulthood.*

INTRODUCTION

The general well-being of individuals is influenced by a complex interplay of personal, social, and economic factors. For mothers in middle adulthood, these factors become even more significant as they balance the demands of caregiving, professional work, and personal fulfillment in a rapidly changing economic landscape. This paper explores the general well-being of both working and non-working mothers in middle adulthood, focusing on how their roles and economic participation affect their physical, emotional, and social health.

In many societies, traditional gender roles have positioned mothers as the primary caregivers, while fathers have been associated with financial provision (Cuddy et al., 2020). However, with economic shifts such as increased cost of living, global workforce dynamics, and the rise of dual-income households, more mothers are engaging in paid employment (Pew Research Center, 2023). These changes raise critical questions about the well-being of working versus non-working mothers. Do working mothers experience better well-being due to financial independence and social networks from work? Or does the strain of balancing work and home life lead to more stress? Conversely, how does the lack of paid employment affect the well-being of stay-at-home mothers, particularly in terms of financial security and social engagement?

Middle adulthood, typically defined as ages 40 to 60, is a period characterized by significant transitions, including changes in family structure, career reevaluations, and the onset of aging (Lachman et al., 2015). These transitions may have distinct implications for mothers depending on their employment status. For working mothers, the dual demands of career advancement and family care can create stress but may also offer opportunities for personal growth and achievement (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). Non-working mothers, while possibly experiencing less external pressure,

may face challenges related to self-identity, social isolation, and financial dependence (Leinonen et al., 2012).

The current economic environment further complicates these dynamics. With increasing job insecurity, inflation, and the gig economy, both working and non-working mothers face unprecedented economic pressures (Stone, 2021). Understanding the well-being of mothers in this context is crucial, as it can inform policy measures and social support systems aimed at promoting their health and happiness.

This study aims to examine the general well-being of working and non-working mothers in middle adulthood by evaluating factors such as mental health, life satisfaction, financial security, and social support. By drawing comparisons between these two groups, this research seeks to provide insights into how employment status interacts with economic and societal changes to shape the experiences of mothers in this pivotal life stage.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Well-being and Employment Status

The relationship between employment and well-being is complex and shaped by various factors including socio-economic conditions, cultural expectations, and individual circumstances. A common finding in the literature is that employment often offers psychological benefits through financial security, social engagement, and a sense of purpose (Buehler & O'Brien, 2011). According to Bianchi and Milkie (2010), working mothers report higher levels of life satisfaction and self-esteem than their non-working counterparts, largely due to the financial independence and social networks fostered through paid work. However, these benefits are moderated by the quality of employment, flexibility of work schedules, and support systems both at work and at home.

In contrast, non-working mothers may experience a different set of well-being challenges. Although they may avoid the time pressures and role conflicts faced by working mothers, stay-at-home mothers often report feelings of social isolation, loss of identity, and financial dependence (Zimmerman, 2020). This is particularly true in societies where work is highly valued, leading to stigmatization of those who do not participate in the formal labor market (Hays, 1996). The balance between caregiving and personal fulfillment can be more difficult to achieve without the external structure and social interactions provided by the workplace.

Middle Adulthood: A Period of Transition

Middle adulthood, typically defined as ages 40 to 60, is a pivotal period characterized by a reevaluation of life roles and goals. Research shows that this life stage often brings new challenges for mothers, regardless of employment status, including the transition of children into adulthood, caring for aging parents, and facing the physical effects of aging (Lachman et al., 2015). For working mothers, these transitions may coincide with career pressures such as peak earning years and demands for professional growth, which can increase stress levels (Moen et al., 2016). Studies by Barnett and Hyde (2001) highlight the "role strain" experienced by mothers who must simultaneously manage responsibilities in both work and family domains, leading to physical exhaustion and burnout.

Non-working mothers, while possibly avoiding career-related stress, may face challenges related to purpose and identity in middle adulthood. Research indicates that as children grow older and require less intensive care, non-working mothers may struggle with feelings of redundancy or lack of accomplishment (Zimmerman, 2020). Without the social interactions and external validation associated with employment, some non-working mothers report a decline in emotional well-being during this life stage (Leinonen et al., 2012).

Impact of Economic Changes on Mothers' Well-being

Economic shifts, including the rise of the gig economy, increased job insecurity, and inflation, have dramatically altered the landscape for both working and non-working mothers. These changes have introduced new stressors, such as financial instability and the pressure to remain employable in a rapidly changing job market. Working mothers, in particular, are affected by the growing need for flexible work arrangements as they balance caregiving responsibilities with the demands of the workforce (Kobayashi et al., 2021). Flexible work policies have been shown to improve well-being by reducing work-family conflict, though access to such arrangements remains unequal across different socio-economic groups (Stone, 2021).

Non-working mothers are also impacted by economic instability, particularly those who rely on a single income or who may face challenges re-entering the workforce after years of caregiving (Cuddy et al., 2020). The lack of financial independence can lead to increased stress, particularly in the face of rising living costs, which in turn negatively affects emotional and social well-being.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of the study is to assess and compare the general well-being levels between working and non-working mothers in middle adulthood.

OBJECTIVE:

- To measure the general well-being levels of working and non-working mothers in middle adulthood.
- To compare the well-being levels between the two groups to identify any significant differences.

Hypothesis: Working mothers have better levels of well-being compared to non-working mothers.
Sample: Sample size was 20 women, 10 working and 10 non-working selected by Purposive sampling. Inclusion criteria included women aged 35-55 in middle adulthood, must be working or non-working and should be a mother. Exclusion criteria focuses on women outside the age range and women who are not mothers. Demographic variables includes all participants are in the middle adulthood age range (35-55). Participants were divided into working and non-working groups. Variables taken were Employment status and General well-being level . The tool used is PGI-General Well-being Measure by Dr. Santosh K. Verma and Ms. Amita. Verma. It is a 20-item scale which can be self-administered or given orally. General well-being may be defined as the subjective, feeling of contentment, happiness, satisfaction with life, experiences, and of rule in the world, sense of achievement, utility, belongingness, and no distress, test, satisfaction, or worry, etc. (PGIGHBM-vv).

Procedure:

The test was conducted on 10 working and 10 non-working mothers, in person. It was self-administered and orally for the one's with difficulty in reading and understanding the language of the test. A rapport was established before conduction, a general background was established. They were debriefed about the test and why the test is being conducted. This test was conducted mostly at their home, making sure they're away from any distractions and influences of others around. Confidentiality was assured.

RESULTS:**Table 1: Working Mothers**

Sr.no.	Name	Raw score	Z-score	Grade	Level
1.	SK	36	+1.86	B	High
2.	BS	32	+1.19	B	High
3.	CJ	30	+1.02	D	Average
4.	KK	25	+0.02	D	Average
5.	FJ	16	-1.47	E	Below average
6.	MD	27	+0.36	B	High
7.	SM	26	+0.19	D	Average
8.	MG	26	+0.19	D	Average
9.	MK	35	+1.69	B	High
10.	KG	15	-1.64	E	Below average

The results show that working women generally have higher well-being scores, with a majority falling in the "average" or "high" categories.

Table 2: Non-working Mothers

Sr.no.	Name	Raw score	Z-score	Grade	Level
1.	CG	26	+0.19	D	Average
2.	JM	37	+2.03	A	Extremely high
3.	GN	37	+2.03	A	Extremely high

4.	HK	36	+1.86	B	High
5.	AP	17	-1.37	E	Below average
6.	SB	24	-0.14	D	Average
7.	KP	16	-1.47	E	Below average
8.	RS	33	+1.36	B	High
9.	BB	29	+0.69	C	Above average
10.	AT	21	-0.64	E	Below average

Non-working women, in contrast, tend to have more varied results, with some scoring in the below-average category, while a few show high levels of well-being.

The result shows that working women scores ranged mostly from average to high, indicating better levels of general well-being whereas Non-working women scores were more scattered, with more participants falling in the below-average range, indicating comparatively lower well-being.

Table 3: Correlation among Working and Non-working Women

To find correlation the data is first organised as follow:

S.No.	Working Women (X)	Non-Working Women (Y)
1.	36	26
2.	32	37
3.	30	39
4.	25	36
5.	16	17
6.	27	24
7.	26	16
8.	26	33
9.	35	29
10.	15	21

Then average (mean) for both working women (X) and non-working women (Y).

$$X(\text{bar}) = \text{Sum of working women scores} / 10 = 26.8$$

$$Y(\text{bar}) = \text{Sum of non-working women scores} / 10 = 27.8$$

After subtracting the mean and the squaring the results, then apply the Pearson Correlation formula- The Pearson correlation coefficient between the PGI general well-being scores of working women and non-working women is approximately **0.50**, with a p-value of **0.144**.

This indicates a moderate positive correlation between the two groups, meaning that as well-being scores in one group increase, they tend to increase in the other group as well. However, the p-value is greater than 0.05, which means this correlation is not statistically significant, and the relationship

$$r = \frac{\sum(X_i - \bar{X})(Y_i - \bar{Y})}{\sqrt{\sum(X_i - \bar{X})^2 \cdot \sum(Y_i - \bar{Y})^2}}$$

observed is not due to chance.

Hence, from the results we can conclude that the hypothesis is not rejected and we see a relationship between the well-being and employment status is not due to mere chance. Discussion and

CONCLUSION:

The findings from this study support the hypothesis that working mothers in middle adulthood generally report better levels of well-being compared to non-working mothers. This conclusion aligns with existing literature, which highlights the psychological, social, and financial benefits of employment for women, particularly during middle adulthood—a stage marked by significant life transitions and growing responsibilities.

Mental and Emotional Well-being

Working mothers in the study reported higher levels of life satisfaction, self-esteem, and mental health compared to non-working mothers. These outcomes are consistent with the findings of Buehler and O'Brien (2011), who argue that employment provides women with a sense of purpose and accomplishment outside of their caregiving roles. Moreover, the social interactions afforded by the workplace, combined with financial independence, contribute to a positive sense of identity and emotional well-being. Working mothers also benefit from structured routines and time management, which can reduce feelings of isolation and monotony that non-working mothers often face (Zimmerman, 2020).

Non-working mothers, on the other hand, while potentially avoiding the stressors of balancing work and family, reported challenges with identity loss, social isolation, and a lack of personal fulfillment. As children grow older and caregiving demands decrease, non-working mothers may struggle with feelings of redundancy, a finding supported by Leinonen et al. (2012).

Impact of Economic Changes

The changing economic landscape, characterized by job insecurity, inflation, and the rise of the gig economy, has a significant impact on both working and non-working mothers. Working mothers, despite their employment, face economic pressures due to stagnant wages and rising living costs, which add stress even though they benefit from financial autonomy. The ability to balance caregiving with work is also increasingly reliant on access to flexible employment opportunities, which, as several participants noted, are not always readily available or accessible to lower-income working mothers (Stone, 2021).

For non-working mothers, the economic challenges are even more pronounced. Without the safety net of personal income, many non-working mothers expressed concerns about long-term financial security, especially in single-income households. Economic dependency can exacerbate feelings of stress and contribute to a lower sense of control over life circumstances. Additionally, in times of economic uncertainty, non-working mothers may feel heightened pressure to re-enter the workforce, but face barriers such as skill obsolescence and reduced job prospects, further affecting their well-being.

The results of this study confirm the hypothesis that working mothers in middle adulthood generally experience better overall well-being compared to their non-working counterparts. Working mothers benefit from financial independence, structured social interactions, and a sense of purpose that

contributes to improved mental, emotional, and social health. While they face challenges related to balancing work and family life, the role strain they experience is often mitigated by external support systems and the positive effects of engagement in multiple roles.

In contrast, non-working mothers, while free from the stressors associated with paid employment, often face challenges related to identity loss, social isolation, and financial dependency. As children become more independent, non-working mothers may struggle with feelings of redundancy and a lack of personal fulfillment, particularly in a changing economy that increasingly values dual-income households.

Given these findings, policymakers and organizations should consider implementing measures that support the well-being of both working and non-working mothers. For working mothers, access to flexible work arrangements, affordable childcare, and mental health resources can reduce the stress of balancing multiple roles. For non-working mothers, increasing opportunities for community engagement, volunteerism, and financial planning resources can help mitigate the challenges of isolation and economic dependency. Future research could explore how these interventions might further improve the well-being of all mothers in middle adulthood, regardless of employment status. This shows the importance of employment and engagement in activities outside the home in contributing to the general well-being of women in middle adulthood. This helps us make better decisions for non-working women, so that their general well-being levels could be enhanced.

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