

## Misconceptions Regarding housewives among Young Females: A Psychological Perspective

\*Mitika Kanwar

### Abstract

*The present study was done to explore the perceptions about a housewife and the need to be one among the present generation Indian girls. Some myths and misunderstandings were explored which were attributed to the causative factors of modernisation and a greater distancing from traditional thinking over the years. A survey question was constructed to know how many girls would be interested in being a housewife, the reasons for their respective answers and their most preferred (tentative) interest after marriage. It was found that 76 out of 80 women chose to be a working woman due to some prejudiced reasons against a homemaker's job. The misconceptions have been explored in this paper along with the reasons and review of literature. Experiences and answers of housewives have been quoted to eliminate some misconceptions which portrayed housewives as lacking identity. Thus, a tunnel vision and overgeneralization was shown by many. Cognitive biases were at work in the psychology of respondents. The paper attempted to replace some irrational opinions about housewives with rational ones, targeting the youth, and instilling respect for homemakers as they deserve. The most preferred need was to have a successful career and opportunity to self actualize their worth while the least preferred need was contentment in homemaking.*

**Keywords:** homemakers, housewives, working women, actualise potentials, balance, nurturing, family, misconceptions, animus, cognitive bias.

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*\*Department of Psychology, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India*

### **Introduction**

Misconceptions regarding housewives among present generation Indian girls: A Psychological (Jungian and Cognitive) analysis

“Being a housewife is not associated with any growth in life,” say a majority number of young girls. This is a common belief held by girls of our present generation which makes many successful homemakers laugh. Most of these young ladies even perceive the term housewife as derogatory to their status. This perspective developed mostly with the advent of modernisation. The most wise and desirable view is to not view any (both housewives and working women) as derogatory but to be able to learn the good points from both the worlds. The author would consider homemaking a big profession in itself.

Lennon (1994) found that fulltime housewives have more autonomy, more interruptions, greater physical effort, more routine, fewer time pressures and lesser responsibilities for matters outside one's control than paid work. According to Pietromonaco, Manis and Markus's study (1987), full time employment does not necessarily enhance self esteem and well being for women who are not career oriented but for those who are. For unemployed women, family ties mattered more and were the highest source of self fulfilment and life satisfaction (Mikucka, 2011). Traditional Indian woman was the primary care giver expected to provide care to the in laws, children, and spouse (Prakash, 1997). Primarily education has bought a positive impact on women's well being as she can be financially

independent and take care of herself. Women empowerment has its advantages but has also brought along with it an inferiority complex among modern generation housewives since the popularity of housewives and most importantly, people's attitudes towards them has degraded over the years. It's not true that a housewife is not capable of working. It's the conscious choice made to serve the family and focus on the emotional well being of the family that is a primary motive for some. Thus, housewives are a victim of wrong psychology in the recent times as found out in this study.

### Method

#### Sample

The sample included 80 unmarried and married young girls from the age group of 19-28 years (M age= 24, S.D = 2.6) belonging to the middle and higher socio economic status. Most of them were currently pursuing education at the university or college. A few responses were also obtained from recently married young housewives. All the subjects were mentally and physically healthy. The sample was chosen using purposive sampling and snowball sampling technique.

#### Procedure

A list of young girls and housewives was prepared. They were contacted to know if they are willing to participate in the survey interview. Volunteers were asked a few open ended questions exploring their perceptions and the will to be a housewife themselves. The interview was conducted on a one to one basis personally over the phone and face to face. The responses were analysed for three aspects: 1) How many girls are interested in being a housewife, 2) The reasons for their answers, 3) Their general perception of a homemaker's job, and (4) their most preferred interest as a wife

### Results and Discussion

Analysing the open ended responses obtained from young girls of the present

generation between the age group of 19-28 years, it was found out that very few women are interested in being a housewife nowadays. 76 out of 80 said that they would love to be a working woman. Only 4 agreed to become a housewife. This led the author to find out the reasons for the decline in the preference for a homemaker. When asked for reasons, young females showed some biases and misconceptions in their understanding of a homemaker.

**Table 1 showing basic demographic and general information of the participants (N = 80)**

General Information of the participants	%
Married	50
Unmarried	50
Graduate	54
Undergraduate	56
Rural	22
Urban	78
Working	43
Housewives	57

**Table 2 Content analysis for the question asking reasons for not becoming a housewife (N = 80)**

Basic Themes emerging from the responses	Frequency
Wastage of education	67
Lack of growth / self actualization	74
Boredom	50

**Table 3 Content analysis showing the most preferred needs of young females as a wife (N = 80)**

Basic Needs	Frequency
Need to Nurture	33
Self worth	32
Intellectual stimulation through work/activities	76

Following misconceptions were revealed through content analysis of the open ended responses:

Misconception 1. "The money spent by parents on education gets wasted if one doesn't get a job."

Its imperative to understand that one does not necessarily educate to get a job. One does study to gain knowledge, degrees and get a job most of the times. But education's prime purpose which many nowadays have forgotten is to train your mind. If one knows the real purpose of education one will never feel education being wasted. Job is not as important as having an educated mind even without a job is. The very purpose of education is to instil critical thinking and prejudice free thinking. Having a prejudiced way of looking at things and not being able to see various perspectives in life is not going to be a result of good quality education. Education gets wasted only when one is not able to think critically, shows limited perspective on things and gets biased. Education will only get wasted when not applied to sift away truth from falsehood and weigh evidence against a theory. Thus, a housewife who is able to think critically, apply logical reasoning in her day to day chores, plans a healthy family life, is emotionally strong and bias free - is able to utilise the "educated mind goal" of education and the rationality and criticality in thinking that education purports to instil.

Noor, 23 says -"If given a chance to become a housewife, I wouldn't for a very simple reason that I have studied all my life to become an independent woman and not to sit at home relying on my husband for money. I can choose work over family because of facilities like cretches."

The individuals' choice of being a working woman is absolutely fine but the reasons for the same need to be replaced. The consequence of having the belief of "wasting my education" not only brings about self worthlessness feelings when one doesn't work but also limits one's understanding of education. The Mental Set applied here limits one's perception of considering education only for job purposes rather than for one's own personal developmental purposes.

Misconception 2. "The job of a homemaker/housewife lacks growth and creativity"

One thing a woman is afraid of is the self perception of being a "somebody." This has always been present in the archetype of every female (Estes, 2008). But what they forget is that this perception, self esteem, and actualization comes from within when one transcends the societal pressure and indulges in free expression. The free expression of one's hidden talents can happen anywhere- home, garden, workplace, beside the river, etc. Misconceiving a homemaker's job as lacking growth and creativity is a bias.

"To create one must be able to respond. Creativity is the ability to respond to all that goes on around us, to choose from the hundreds of possibilities of thought, feeling, action and reaction that arise within us and to put these together in a unique response, expression, or message that carries moment, passion and meaning. In this sense loss of creative milieu means finding ourselves limited to only one

choice, divested of, suppressing, or censoring feelings and thoughts, not acting, not saying, doing or being..."

Clarrisa Pinkola Estes (2008)

74 out of 80 women viewed housewife's job as that of lacking growth and learning in life. When asked for reasons, it was found out that this stemmed from their ideas of a housewife washing dishes, cooking and cleaning all day, without being able to take out time for learning, and exploring her identity. There is some amount of truth in these beliefs because some housewives after marriage become very preoccupied with family life that they do not have much time left for their own needs. However, before generalising this belief to all housewives there is a need to form three categories of housewives.

For some their basic identity in life is to be a good homemaker, for some it is important to self actualise their individual potential keeping the family as an equal priority and for some its all about self fulfilment, personal success and their identity of who they are and have been before marriage. A lot was explored considering these three types of housewives. The ones who belonged to the second and the third category were mostly admired by young girls for being able to actualize their potential in this study. Surprisingly, only 4 women out of 80 admired the first category of wives. Infact, most of them were embarrassed to belong to the first group.

Puneet, aged 19 says, "I would not like to be a housewife at all because I have experienced a life similar to a house wife's during vacation period like the one going on now. A housewife is deprived of intellectual growth and interaction and an empty mind is devils house. Also I don't feel comfortable asking my own parents for money let alone ask a stranger (husband) for it. And children need full time care in their initial years but who said just from mothers? I would leave my job only if my

children are not living with their grandparents and I would have children only when I have enough money in the bank for them and myself. I don't think so because such a person is ungrateful and takes others for granted because she is living off someone else's hard earned money. She will not read and grow but use the same money on cosmetics."

What makes her think that children don't need mother's parenting directly? What was found out is that most of them are not patient enough to take responsibility for a child and a family life; the primary reason for relationship failures and marriage break ups in today's world. Modern families are facing many challenges due to increasing number of women working outside family (Lin & Wang, 1988).

Again the reason stemmed from the belief that housewives lack the ability to actualise themselves. Therefore, evidence was collected from housewives to break this belief pattern among young girls. Here are a few responses which would make it clear that growth in life and self exploration start from within and a lot that one wants to achieve and learn depends on him/her. Irrespective of her job, a woman can learn and grow even after being a housewife provided she takes out time for herself. The same applies to a working woman, where she needs to take out time for the family. Vice versa, both have a responsibility to look after the family as well as their own potential and actualisation. To strike the balance is very important and one should explore some ways of how to strike this balance in today's world where the need for self expression has increased.

45 year old when asked what she enjoys about being a housewife replied as follows- "When my kids go to school, I have free time to play Golf, Swim and paint. These have always been my hobbies. The time devoted to my family is also sufficient since I'm able to stay home to receive my children and husband. What I enjoy

the most about being a housewife is that I have more stress busters than a working woman has because I have more free time to channelize my energy into something. Whereas, I think a working woman despite being a helping hand to the family, has more stressors as she has to not only earn for herself and her family but also cook and look after everyone else throughout the day. Here, we have an advantage..... No I don't believe that there is no growth in my profession as a homemaker because I socialise with the right kind of people whom I like talking to and discussing current topics with.... I read books and paint. That is sufficient for the therapy of my soul. Moreover, I also have the entire day to look after my kids and husband..."

This sets an example for housewives to not associate their job as less intellectual than other jobs because one's motivation and will to learn; to remain intelligent and confident is in one's hand. You are clearly your master.

Carlos Pinkola Estes (2008) suggests women to be Wild- allow yourself the freedom you deserve; Begin- the fear of failing will disappear, Stay with it- continue to create what you are creating by saying, "I love my creative life more than I love cooperating with my own oppression," and Insist a balance between personal rapture and family responsibilities. Very beautifully one can apply Estes' suggestions to that category of housewives who have lost charm and passion for dreams in the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

Misconception 3. "A housewife's life is full of boredom"

Many housewives were interviewed in this process and it was found out that they are as busy as working woman and have equal number of stressors.

Sanika Khanna a housewife, (age 25) "I am a housewife, though I put up exhibitions as a hobby, I believe in taking care of the house and family. It's not as if we get up late or lay around

the whole day. We have responsibilities and at the same time the privilege to spend time with family, friends and most importantly ourselves whenever we want to. It's my time and will and I am not selling it to someone. I can say this because I have worked in a corporate..done my own business.. but there is nothing better than being home when your husband comes from work."

Another response obtained from Manzil Kohli, showed his respect and understanding for homemakers "A housewife is capable of being called a **HOMEMAKER**. All principles of management that apply to a man in his day job apply to a homemaker's job as well. She's the best supply chain manager as she never let's your atta (flour) or other basic ingredients run out of stock, she's a marketing manager who knows how to raise her kids and make them strong for the world, she's an HR manager since she handles all emotional and behavioural aspects of the family. A lot of couples need to decide on basic preferences. A working wife will obviously also add to household income. A balance needs to be struck between increasing that income level vs. Care for family at home. Other parameters include cost of living in a city, family support from elder for grand kids, qualifications of both spouses..."

A study conducted on 444 housewives in Taipei proved the occupation of housewives to carry quality and quantity work load. Working women got support in dealing with daily demands from family. Whereas housewives spent more time cooking, looking after their husband, child care, managing household, T.V and chatting. Housewives also reported higher level of Life Satisfaction. Working women spent more time studying than doing household chores (Chen & Lin, 1992).

1. The Ambiguity Effect- for some young girls their mothers were also working. Since they did not know the favourable outcome of being a

housewife, they discarded it as an option completely. Thus, the bias operating here is the tendency to select options about which the advantage is known over an option whose advantage is not known; assuming that the one they know of is more advantageous than the one they don't know much of.

2. The Anchoring Effect or Focalism- most of them strongly considered the reasons for being a working woman to be one sided. They relied on only one piece of information while making decisions. Ex- "no growth is the main reason I dislike a housewife's job," "avoiding waste of education is the only reason we would like to get a job after studying so much." They needed to be more open minded about dialectical perspectives. The positives and negatives of both the professions well integrated and not discarded is the key to bring balance.

According to Jungian analysis it is healthy for a woman to have a strong Animus. Animus is the male element in a female and helps her in executing her wishes, plans and potentials. The more a woman stays in touch with her animus, the more she will be able to feel good about her inner wild nature, irrespective of her job as a homemaker or a paid worker.

Limitations of the study and Future Directions-

The study was done using qualitative analysis through interviews. It only offers a theoretical perspective. Statistical and empirical analysis can be further carried out with the help of some variables and measures to know how far the biases and prejudice against homemakers exist among today's young females and what are the causes. Secondly, a larger sample needs to be considered to generalise the finding more accurately to young female population's misunderstanding about housewife.

The study did not consider financial status as an influential factor on one's decision to be a working woman very clearly. To control the effect of finance, all ladies in the sample were chosen from upper middle and high socio economic status background where the need to be a working woman or a housewife would be influenced by the need for a strong identity and self actualization than money being the requirement.

For future research, rural and urban differences in perceptions can be explored. How does preference for nurturance, homemaking or professional satisfaction/ work satisfaction influence Indian women's well being and



Figure 1 showing the desired behaviours that emerged from the respondents' answers with maximum responses in favour of Professional satisfaction (95%) and the least in favour of contentment in homemaking (5%). 10% showed a desire for having all four sources to enhance their self worth upon marriage.

marital satisfaction? Are there any significant differences in their marital adjustment? Does supporting one of the two professions influence a woman's level of life satisfaction? Who is more satisfied? These are a few questions that might be explored further.

### Conclusion and Suggestions

The paper does not attempt to promote a homemaker's job by any means and is not one sided. The emphasis on a homemaker's profession in the present study was done simply to bring it to an equal status of that of a working woman in the eye's of today's youth. It's fairly a personal choice to be a working woman or a housewife. A lot depends on one's financial status, requirement of money to feed and educate one's kids, the need for social productivity, the cultural background one comes from, etc. The only concern was to dissolve some misunderstanding about housewives that have prevailed since a decade or two due to globalisation and changing trends. We may not come to any particular conclusion about whether it's the best for a woman to be a homemaker or a working woman because everyone derives satisfaction from different things. What is the requirement is her feeling of warmth within herself whether as a housewife or as a working woman. The best combination would be to be able to nurture her family and those around her (a very typical female instinct of nurturance) along with giving power to her animus for self expression:- To purge out her inner potentials, to put them into concrete ideas, to paint what she wants to, to sing what she wants to. Without the manifestation of her desires, she would only get frustrated.

At the end, it is in a woman's hand to either be a dedicated homemaker who can look after her personal accomplishments as well or be a working woman who can balance her personal and professional life. The solution for concerns regarding financial independence can be such that life being unexpected sometimes, it is

imperative that a housewife is able to take financial care of herself after divorce, death, etc. For this purpose it would be ideal if one takes good quality higher education in order to be able to get a job in hard times and feel educationally secured. Before taking the decision of being a housewife, a woman may try to have proper education and degrees as a backup plan.

Having a bias free judgement of housewives will help them also feel good about their profession. Lack of respect for a homemaker influences her self esteem and psychology. It is hoped that they get the respect and acknowledgment that they deserve.

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