10.12: Double Burden (Part 2)

Effects of Double Burden

Health Effects

Stress

When faced with the double burden of having to deal with the responsibilities of both a career as well as domestic duties, sometimes a person's health is affected. Many people faced with these circumstances have a higher chance of being sick since health and stress seem to be correlated, as stress has been implicated in up to eighty percent of all illnesses, as found by a report done by the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. In an article that was written by a team of researchers it was found that both men and women faced with a “spillover” of work and family issues were 1.5-1.6 times more likely to have an absence due to sickness than others. Men and women in these situations have also been proven to be more likely to be faced with psychological stress and even see themselves as unhealthier than their colleagues who are not in their situation.

Although women faced with double burden usually have more stress than most women in today’s society, it was proven that in most cases they are psychologically healthier than women who are not faced with these circumstances, for either being a stay at home mother or for being a working woman without children to take care of.

Mortality Rate

In a study done by Rosamund Weatherall, Heather Joshi and Susan Macran of the London School of Hygiene and
Tropical Medicine in 1994, the research presented suggests that women presented with the double burden have a lower mortality rate than women who are simply housewives.\textsuperscript{[46]} The women who were observed that had part-time jobs had a mortality rate lower than the women with full-time jobs and children.\textsuperscript{[46]} The same study also suggests that women who have young children are less likely to die than women who have no children or have older children.\textsuperscript{[46]} Although this evidence can not be strictly attributed to the double burden of having children and a career field, it can give a good indication of a trend in society. Also, this study was conducted in multiple countries including England, Wales, and the United States which gives the information presented from the study a more global perspective on the double burden.

**Absences Due to Sickness**

In several Western countries it has been seen that absences due to sickness for women are far greater than men.\textsuperscript{[36]} When investigating the reasons behind this, a study done in Sweden published in 1996 found that half of the difference between genders can be dismissed if you take out the days missed by pregnant women.\textsuperscript{[36]} When taking into account the health effects of double burden, child birth is always a possibility for mothers who already are faced with taking care of children and having a career and effects them and their health. In many studies people have tried to relate the difference in sickness absences directly to the double burden effect. It has been somewhat successful as women who are faced with work and child care have been known to request more sick days than men in the same situation.\textsuperscript{[36]} Additionally, working wives with children have twice the absence rate as men who are placed in the same position in work family conflicts.\textsuperscript{[9]}

**Loss of Sleep**

The stress of maintaining a career and a household can also lead to a loss of sleep.\textsuperscript{[3]} In traditional gender roles it is usually the mother who is the one to get the family going in the morning as she fixes breakfast and takes the children to school before she goes to her own job.\textsuperscript{[9]} At night the mother cooks and does various other activities around the house that cause her to be the last person to retire for the night as well. Although this is merely just a few gender roles that are not set in stone, they may hold to be true. It was found that working women sleep twenty-five minutes less a night due solely to their responsibility for domestic work.\textsuperscript{[9]} Applying this statistic in larger scale leads to the assumption that women on average lose up to thirteen hours of sleep per month due to domestic duties. It can be assumed that it is possible for an average woman to lose up to one hundred and fifty-six hours of sleep during a year because of domestic work and motherly duties.

![Figure](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Anthropology/Cultural_Anthropology/Book%3A_Cultural_Anthropology_(Evans)/10…)
Work Intensity

For many poor women and men whose work hours have reached the point where they cannot cut back on leisure time anymore to make time for domestic and paid work, work intensity is an issue because they often intensify their work time by doing two or more activities at once, such as taking care of children while cooking. Work intensity can lead to many negative health consequences, such as lack of sleep, stress, and lack of recreation.[32]

Economic Effects

There are many economic effects to the person who has to shoulder the double burden. Oftentimes, this tends to be the woman in the relationship, and so there has been analysis done on the economic effect of the double burden on women. According to Himmelweit (2002), because women often earn less than men, there is the thought that the woman should be the one to fit her paid job around household activities such as taking care of children. Because of this, and because they have many domestic duties, women often take part-time jobs and jobs in the informal sector in order to balance paid work with domestic work.[32] Part-time jobs and jobs in the informal sector do earn less than full-time jobs, so men have to increase their paid work hours in order to compensate for the lacking family income. This will "weaken her earning power and strengthen his", leading to an unequal distribution of power in the household, and allow the man to exploit the woman’s unpaid work.[4][47] This situation could have negative consequences especially for the woman because she is perceived to have less contribution to the household, due to domestic work being seen as less of a contribution than paid work. Such negative consequences include the lack of a divorce threat, where the woman does not have the economic means to ask for a divorce because she does not have a full-time job, and she has less money that she personally receives, decreasing her perceived contributions to the household.[4]

Solutions to the Double Burden

Family-Friendly Initiatives

Family-friendly initiatives are a possible solution to redistributing the load of unpaid work and alleviating the double burden. Possible initiatives include flexible work hours; part-time and job-sharing options; parental leave; child care subsidies; and on-site daycare options. There are two primary approaches to assisting working families: “One stresses the importance of action from within, with emphasis on private, internal, local initiatives within firms and organizations to alter workplace norms, conventions, and practices. The other approach calls for government interventions designed to facilitate proper care for children with less sacrifice of parents’ job opportunities, advancement, and compensation".[4]

Government Initiatives

The Nordic countries exemplify the use of family-friendly initiatives. For example, a nine-month parental leave is divided into thirds in Iceland. Three months are for the mother. Three non-transferable months are for the father, and there are three months that both parents can share. “The reimbursement is 80 per cent of the salary. From 2001 to October 2003, the average number of days taken by men increased from 39 to 83, and 13 per cent of Icelandic fathers used more than their non-transferable part." [25] Dual-income families are becoming the norm, especially in industrialized countries, so it
is not uncommon for large corporations to practice some form of family-friendly initiative.

Government family-friendly initiatives such as child subsidies and cheaper child care facilities can also greatly decrease the gender difference in the workplace, due to the woman being able to work longer hours outside the home. In addition, when developing policies related to paid work, it is important to do gender impact assessments in order to assess the impact of a policy on both the paid and unpaid sector.

Workplace Initiatives

Whenever there is talk about new policies regarding new work time policies, there is often the argument for longer work hours in exchange for a shorter work week. For example, many are in favor of longer work hours such as “three ten-hour days or four eight-hour days”. However, this is often not the best work hours for people who take care of children, because children go to school for perhaps six hours a day, not eight or ten. Caretakers would prefer the opposite – shorter hours and longer weeks, such as six hour work days for six times a week, with limits on evening work and overtime, as well as flexible schedules. In order to lessen the burden of taking care of children and domestic duties as well as working in the paid sector, workplaces should consider policies that take into account the preferred work hours of caretakers. In addition, it is often the case now that many workers juggle domestic work and paid work. In order to get the most effective workers, companies should consider changing their policies in order to attract the best people in the field.

References

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