

A Comparative Study on Maternal Employment, Mother-child Relationship Quality, and Children's Anxiety Levels in Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Background: Mother-child relationships play a crucial role in shaping a child's emotional and psychological well-being. While various factors influencing these dynamics have been explored, limited research has examined the role of maternal employment status on relationship quality and children's anxiety levels. *Aim:* This study compares the quality of mother-child relationships and anxiety levels among children based on their mothers' occupational status, categorizing mothers as either working professionals or homemakers.

Methods: A cross-sectional comparative study was conducted with 100 children aged 10 to 19 years, including 56 children of working mothers and 44 children of homemaker mothers. The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) measured relationship quality, while the Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (Spitzer et al., 2006) scale assessed anxiety levels. Descriptive statistics and an independent sample t-test were used to analyse group differences.

Results: The analysis revealed no significant differences in mean scores between children of working mothers and homemakers.

Specifically, no significant differences were found in overall relationship quality ($p = 0.72$), parent trust ($p = 0.36$), parent communication ($p = 0.18$), parent alienation ($p = 0.79$), or anxiety levels ($p = 0.47$).

Conclusion: Findings suggests that maternal employment doesn't negatively affect mother-child relationships or children's anxiety. These results could help alleviate guilt experienced by working mothers. Policymakers should encourage female workforce participation to enhance household income without concerns about harming family dynamics. Organizations should implement supportive policies for working mothers.

Keywords: Maternal employment, Mother-child relationship, Child anxiety, Working mothers, Family dynamics

It is universally accepted that the mother-child relationship is critical for emotional and psychological growth (Şahin, 2015). But its perceived centrality is a reflection of centuries old social and cultural demands made on women. The understanding that early experiences in caregiving shape internal working models which affect relationships, emotional regulation, and mental health outcomes across the lifespan

is centred upon attachment theory (Fletcher & Gallichan, 2016). High-quality mother-child relationships characterised by open communication, trust, and emotional attunement are responsible for developing resilience, self-esteem, and overall wellbeing in children and adolescents (Lamb & Lewis, 2011).

Traditional family structures have evolved over the past few decades as a result of changes in society, particularly with the increased participation of women in workforce. Concerns regarding the impact of these changes on children's emotional and psychological wellbeing have been raised due to the worldwide increase of women's employment (Bakhtari Aghdam et al., 2015). Current research has indicated that maternal employment is now not viewed as a uniform risk, but instead that its influence greatly varies based on a variety of contextual and mediating factors, such as the nature of work, family support, and quality of childcare provision (Kopp et al., 2024).

Concerns still remain about the potential impact of maternal employment on children's mental health, even though it is being increasingly recognized as the norm. There have been many studies that have examined whether a mother's working status increases her children's risk of internalizing behaviour, like anxiety. Salimiha et al. (2018) found that maternal employment was associated with varied outcomes in the child's socio-emotional development, whereby certain evidence suggested that specific work settings were associated with increased anxiety levels and emotional disturbances. Nevertheless, mother's job satisfaction, working hours, and provisions of supportive caregiving mitigated these effects.

Although, the evidence of direct correlation between maternal employment and anxiety outcomes remains inconsistent. Based on some studies, employed mothers may exhibit reduced emotional availability and increased stress, potentially making their children more anxious (Bakhtari Aghdam et

al., 2015). Other studies, however, argue that maternal employment might encourage good modelling behaviours, increased maternal self-efficacy, and better emotional outcomes for children in the long run, particularly when it is associated with job satisfaction and economic security (Lemmon et al., 2018; Vikram et al., 2018). Our knowledge of the interplay between maternal employment, the emotional aspects of parenting, and child's mental health should be revised in the context of the evolving social landscape and the increasing prevalence of adolescent anxiety. A more detailed exploration that accounts for the quality of mother-child interactions is needed, rather than viewing maternal employment as a single risk or protective factor.

This study aims to compare the quality of mother-child relationships and anxiety levels among children, categorizing mothers as either working professionals or homemakers. The primary objective is to investigate whether maternal employment status influences the quality of mother-child relationships and the anxiety levels of children. It was hypothesized that there will be a significant difference in the quality of mother-child relationships and anxiety levels of children based on their mother's employment status.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample

The present study employed a cross-sectional comparative research design to explore differences in mother-child relationship quality and children's anxiety levels based on maternal occupational status. Prior to administration, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study. Informed consent was obtained from the participant or their parent in compliance with ethical research guidelines. A total of 100 adolescent participants, aged between 10 and 19 years, were recruited for the study with no restrictions regarding gender or socioeconomic class. However, individuals

with divorced/separated parents or single mother and individuals undergoing any psychiatric treatments or medications were excluded.

Study tools

1. Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA): Developed by Armsden and Greenberg (1987), the IPPA was used to measure the quality of the mother-child relationship. Of the two subscales only the parent subscale was included in the study which assesses three dimensions: Trust, Communication, and Alienation. Higher scores on the inventory indicate stronger, more positive attachment relationships. The internal consistency measured by the Cronbach’s alpha was 0.87.
2. Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 Scale (GAD-7): Developed by Spitzer et al. (2006), was used to assess anxiety levels

in adolescents. It consists of seven items, with higher scores indicating higher levels of anxiety symptoms with an internal consistency of 0.89.

Procedure

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained from their parents/guardians. Data was collected online through the use of Google form. Strict confidentiality and anonymity were assured and maintained throughout the study. Participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the study at any point of time. Participants were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaires, and any queries were clarified by the researchers. Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 21.

RESULTS

Table 1: Showing the socio-demographic details

Variable	Category	Frequency
Age (in years)	10-12	16
	13-15	26
	16-19	58
Gender	Male	47
	Female	53
Mother’s Occupational Status	Working Professional	56
	Homemaker	44

The study included 100 adolescent participants within the age range of 10-19 years. Table 1 presents the socio-demographic details of the participants, including their age distribution, gender, and mothers’ occupational status. The age distribution revealed that majority of the participants fell within the range of 16-19 years (n=58), followed by smaller

proportions in 13-15 years (n=26) and 10-12 years (n=16). The gender distribution is relatively balanced with a slight dominance of females with 53% (n=53) compared to males with 47% (n=47). Regarding the mother’s occupational status, largely responses came from participants with working mothers; 56% (n=56), while the rest 44% (n=44) had homemakers.

Table 2: QR* and AL among children of Working Professionals (Group 1, n=56) and Homemakers (Group 2, n=44).**

Variable	Group	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Quality of Relationship total	1	87.73	9.96	-0.70	0.17
	2	86.97	11.07	-0.31	-0.64
Parent Trust	1	40.22	6.56	-0.81	0.04
	2	38.93	7.50	-1.23	2.16
Parent Communication	1	34.54	7.23	-0.54	0.04

	2	32.60	7.20	-0.40	-0.83
Parent Alienation	1	14.40	4.62	-0.06	-0.63
	2	14.65	4.83	0.78	1.05
Anxiety Level	1	7.87	5.10	0.55	-0.50
	2	8.62	5.20	0.47	-0.32
QR*: Quality of Relationship					
AL**: Anxiety Level					

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for Quality of Relationship (QR), its subscales and Anxiety Levels (ALs) among two groups. Group 1 represents children of Working Mothers (n=56) and Group 2 represents children of Homemakers (n=44). The mean QR score for Group 1 (M = 87.73, SD = 9.96) was slightly higher than that of Group 2 (M = 86.97, SD = 11.07). Both groups showed negative skewness, indicating a tendency for higher relationship quality scores, though Group 1 exhibited a more pronounced skewness (-0.70) compared to Group 2 (-0.31). In terms of sub-scales, Parent Trust was reported to be higher in Group 1 (M = 40.22, SD = 6.56) than in Group 2 (M = 38.93, SD = 7.50). However, Group 2 showed greater variability and a more negatively skewed distribution (-1.23) compared to Group 1 (-0.81). Parent Communication also followed

a similar pattern, with Group 1 reporting a higher mean score (M = 34.54, SD = 7.23) compared to Group 2 (M = 32.60, SD = 7.20). On the other hand, Parent Alienation scores were relatively similar between the two groups (Group 1: M = 14.40, SD = 4.62; Group 2: M = 14.65, SD = 4.83). However, Group 2 had a notable positive skewness (0.78) and higher kurtosis (1.05), suggesting the presence of more extreme scores. Regarding Anxiety Levels, Group 2 exhibited a slightly higher mean anxiety score (M = 8.62, SD = 5.20) than Group 1 (M = 7.87, SD = 5.10). Both groups showed a mild positive skewness, indicating a tendency for some children to report higher anxiety levels, with Group 1 showing slightly more skewness (0.55) than Group 2 (0.47). Overall, the skewness and kurtosis were within acceptable range, enabling the use of parametric statistical analyses.

Table 3: Levene's Test for Equality of Variances across Variables

Variable	Levene's F	p-value	Variance Assumption
Quality of Relationship total	0.97	0.32	Assumed
Parent Trust	0.33	0.56	Assumed
Parent Communication	0.00	0.97	Assumed
Parent Alienation	0.01	0.89	Assumed
Anxiety Level	0.00	0.98	Assumed

The Levene's Test for Equality of variances shown in table 3 revealed that none of the domains showed significant differences in variances, as all p-values were greater than 0.05.

Table 4: t-Test for Quality of Relationship, its domains, and Anxiety Levels among children of Working Professionals (Group 1, n=56) and Homemakers (Group 2, n=44).

Variable	t-value	df	significance	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Quality of Relationship total	0.35	98	0.72	-3.50	5.02
Parent Trust	0.90	98	0.36	-1.55	4.15
Parent Communication	1.33	98	0.18	-0.95	4.83
Parent Alienation	-0.25	98	0.79	-2.15	1.65
Anxiety Level	-0.72	98	0.47	-2.82	1.32

Table 4 presents the results of the independent sample t-test that was conducted to compare the QR, its domains such as parent trust, parent communication, and parent alienation, and ALs among adolescents based on maternal occupational status. The findings reveal that none of the comparisons between children of working mothers and homemakers showed statistically significant differences. For the total QR score, the t-test result ($t = 0.35$, $df = 98$, $p = 0.72$) indicated that this difference was not statistically significant. In the parent trust subscale, the t-value of 0.90 and a non-significant p-value ($p = 0.36$) suggest no meaningful difference between the two groups. The Parent communication scores followed a similar trend, with the t-test result ($t = 1.33$, $p = 0.18$) showing no statistically significant difference. For Parent Alienation, similar results were shown where the t-value of -0.25 and p-value of 0.79 confirm that this difference is not significant. Lastly, the t-test result for Anxiety ($t = -0.72$, $p = 0.47$) showed no statistical significance.

In summary, while small mean differences were observed across QR domains and anxiety, none reached statistical significance. These findings suggest that the mother's occupational status does not have a significant influence on adolescents' perceived quality of relationship or anxiety levels in this sample. Therefore, the results did not support the proposed hypotheses, indicating that maternal employment status does not significantly influence the quality of mother-child relationship or children's anxiety levels.

DISCUSSION

This study compares the quality of mother-child relationships and anxiety levels among children based on their mothers' occupational status, categorizing mothers as either working professionals or homemakers. The findings revealed no statistically significant differences between children of working mothers and those of homemakers across any of the variables.

Though children of working mothers showed a slightly higher overall QR scores compared to children of homemakers, the difference was minimal and non-significant ($t = 0.35$, $p = 0.72$). The AL were slightly elevated in children of homemakers versus working mothers but failed to achieve significance ($t = -0.72$, $p = 0.47$).

These results align with findings by previous studies that were conducted, indicating that maternal employment per se does not deteriorate family relationships or increase child anxiety. Instead, relationship quality likely depends on other moderating factors, such as the mother's emotional availability, work stress levels, and parenting practices. Additionally, consistent with enrichment theory (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), maternal employment could provide benefits such as improved financial stability, role modelling, and emotional resilience, which might compensate for reduced physical presence. Thus the positive outcomes associated with maternal employment might overshadow any potential disadvantages, such as less time spent together with children, especially if the mother is capable of engaging in positive and supportive parenting. Furthermore, the present findings are in line with Vikram et al. (2018) who emphasized that employment may have cognitive and emotional advantages for children when mothers maintain engaged and supportive parenting despite work obligations.

Overall, the study contributes to a nuanced understanding that employment alone does not predict relational or emotional difficulties among adolescents. This suggests that the interactions quality, rather than the maternal employment status might be the main determinant of relationship quality and anxiety levels.

A major strength of this study lies in its use of validated measurement tools which ensured reliability and accuracy in assessing relationship quality and anxiety levels. Additionally, the sample featured a relatively balanced representation of children with working mothers and

homemakers, enhancing the generalizability of the findings. However, the study also had limitations. The cross-sectional nature of the research restricted causal interpretations. Although cross-sectional studies provide valuable information about relationships, a longitudinal design should be employed to assess the potential long-term effects of maternal employment status on adolescent development. The reliance on self-report questionnaires may have introduced biases such as social desirability effects. Furthermore, the study did not account for moderating variables like the presence of other care givers, maternal job stress, work hours, or perceived flexibility, which could have provided deeper insights.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study suggest that employment status of mothers is not significantly associated with mother-child relationship quality or adolescent anxiety levels. Working mothers need not experience undue guilt regarding potential harm to their children's emotional well-being. This indicates that maternal employment alone does not have a detrimental effect on the quality of mother-child relationship or adolescent anxiety levels. The results advocate for greater societal support for maternal workforce participation without fear of compromising family dynamics. Policymakers and organizations should implement family-friendly workplace policies, recognizing that quality parenting is possible alongside professional engagement. These findings highlight how imperative it is to establish supportive work environments that allow mothers to maintain positive home dynamics while pursuing their career goals. Although this study provides insightful data, future studies should incorporate a larger sample size, a longitudinal study design, and account for other confounding variables such as maternal job stress and family support systems. Such studies could provide comprehensive knowledge regarding the long-term effects of maternal employment

on adolescent mental health and family relationships.

Declaration by Authors

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