

**Parental Burnout among Working Mothers in Bangalore post COVID-19 Lockdown**

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*(This research article is a brief extract of an unpublished thesis submitted towards a Master of Arts in Marriage and Family Counselling at Urban India Ministries FRTI. This article has been co-authored by Priya Job Joy (MA student), and Olive Nagarajan (Faculty, UIM-FRTI). Priya Joy is a homeopathic doctor, counselling therapist and can be reached at [drpriyajohn@gmail.com](mailto:drpriyajohn@gmail.com). Olive Nagarajan is a psychological counselor with Home Shanthi, the Counselling Department of UIM and can be reached at [olive.n@urbanindia.org](mailto:olive.n@urbanindia.org))*

**Abstract**

Today's COVID-19 pandemic has intensified parental pressure due to the many government-initiated pandemic protocols with innumerable restrictions in view of preventing the spread of the virus among the population. An increase in long term parental pressure eventually results in parental burnout which in turn is associated with a range of negative outcomes for the parents who are affected as well as for their children. Parental Burnout is defined as a state of intense exhaustion related to one's parental role, in which the parent becomes emotionally detached from their children and doubtful of their capacity to be a good parent (Roskam et al., 2017). This study investigates the prevalence of parental burnout in a sample of 100 working mothers in Bangalore city using Parental Burnout Inventory (Roskam et al., 2018). Though a widespread prevalence of parental burnout was not observed, this study has revealed that working mothers with the youngest child of age equal or less than 6 years, manifested higher prevalence for parental burnout. In the factor analysis that was conducted, a correlation was

observed between the prevalence of parental burnout and sleep based on the age of the youngest child.

### **Keywords**

Parental Burnout, Working mothers, COVID- 19

The panic caused by the COVID -19 pandemic has significantly enhanced chronic stress within families. Uncertainty, acute financial crisis, anxieties about contracting illness and mandatory ‘stay-at-home’ orders, disrupted the daily routine of families (Adams et al., 2021). This pandemic induced pressure has increased the risk of parental burnout. Such chronic parental stress is unguardedly expressed by parental neglect and violent behaviors (Griffith, 2020). Chronic parental stress would deplete individuals' resources and lead to parental burnout symptoms if they last too long (Pruessner et al., 1999). Studies indicate that mothers are more vulnerable to experience burnout, when compared to their male counterparts (Chen et al., 2022). Several studies are conducted to study burnout and psychological distress among Indian housewives due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This study is aimed at a better understanding of the prevalence of parental burnout among working mothers in the city of Bangalore post the Covid-19 Lockdown and for this reason this research study was initiated. Further research is still necessary and warranted in this area.

### **Review of Literature**

The term “motherhood instills a sense of goodness, “something regarded as so unquestionably good as to be beyond criticism representing irrefutable and unquestionable goodness and integrity” (Ross, 2016). The role of ‘intensive mothering’ projects mothers as the sole responsible person for childcare, her prime focus which implies a caretaking relationship - both caregiving and educating children (Séjourné et al., 2018). One of the factors increasing

parental burnout in mothers is societal pressure to be a perfect mother. A less than perfect child triggers the self-blame of the mother. (Wilborn, 1976). Research findings reveal that mothers' pressurizing expectation to be a perfect mother is positively related to parental burnout. They also fear social branding, when the non-realistic mother mandates are not met. Such mothers were also found to be experiencing lower work- family balance (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018). Work- Family guilt is a painful emotion that arises when people feel they are incapable of meeting the demands at work and at home to fulfill the social or moral standards of parenting. A cross-cultural research reveals that mothers of toddlers experience stronger feelings of Work-Family guilt compared to fathers as well as mothers of older children (Borelli et al., 2017).

The tradition of Indian women being homemakers has changed tremendously. Working women who attempt to balance career and family, might be facing emotional, psychological and physical burden if asked to prioritize one over the other (Kadale, et al., 2018).

Parenting responsibility during the Covid-19 pandemic largely rested on parents due to a restricted social support system resulting in frustration on families and children (Morelli et al., 2020). Parental exhaustion was obvious with multiplication of tasks (e.g., number of meals to prepare, keeping younger children engaged, online schooling, and homeschooling) along with available but not accessible external resources (e.g., outside help to care for children) and depletion of internal resources (e.g., poor selfcare). Imposed quarantine is a crucial factor that undermines both parents and children's well-being (Spinelli et al., 2020). A survey comparing working women with and without children revealed that the lockdown was particularly stressful for the former group (Benassi et al., 2020). Burn-out was originally identified among the people in human services. According to a survey conducted by Deloitte, one-third said their workloads have increased due to the pandemic (Suresh and Ashraf).

Parental Burnout is defined as a state of intense exhaustion which is directly in proportion to the parental role. This exhaustion causes emotional detachment from children and self doubt about being a good parent (Roskam et al., 2017). This burnout includes emotional exhaustion, emotional distancing, saturation, and contrast (Lumanlan, 2020). During such contrast they regretfully realize the difference between the parents they were and the parents they have become (Lebert-Charron et al., 2021).

Maternal burn-out is a psychological, emotional and physiological condition resulting from the accumulation of various chronic and repetitive stressors (Séjourné et al., 2018). Parental burnout is an imbalance between risks and resources. The drive for perfectionism, inconsistent focus, poor coparenting, lack of self-care, and fluctuating emotional competency are high risk factors for parental burnout. Exposure to chronic parenting stress which leads to parental burnout can lead to overwhelming exhaustion and ineffectiveness in one's parenting role (Mikolajczak, Brianda, et al., 2018). This leads to detrimental impact on children too as parental burnout drastically increases neglectful and violent behavior towards one's children (Mikolajczak et al., 2019). Exposure to Parental burnout is found to have ruinous effects on parents as it can lead to addictions, sleep problems, and severe marital conflicts too (Mikolajczak et al., 2018) Hence, Parental burnout is a serious concern which demands attention. In India, not much research is done to understand Parental burnout and its consequences.

Not much research studies have been done in India on parental burnout and its harmful consequences. A study among working mothers in Delhi revealed that tele-working impedes psychological well-being and resilience (Kapoor et al., 2021). More research is required pertaining specifically to 'Parental Burnout' among the Indian working mothers post Covid-19 lockdown thus initiating the current study.

## **Methodology**

Quasi-experimental quantitative research was done to identify the prevalence of Parental Burnout among working mothers of Bangalore.

### ***Participants***

100 working mothers in urban Bangalore, employed either part time or full time participated in this study which was conducted during the months February and March 2022 via an online survey.

### ***Data Collection***

The questionnaire was distributed and retrieved through an online survey using Google forms. Participants filled out the questionnaires using the survey link posted on the social networking platforms. The questionnaire comprised of the following:

1. Introduction to the survey which included the scope of the survey.
2. Informed consent which is a mandatory field. All participants joined the study voluntarily and gave consent after being informed about the aim of the survey. They were assured of data confidentiality.
3. Demographic data sheet included optional information such as Name, Highest levels of education, Spouse's name. The mandatory fields were the Email ID, Date of Birth, Occupation, Marital Status, Number of Children, Date of birth of children, Living condition with spouse and Number of hours of work per week.
4. Parental Burnout Assessment (PBA) is a validated tool developed by Roskam, Mikolajczak and Maria-Elena Brianda (Roskam et al., 2018). It includes 23 items covering four dimensions (exhaustion, contrast with previous parental self, feelings of

being fed up, and emotional distancing). The online survey required respondents to answer every question of the scale ensuring there was no missing data in the study.

5. Response options for each question are based on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “never” to “every day.” Items were summed for a total score, with higher scores indicating a higher level of parental burnout.
6. The responses were collated and analyzed.

### ***Research Questions***

Research questions that drove this study were

1. Is there Parental Burnout among Working Mothers in the city of Bangalore post the Covid Lockdown?
2. Does the age of the youngest child influence prevalence of Parental Burnout among Working Mothers in Urban Bangalore post Covid-19 Lockdown?
3. Does the number of hours of work have a correlation with Parental Burnout among Working Mothers of Urban Bangalore post Covid-19 Lockdown?
4. Does the type of job have an impact on the prevalence of Parental burnout among Working Mothers of Bangalore post Covid-19 Lockdown?

### ***Data Analysis***

We performed statistical analysis to analyze the data. Analyzed results were reported using pie charts and tables.

## **Results**

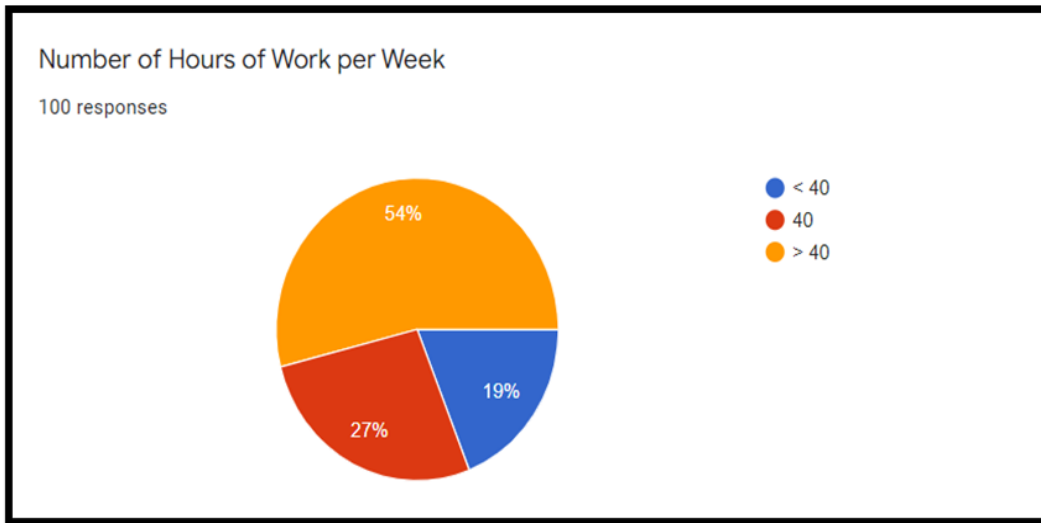
### ***Sample Descriptive***

The sample consisted of 100 mothers. The age of the parents ranged from 27 to 52yrs. The ages of the youngest child ranged from below 1 year to 25 years of age. 96% of the mothers

are married and living along with their spouse. Remaining 4% are divorced and single mothers. 49% of the participants had 2 children, 47% had one child, and the remaining 4% had 3 children.

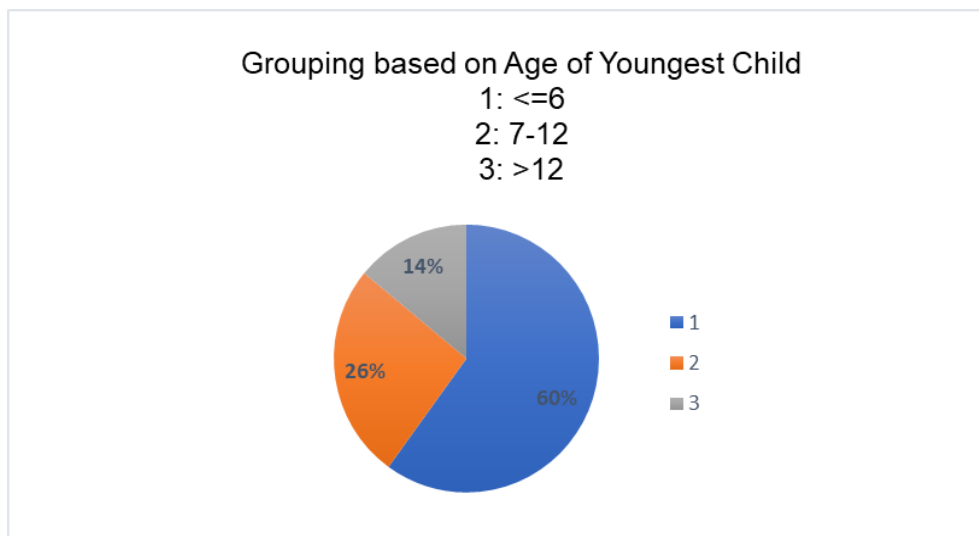
**Figure 1- Grouping based on the Number of Professional Working Hours in a Week.**

Mothers were grouped based on the number of professional working hours in a week.



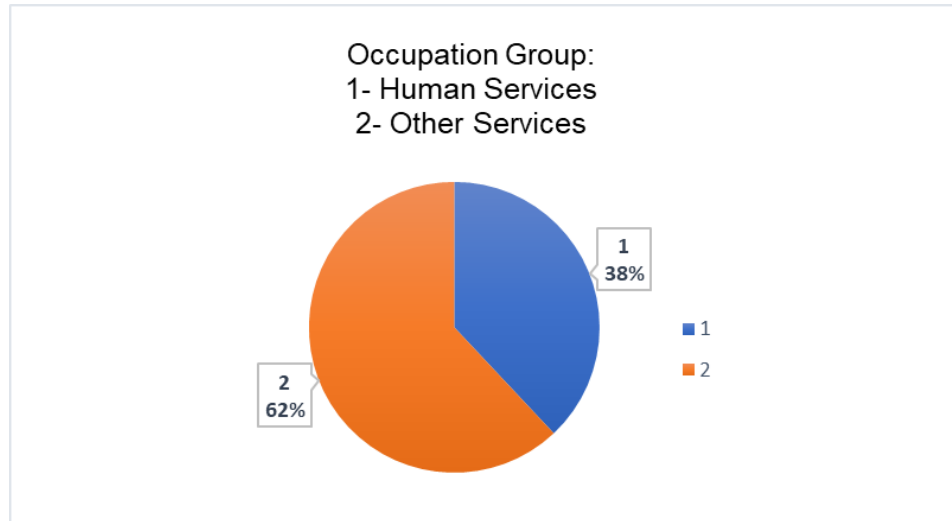
Most of the participants (54%) were putting in more than 40 hours of professional work each week.

**Figure 2 - Grouping based on the Age of the Youngest Child.** The age of every child was collected. The age of the youngest child was taken into consideration for further analysis.



60% of the youngest children are aged  $\leq 6$ , 26% of them are aged between 7 to 12, and 14% of them are above 12.

**Figure 3 - Grouping based on the occupation.** Mothers were also grouped based on two types of occupation. 38% of them are employed in human services (involving interactions with people and meeting human needs) and the rest of them in other services.



*Descriptive Statistics*

**Table 1 - Recording the Descriptive Statistics for Parental Burnout and Sleep in the Sample Group - Age of the Youngest Child**

Table 1						
Statistic	Total PBD			Sleep		
	$\leq 6$ yrs.	7 yrs. To 12 yrs.	$> 12$ yrs.	$\leq 6$ yrs.	7 yrs. To 12 yrs.	$> 12$ yrs.
Mean	31.2333	34.1538	9.1429	3.3333	2.9231	1.0000
Std. Deviation	27.04194	24.46825	7.47156	2.13658	1.99846	1.24035
Minimum	3.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00



Maximum	105.00	95.00	26.00	6.00	6.00	3.00
Range	102.00	95.00	25.00	6.00	6.00	3.00

**Table 2 -Recording the Descriptive Statistics for Parental Burnout and Sleep in the Sample Group - Number of Working Hours/Week**

<b>Table 2</b>						
	<b>Total PBD</b>			<b>Sleep</b>		
<b>Statistic</b>	<b>&lt;40 hrs.</b>	<b>40 hrs.</b>	<b>&gt;40 hrs.</b>	<b>&lt;40 hrs.</b>	<b>40 hrs.</b>	<b>&gt;40 hrs.</b>
Mean	32.1053	29.5185	27.4630	2.8947	2.2222	3.2407
Std. Deviation	25.39443	31.70340	22.69129	2.07885	1.96769	2.18861
Minimum	4.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Maximum	95.00	105.00	95.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
Range	91.00	104.00	95.00	6.00	6.00	6.00

**Table 3 - Recording the Descriptive Statistics for Parental Burnout and Sleep in the Sample Group -Type of Job (Occupation)**

<b>Table 3</b>				
	<b>Total PBD</b>		<b>Sleep</b>	
<b>Statistic</b>	<b>Human Services</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>Human Services</b>	<b>Others</b>

Mean	29.7368	28.3871	2.7105	3.0161
Std. Deviation	27.55798	24.69642	2.06526	2.18409
Minimum	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Maximum	105.00	95.00	6.00	6.00
Range	104.00	95.00	6.00	6.00

Most of the participants (54%) were putting in more than 40 hours of job related work each week. The age of every child was collected. The age of the youngest child was taken into consideration for further analysis. 60% of the youngest children are aged less than 6, 26% of them are aged between 7 to 12, and 14% of them are above 12. Mothers were grouped based on two types of occupation. 38% of them are employed in human services (involving interactions with people and meeting human needs) and the rest of them in other services.

## Discussion

When this data was analyzed, it is found that among 100 respondents, 15% of them are at risk of developing Parental Burnout with total PBA scores above 53 and 4% of them were found to have Parental Burnout with total PBA scores above 86.

The three hypotheses are as follows:

1<sup>st</sup> Hypothesis- Age of the youngest child impacts the prevalence of burnout.

The 1<sup>st</sup> hypothesis was verified as seen in table.1. The mothers with children younger or equal to 6 years of age manifested a higher prevalence of parental burnout when compared to mothers having children above 6 years of age.

The fact that having young children can be a risk factor for the manifestation of burnout, especially the emotional exhaustion dimension was seen in a study conducted among 372 French

parents (Vigouroux & Scola, 2018). Results from a survey conducted in Italy showed that the prevalence of parenting-related exhaustion (the main symptom of parental burnout) during the COVID-19 lockdown was as high as 17%, and having younger children was one of the factors predicting greater parenting-related exhaustion (Marchetti et al., 2020).

In a study to determine the prevalence of parental burnout in 42 countries, it was found that parents with younger children had more prevalence of parental burnout (Roskam et al., 2021).

2<sup>nd</sup> Hypothesis - Number of working hours has an impact on the prevalence of burnout among working mothers.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> hypothesis was rejected as seen in Table.2. There was no relation seen between prevalence of parental burnout and number of hours of work put in.

3<sup>rd</sup> Hypothesis – The type of job or occupation the mother is involved in has an influence on prevalence of parental burnout.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> hypothesis was rejected as seen in table.3. No correlation was found between the type of job and the prevalence of parental burnout.

There are studies indicating those involved in human services are more prone to burnout and compassion fatigue due to the demanding nature of their work (Chesak et al., 2020), (Mashego et al., 2016), (West, 2015). However, these are more with regards to job burnout. Correlation between parental burnout and type of job needs to be investigated further.

## **Findings**

Though a widespread prevalence of parental burnout was not observed, this study has revealed that working mothers with the youngest child of age equal or less than 6 years, manifested higher prevalence for parental burnout.

An observation made was that the statement pertaining to sleep showed a higher scoring on the Likert scale. (First question on the PBA- “I’m so tired out by my role as a parent that sleeping doesn’t seem like enough”). This observation was further analyzed.

There was a correlation observed between having younger children and not getting adequate sleep. Results mentioned below:

**Table 4 - Kruskal Wallis Test to Compare Groups (Age of Youngest Child) on Parental Burnout Total and on Sleep**

	<b>Total PBA</b>	<b>Sleep</b>
Chi-Square	12.757	13.581
Df	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	0.002*	0.001*

\*P<0.05; Significant differences exist in Parental Burnout and Sleep based on Age of Youngest Child.

This study has revealed that working mothers with the youngest child of age equal or less than 6 years, had higher prevalence for parental burnout. They were also found to have challenges with regards to getting adequate sleep.

No correlation was observed between the number of hours of work per week or the type of job engaged in and prevalence of parental burnout among the working mothers. In this study, the number of hours of work and the type of job was not shown to have a bearing on the sleep factor of the mothers.

Social Desirability was one of the key limitations noticed in this study and we make recommendations for further research to investigate and understand this bias using the social desirability scale.

## **Recommendations**

### ***For the Family counselors and Educators***

1. To initiate psycho-educative sessions to create awareness about parental burnout especially among working mothers with young children.
2. To elucidate the support systems to deal with the demands of working mothers.
3. To educate the importance of holistic self-care and setting boundaries among working mothers.

### ***For the Work-Units***

1. To organize programs in companies to build sensitivity about this growing challenge.
2. To optimize women friendly policies to identify women at risk of developing parental burnout and providing timely intervention.

### ***For Young Working Mothers***

1. To elicit awareness about parental burnout and its consequences.
2. To endorse the importance of self care and sleep hygiene.
3. To explicate the support systems and improve the coping mechanism for parental burnout.
4. To enhance parenting skills to decrease parental stress which will in turn mitigate the feelings of burnout.

### **Scope for Further Studies**

1. Study could be conducted to assess the difference in the prevalence of parental burnout between the working mothers in the nuclear families and joint families.
2. Cross-generational study could be conducted to observe whether the age of the participants of different generations would make a compelling impact in the response.
3. Social Desirability is an important factor to be investigated while considering current cultural norms. Study could be conducted including a larger sample of respondents to investigate and understand the impact of Social Desirability on parenting.
4. Case studies of individuals and qualitative analysis using focus group discussions can be conducted for better results and productive clarifications.

### **Conclusion**

This study provides a fraction of insight into what has taken place during COVID-19 pandemic among the working women in Bangalore city who are mothers with young children, emphasizing the need to educate them about specific factors affecting them. Importantly, these results highlight that deprioritizing sleep is one way to deal with the time management crisis of working mothers, but the consequences are inevitable. Creating awareness about practicing holistic self care and developing support as protective factors to nurture resilience and reduce the risk of burnout and its adverse consequences.

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