GENDER, MOTHERHOOD AND LABOUR MARKET INEQUALITY IN BANGLADESH

By

Shafiqul Islam

MPhil, University of Oslo, Norway
MSc, Lund University, Sweden
MSS & BSS (Hons.), University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Sociology
The University of Auckland, 2024

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ABSTRACT

Bangladesh is experiencing rapid economic, social, and cultural shifts that are influencing the labour market. Increases in women's labour market participation, especially among married women, particularly those with young children, have emerged as one of the most remarkable changes over the past three decades. This presents an interesting case for Bangladesh, where, despite the increase in mothers' participation in paid work, there are significant gender gaps that continue in terms of their representation and key labour market outcomes, notably income. Although there is a large body of literature which explores the gendered conflicts of work and family, this is predominantly on the experiences of Western, middle-class households and parents overlooking and marginalising the perspectives and experiences of parents and families from other regions, such as Asia and Africa. One of the overarching objectives of this study is to advance research on women from the global South, specifically Bangladesh. Drawing on the conceptual framework of cultural work and family devotion schemas that centre gender, family and work, this study sheds light on how persistent patriarchal beliefs and practices are in reproducing gender inequality in Bangladesh's contemporary labour market, focusing in particular on mothers with young children employed in the formal economy. Constructions of motherhood impede women from emulating masculinised expectations of paid work in Bangladesh, which, although desired, could also be harmful. To further explore this issue, I conducted in-depth interviews with 38 participants in Bangladesh from three cohorts: middle-class employed mothers, fathers, and experts in the field, to gain insight into the everyday home and work-life practices that affect mothers' labour market outcomes differently from fathers'. Key findings suggest that employed mothers struggle to navigate multiple roles while conforming to or defying the social standards of their roles, both at home and in the workplace. Their daily struggle heightens the conflict between work and family devotion schemas, leading to reduced career progression relative to their husbands and male co-workers. Conversely, fatherhood ideals are embedded within the work devotion schema, with idealised fathers serving as a synonym for ideal employees. Findings show while most interviewed fathers supported the organisation's ideal worker norms, most interviewed mothers did not. Theoretically, then, this research speaks to the hegemony of work and family devotion schemas, where so many parties (fathers, in-laws, employers, policymakers) unconsciously take for granted women's restrictions in domestic spheres. Findings further suggest that while the present maternity leave policies and regulations have glaring flaws (e.g., they do not apply equally to all mothers), the policies regarding childcare remain dysfunctional. Overall, the study's findings frame working mothers' lives in Bangladesh's growing labour market as complicated and nuanced, with experiences of disjunction, hope, and opportunity. It also revealed the integration between two overarching devotions. The study stresses a need to reconceptualise motherhood within Bangladesh's increasingly neoliberal social structure in order to break down the structural and cultural barriers toward mothers' labour market equality.

DEDICATION

For my sweetest and beloved daughter Nora and son Elite, who are the wellsprings of all my inspirations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to convey my gratitude to everyone who helped me finish this thesis. Dr Rachel Simon-Kumar and Dr David T. Mayeda, my supervisors, I shall be forever grateful for their tireless assistance and support. You are the best mentors a student could have, Rachel and David. I bestow additional thanks to David and Rachel, who, in addition to overseeing my project, helped me manage my stress due to COVID-19's effects.

I appreciate my wife's support, encouragement, and allowing me to openly share and talk about the challenges I faced. No words can express my gratitude for your unwavering support along the journey. Thank to my departed mother and father for your heavenly aid; always you provide for me. I am grateful to all my sisters and brothers; I acknowledge your continuous support and cooperation. My daughter, Nora and son, Elite have always been a source of love and inspiration for me. They have stimulated my interest in parenting and planning for the future, and they have also provided a welcome break from the thesis work.

I owe a lot of gratitude to the University of Auckland for providing me with scholarships and financial assistance. I have enjoyed the company and advice of fellows and professionals at the University of Auckland. Your inputs, discussion and sharing knowledge, even jokes sometimes, helped me both work and relax.

I also thank my former classmates from the University of Oslo, Lund University, and the University of Dhaka for their unremitting support during this PhD adventure.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who took part in my study, especially the mothers of small children. I appreciate you taking the time to share your life experience with me. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to hear about your journey through motherhood and share your stories and experiences.

1. INTRODUCTION

The number of women in the paid labour force has increased over the decades worldwide, with an increasing proportion of female workers being mothers of young children. Across the scholarly literature on gender and economic development, paid labour is broadly considered to be associated with women's empowerment. However, when comparing actual labour market outcomes of mothers with those of male co-workers (including fathers) and female co-workers without children, it becomes clear that significant disparities exist both in the workplace and in private domestic spaces. Among existing conceptual frameworks used to predict mothers' labour market trajectories (e.g., meritocracy, social ecology), traditional cultural beliefs about gender appear pervasive and still underlie the inequality mothers face in various labour markets. Contemporary research demonstrates that gendered norms shape nearly irreconcilable work-family life incompatibilities, particularly for working mothers of small children. Working mothers are frequently expected to be carers and the role of motherhood is commonly disregarded in the workplace; men, contrarily, are viewed as the principal breadwinner for the family and 'ideal workers' by their employers (Liu, 2023; Yoon & Park, 2022; Valiquette-Tessier et al., 2019; Blair-Loy, 2010). Gender norms, it would appear, are not only challenged through the practices of paid labour, but they are also often reproduced (Padavic et al., 2019; Risman & Davis, 2013; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Laslett & Brenner, 1989).

Gender, motherhood, and work-family conflicts have long been overarching interests of sociological inquiry (Dotti Sani & Luppi, 2021; Holmes et al., 2020; Collins, 2019; Grimshaw et al., 2017; Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). The fundamental, perhaps over-simplified premise held by various scholars is that there is a reciprocal and two-way connection between work and family; that is, work influences family, and family influences work (Holmes et al., 2020; Emslie & Hunt, 2009). These dynamics can have both beneficial and adverse effects on the ways in which work and family life interact with one another. There is accumulating evidence from research that motherhood is significantly associated with the adverse outcomes of the labour market (Williamson et al., 2023; Schmidt et al. 2022; Miller & Riley, 2022; Goldin & Mitchell, 2017). However, even though there are many rich insights, past

scholarship often faild to systematically explore the interplay between gendered family values, masculine workplace culture, gendered legislation, and regulations enacted by the state. In fact, most former research on family-work trajectories has been quantitative, revealing the extent of interactions and causal links, such as parent status and gender (Chai et al., 2021; Binder, 2021; Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysiak, 2020; Dotti Sani & Scherer, 2018). Recent reviews (e.g., Liu, 2023; Turnbull, 2023; Cummins & Brannon, 2022; Padavic et al., 2019; Bianchi & Milkie, 2010) have drawn attention to the dearth of qualitative family-work research and have urged its continuation so as to better understand people's experiences with and approaches to managing complex work-life trajectories in diverse contexts.

Set within the context of Bangladesh, a society which has seen significant recent economic transitions, this thesis aims to understand the continuities and contradictions between gender roles in society and paid work, particularly for women who are mothers of young children. Focusing specifically on the experiences of middle-class, educated and professional women, this research seeks to highlight the particular labour market disadvantages surrounding 'motherhood'. Women of all ages and at all stages of their lives experience employment discrimination and disadvantages. Yet, the labour market constraints of motherhood highlight the particularly contested gendered constructions of the maternal in a society where women confront the effects of both the contemporary and the traditional.

The thesis further explores the dilemma between paid work and maternal roles using the conceptual framework of 'cultural schemas' and the competing expectations of 'work' and 'family' schemas within it. Work and family devotion schemas function as a symbiotic cultural model, illuminating a work-family landscape still fraught with cultural tensions and governed by historically built and highly institutionalised views about gender (Liu, 2023; Padavic et al., 2019; Mosseri, 2019; Cech et al., 2016; Dean et al., 2013; Blair-Loy, 2003). The work and family devotion schemas are inherently at odds, though they work symbiotically to reproduce gender roles. While the work devotion schema maintains the gender hierarchy in organisations by portraying men as ideal workers, the family devotion schema exerts pressure on women to prioritise domesticity and maternal ideologies, overriding all other commitments, including paid work (Yoon & Park, 2022; Padavic et al., 2019). However, studies on evolving cultures such as that of Bangladesh have been notably scant, where mothers' life prospects and work-family trajectories are profoundly influenced by the work and family devotion schemas, given that Bangladesh is predominantly a patriarchal nation (discussed in detail in Chapters 2 and 3). Therefore, another overarching

objective of the current study is to detail how Bangladeshi middle-class, educated mothers accept, reject, negotiate, and compete over the demands of increased labour market opportunities and prevailing maternal ideologies.

2. CONCEPTUALISING GENDER AND LABOUR MARKET INEQUALITY

According to a social constructionist perspective, gender is not essentialist or fixed, but rather is a series of associations and norms embedded into power relationships that are constantly shifting (Hughes, 2013; Rothman, 1989; Lather, 1991). Furthermore, it is the cumulative product of societal influences throughout an individual's life (Zhu & Cheng, 2019; Deutsch, 2007). Sociologists place great emphasis on the notion of gender because it provides a lens through which to examine how cultural beliefs and social norms regulate people's lives (Greenstein & Davis, 2009; Chafetz, 2006). As de Beauvoir (1949) asserted, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (p. 283), and in turn, classifying people according to their gender is a powerful way of exerting influence over members of society and fostering inequality (Vogl & Baur, 2018). Classifications of gender function as a central organising force in the labour market (Lather, 1991), affecting men and women differently (Liu, 2023; Cech et al., 2016).

Flax (1987) notes that critiquing gender relations is a central aim of gender-based theories; in other words, these theories examine how gender relations are shaped and perceived and how we think or do not think about them. Gender-based theories also acknowledge and unpack how patriarchal structures are built on masculine and feminine attributes, where the value of men's and women's roles invariably differs. However, such broad claims regarding the conceptualisation of gender, which derive primarily from Western contexts, may not apply so neatly to non-Western (e.g., Bangladeshi) contexts (to be discussed later in this section). Thus, it is necessary to re-examine gender schemas. This is a key objective of the present study.

Culturally specific understandings of masculinity (e.g., fatherhood) and femininity (e.g., motherhood) shape the roles of men and women differently in various societies. However, almost universally, social order privileges and values masculine traits and norms while devaluing those associated with femininity (Garica-Gomez, 2020; O'Reilly, 2004; Connell, 1987). Paechter (2018) maintains, "All forms of femininity are constructed in the context of male domination" (p.122). Past scholarships across cultures demonstrate that traditionally, women and traits constructed as feminine have been portrayed as deficient in reason and

logic and are more closely associated with emotionality and private, non-labour market domains (Acker et al., 2011; Phoenix et al., 1991). Motherhood, specifically in its social construction, has been associated with feminine attributes, where the mother is the "perfect" caregiver, leading to an inverse/conflicting relationship with the workplace (Berniell et al., 2018; Christopher 2012; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Blair-Loy, 2003). According to Berniell et al. (2018), motherhood drives the gender gap in the labour market because mothers still bear the brunt of childcare, notwithstanding gender convergence in educational attainment (meritocratic achievement). As a result, to investigate the mechanisms underlying the persistence of gender inequality in the labour market, we must be aware of the interplay between paid employment and unpaid family care practices (Samtleben & Muller, 2020; Scott, 2010).

According to the literature on gender inequality, traditional sociological approaches and labour market design have generally overlooked the gendered aspects of work and family, particularly mothers' knowledge, values, and demands (McDowell, 2014; O'Reilly, 2004). Morever, motherhood has historically been seen as a woman's ultimate road to physical and emotional fulfilment (Neyer & Bernardi, 2011; Phoenix et al., 1991; Rich, 1986). Neyer and Bernardi (2011) further argue that childbearing and motherhood have been regarded as a woman's nature, relegating women to a secondary social position. Under such conditions, a sexual contract (e.g., traditional patriarchal marriage contracts) cedes women's bodies and progeny to males and society governs the unequal relationship between women and men. Unpacking the constraints of motherhood and work entails not only learning about the specific conditions of mothers' daily material work, but also the alterations that motherhood brings to their relationships with their family, spouse, employers, and co-workers in tandem with their experiences as unpaid caregivers and paid workers (Crofts & Coffey, 2016; Barlow & Chapin, 2010).

3. GENDER ROLES AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH

South Asia comprises 25.2% of the global population. Work-family conflicts have intensified significantly in the region's attempts to meet global demands tied to an expanding labour market. Intensified work-family conflicts are mainly due to the increased number of women in the paid labour force, especially mothers of young children (Mukhopadhyay, 2023; Strachan & Adikaram., 2023). Therefore, it is crucial to examine how South Asian mothers negotiate opportunities within an expanding labour market while the gendered expectations

of the home and workplace continue impacting their labour market participation and key outcomes in ostensibly adverse ways (Strachan & Adikaram., 2023; Hussein, 2017). A large body of literature exists which explores the gendered conflicts of work and family. However, much of the existing literature and theories on work-family conflict have focused predominantly on the experiences of Western, middle-class households and parents. It has largely overlooked and marginalised the perspectives and experiences of parents and families from other regions, such as Asia and Africa (Hussein, 2017; Kabeer, 2011; Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988). One of the overarching objectives of this study is to advance research on women from third-world/non-Western countries (e.g., Bangladesh).

Third-world/postcolonial scholars, such as Mohanty (1988) and Spivak (1988), sharply criticise Western feminism as espousing a false universalism. The scholars yearn for a coalition of third-world women as imagined communities of women with varied histories and social locations who are held together by political threads of opposition to pervasive and systematic dominance. According to Mohanty (1988), women's scholarships, mainly developed in the West, are conflated with their discursively perceived homogeneity. She notes that such homogeneity ignores the consequences of varied family systems, colonialism, and labour organisation, among other things, on women in third-world countries whose realities differ from those in Western society. Within the context of motherhood, Mohanty (1988) argues that it is essential to distinguish between the act of mothering and the status accompanying it, and further, that this distinction needs to be analysed within the context where it occurs.

For decades, studies on third-world women by Western scholars have been monolithic. This is because these scholarly works have fixated on passive victimisation at the hands of patriarchal and capitalist exploitation from colonial to post-colonial forces (Alam, 2021; Hussain, 2018; Mohanty, 2003). However, recent theorisations of 'new womanhood' in South Asia, and Bangladesh, in particular, have challenged the essentialist notion of marginalised 'third-world women'. They portray South Asian 'new women' as part of a new and potentially powerful symbolic social category whose ambitions resemble those of the world's privileged group in the global North and South (Hussein, 2018; Kabeer et al., 2014). These new women more often represent the educated, growing middle class who have engaged in paid work amid the labour market shifts brought about by neoliberalism. According to Hussein (2018), South Asia's new women are symbolically reinventing themselves by questioning gender and sexuality norms and demanding jobs, education,

fashion and identity. This shift in gender roles can be connected to some degree to neoliberalism,[1] which, through liberalised market policies, has increased women's labour force participation (Laruffa, 2023; Hussein, 2017).

Nevertheless, neoliberalism's impacts have drawn harsh criticism because they are neither clear nor equal for all women around the world. In fact, neoliberalism transforms market virtues into individual competitiveness, deregulation and many other forms of societal disengagement in a diverse global environment (Laruffa, 2023; Jabbar et al., 2018; Radhakrishnan & Solari, 2015). These broader criticisms of neoliberalism were, however, also augmented by a focus on labour market gender inequality (Dalingwater, 2018), especially for working mothers with young children (Ylostalo, 2022; Nkansah-Amankra et al., 2018; Giles, 2014). Similarly, Jabber et al. (2018) observe that neoliberal market policies constrained the options available to women and influenced gendered practices of parental choices. Thus, previous research (also see Chapter 3) that has been carried out across cultures shows how neoliberalism, which is ostensibly gender-neutral, favours men over women and fathers over mothers through its market-driven policies such as gendered hiring and pay policies and the emphasis on an individual's competitiveness and work-oriented life (Laruffa, 2023; Schmidt et al., 2022; Huessin, 2017; Jabbar et al., 2018).

The obligations placed on mothers evolved due to the emergence of neoliberal economic, political, and cultural upheavals, such as the deregulation and commercialization of social services by free markets, which encouraged or mandated women with children to work for pay (Schmidt et al., 2022). Even during the neoliberal era, the gendered division of labour persisted at home and in the workplace (Sullivan, 2021; Radhakrishnan & Solari, 2015; Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). The gendered ideology of 'good' mothers has not been waived but intensified, and the moral but highly influential persuasion of 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1986) and doing the 'second shift' (Hochschild, 1989) is still a high social expectation in societies. In this vein, Schmidt et al. (2022) argue that "This constellation of norms has consolidated both neoliberal tendencies and intersectional power structures" (p. 58).

Neoliberalism is, in some ways, a contemporary manifestation of capitalism that is a continuation of the patriarchal exploitation of working women. Giles (2014) notes "[d]espite the emancipatory potential within the 'feminization of society,' neoliberalism remains an

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[1] I acknowledge that the shift in gender roles and women's increase in the labour force is influenced by many other factors, e.g., increased girls' education, political participation, protection of laws, microcredit, NGOs, increased networks etc. (I elaborated on these in Chapter 3).

inherently male paradigm..." (p.6). Likewise, Radhakrishnan and Solari (2015) argue that even after the large-scale incorporation of women into the global labour market, global ideologies provide culturally relevant reasons for men's role as breadwinners and women's unpaid reproductive labour, highlighting the centrality of the family to capitalist expansion. Working mothers are highly susceptible to labour market penalties because of the ways that patriarchy and capitalism devalue domestic work. In short, the neoliberal era has not diminished traditional ideologies around motherhood, which are "child-centred, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labour intensive and financially expensive" (Hays, 1996, p. 414). Despite the fact that mothers can work and perform equally to men, the cultural schema (i.e., family devotion schema, Chapter 2) compels them to manage the household and childcare perfectly.

In contemporary Bangladesh, mothers with young children have increased opportunities in the labour market and various choices regarding their life courses. However, these changes have not been fully accompanied yet by changes to wider societal gender norms (Kabeer et al., 2018; Hussein, 2017). Blunch and Das (2015) note that "despite these changes, there is a coexistence of patriarchal norms and conservative attitude to women's role" (p. 6). Working mothers, especially, encounter and confront a multitude of traditional gender norms in their everyday lives because the many dimensions of motherhood mean women cannot easily emulate men when it comes to paid work. As it was when Russo (1976) first wrote about the 'motherhood mandate', the notion of 'womanhood' as becoming a mother or aspiring to be a mother remains a potent influence in women's lives in Bangladesh (Hussein, 2017)[2] and elsewhere in the world (Jacques & Radtke, 2012, p. 444). In the present day, mothers with young children face contradictory cultural pressures. On the one hand, high cultural expectations work for them to be dedicated to their children and family; on the other hand, availing opportunities in the expanding, neoliberal labour market to build their professional careers is tempting and, in many cases, required due to increased costs of living. These contradictory pressures reinforce societal and moral concerns while reproducing and reinforcing gender inequality (Karim, 2022; Bidisha et al., 2020; Asaduzzaman 2016; Salway et al., 2005).

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[2] I acknowledge that while Russo's "motherhood mandate" was developed in the context of Western society, it is likely culturally distinctive for non-Western Bangladeshi mothers, which I explore subsequently.

Finally, while past studies have examined women's labour market participation, studying working mothers with young children was especially important in Bangladesh. This is one of Bangladesh's first studies investigating working mothers' paid labour and family commitments from both the mothers' and fathers' perspectives, considering both home and work domains. Further, accounts of the interviewed working mothers that informed an analysis of whether their paid work opportunities are equal to their counterparts, e.g., men and non-mothers, were insufficient and often missed discussions of how policy and education were relevant to their lives. Therefore, this study brings new insights into the ways that rigid constructs of motherhood problematise women's equal labour market participation in a South Asian context. The case of Bangladesh is imperative because of its long history as a male-dominated society in South Asia, where neoliberalism is now fully entrenched.

4. THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

The People's Republic of Bangladesh, a comparatively new country, gained its liberty in 1971 from then-West Pakistan after a traumatic war of liberation of approximately nine months (Umar, 2004). Today, Bangladesh is the world's 4th largest Muslim country[3] after Indonesia, India, and Pakistan, representing 9.3% of the world's 1.57 billion Muslim population. Its total population is 165 million, placing it 8th in the world but 90th in land size, illustrating the country's densely packed population (BBS, 2022).

Bangladesh has had many successes and failures socially, politically, and economically in the 50 years since it gained its independence. In addition to the traditional gender influences on its population, Bangladesh has been plagued by numerous problems since its inception, such as the high rate of population growth, mortality, and illiteracy; negative per capita growth; pervasive poverty, increasing landlessness, poor infrastructure development, insufficient industrialisation, and a limited and weak labour market (Heintz et al., 2018; Raihan, 2018; Ahmed et al., 2014; Mahmud, 2014; Ahluwalia & Mahmud, 2004). Nevertheless, in recent years, Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in achieving steady economic growth accompanied by "a rapid decline of fertility rates, increasing rates of per capita growth, a moderate but steady decline in poverty rates, and remarkable progress on the social front" (Heintz et al., 2018, p. 266). This social progression includes the increasing rate of education, especially for girls, women's increased political participation, amendments and formulation of new laws to discourage discrimination against women both in the public and private sphere

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[3] In terms of Muslim people living in the country

and the establishment of victim support centres by the government for vulnerable women due to domestic and public violence and moral censure (Sawada et al., 2018; Dearden, 2017; Marshall, 2015). These signs of progress on the social front are also associated with the country's on-going economic progress (Heintz et al., 2018; Raihan, 2018; Khan, 2013).

Bangladesh's economic progress and growth, especially in terms of its consistency in the development of GDP[4], is astounding compared to neighbouring countries (e.g., Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, etc.) (Sharma, 2021; Ovi, 2020). Raihan (2018) states that recently, "Bangladesh has been upgraded from the low-income country (LIC) to lower-middle-income country (LMIC) as per World Bank's classification" (p.9). Raihan (2018) adds that Bangladesh has a strong ambition to meet the 'Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) by 2030. Bangladesh's recent economic growth rates have been higher than many other South Asian and Sub-Saharan African countries, which is a remarkable success by historical standards and equally noteworthy compared to the developing world as a whole (Sharma, 2021).

This significant economic growth has become possible due to the stability in the GDP growth over many consecutive years. Growth of GDP in Bangladesh was much slower during the 1980s, at only around 3.7%, but it rose to 5.2% by the end of the 1990s (Ahluwalia & Mahmud, 2004). This upward trend continued to an average of "above 6% annual growth for nearly a decade, reaching 7.86% in 2018" (Robinson, 2018, p.1). Bangladesh is now the third fastest growing economy among developing countries, only behind South Sudan and India (Ahsan, 2019), resulting in the advancement of key socioeconomic indicators (Heintz et al., 2018). For example, Bangladesh now outperforms many neighbouring nations in terms of "overall improvements in life expectancy, child mortality, education, health, and nutrition and have been accompanied by declining gender inequalities on all these indicators" (Heintz et al., 2018, p. 226).

However, these improvements in economic performance and human development indicators have also affected Bangladesh's labour market. One of the most remarkable changes in the Bangladeshi labour market over the last 30 years is the increase in women's engagement, particularly among married women (Mahmud & Bidisha, 2018; Hussein, 2017; Bridges et al., 2011). This presents a potentially interesting case for Bangladesh, where although the participation of women in the labour market has increased, gender wage gaps persist, and

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[4]Gross Domestic Product

participation remains problematic for women (Hamid, 2019; Mahmud & Bidisha, 2018; Kabeer et al., 2014). Mahmud & Bidisha (2018) note, "While rising female labour force participation in Bangladesh denotes progress for women in a relatively conservative society and has significant implications for economic growth and poverty alleviation of the country, there remain critical aspects that need examination" (p. 51). Together with wage inequality, women are confined to fewer employment sectors and job choices than their male counterparts (Akhter & Islam, 2019; Heath, 2014). Moreover, the conservative outlook informed by Bangladesh's long-established and widespread patriarchal social structure towards women's free access to the labour market is still widely pervasive (Sayem & Nury, 2013, p. 103; Blunch & Das, 2015, p. 184). As a result, although more women, including mothers, are working in Bangladesh, there is a dichotomy between their development and current struggles for women's fundamental rights (Marshall, 2015), including employment equality (Hamid, 2019; Heintz et al., 2018).

Employed mothers with small children face a specific dilemma because, on the one hand, they are seen as the epitome of domesticity and "ideal" mothers whose primary role is to care for their children, spouse, and elderly family members. On the other hand, many mothers desire to enter the paid labour market. The constructed motivations of Bangladeshi mothers are to be "good" mothers by complying with the traditional cultural values that prioritise caring for their children beyond everything, including engagement in paid work. However, it is also true that many young, educated, middle-class women may choose to transcend such conventional gendered standards and prove that they can be both a mother and a paid worker or may choose one over the other. Given Bangladesh's current state in the neoliberal global economy, this thesis explores how being a highly educated, professional, middle-class mother intersects with expanded labour market challenges and opportunities in contemporary Bangladesh.

5. RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

Considering such gaps, both in the theoretical and empirical literature, my study aims to explore how labour market participation and key outcomes (e.g., wages, skill development, regular promotion, career progress, etc.) for Bangladeshi middle-class, educated women are affected by having young children. Specifically, my study unpacks how widely held patriarchal beliefs and practices shape the attributions of work and family devotion schemas (see Chapter 2) and inform assumptions about the course of women's lives, especially as

mothers. It also investigates the appropriate division of labour in families and how each of these factors impacts women's experiences of employment, and more broadly, the goal of gender equality in the labour market of contemporary Bangladesh.

It is imperative to explore what gender norms or beliefs govern middle-class, educated, working mothers' labour market participation and the key outcomes from their participation. It is also crucial to explore the ways in which these gender rules or beliefs are constructed, maintained, and reproduced over time. Moreover, it is essential to shed light on the circumstances under which such asymmetric norms and practices can be challenged, contested, and renegotiated in the Bangladeshi context and setting. The primary research questions I wish to answer through this project are:

i) *How does family devotion schema affect middle-class, educated mothers' labour market participation and involvement in the domestic sphere?*

ii) *How do pre-and post-natal experiences of working mothers affect their work and family life?*

iii) *How do labour market laws and policies embedded in the work devotion schema facilitate and constrain working mothers' labour market participation?*

iv) *How do workplace cultures, shaped by the work devotion schema, facilitate and constrain mothers' labour market participation and key employment outcomes?*

v) *How do Bangladeshi working mothers negotiate and contest the work and family devotion schemas?*

6. ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

The thesis is divided into 9 chapters. **Chapter 1** briefly introduces the research significance, gaps, rationale and broad objectives, aims, and key questions.

The conceptual frameworks of the study are presented in **Chapter 2.** This chapter offers a critical review of the key conceptual assumptions (e.g., cultural schemas, family and work devotion schemas, ideal workers, etc.) that examine the social constructions of gender and unpacks how gender is created, preserved, and reproduced over time. The final section emphasises how mothers may reject, challenge, and renegotiate old gender norms while provoking positive shifts in gender relations in the Bangladeshi labour market, indicating conceptual adaptations in work and family devotion schemas.

Chapter 3, as the study's background and part of the literature review, analyses how family and workplace gender norms hinder married women's labour market participation compared

to males and non-mothers. First, it discusses the gender order and current changes in Bangladesh. After describing the Bangladeshi labour market, I focus on women's labour market participation, taking into account critical background factors like gendered norms, religious ideals, educational attainment, restructured labour market opportunities influenced by global neoliberal policies, NGOs, microcredit schemes, and other relevant factors that constrain and facilitate mothers' labour market participation and related occupations. Labour market rules, State and organisation policies, maternity and childcare laws, and implementation difficulties are covered in the final section.

A presentation of research methods is detailed in **Chapter 4.** After an overview of the gender-based methodological approaches used for this study, I discuss the research technique, research sites, participants, sampling procedure, fieldwork organisation, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations. As briefly noted above, my work includes interviews with employed mothers and fathers in Dhaka, Bangladesh. For both cohorts, participants are well educated with most earning MA degrees and higher. All participants are also employed in professional roles. While I have deliberately chosen to interview both mothers and fathers, the focus is predominantly on the tensions between motherhood and middle-class employment. Additionally, my interviews include conversations with key informants from Bangladesh who hold expertise in gendered workplace inequality, which offers further insights into the study. Finally, as a male researcher in this project, I describe my positionality and reflexivity.

Chapter 5 begins the research's findings, which are divided into two major themes – Family and Workplace Perspectives. Chapter 5, in its initial point of discussion, examines how family norms and values around womanhood, or feminine respectability in Bangladesh, place women in a distinct, disadvantaged position relative to men. The chapter then discusses the values of motherhood and how societal pressures on compulsory motherhood are shaped in Bangladesh. More specifically, the chapter showcases how ideal motherhood is influenced by the family devotion schema that idealises mothers' responsibilities as homemakers and primary caregivers for children, the ideals of Bangladeshi fatherhood, and whether such standards are complementary or contradictory to their labour market goals.

Chapter 6 also examines family perspectives but focuses on three new significant sections. First, the chapter analyses the challenges and moral judgments of pregnant women as they make the journey to motherhood. Next, the chapter illustrates the impact of double shifts for

working mothers with young children in a still-traditional Bangladesh and how inequality at home interfaces with work opportunities. Finally, the chapter focuses on fathers' involvement in childcare and other domestic responsibilities and how they facilitate and/or constrain mothers' labour market goals.

Chapters 7 and 8 present findings under the second key theme of workplace and state perspectives. **Chapter 7** is divided into three sections that examine the challenges which mothers of small children face in continuing paid work, emphasising the interface between government policy and parents' lived experiences. Section one (Maternity Laws and Policies of the State) argues that maternity leave is an excellent illustration of how the state can impede or promote gender equality, depending on how it governs and legislates work. Section two focuses on whether maternity-related policies and facilities are equal for all employees in Bangladesh. Section three covers childcare services provided to working mothers in Bangladesh through the state and respective organisations.

Chapter 8 shifts the focus onto the incompatibility of family and career for working mothers. The first portion of this chapter examines "ideal worker norms" and their impact on Bangladesh's gendered workplace. Section two covers the experiences mothers face during their pregnancy journey from a workplace perspective. The third section focuses on mothers returning to work following maternity leave. This part examines both affirmative and negative feedback after returning to work. The concluding section focuses on working mothers' labour market outcomes to see how equal or disproportionate it is to their husbands and non-parenting female co-workers. This section highlights how women's motherhood status influences significant labour market outcomes or career advancement (e.g., income level, promotion, skill development, work quality, career progress, etc.) during and after maternity leave.

Chapter 9, the final chapter, presents the discussion and conclusions that can be drawn from this research. The thesis ends by stating the current study's limitations and contribution and suggesting further investigation.

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The introduction outlined 'Schemas' as the theoretical perspective that underpins this research. In this chapter, this body of scholarship is developed in some depth. Broadly, the chapter will critically review existing theoretical literature that explains the social constructions of gender and, furthermore, how these are able to unpack the complex role of Bangladeshi mothers of young children in the workforce. Culturally accepted ways of perceiving, categorizing, and assessing the world around us are known as "schemas", the virtual dimension of structure (Sewell, 1992). Schemas define moral boundaries and influence the desirability of various possibilities, thus shaping attitudes and directing our behaviours (Dean et al., 2013).

Following the background on the selected theoretical framework (2.2), 'The Cultural Schemas', I then examine two dominant conceptual schemas that inform our understanding of the labour market, namely, meritocratic and structural or systemic inequality approaches (Section 2.3). Offering a brief discussion on the meritocratic approach, I move on to two key analytical concepts; family devotion schema (Section 2.4) and work devotion schema (Section 2.5). This is so as to explore how the labour market-related goals of a working mother with young children are both enabled and problematized by these schemas. I then review the current research in the context of contemporary Bangladesh that contests the assumptions within the devotion schemas (Section 2.6). Here I elucidate how middle-class, educated, married women may question, challenge, and renegotiate their lives to reject, accept or balance traditional gender routines and, thus, bring changes to and/or integration into family and work devotion schemas.

2.2. CULTURAL SCHEMAS: AN OVERVIEW

The philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is generally recognized as the first scholar to address schema as an organizing framework that mediates how we observe, understand, and explicate our social worlds (Johnson, 1987). Kant contends that a schema is a lens which simultaneously shapes and is shaped by our experience (McVee et al., 2005). Subsequently, the psychologist Bartlett (1995) contributed significantly to the body of knowledge on the

schema to explain how a person's past experiences influence their present. According to McVee et al. (2005), Bartlett's work lays the groundwork for understanding schemas as patterns that extend beyond the knower and into the social and cultural sphere, implying that they are more than just internal or mental phenomena. Fiske and Linville (1980) maintain that "the schema concept refers to cognitive structures of organized prior knowledge, abstracted from experience with specific instances; schemata guide the processing of new information and the retrieval of stored information" (p. 543). Similarly, Taylor and Stoltz (2020) state that schemas are essential to human learning, thinking, and behaviour because they help us identify, inform and update patterns in our daily observations (e.g., how men and women are evaluated for unpaid care work). Depending on the individual's knowledge and experience, the content of the schema may vary across cultures (Prameswari & Hibino., 2020; Rice, 1980).

However, the application of schema theory is broad, extending to both abstract and tangible concepts, from faith and justice to codified or written law (Ameli & Shahghasemi, 2018; Prameswari & Hibino., 2020). As such, the field of sociology also benefits from applying schema theory (Wood et al., 2018, Lizardo, 2016). Wood et al. (2018) note that schema frame and framing help sociologists understand how people and groups organize and change their perceptions, typically for persuasion. Given that schema theory has a wide range of applications, this study places particular focus on the "cultural schemas" to investigate gender inequalities. Building on Blair-Loy's conceptualization, I define the "gendered cultural schema" as socially constructed shared knowledge and experience in which individual gendered thought processes can arise from broader cultural beliefs about gender which prejudices people's perceptions and actions (Blair-Loy et al., 2023; Hunzaker & Valentino, 2019; Cech et al., 2016; Cech & Blair-Loy, 2014). Sewell's (1992) description of social structures as made up of "mutually sustaining cultural schemas and sets of resources that empower and constrain social action [that] tend to be reproduced by that action" (p. 27) informs Blair-Loy's theoretical foundation.

Blair-Loy (2001) examines the genesis of schemas with a particular focus on gender, in accordance with a sociological tradition that holds that gender is an institutional construct deeply ingrained in societal structure. Hunzaker and Valentino (2019) note that "a growing body of research in sociology uses the concept of cultural schemas to explain how culture influences beliefs and actions" (p. 950). They define schemas as a set of cognitive associations that occur over the repeated experience of members of society which facilitate

our understanding of how individuals' actions and beliefs are influenced. In this vein, Strauss and Quinn (1997) argue that individual cognition is based on schemas and is essential to describing cultural processes, particularly as culture is shared knowledge or meaning; they note, "Cultural knowledge and meaning are the by-products of internalised networks of cognitive associations" (p. 47). The cultural schemas that people have for their jobs and their families give their life meaning and purpose. They enable the individual to live life in a particular way, underpin moral limits, and affect the desirability of alternative possibilities. As a result these schemas influence the creation of dispositions and may affect action.

One of the fundamental goals of this research is to understand how working parents find meaning in their obligations to family and paid jobs and, furthermore, how they navigate their family and work lives. The identification of 'cultural schemas' underpinning these obligations and interrelationships has resulted in significant theoretical and empirical advancements in this field (Oleschuk, 2019; Cech & Blair-Loy, 2014). From a gender perspective, cultural schemas are crucial because they serve as key mechanisms for evaluating gender-differentiated goals and framing the boundaries of normative gendered behaviour (Oleschuk, 2019). As stated earlier, Blair-Loy (2003) provides a useful framework, for example, 'cultural schemas', for elucidating how cultures influence women's career and family decisions. Blair-Loy (2003) characterizes the work-family cultural schemas (hereafter family and work devotions schemas) as plausible, moral, and tempting, contributing to an incompatible workplace and family structure, having more deleterious impacts on working mothers' labour market opportunities than working fathers'. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) further maintain that because the societal definition of 'mothering' conflicts with the allegiances of a paid worker, women face additional difficulties in the workplace upon disclosure of being mothers. Likewise, in her research on mothers, Sharon Hays (1996) presents an ideology of 'intensive mothering', wherein mothers are held accountable for children's mental and physical growth, including their intellectual development. Hays (1996) further notes that it is nearly impossible for a mother to juggle the career and social expectations of childcare.

Work and family life are suffused with purpose, emotion, and morality, and this has been the subject of extensive research based on the theoretical premise of cultural schemas of inequality. However, much of this work has primarily been in the Western context and limited to homogeneous samples of white mothers frequently depicted as universalised ideologies (see Blair-Loy et al., 2023; Mosseri, 2019; Hunzaker & Valentino, 2019; Blair-

Loy & Cech, 2017; Halrynjo & Lyng, 2009). Consequently, it is especially striking that this scholarship disregards the implications of social, spatial, and racialised distinctions for working mothers outside Western contexts, given that they experience and shape their lives differently. In South Asian nations, where men predominantly control society and the gendered division of labour is widely pervasive, mothers may feel pressured to adhere to a family devotion schema that contradicts their professional goals (Strachan & Adikaram., 2023; Bhandari & Titzmann, 2017; Yeung et al., 2018). However, many South Asian women might prefer to benefit from increased paid employment opportunities as opposed to merely succumbing to hegemonic policies entwined with neoliberalism and capitalist exploitation (e.g., devaluing motherhood roles, glass-ceiling). Therefore, it is important to investigate how employed mothers might negotiate with patriarchy and challenge the normativity of these gendered schemas through the use of neoliberal resources (e.g., paid employment) as their agency. In fact, little systematic research has empirically examined the 'gendered cultural schemas' related to family and work-life devotions, the conflict working mothers experience and how they may negotiate and contest these devotions, particularly in South Asian nations. The present study aims to fill this gap by examining the cultural schemas of family and work devotions among middle-class, highly educated working mothers in Bangladesh, the third most populated country in South Asia.

However, though cultural schemas are widely held beliefs, they can differ in their degree of intensity in which the "deeper schemas lie beneath and help generate more explicit or apparent understandings" (Cech et al., 2016, p.130). Workplace behaviours, for example, are inspired by the deeper work commitment programme, which devalues family responsibilities and stigmatises work-family policies (Cech & Blair-Loy, 2014). Cultural dynamics of inequality define the labour market as unequal and rely on values that are residual from the early era of industrialisation and a traditional family structure that emphasises the role of men as breadwinners and women as home caregivers (Acker, 2011; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Such schemas may support the presumption that men prefer to work more hours, seek more prestigious jobs (such as in large corporations), and earn more money than women (Blair-Loy, 2009). Thus, the deeper the cultural schemas are, the greater the prospects for men but constraints for women (Cech et al., 2016). The cultural schemes of inequality may view surface-level perceptions and actions as profound, widespread and taken for granted. However, the internalisation of these schemas of inequality may vary between individuals across cultures.

2.3. CULTURAL SCHEMAS AND LABOUR MARKET INEQUALITY

Gender inequality in labour market participation has been explained through two broad theoretical perspectives in social sciences proposing possible reproduction mechanisms: meritocratic and devotion schemas (Cech et al., 2016; Lewis & Simpson, 2010). These two explanations function as 'cultural schemas of inequality', through which employers' assessments of broad variations in labour market participation and key outcomes among different cohorts (e.g., men, mothers, non-mothers, etc.) are widely and profoundly constructed (Cech et al., 2016; Ridgeway & Kricheli-Katz, 2013; Blair-Loy, 2001). Meritocracy explains labour market inequalities in terms of individual differences in skills, experience, training, competency, productivity, among others, which can be influenced by either a lack of human capital investment or a lack of motivation and talent (Cech et al., 2016; Maher, 2011; Budig et al., 2012). The literature further demonstrates that individuals' labour market opportunities may vary regarding their participation rate and key outcomes (for example income levels and career progress) according to their investments that increase their values to employers (Staff & Mortimer, 2012; Correll et al., 2007). According to Castilla and Benard (2010), the meritocratic system allows employees to think of an equal chance to progress and gain rewards based on their merits and efforts, regardless of gender, ethnicity, class, or other non-merit criteria.

Within the meritocracy viewpoint, labour market involvement and retention of mothers are more negatively affected than other cohorts (e.g., all men and non-mothers) due to their poorer investment in schooling, job-required training, work experience, and other components of human capital (Pacelli et al., 2013; Lewis & Simpson, 2010). In addition, employers tend to believe that they are less productive than their colleagues, who are non-mothers and men (Dai et al., 2022). Dai and colleagues (2022) noted that to evaluate working mothers, employers often utilize the meritocratic assessment system, which values focused, dedicated, and competitive ideal workers. Motherhood status is enough to convince organisations that such individuals are easily distracted, sluggish, uncommitted, and hence are not preferred by employers (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

Cech et al. (2016) found consistent evidence of inequality in the treatment of white, Asian/American and under-represented minority women in the US context. They identified that the ways in which people understand the origins of ascribed group differences are shaped by their own life experiences and more fundamental cultural schemas. People with these schemas would be unlikely to see processes of inequality at work in their interpersonal

environment if these schemas do not characterize gender and racial differences as inequities. Similarly, Halrynjo and Lyng (2009) who studied middle-class working mothers in Norway reported that the experiences of the interviewed mothers not being able to 'deliver' seemed to have started a process of questioning and doubting of the skills and capacities that they previously took for granted and were confident about. They added that these mothers privatize the conflict of obligations rather than challenging the ethical and practical requirements of the two schemas of devotion (e.g., work and family) that render the combination of care and employment incompatible. In contrast, a study by Dean et al. (2013) on middle-class black mothers in the US found somewhat different results. Mothers in their study had returned to full-time work after childbirth, held the dual identities of worker-mother, and relied extensively on others for childcare, yet believed their careers were as meaningful as their husbands. This indicates that some working mothers, perhaps under certain conditions, can adjust or strike a balance between work and family, as observed, rather than feeling acute incompatibility between profession and family (Cech et al., 2016; Halrynjo & Lyng, 2009).

There is also a maternity penalty arising from the segregation of labour in both the home and workplace (Fuller & Hirsh, 2018; Correll et al., 2007; Kmec, 2011; ILO, 2017). For example, due to childcare responsibilities, mothers may prefer jobs that are more "mother-friendly," taking into account factors such as proximity to residence, more flexible hours, less pressure for working on the weekends and travelling for official purposes, onsite day-care facilities, among others (Cukrowska-Torezwska & Matysiak, 2020; Gangl & Ziefle, 2009). Moreover, employed mothers of young children might opt out of the labour market entirely due to childcare responsibilities, resulting in diminished career progress (Bass, 2015; Blair-Loy, 2003).

Questions remain, however, about the extent to which this relationship between human capital accumulation and labour market outcomes is causal and, moreover, about the mechanism by which motherhood affects labour market participation and key outcomes (van Dijk et al., 2020; Sealy, 2010; Lundberg & Rose, 2000). In the same way, van Dijk et al. (2020) point out that studies have cast doubt on the notion of meritocracy in the workplace, demonstrating that workers appear to be mistreated in many workplaces based on their social category participation, for example, gender, ethnicity, class and motherhood, among others. Likewise, Castilla and Benard (2010) contend that the question of whether gender and ethnic inequality persist despite management's efforts to promote meritocracy remains unanswered.

One significant argument illustrating the pitfalls of meritocracy in evaluating mothers' penalties with regard to their labour market participation and key outcomes is that meritocracy overlooks how acquired skills deteriorate at varying rates due to differences in parental status (e.g., working mother and father). Thus, although according to the meritocracy perspective the accumulation of skills may vary by cohort, such as mother, non-mother, man, "…there is no reason why skills, once attained, should decline at varying rates for men and women" (Weisshaar, 2018, p. 37). Moreover, meritocracy holds that an individual may be held accountable for his or her own misfortune, which is far less rational. In fact, employees, irrespective of their parental status, can be affected equally due to a lack of skills and skill obsolescence. This may also occur during the unemployment period for both men and women or mothers and fathers (Weisshaar, 2018). Moreover, while traditionally marginalised communities grow with fewer advantages and possibilities, the meritocratic performance-based structure suggests that everybody has an equal chance to earn opportunities and incentives (van Dijk et al., 2020). Thus, the meritocratic perspective is insufficient in delineating the problems mothers of young children face concerning their labour market participation and the critical outcomes of their participation (Cech et al., 2016; Blair-Loy, 2004).

Considering the limitations of the meritocratic approach, this study explores if labour market inequalities for mothers are grounded in gendered values shaped by work and family devotion schemas (Yoon & Park, 2022; Cech et al., 2016; Dean et al., 2013; Halrynjo & Lyng, 2009; Blair-Loy, 2003). These devotion schemas are gendered models that acknowledge ascriptive disparities between labour market participation and outcomes of men and women while being sceptical of meritocracy claims (Cech et al., 2016). They also view family and work devotion through the lens of systemic inequality, which functions broadly as a cultural frame or schema. According to Blair-Loy (2001), culture not only orders cognition but also gives compelling normative judgements and inspires profound emotions, thus encouraging our 'devotion'. Blair-Loy (2001) presumed the concept of 'devotion' to imply a more influential and pervasive role of culture that shapes our daily lives. Blair-Loy (2001) places "this aspect of culture in schemas of devotion, which are particularly gripping cultural models that orient us toward where we devote our time, energy, and passion" (p. 689). She further argues that these devotion schemas are strongly reinforced by normative aspects of gender, contributing to male and female hierarchal status and powerfully reinforcing interactional and institutional settings.

These gendered schemas (work and family devotions) are objective because they are widespread and publicly shared knowledge. However, they are also subjective since they are partially internalized, given that they are challenged and contested over time, demand, and circumstance, indicating the changes or integration between these schemas (Yoon & Park, 2022; Mosseri, 2019; Blair-Loy, 2003). Correspondingly, Blair-Loy (2001) observes that these two schemas of devotion (family and work) shape gender norms that have become increasingly contested with the rise of married women and mothers in the workforce over the last few decades. Blair-Loy (2003) further added that they act as powerful, widespread cultural frameworks for understanding life's experiences and moral convictions, forming people's "deepest social and personal identities of what it means to be a man or a woman, a parent or a worker" (p. 4). Work and family devotion schemas are meaningful and influential as they give possible ways to live one's life, define moral boundaries, affect the desirability of diverse alternatives, therefore helping the formation of attitudes and directing our everyday behaviour and actions (Blair-Loy & Cech, 2017; Dean et al., 2013). The subsequent sections will elaborate on family and work devotion schemas.

2.4. FAMILY DEVOTION SCHEMA

Despite significant strides towards gender parity, cultural models of work and family life continue to constrain women's labour market participation and career successes (Padavic et al., 2019; Cech & Blair-Loy, 2019; Mosseri, 2019). Such cultural models that challenge the employment prospects of mothers with young children are strongly influenced by cultural schemas of family commitment known as the 'family devotion schema' (Mosseri, 2019; Cech et al., 2016). The family devotion schema is rooted in heterosexual marital systems and compulsory motherhood for married women, while the father is considered the family's primary breadwinner (Christopher, 2012; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Blair-Loy, 2003). This division of labour is produced by and also produces an unequal distribution of power between husband and wife, resulting in the wife's dependence on the husband for economic security and social status (Okimoto & Heilman, 2012; Blair-Loy, 2010). As a result, mothers' labour market goals receive a comparatively lower priority.

In this schema, women are expected to be satisfied with the intimacy of 'intensive motherhood,' a child-centred, emotionally absorbing, and labour-intensive mode of parenting (Hays, 1996), where their fidelity to family overshadows all other responsibilities (Bianchi, 2011; Turco, 2010). If this is not achieved, women are stigmatised as bad mothers or selfish mothers (Blair-Loy & Cech, 2017). The family devotion schema contains societal norms and

expectations that significantly impact how people act, think, and view the world (Halrynjo & Lyng, 2009). For a sense of self and the reinforcement of this fundamental social identity, the individual must be able to uphold the expected societal standards. Since people are socially rewarded for sticking to social norms and penalised for departing from them, maintaining social norms is essential for satisfying the urge to belong (Padavic et al., 2019). Past studies have shown that women are stressed by social repercussions when they fall short of society's high expectations for parenting embedded in the family devotion schema. For instance, working mothers who choose not to take the total amount of their legally required maternity leave are viewed negatively by others and thought to make poor partners (Meeussen & Laar, 2018). While such high expectations for mothers may originate from a positive view of motherhood (that a mother is ideal for her child care), they can have enormous costs for working mothers.

However, such a prescription contradicts the work-devotion schema because working women with children have more childcare responsibilities and are more likely to experience career derailment, such as leaving the workforce, being penalized, or having distorted career goals (Yoon & Park, 2022; Blair-Loy & Cech, 2017; Bianchi, 2011). Consequently, the demands of these competing schemas between work and family devotions cause the struggles of employed mothers in balancing their family and work life (Kremer, 2016; Correll et al., 2007). Kremer's (2016) study on Israeli married adults reveals that working mothers experience greater work-family conflict than their male counterparts due to the pressure they take for family obligations, including childcare. Similarly, Halrynjo & Lyng's (2009) work on Norwegian working mothers argues that, as a social construct, mothers' unwavering commitment to their families has become increasingly normalized and taken for granted over time. Some other studies (see more Hwang & Jung, 2020; Moilanen et al., 2019; Balogun, 2019; Fuller & Hirsh, 2018; Blair-Loy & Cech, 2017; Harris & Estevez, 2017; Fedor & Toldi, 2017; Narita & Diaz, 2016) found consistent results in which mothers experienced conflict when balancing between family and work devotions schemas. For instance, research by Moilanen et al. (2019) on Finish, Dutch and British working mothers demonstrates that some married mothers, particularly those who can count on the father to be the family's primary economic provider, might be unsure of their motivations for working for pay, the demands of which they perceive as conflicting with their family obligations.

The intensity of family devotion also varies culturally and spatially. For instance, the family devotion schema may be more profoundly rooted among working mothers of young children

in Bangladesh relative to other countries, considering the prevalent patriarchal norms and the ubiquitous practices of gender aspects of heteronormativity that often dominate Bangladeshi culture (Heintz et al., 2018; Hussein, 2018; White, 2017; Bridges et al., 2011). In this study, the heteronormative Bangladeshi culture refers to the normative roles imposed by gender, culture and religious boundaries that may problematize mother's roles as paid workers. As a heteronormative society, Bangladesh firmly emphasises marital normativity remaining at the centre of gender and sexual relations (Karim, 2022; Hussein, 2017). Rich (1986) contends that heteronormative frameworks allocate complementary responsibilities for men and women in partnerships, with men being assigned the duties of protectors and providers while women are given the roles of mothers and caregivers.

While Rich's (1986) observation pertains specifically to the Western setting, Bangladesh's scenario is likely to be comparable, given that it is a predominantly patriarchal society where asymmetric gender roles are widely pervasive. In patriarchal societies (I acknowledge the cultural specificity to be explored in my findings' chapters), the schema of family commitment denotes marriage and motherhood as the primary aspects of a woman's identity and respectability (Hussein, 2017; Mannay, 2015; Leskosek, 2011; Deutsch, 2007), mandating compulsory heterosexual marriage and selfless dedication to childrearing, which takes tremendous emotional resources, time, and energy, and is expected to provide an unprecedented source of identity and well-being in women's lives (Williamson et al., 2023; Blair-Loy & Cech, 2017; Blunch & Das, 2015). Williamson et al. (2023) state that women's parenting role influences their lives, attitudes about women, masculinity and sexual inequality, and a specific kind of labour-power. Thus, the family devotion schema regards homemaking as a calling that needs time-intensive care for infants or/and sick children, husbands and households. As daily interactions, practices, discourses and societal conventions constantly develop ideals of motherhood (Berger et al., 2020), the reward comes from the creativity and meaning that this type of work inevitably includes, as well as the sense of community with other mothers (Blair-Loy, 2010), which strengthens the family devotion schema.

However, individual internalisation can vary depending on spatial, cultural and structural barriers (Berger et al., 2020). For instance, Muslim women and women of developing countries are more likely to face employment restrictions and discrimination due to traditional family expectations than Western women (Afridi et al., 2022; Peletz, 2021; Tariq & Syed, 2017). These traditional family expectations encompass compulsory heterosexual

marriage, the wife's fidelity to her husband, 'patrilineal' and 'patrilocal' family arrangements, the wife as homemaker and caregiver, the husband's as the provider and protector, etc. (further elaborated upon in the following chapter).

In fact, men's and women's compulsory heterosexual marriage schemas are complicated and often competing aspects related to labour market participation and stable marriage or family life. This schema shows how ordinary people conceptualise family transition, which involves a complex integration of structural (e.g., state support for maternity or childcare facilities) and ideational variables (e.g., a woman is accountable for childcare). Working mothers with young children in Bangladesh (Adams, 2015) and other countries (Hwang & Jung, 2020; Balogun et al., 2019) face a "double pressure" of household and wage work as family role expectations have become more resistant to change.

Family devotion schema further establishes acceptable boundaries for women and mothers, such that women and mothers feel the social obligation to demonstrate their respectable femininity (ideal woman or motherhood, described further, below) (Marcus-Newhall et al., 2009; Dillaway & Pare, 2008; Gerson & Peiss, 1985). For analysis of gender relations, Gerson & Peiss (1985) argue that boundaries encompass a number of physical, psychological, social, and ideological structures from which differences and similarities between men and women emerge. Likewise, Radhakrishnan (2009) defined *respectable femininity* as a gendered ideological construct that establishes the standards of behaviour for women in a specific socio-cultural context. Although these boundaries restrict mothers' free physical movement, employment opportunities and social networks, they do not impact fathers. Aligned with the family devotion schema, Whiteside (2007) states, "respectable women were good mothers and good housekeepers: they effectively controlled expenditure and managed the household and children" (p. 26). However, although they may be more outdated in specific Western contexts, gendered respectability norms still seem to affect women in South Asian collectivist communities, especially professional women. These women, who violate the public/private sphere dichotomy and the domesticity standard, must wrestle with being 'ideal women and successful careerists' which is practically impossible, as argued by Fernando & Cohen (2014) in a study on Sri Lankan women.

Hossain (2017) argues that respectability for Bangladeshi women from both Muslim and Hindu families are dominated by three widely-held discourses: the ideal wife, who is loyal to their husband, the subordinate role of a woman to a man as part of her *Dharma* (duty), and the separation of public and private spheres between men and women. In Bangladesh,

normative perceptions of middle-class respectability depict stay-at-home mothers as decent women. Such cultural expectations act as a family devotion schema in which the power of religiosity is often one of the key elements that leads to resisting shifts in gender inequality (Hussein, 2017; Adams, 2015; Hussain, 2010). In this vein, Adams (2015) states, "in Bangladesh, gender norms are intimately bound up with religious beliefs and cultural practices, as they are throughout the world" (p.1). The middle-class educational accomplishments of respectable women in colonial India, particularly Bengal, were expected to pursue education and cultural sophistication to become worthy spouses while maintaining their traditional feminine spiritual values and sub-ordinated household status (Chatterjee, 1989, p. 628). However, though religion promotes women's respectability, which perpetuates men's and women's unequal roles in the economic, political, and social arenas, religious values do not affect all women or mothers equally.

To conclude, the normativity embedded in the family devotion schema is not monolithic but dynamic and changes over time (Risman & Davis, 2013; Duncan, 2011; Connell, 2010; Blair-Loy, 2003). As a result, the assumption throughout this study is that while a conservative society such as Bangladesh is influenced by long-established and widely held gender stereotypes that shape the roles and ambitions of mothers and fathers in work and family life, these manifestations of culturally dominated motherhood and fatherhood can be resisted and questioned by contemporary working parents, which can be attributed to a set of cultural, economic and institutional factors (Hussein, 2018; Kabeer, 2011). Therefore, this thesis seeks to expose not only stories about who Bangladeshi working mothers are but also about how they contest, resist and renegotiate their roles both as mother and paid worker.

2.5. WORK DEVOTION SCHEMA

In contrast to the family devotion schema, the work devotion schema prioritizes career goals over family obligations (Mosseri, 2019; Blair-Loy & Cech, 2017; Dean et al., 2013). The work devotion schema requires substantial time, effort, and organisation dedication. Gendered beliefs about work are hegemonic because they are institutionalized in the media, corporate images, legislation, and public space organisation (Ridgeway & Kricheli-Katz, 2013). Corporate culture and capitalists' demands are strongly related to work-family conflict, contributing to discrimination against women and mothers in the labour market, as elucidated in several studies (Mosseri, 2019; Jensen, 2017; Christopher, 2012; Acker, 2011; Blair-Loy, 2004). Blair-Loy (2004) claims that this work-family incompatibility reveals assumed work devotion and helps us understand gendered corporate cultures. According to

Mosseri (2019) "The work devotion schema prescribes the centrality of work, demanding unwavering focus, strong emotional commitment and the minimization of family responsibilities in return for material rewards, social recognition and a sense of fulfilment and personal transcendence" (p. 5). Kanter (1977) provides a historical account of how extremely large corporations segregated men and women into positions of varying status and compensation. Likewise, Acker (2011) later reveals how social hierarchies become embedded in an institution's logic and produce structural inequity between workers, such as fathers and mothers.

This work devotion schema is focused on long-established conceptions of masculinity that frame men/fathers as the principal breadwinner of the family, where wives and other female relatives will have to care for them, their children, and other family members (Mosseri, 2019; Brumley, 2014; Acker, 2011). Such empirical findings are available both in the Western (see Mosseri, 2019; Blair-Loy, 2004) and non-Western contexts (see Yoon & Park, 2022), though the literature on work devotion is comparatively scarce in the non-Western context. Mosseri (2019) argues that the work devotion schema, which assumes an unfettered worker, is founded on a historically evolved and culturally dominant conception of masculinity. Despite the implementation of neoliberal market policies that have the potential to advance women's participation, the discourse surrounding masculinity and femininity remains influential in shaping social and economic activities (Heine, 2022; Radhakrishnan & Solari, 2015).

Work devotion schema presumes that the image of an ideal father coincides with the concept of an ideal employee; someone utterly devoted to his organisation, taking little time for himself or his family (Tanquerel & Grau-Grau, 2020). This is because a man's masculine identity is assumed to be compatible with paid employment but incompatible with household work (Blair-Loy, 2003), reinforcing the breadwinning men and homemaking women (Cha, 2010). Thus, gender asymmetric masculine norms create structural constraints to the advancement of many women and even some men (if they fail to demonstrate male tasks and behaviour or explicitly resist the dominant gender order at work) in their professional goals. In other words, masculinity transcends individual actions. In fact, masculine identities and norms are linked to the concept of work, the gendering of vocations, and their values. Such practices disadvantage women in the workplace by allowing dominant men to define work and deny its gendered nature (Connell, 2005).

Even though the number of mothers of young children recently increased in the global workforce, the severity of the work devotion schema favouring fathers has remained strong

(Yoon & Park, 2022; Blair-Loy & Cech, 2017). Deep-seated societal values and practices informed by the social system of gender systematically reinforce masculine and feminine characteristics in the workplace and in the family (Connell, 2010; Acker, 2009; Martin, 2003). For example, Martin (2001, p.588) demonstrates that it is typically men who have greater status, legitimacy, and authority, and the way they behave forms the context for women in organisations. Likewise, Allard and Hwang (2011) state that, worldwide, the notion of the single breadwinner model is shifting the work-family conflict, yet has a costly effect, where mothers must face the greatest penalty in terms of their labour market prospects. Some previous studies (e.g., Atkinson, 2022; Bianchi et al., 2012) claim that although fathers have increased their share of housework over time, being a good mother is a central identity that has not changed as women have taken on more hours of paid work. Mothers' underrepresentation in the workforce is a direct outcome of the pervasiveness of a traditional breadwinner model embedded in the work devotion schema. Thus, the 'motherhood ideal' continues to be tied to the sacrifices they make at home, while the 'ideal fatherhood' is consistent with the image of the 'ideal worker' (Valiquette-Tessier et al. 2019; Weisshaar, 2018; Christopher, 2012).

However, not only does the "motherhood identity" contradict the "ideal worker norms," but the male-dominated work environment also encumbers mothers' labour force participation and career progress. For instance, despite the current legislative safeguards in several countries to allay this stigma, research shows that pregnant women are discriminated against in the workplace (Morgan et al., 2013; Gatrell, 2013). According to Morgan and colleagues (2013), certain aspects of the stereotype of pregnant workers, including ineptitude, a lack of commitment, inflexibility, and a need for accommodations, were examined and shown to be pervasive in the workplace. Due to the ubiquitous preconceptions about pregnancy in society, any pregnant working woman runs the risk of being negatively impacted. When professional women become pregnant and new mothers, it becomes more difficult for them to uphold standards of conduct outlined by the organisational body (Longhurst, 2008). Similarly, Wolkowitz (2006) observed that pregnant women are subject to reconciling conflicting expectations as they negotiate the embodied demands of masculine corporate cultures and wish to preserve the assumed femininity that comes with being pregnant.

Jones (2017) maintains that due to motherhood stereotypes and perceptions of ambiguous boundaries between work and family life, pregnancy disclosure in the workplace frequently results in stigma and even discrimination. Pregnancy is a transient stigma that becomes

increasingly evident (Sabat et al., 2021) and is related to bodily change symptoms that encounter masculine gender norms at the workplace (Gatrell, 2013). Such physical changes (e.g., gaining weight) can evoke male colleagues or supervisors to assume that pregnant women are unfit to carry out their official responsibilities on time. Finally, the stigmas pregnant mothers encounter may lead to their intentional exclusion from the workplace, unfavourable treatment regarding work roles, decision-making, and promotion, anxiety and frustration, marginalization in social gatherings, forced resignation, and further career advancement (Sabat et al., 2021; Gatrell, 2013).

Previous research shows that pregnant women may face discriminatory treatment in the workplace, including termination, unfavourable treatment during the recruiting process, reduced wages and delayed promotion. (Jones, 2017; Budig et al., 2012). Jones (2017) found consistent theoretical and empirical evidence that mothers confront specific workplace problems throughout the career cycle. Working mothers face challenges and inequalities due to asymmetric gender norms in their daily lives and macro-level laws and policies of the state and organisation (Hook & Paek, 2020; Brady et al., 2020). Blair-Loy (2003) studied US female finance leaders and found two socially produced schemas of devotions that give women normative scripts for a life worth living and affect work, family, and public policy. Institutional support and state policies like flexible working hours or days, gender equality laws, maternity and paternity leave, and publicly financed day-care also influence the motherhood penalty (Dotti Sani & Lupi, 2021; Collins, 2019).

State and organisational laws and policies, especially for work-life balance, also shape and are shaped by gendered work and family devotion schemas. According to Christopher (2012), several researchers have reported how the capacity of mothers to balance jobs with active parenting is limited by stereotypical gender ideologies, inflexible workplaces, and insufficient public policies. Likewise, Budig et al. (2012) maintain that work-family policies are considered to assist women in keeping their jobs during childbearing years. Yet, societal norms about gender, work, and family shape and affect public policy formation, implementation and effectiveness. Yoon's and Park's (2022) study on the work-devotion schema focusing on South Korean mothers notes that due to organisational gender norms, many interventionist approaches (maternity leave with 100% payment) have failed to retain working mothers. However, I acknowledge that Bangladeshi working parents' reflections of work-family devotion schemas are likely to be culturally distinctive.

Along with gendered policies, gendered compositions also affect organisational rules and regulations significantly (Mosseri, 2019; Cech & Blair-Loy, 2014; Acker, 2011). Corporate policies that are impacted by the work devotion schema, for instance, support valued or ideal employees, such as those who work at least 40 hours a week for 50 weeks a year (Risman, 2009). In this vein, Ridgeway & Correll (2004) argue that organisational policies endorse such features of the job that meet organisational demands with unlimited time and beyond family responsibilities. While this work devotion is tied strongly to masculinity, in many countries, changes in social expectations have seen the norms associated with the 'ideal worker', where work is prioritised over all other parts of their lives, applied to all workers, irrespective of gender identity (Sallee, 2012; Reid, 2011; Blair-Loy, 2003). Today, professional and managerial jobs require large time commitments in these countries (both in the global North and South), and job providers expect their workers to be available around the clock, beyond their family's needs (Davies & Frink, 2014; Acker, 2012).

Moreover, the spill-over of work-related tasks after leaving the office has also increased due to technological advancements (e.g., the monitoring of employees virtually, the expectation that workers check emails or respond to phone calls when at home). Employees who can conform to such demands in their working lives are considered perfect workers (Davies & Frink, 2014; Acker, 2012, 1992). In this sense, the work devotion schema normally associated with masculinity has been applied to women, ignoring the caring responsibilities they are also expected to fulfil, often creating significant work-family conflict when navigating their professional and family lives (Kelly et al., 2010; Blair-Loy, 2009). Thus, the institutional policies, rules and regulations accentuate taken-for-granted cultural beliefs regarding working fathers' conformity and working mothers' incompatibility with the demand of these abstract workers (Acker, 2012; Ridgeway, 2009).

The cultural definition of work devotion schema is closely intertwined with patterned relationships and assessment, compensation and allocation of resources (Blair-Loy, 2003, p.188), in which men are considered to be "ideal workers" who are competitive for receiving such compensation and ensuring their career advancement. On the contrary, normative conceptions of good mother "create an inverse cultural connection between the enactment of the motherhood role and the enactment of the committed worker role" (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p. 690). Thus, the cultural constructions of work devotion are built into the organisational policies that privilege men because these policies indicate an "abstract worker who is a man" (Acker, 1992, p. 567). Such assumptions are often implicit in hierarchies of

the organisations' resources, responsibilities, power and control mechanisms (Acker, 2012, p.217). In this vein, Blair-Loy argues, "[t]his gendered cultural system reinforces the power of capitalist employers over the family and the patriarchal power of the husband over the wife" (2003, p.180). Therefore, mothers and even non-mothers are structurally marginalised, discriminated against, stereotyped, and problematised by family and work-life interfaces. However, it is also true that cultural ideas and policies in the State and organisations are not homogeneous across numerous countries or regions (Jensen, 2017).

There is a wealth of research on how different national policies on work-family balance affect the success of working mothers and their children (Liu, 2023; Brady et al., 2020; Padavic et al., 2019). Some Western countries, especially those considered welfare states (e.g., Luxemburg: 20 weeks, 100% paid, Croatia: 30 weeks, 100% Paid), have developed comparatively better maternity leave policies. Previous studies observed that new mothers taking lengthier leaves reproduce wage penalty discrimination and are less likely to be promoted or even be demotivated upon their return to work (see Hideg et al., 2018). However, it is also considerable that the mother can only return to their paid work with proper length and compensated maternity leaves.

Beyond maternity leaves, state-subsidized (e.g., cash for childcare schemes) in some countries (e.g., Norway, Sweden) for working mothers failed to reduce the gendered division of labour due to social expectations of child-centred, labour-intensive, and emotionally draining motherhood roles (Miller & Riley, 2022; Duvander & Ellingsaeter, 2016; Hays, 1996). Moroever,many organisations have flexible work arrangements to avoid work–family conflict, but adopting such alternatives suggests an inability or unwillingness to work long hours, and in a professional-work culture that valorises nearly unremitting labour, taking time off is stigmatized (Liu, 2023; Blair-Loy & Cech, 2017; Goldin, 2014). The stigma associated with working flexibly is known as the "flexibility stigma," which accounts for the discrepancy between the need for more family-friendly policies and their actual implementation (Chung, 2020; Williams et al., 2013). However, this body of literature primarily reflects the Western context, while Bangladeshi working mothers' experience and labour market policies are likely to be varied and culturally specific.

Given widely held gendered norms that privilege the father above the mother, labour market opportunities are also reflected in state policies and organisational rules and regulations in Bangladesh (Hussein, 2017; Adams, 2015).Earlier studies have found evidence of how corporate policies discriminate against working mothers of young children while working

fathers are almost unaffected (Tasnim et al., 2017; Ali, 2010). However, mothers of young children are allowed six months of maternity leave with full pay, though this is not standard compared to many other countries in West and South Asia (see Chapter Three). As a result, mothers of young children might feel intense pressure to return to paid work and leave the infant at home, resulting in detrimental stigmatisation. Moreover, existing policies in the Bangladeshi labour market have been enforced unevenly, resulting in inconsistent practices affecting working mothers in various sectors of the economy (Tasnim et al., 2017).

Although these cultural schemas are very powerful in terms of their broad historical, social, and cultural forces affecting mothers' labour market goals negatively, the severity of the schemas can vary when internalised at a personal level (Cech et al., 2016; Blair-Loy, 2003). Moreover, despite these devotion schemas having parallel effects across several studies, predominantly on the lives of Western, white, heterosexual, middle-class families, these can be very cross-culturally, which are not even static and can change over time (Mosseri, 2019; Dean et al., 2013). However, what needs to be clarified is how changes in gendered norms occur and how, simultaneously, changes are resisted in societies. This requires in-depth studies of working parents in various settings to understand more comprehensively how family and work devotion schemas impact mothers' participation in and outcomes from the labour market, as well as how they contest and integrate to bring about changes in these devotion schemas.

2.6. CONCEPTUAL ADAPTATIONS IN WORK AND FAMILY DEVOTION SCHEMAS

Regarding changes in schemas, some scholars argue that schemas might be susceptible to change due to their inherent transposability (Leung, 2020; Hays, 1996; Sewell, 1992). This is in contrast to psychological notions of schemas as immutable from a young age (Valian, 2005; Bem, 1993). In actuality, schemas can change when adequate resources or alternative schemas are accessible and in response to macro-scale social or cultural changes (Blair-Loy, 2003). Blair-Loy (2001) further argues that "Cultural change often occurs as the outcome of a struggle between different ideologies, different models of a worthwhile and desirable life, enacted in the lives of people responding to social structural change" (p. 705). Cultural schemas both constrain and facilitate actions as a social structure or process; a set of rules that may change over time as individuals partially internalize these schemas (Swell, 1992; Blair-Loy, 2001; Gerson, & Peiss 1985). Blair-Loy (2001) argues that the 'cultural aspects of structure' are schemas, which facilitate comprehension of the relationships between structures and agencies. Consequently, devotion schemas are valuable analytical instruments

for comprehending the change and stability of mothers' and fathers' work and family lives over time (Blair-Loy, 2001).

Given that motherhood is a complex site in which powerful gender norms can be both reproduced and challenged, some of the middle-class, educated working mothers with young children in present-day Bangladesh may be found to resist and contest these traditional gender norms (see Chapter 3) embedded in the work and family devotion schemas (Hussein, 2018, Kabeer, 2011). Therefore, it is imperative and one of the major goals of the current study to shed light on how these shifts from more conventional viewpoints to egalitarian norms that inspire gender equality in the labour market materialise. I have explored that by investigating how interviewees contest and challenge the gender normative aspects of family and work devotion schemas and how Bangladeshi middle-class mothers might pragmatically make family and paid employment choices simultaneously. This might suggest that contemporary educated middle-class working mothers with young children can oppose conventional gender norms, such as simply being a mother, as these norms are challenged and contested in their everyday struggles and experiences. Contrary, they may view themselves as both mothers and paid employees by pushing patriarchal boundaries (e.g., avoiding early marriages and delaying childbirth) and prioritising their paid work participation. Some of the mothers interviewed may have valued their careers more than their families and their financial success and professional standing may have informed a consistent sense of self-worth.

Again, as gender is socially constructed and influences actions at the interactional stage, the functional implications of these strategies that enforce and recreate gender inequalities can also be undone with alternatives if changes seem worthy for their family and themselves (Liu, 2023; Davis & Risman, 2015; Duncan, 2011; Martin, 2003). So, it is critical to see how and if working mothers might exercise their agency by unpacking gender when they navigate a range of cultural and social constraints embedded in family and work devotion schemas (Connell, 2010). Several scholars (Connell, 2010; Risman, 2009; Deutsch, 2007) argue that the gender binary can be subverted in interactions, contrary to West & Zimmerman (1987), who maintain that through "doing gender" inequality is oftentimes reproduced in our everyday interactions. Similarly, Ridgeway & Correll (2004) contend that interactional processes play a crucial role in the gender system and have the power to either enact and reproduce the defining beliefs of the system or put pressure on them to change. Nonetheless,

the competing logic of maintaining boundaries (e.g., patriarchal, gender, or religious) and shifting that may accompany such changes may be revealed through my inquiry.

Thus, the current study explores mothers' agentic power and shifting adherence to family and work devotion schemas central to the labour market. Actions reflecting their contestation and resistance revealed alternatives that allowed women to function outside of strict family and work devotion schemas; for example, rather than irreconcilable competition between these two schemas, they sometimes rejected them, embraced them, or found ways to balance them (see Chapters 5-8). As Blair-Loy and Cech (2017) argue, cultural schemas are widely-held publicly shared knowledge, but when they are internalized individually, they may vary because "at the individual level, employees may or may not personally adhere to this schema" (p. 6). But again, such rejection, embracing or exercising the alternative ways will likely occur within the constraints of the patriarchal social structure. As Kandiyoti (1988) states, "Women strategize within a set of constraints …to maximize security and optimize life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression" (p. 274).

Further, working mothers may question, alter, and rewrite the rules and scripts of patriarchy by pursuing education and employment, thus accommodating themselves in the interface of work and family life (Lan, 2000). In considering such pragmatic choices, however, mothers of young children may have to exercise some sort of power, though their choices might often be impacted by others, such as their husbands, mother-in-laws, another family member, or co-workers. Then the question may arise of how the agent exercises power or authoritative resources, perhaps limited by the constraints of society (Risman & Davis, 2013; Duncan, 2011). Although these authoritative mechanisms (e.g., women's decision-making power) regarding their choices to work as only mother or worker, or both as mother and worker, are strongly gendered, and related behaviour takes place according to cultural expectations or gender beliefs, they may also depend on an agent's (e.g., a mother's) practical demands and choices (Duncan, 2011). In this vein, Blair-Loy (2003, p. 173) notes that, as autonomous actors, people might make a choice that considers options and incentives as they make strategic and economically rational choices. Although people's choices are socially organised and shaped by traditional cultural beliefs and practices, strategic, individualistic, and reactive expectations may affect their acceptance or rejection of these choices (Risman, 2009; Blair-Loy, 2003).

As a result, it can be assumed that certain contemporary Bangladeshi working mothers' labour market goals may not be compromised by gender schemas but rather may be determined by their own pragmatic choices and decisions, which may be either strategic, reactive or both (Blair-Loy, 2003), yet such choices are also constrained by society's structure (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Kandiyoti, 1988). Some mothers of small children may prefer paying jobs, but at the expense of alternative childcare management (e.g., housemaid) to avoid the social stigma of becoming a selfish mother (Hussein, 2018; Chowdhury, 2009). Some others may wear an *Islamic Hizab* (i.e., veil) to legitimise their stay outside the home (e.g., in the workplace) and to associate with outside individuals (e.g., colleagues; wearing a hijab for Muslim women indicates her "respectable femininity" in a country where most are Muslims, such as Bangladesh). From this, women may achieve one advantage (e.g., labour market participation and retention of paid work after being the mother) at the cost of other disadvantages (e.g., taking the load of 'double shift'). The following diagram was created to illustrate my conceptual framework for this investigation.

In light of the preceding discussion, I have drawn the following diagram to illustrate my theoretical premise. The diagram illustrates the differences between meritocratic and devotion schemas in delineating employees' inequality in the labour market. The gendered aspects of work and family are depicted in the diagram, with differing effects on paid job outcomes (such as wages, profession choice, career advancement, organisational commitment and happiness with work and family life) for working fathers and mothers. Finally, the diagram hints that working parents may experience shifts in their family and work devotion schemas, leading to integration rather than conflicts between the two.

Cultural Schema & Labour Market

Meritocratic Schema

Devotion Schemas

Family Devotion Schema

Work Devotion Schema

◻Educational qualification
◻Individual talent
◻Length of work experience
◻Professional training
◻Professional skill
◻Dedication to career
◻Hard working manner
◻Commitment to job
◻Individual competency

◻Mothers are more inclined to Family Devotion Schema
◻Unwavering family commitment
◻ Fulfillment of women nature
◻Compulsory marriage
◻ Motherhood & maternal devotion
◻ Childcare is mothers' prime duty & responsibility
◻ Domestic chores, husbands' & elderly care
◻ Mothers those work outside are not ideal mothers
◻ Family satisfaction depends on mothers' sacrifices
◻Father is the sole breadwinner
◻ Role model for children
◻ Responsible for family's outside work
◻ Unemployed father is not ideal father
◻ Decision maker in the family

◻Fathers are more inclined to Work Devotion Schema
◻ Unwavering work commitment
◻ Ideal workers' norms are compatible with ideal father
◻ Work is father's identity
◻ Organisations are gendered
◻ Masculine work environment
◻ 24/7 work demand and commitment
◻ Competitive & success motivation
◻Priority to financial Satisfaction
◻ State & organisation polices to support work-family life
◻Work demands are mutually beneficial
◻ Discourage family responsibilities (care & domestic roles)
◻ High reward for high commitment & performance

Gender aspects of Family & Work

Family-Work
Conflict/Incompatibility
Facilitation/Compatibility

Differential impacts in paid work outcomes for mothers and fathers (e.g., wages, choice of profession, career progress, organisational commitment, satisfaction to work & family life, etc.).

Changes/Integration/Balance in Family & Work Devotion Schemas

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

2.7. CONCLUDING REMARKS OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter has positioned the thesis with respect to cultural schemas of inequality, underpinning gender discrimination in the labour market for mothers with young children. As detailed in this theoretical analysis, hegemonic norms model what it means to be a good mother and a good worker, but these are not impartial or without implications. Instead, how we understand socio-culturally and legally what it means to be a good/bad mother, or an ideal worker, depends on asymmetrical norms rooted in how we understand gender through the two major analytical concepts; family and work devotion schemas. As a result, the meaning, sentiment, and morality inherent in work and family are illuminated by a rich scholarship which exposes a psychologically fraught work-family landscape. This is a landscape dominated by socially and culturally developed and deeply institutionalised gendered devotion schemas.

Cultural studies of the work-family interface also provide a structure for interpreting individual decision-making. These studies also help to clarify variability within closely located communities, such as working mothers, in work-family values and strategies. The theoretical underpinning discusses how the social construction of motherhood, regular mothering activities, patriarchal fatherhood, and ideal workers problematise the involvement of mothers in the labour market as well as the labour market outcomes.

The gender history of Bangladesh, its labour market, and contemporary society are covered in the following chapter.

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the study context, emphasising how conventional gender norms in both the family and workplace limit married women's equal involvement in the labour market compared to men and non-mothers. First, it illuminates the gender order and its recent shifts in Bangladesh (3.2). Following the general characteristics of the Bangladeshi labour market (3.3), I focus on women's labour market participation, taking into account critical background factors such as various gendered norms, religious ideals, educational attainment, restructured labour market opportunities influenced by global neoliberal policies, NGOs, microcredit schemes and other pertinent factors that constraint as well as facilitate mothers' labour market participation and related occupational outcomes (3.5). The final section discusses labour market regulations, State and organisation policies e.g., maternal and childcare laws and their implementation setbacks (3.6).

3.2. THE GENDER ORDER AND BANGLADESH

In terms of gender relations, Bangladesh is historically a patriarchal nation. Patriarchal dominance may not always be explicitly coercive; it can materialise through passive acceptance by the subordinated group (e.g., women & mothers), who accept their place as normal (Hartmann, 1981). As mentioned in the previous chapter, not all women in Bangladesh or elsewhere, passively accept living in an oppressed state. In fact, many women challenge patriarchy through a variety of obvious and subtle behaviours. The term "patriarchy," which literally means "the rule of the father," was originally used to refer to the father's undisputed power over his household (LeGates, 2001). According to Lerner (1986), the family is the basic edifice of patriarchal societies, pushing its members to adopt sexually divided roles and uphold women's subordinate status. Cain et al. (1979) argue that the rigidity in the economic class-based sexual division of labour in Bangladesh is indicative of the strength of patriarchy. Women in Bangladesh have been educating themselves and increasing their participation in the paid labour sector as a form of resistance to patriarchy. However, education and paid employment failed to liberate women as patriarchy persists in different forms. For instance, working for pay may do nothing but add to their 'double shift' and thus reinforces patriarchy (Chowdhury, 2009).

Despite variations in the degree of male dominance, the basic tenet that men enjoy disproportionate power remains constant in society (Sultana, 2011), including in the labour market (Owoo, 2022; Islam, 2014; Sultana, 2011; Chowdhury, 2009). Patriarchy can be dissected within the context of capitalism (Chowdhury, 2009; Mies, 1986; Hartmann, 1981), where women's goals are constrained by public patriarchal norms that the state and formal organisations (e.g., the workplace) promote and by privately mandated norms in the household (Das, 2017). Though women's labour market participation has increased over the decades, the patriarch still relegates women to subordinate roles in both the public and private sectors (Walby, 1990). In Bangladesh and across South Asia more broadly, women are constrained by numerous physical, psychological, social, and ideological boundaries, disproportionately affecting their labour market goals and opportunities that reflect patriarchal and heteronormative beliefs.

Heteronormativity refers to behaviours or attitudes congruent with the traditional male or female gender roles and the notion that heterosexuality is the norm and default. Heteronormativity is predicated on the procreative and assumed 'natural' status of heterosexuality, which is strictly related to sexism and sexual stigma (Ferrari et al. 2021), and subsequently, gender roles for men and women emanate from this heterosexual foundation. Bem (1981) maintains that in the context of a rigorous, dichotomous, complementary male-female gender schema, heteronormativity suggests a view of sexuality as strictly procreative and reacting to a gender binary that aligns biological sex, gender identity, gender expression, gender roles, and sexual orientation (see more section 2.4). However, maintaining a heteronormative gendered life is one of Bangladesh's deeply ingrained cultural practices in which mandatory heterosexual marriage, men's guardianship and dominance over women have firmly cemented over the decades (Kabeer et al., 2018; Hussein, 2017). From pre-colonial and colonial Indian to post-colonial Bangladeshi society, mandatory heteronormativity, including marriage and guardianship, has firmly cemented men's dominance over women (Kabeer et al., 2018; Hussein, 2017). Previous research demonstrates that even though more women have entered the workforce, patriarchal household structures followed by obligatory heterosexual marriage continue to be the norms in Bangladeshi society, with varying effects on mothers' and fathers' lives (Bellani et al., 2023; Heintz et al., 2018).

Within this heteronormative context, Bangladeshi families are conventionally characterised by patriarchal descent and patrilocal residence (women leave their home after marriage to

live with the husband's family), which is typically a large household consisting of the husband and wife, children, husband's parents, husband's sisters and brothers and if a family can afford it, domestic help (Sultana, 2011). Although such extended or joint families have recently transitioned to semi-extended (e.g., a husband, wife, child, and parent of the husband) or the nuclear family (a husband, wife, and their children only), all types of families are still dominated by men in Bangladesh due to the country's traditional power structures (White, 2017; Samad, 2015).

In fact, marriage in Bangladesh comprises normative aspects of gender and religion that perpetuate men's power over women (Kabeer et al., 2018; Raj et al., 2014). Marital trends in Bangladesh are obligatorily heterosexual, where the bride will be younger than the bridegroom, there will be a dowry exchange and the potential couple will belong to the same caste or religion among other things.[5] While the "ideal bridegroom" is one who can provide secure financial support to the family, the "ideal bride" is religiously observant and has never been involved in a prior intimate relationship (making virginity a constructed positive quality for young women). Furthermore, marriage occurs not only between a man and woman but also between two families, indicating that kinship plays a significant role in selecting the couple and finalising the union (Raj et al., 2014; Chowdhury, 2009; Kabeer, 1998). In this vein, Naila Kabeer (1998), a Bangladeshi-descent British scholar, argues that extended family dynamics play a significant role in reproducing social controls over women in Bangladesh following marriage.

Non-marital cohabitation between adult males and females is socially stigmatised in Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2009) and may result in men and women feeling social pressure to lead a married life. Living alone without a spouse is regarded as an anomaly for adult men and women, rendering women's social lives more vulnerable than men's. The same holds for women who are separated or divorced. Thus the gender hierarchy that places women under the subordination of men is largely maintained by this compulsory heterosexual marriage (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009), and family works as a primary institution that maintains patriarchal oppression (Nazneen, 2017; Sultana, 2011).

It is also useful to examine how gender inequality in the household functions symbiotically with gendered labour market disparities. Marriage arrangements are inevitable due to women's constructed inadequacies in paid labour, and their familial status places them at a disadvantage in paid employment; thus, these two forms of expropriation mutually reinforce

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[5] Islam and Hinduism, the two major religions in Bangladesh, adhere to more or less similar marital customs

one another. Deshpande & Kabeer (2019) state, "cultural restrictions[6] on women's mobility tend to be particularly severe for married women, leading to a 'marriage effect' within the female labour force" (p.3), which relies on a set of gender beliefs and practices that determines the ideal mother in Bangladesh. In fact, having a job has not made a difference in how much work is done at home; instead, mothers' ideal image still depends on the gender roles in their families. Similarly, Adams (2015) argues that working Bangladeshi women must also perform home activities and paid jobs since family norms resist change. While mothers are expected to participate in childcare and domestic duties regardless of paid employment, husbands' non-participation in domestic tasks goes unquestioned (Munro et al., 2015). Thus, Bangladeshi society, including the family, is segregated by gendered roles, in which the mother is still a constructed symbol of domesticity.

Religious values also shape gendered domesticity in Bangladesh. As mentioned earlier, Bangladesh is a majority Muslim country, and Islam profoundly influences men's and women's daily lives. "Purdah", a major Islamic rite for Muslim women, restricts their free movement (Asadullah & Wahhaj, 2016; Shahid, 2013). The word "purdah," which literally means "curtain," is also used to refer to the custom of keeping women apart from men who are not members of their immediate family. Purdah has two dimensions in its most extreme and comprehensive form: the separation of living space and the covering of the female face and body (Nazneen, 1996, p. 47). However, practices of "purdah" (veil) can take place in different forms "ranging from simple headscarf to full-body burqa" (Ahmed & Sen, 2018, p. 24). The type of veiling or its frequency depends on individual choice, as the practice of veiling is not compulsory in Bangladesh like in some other Islamic countries, e.g., Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, etc. However, variation in practicing of purdah exists in locations, e.g., rural and urban areas, and among different age cohorts, social classes, and education. The "purdah" or veiling keeps women at the homestead and limits their interactions with unknown males (White, 2010), which hinders their labour market participation in Bangladesh. Thus, purdah regulations and a lack of employment options mutually reinforce Bangladeshi women from engaging in the labour market.

Purdah resolutely restricts women's employment because those who observe it are not permitted to work in places or institutions where there is contact with men (White, 2017). Purdah is a complicated custom based on family honour (and the symbol of feminine

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[6] In this context, cultural restrictions refer to women's free access to public spaces, interactions with unknown men or outsiders, adherence to purdah (if Muslim), and fidelity to one's husband, father, and other family members, etc.

respectability) that protects women's sexual purity by keeping them away from public spaces and men outside their families. This purdah culture is strengthened by the Quran's (the Holy Book of Muslims) emphasis on modesty, so veiling and seclusion were firmly established throughout the Muslim world. Previous studies (see Abdelhadi & England, 2019; Dogan, 2016; Fish, 2011) demonstrate that purdah culture makes Muslim women less likely to engage in paid work than women of other religions, even after controlling for demographic factors like education, family position, etc. In their WVS[7] study, Guiso et al. (2003) suggest that the religious effect on women's labour force participation is twice as strong for Muslims as it is for followers of any other faith, and Heineck (2004) demonstrates that women in Germany who hold more fervent religious convictions are less likely to participate in the labour force. Likewise, according to Algan & Cahuc's (2006) analysis of worldwide data, Catholics and Muslims are more inclined to support the conventional gendered division of labour, negatively affecting women's participation in the labour force. Ali's (2010) study on the women of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan concludes that "what seems to be common in all three countries is an unrelenting alliance of patriarchal traditions and gender in-egalitarian interpretations and practices of various religious and/or tribal codes" (p. 51).

However, other studies on religion and women's labour market participation yielded mixed results (Dogan, 2016; Ross, 2008). Muslim nations do not diminish women's employment after controlling for male-typical jobs, according to Ross (2008). In cross-sectional data sets, Dogan (2016) found that religion only influences gender disparity when economic development, education, ICT[8], and institutional quality are excluded. In addition, there is also no statistically significant interaction between the religion variable and the classification dummies for Arab and Muslim majority nations. Recent research conducted in Bangladesh (e.g., Bellani et al., 2023; Islam & Marzia, 2013) also reported less discernible effects of religion on women's employment. In addition, the purdah culture has been contested over time because women can work while wearing purdah. Many Muslim nations, including Bangladesh, engage in this practice. However, some particular workplace cultures or organisations (e.g., religious teaching institutions) may stigmatize or impose sanctions on female employees who fail to observe the purdah requirement.

However, the unequal treatment of mothers in the labour market is not only a result of gender normativity or religious values. Lack of state policies also demonstrates a poor commitment

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[7] World Value Survey
[8] Information and Communication Technology

to gender equality. In fact, the degree of the motherhood penalty is significantly influenced by institutional assistance and state policies, including flexible working hours or days, gender equality legislation, maternity and paternity leave, and publicly subsidized daycare, as demonstrated by previous studies (see Dotti Sani & Luppi, 2021; Collins, 2019; Budig et al., 2012). Since the beginning of its independence, Bangladesh's government has prioritized defending gender-equal rights through its constitution, which forbade sex-based discrimination and promoted women in public life and politics. The provision was also made to provide special accommodations for women (e.g., 50 reserve seats were allocated for women in the national parliament, while the remaining 300 seats are open for both men and women to compete in the general election, and women receive a 10 % quota advantage in public employment). In this vein, Sultana (2014) adds that over four decades, numerous national plans of action and initiatives have been implemented by different governments which attempt to ensure that women have equal chances in more aspects of life.

However, the actual and effective implementation of such policies to promote women's participation in public life remains a significant challenge in Bangladesh (Sultana, 2014; Ali, 2010). In fact, work and family devotion schemas are incompatible for working mothers with young children (Blair-Loy, 2003), and scholars have advocated policies to alleviate and manage this work-family conflict in cross-cultural settings (Kelly et al., 2010; Jacob & Gerson, 2004). However, unlike many Western nations, Bangladesh could not establish a comprehensive policy framework for work-family reconciliation, and its existing laws and policies are inadequately implemented. Additionally, workplace expectations and definitions of a committed worker set one's actions and manifestations of devotion in context (Oh & Mun, 2022). According to Ely & Meyerson (2010), working women might not think using work-family policies is feasible, for instance, if the workplace culture is masculine and employment is highly demanding (e.g., working in an inflexible schedule or long time). Gender scholars caution against choice rhetoric and urge us to consider how job quality, workplace structure, and culture may limit women's market work (see Dean et al., 2013; Damaske et al., 2014).

However, it is also noticeable that over the last few decades, Bangladesh has undergone many changes regarding cultural expectations and public rules and regulations that have historically undermined women's access to the public sphere, including engagement in paid work (Heintz et al., 2018; Ahmed & Sen, 2018; Anderson & Eswaran, 2009). According to Adams (2015),"Access to education and employment has broadened women's sphere of influence

beyond domestic spaces and challenged long-standing norms in recent Bangladesh" (p. 4). In particular, middle-class women in Bangladesh encounter this dilemma (e.g., increased opportunities for paid work and prevailing cultural constraints, such as mothers' need to stay home for childcare) more than any other cohort since their acceptance is highly contested as they cope "…with binaries of respectable (domestic duties) and unrespectable practices (professional/personal aspirations)" (Hussein, 2017, p.4). Due to these changes, it is reasonable to envision that some middle-class, educated working mothers with young children may reject, challenge, contest and renegotiate their positions as both mothers and workers in current Bangladesh. Nevertheless, many might fall short and encounter difficulties gaining equality in both participation and outcomes, especially with respect to wages.

The conflict between the cultural expectations of traditional mothers' and ideal workers' roles might seem inevitable, but cultural aspects of these gender-specific roles are socially constructed, and are, therefore, changeable over time (Connell, 1987; Blair-Loy, 2003). Bradley (2007) maintains that "being a social construct, gender is not something fixed, but something that varies according to time, place and culture" (p.3). Since working mothers and fathers with young children are not affected equally by socially constructed gender norms, their impact varies in terms of "personal aspirations, identities, and desires" (Blair-Loy, 2003, p. 178). But it is also true that work-family issues are fundamentally rooted in shared, powerful, and cultural understandings (Risman & Davis, 2013; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). This suggests that the paradoxical predicament faced by working mothers with small children in Bangladesh between traditionally held gendered norms and the demand for changes to these norms may underlie their labour market trajectories that necessitate conducting this research.

3.3. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BANGLADESHI LABOUR MARKET

As noted previously, Bangladesh's economy has changed significantly over the previous four decades (Raihan, 2018; Asadullah et al., 2014). Structural reforms began in 1975 when the then-socialist government's policies were overthrown (Nuruzzaman, 2004; Sobhan, 1996). These structural changes included "a move from state-bureaucratic constraints and industrial autarky to economic liberalization and integration with the global economy" (Ahluwalia & Mahmud, 2004, p. 4009). Changes in education and health budgets accompanied these reforms. In the 1980s, neoliberal free-market policies emphasised institutional reforms to expand the market (Raihan, 2018; Mahmud, 2003). Private ownership was encouraged, and steps were taken to promote public-private partnerships and joint ventures to improve

Bangladesh's human capital base (Asadullah et al., 2014; Mahmud, 2003). Thus, structural adjustment and market liberalization led to stable economic growth and human development indicators, especially in health and education (Raihan, 2018; Blunch & Das, 2015).

Despite steady economic growth, relative to many Western countries, Bangladesh's economic progress has not led to a strong labour market. Inadequate diversification, poor working conditions, and low productivity still afflict our labour market (Raihan & Bidisha, 2018). Raihan (2018) contends, "Despite some important structural transformation in the economy, the economic structure is still far from a well-diversified one" (p.7). The Bangladeshi labour market is also stratified by gender in terms of participation and significant outcomes (Heintz et al., 2018; Bridges et al., 2011). Policy formulation and reformulation are not enough to guarantee systemic changes. Instead, more adjustments are required, such as economic resource shifts from less productive sectors (e.g., agricultural) to more productive industries (e.g. industrial), new product discovery, and diversity and sophistication of new products and exports (Felipe, 2009). Another significant labour market challenge in Bangladesh was moving from agriculture to a vibrant industrial sector. Labour market diversity is also used to influence social justice, equality, and normative perceptions and behaviours (Abbasi et al., 2017; Toufique, 2014; Murad, 2009; Khondker & Jahan, 1989). However, Bangladesh's success in assuring such diversity to develop a dynamic and resilient labour market remains noticeably low (Ahmed & Maitra, 2010).

Given Bangladesh's abundant population, the economic outlook depends to some degree on the labour market's characteristics (Murad, 2009, p.2). Informality is one of Bangladesh's biggest difficulties, and women are largely victims of this sector (Raihan & Bidisha, 2018; Ali, 2017). Ali (2017) notes that Bangladeshi women contribute substantially to their households and the country's economy, but most female workers are primarily involved in the informal sector. Bangladesh's informal sector includes small, unregistered private companies that sell or barter goods and services (Akhter & Islam, 2019, p. 52). Research conducted by Akhter & Islam (2019) shows that the agricultural industry employs the most informal and underemployed workers, with 96% of its workforce categorized as such, followed by the industrial sector with 90% and the service sector with 70%. They further claim that only 10% of Bangladeshi women work in the formal sector, compared to 20% of men. Thus, despite women's greater participation in Bangladesh's labour market, most work in informal sector, resulting in lower pay, gender segregation, and other disadvantages (e.g., health, safety at the workplace, maternity leaves, etc.).

Women's informal jobs have expanded due to their lack of inclusion in the service and industrial sectors, despite these sectors' rising contributions to Bangladesh's GDP (Asadullah et al., 2014). Bangladesh's service and industrial sectors grew substantially during the almost 30-year period from 1990-2017 (Plecher, 2019; Raihan, 2018). However, according to Raihan & Bidisha (2018), most women still labour informally in agricultural jobs or the ready-made garment (RMG) industry, where 76% of all employees are women, often employed without contracts that would better guarantee labour rights (Berik, 2017; Carlson & Bitsch, 2018). Moreover, within the RMG industry, male workers are disproportionately represented in privileged positions, such as accounting and management (Shoma, 2017).

Unpaid work is another issue for Bangladeshi women. Women in the family conduct unpaid labour, which is productive but not compensated (Raihan & Bidisha, 2018, p. 65). Fan (2017, p.1) suggests a considerable discrepancy in this area: one in three working women are unpaid, compared to 5% of working men. Moreover, Bangladesh's unemployment rate is high, particularly for young women. According to a World Bank report, one in three Bangladeshi graduates is unemployed (10 October 2019) but that roughly 43% of female graduates are unemployed, showing their disproportionately high unemployment rate relative to male graduates. Informal, unemployed, underemployed, and unpaid labour characterises the Bangladeshi labour market, resulting in more substantial effects on women than men (Raihan & Bidisha, 2018).

3.4. WOMEN AND LABOUR MARKET IN BANGLADESH: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

With women being approximately half the population (although the Population Census 2022 shows that women outweigh males, with a male/female ratio of 99/100), advancing Bangladesh's economic development without women's labour force participation is nearly impossible. Considering this, the former Bangladeshi government recognised female labour participation as a constitutional guarantee at the time of independence in 1971. According to Article 29, "no citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, be ineligible for, or discriminated against, in respect of any employment or office in the service of the Republic"[9]. Nonetheless, in Bangladesh, factors were always at work to keep such a revolutionary ideal a fervent hope for years (Wright, 2000, p. 234). Wright (2000) contends those social prejudices (e.g., religious prohibition in women's movement to the public sphere) and cultural norms (e.g., perceptions that women are not equal to men) "are not mere historical influences that have faded into a distant past, but instead, remain powerful and have

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[9] Bangladesh Constitution , Part III, Fundamental Rights

direct controls upon the capacity of women" (p. 232-233) and affect women's employment equality. However, traditional gender views are changing as more women enter the Bangladeshi labour market (Ahmed & Sen, 2018; Hussein, 2017).

In fact, such traditional gendered norms, as we discussed earlier in this chapter, have not remained static over time (Kabeer, 2011, p. 501).Over the last 30 years, Bangladesh's socioeconomic and cultural context has undergone many changes. Among many other reasons (e.g., the increase in females' access to tertiary education, laws against gender discrimination) that propelled the socioeconomic and cultural changes, the influence of neoliberalism is also noteworthy. According to Hussein, initially, "neo-liberalisation gave poor Bangladeshi women access to the market, microfinance for rural women, and the ready-made garment industry for urban women" (p. 5). Chowdhury (2010, p. 302) notes that two sectors, one with an expressly economic aim and the other with a social mission, have transformed women's participation in the Bangladeshi labour force. However, there is a dearth of research on the effects of neoliberalism on working mothers in Bangladesh. Literature covering the global context for the present study will delineate how working mothers in the East (e.g., Bangladesh) and West have different labour market participation experiences.

Despite being covered frequently in academic literature, neoliberalism is challenging to describe because it encompasses a complex fusion of economic policies, institutional reforms and ideologies (Nkansah-Amankra et al., 2018). However, broadly, "neoliberalism" describes the widespread adoption of an economic structure strongly emphasizing free markets and commerce. Neoliberalism places a high priority on reducing regulation by the government, privatizing state-owned companies to reduce expenditure, and removing barriers to foreign investment and trade (Sniegocki, 2008). Economic growth and efficiency are the primary objectives of these strategies, though there is intense debate over what these strategies actually are and who benefits most from neoliberal policies (Sniegocki, 2008; Peck & Tickell, 2002). Because, the prevalence of the neoliberal ideology in a diverse global environment also represents a transformation of market virtues to individual competitiveness, deregulation, privatization, the commodification of public goods, and other forms of societal disengagement (Nkansah-Amankra et al., 2018; Lavee, 2015).

Neoliberalism has made unequal economic and sociocultural development in terms of geographical locations. For many underdeveloped nations, including Bangladesh, the structural regulatory framework of neoliberalism produced regulatory dumping; progressive

local alternatives remain susceptible to sociocultural undermining and institutional overloading (Peck & Tickell, 2002). These broader criticisms of neoliberalism were, however, also expanded by a focus on labour market gender inequality (Dalingwater, 2018), especially for working mothers with young children (Ylostalo, 2022; Nkansah-Amankra et al., 2018; Lavee, 2015). Neoliberals value individualism, self-reliance, personal responsibility and market citizenship (Bauman, 2007; Harvey, 2005). Personal accountability and independence go beyond financial stability. Personal accountability and independence go beyond financial stability. Neoliberal policies changed collective responsibility for dependents like children and elderly family members to private responsibility, especially for mothers within a familial context, where being a good mother means taking care of children and domestic responsibilities without support from others (Tabatabai, 2020; Wilton, 2017). Thus, while neoliberalism has boosted women's labour market involvement (albeit unequally), it has also exacerbated and exploited their reproductive (childcare and domestic service) and productive (motherhood wage penalty) employment. Reproductive work is often unpaid and essential to capitalist accumulation and social existence (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018). I explore that despite their apparent incompatibility and ambivalence, neoliberalism and motherhood are one dominating force instead of two, resulting in unequal labour market participation and key outcomes (e.g., wages, career progress) compared to husbands, men in general and non-mother co-workers in contemporary Bangladesh. More clearly, the assumption is that educated, middle-class mothers of contemporary Bangladesh might be able to overcome obstacles to entering the workforce due to the impact of neoliberalism and the expansion of capitalism. Yet, their gender might continue to be associated with the construction of the ideal motherhood, which might insist that they prioritize their family and children above paid employment or take the burden of "double shift".

In many postcolonial nations, however, this neoliberal ideology or choice of individual life goals is contingent on the existence of a nation-state that guarantees those rights and options, which is absent (Chowdhury et al., 2019). One of the reasons is the deregulation of the neoliberal market and policy with their severe effects, especially for the citizens of developing nations such as Bangladesh (Chowdhury et al., 2019; Gumisiriza, 2019). Gumisiriza (2019) argues that such deregulations in developing nations enable capitalists to prioritize profit maximization over using cheap labour and exploiting natural resources.The extension of this unbridled capitalism is operated and maintained by local and global patriarchs who already have privileged positions relative to women (Kocabıçak , 2022; Dent,

2020). Thus, neoliberal policies, in particular, are seen as a continuation of capitalism and patriarchy, allowing for the analysis of how various gendered identities are valued in various circumstances by treating the workplace and motherhood as two distinct domains. This is because motherhood has always served and has been serving as a means of institutional, societal, and regulatory control in both the East and the West (Jiang, 2023; Dent, 2019).Consequently, although paid opportunities for mothers have expanded in the current labour market, it remains unclear how they might benefit while narratives of 'ideal worker' and 'ideal motherhood' continue to conflict (as discussed in Chapter 1). Given that Bangladesh is still an influential patriarchal nation, it is crucial to explore the historical development of the ideals of motherhood and how it has shifted from being a static, passive object of patriarchal and capitalist control to contemporary narratives of corporate, competitive parental determinism in the quest of neoliberalism considering working mothers' divergent experiences.

Alongside problematic neoliberal influences, women's desire for paid work was incentivised by national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Since Bangladesh's independence in 1971, numerous NGOs that focused on relief and rehabilitation have become development agencies for the underprivileged, especially lower and middle-class women (Raihan et al., 2017). Initially, these microcredit schemes were for the poor and in rural regions, but later, lower and middle-class women, even in cities, adopted them (Raihan et al., 2017). Given that poverty is one of Bangladesh's greatest challenges, millions of impoverished individuals took advantage of this opportunity to improve their socioeconomic positions through relatively lenient conditional loans. Women especially were given organized counselling and loans with meagre interest rates through microcredit schemes in an effort to improve their social and economic standing. The program offered women loans to expand their current businesses or launch new ones. These investments were thought to promote socioeconomic and gender equality in society (Ali, 2021). In this vein, Karim (2008) noted: "... I found that micro-credit benefited several categories of women the most—the rural middle class, women with marketable skills, women whose husbands had marketable skills—or whose husbands had a regular employment and could thus pay the weekly installments—widows, divorced and abandoned women" (p. 5). However, microcredit schemes' effects on women's development and the gender gap have been questioned, as targeting women's welfare is often unclear (Kalam & Amin, 2016, p.54). Moreover, though its interest rates were meagre initially, with time, many entrepreneurs or even NGOs started

this business with high interest rates against their loans, raising hefty controversies in Bangladesh (Islam, 2024). Nevertheless, microcredit initiatives helped millions of women improve their socioeconomic situations, especially those excluded from Bangladesh's banking system (because in the conventional method, the banks do not grant them loans as these loan-seekers are not financially able to give mortgages against those loans, etc.) and labour market (Bayulgen, 2008, p. 526; Kelkar et al., 2004, p. 3627).

As touched upon earlier, apart from NGO cooperation, the rise of Bangladesh's ready-made-garment (RMG) industry also improved women's public visibility (Dey & Basak, 2017; Siddiqi, 2009). With a modest start in the 1980s, the RMG now ranks second in size after China (Hamid, 2019). Bangladesh's RMG industry employs 4.5 million people and generates $22 billion yearly, with 70% of all workers being female (Robinson, 2018). However, such contributions from women have not changed their economic status significantly. The majority of them are deprived of many work-related rights (maternity facilities, unionisation, health facilities, timely payment, and contract letters) (Berik, 2017). Bangladeshi RMG workers get the world's second-lowest salaries, around $115 per month (Muhammad, 2023), making Bangladesh an attractive country for industrial capital (Dey & Basak, 2017, p. 163). Thus, while Bangladesh's RMG industries have allowed millions of people, especially women, to enter the workforce, their participation is laden with gender-based empowerment and oppression (Kabeer et al., 2018).

However, women's increased participation in Bangladesh's labour market during the last 30 years is not only confined to micro-credit or RMG. Women's participation has grown in a range of professions, including in law, medicine, engineering, banking, social work, education and business (Shoma, 2017), though women still lag behind men in participation and crucial outcomes, especially wages (Hamid, 2019). In Bangladesh, just 5% of organisations have female CEOs (ILO, 2017), indicating the intensity of glass ceiling in the labour market. Bangladesh's informal labour market is dominated by women (Mahmud & Bidisha, 2018), with over 90% of the women's workforce being informal, mainly in agriculture, construction, and home-based work (Akhter & Islam, 2019).

And although women lag behind men in their total labour market participation by 27%, women have surpassed men's growth rate by 7.3% in recent years (BBS[10] 2018). Female labour force participation (% of female population age 15+) increased from 4.13% in 1974 to

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[10]Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics

29.2% in 2005 (Rahman, 2005), and it is currently 37% (Bidisha et al., 2022). In particular, middle-class and educated married women have gained momentum over the last two decades (Hussein, 2017; Chowdhury, 2010). Their increase in the current Bangladeshi labour market may signal the transformation of old-aged gender norms of inequalities into new standards of equality (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Employment rate of men and women from 2000 to 2017[11]

Figure 2. 1: Male and Female LFPR: 2000 to 2017
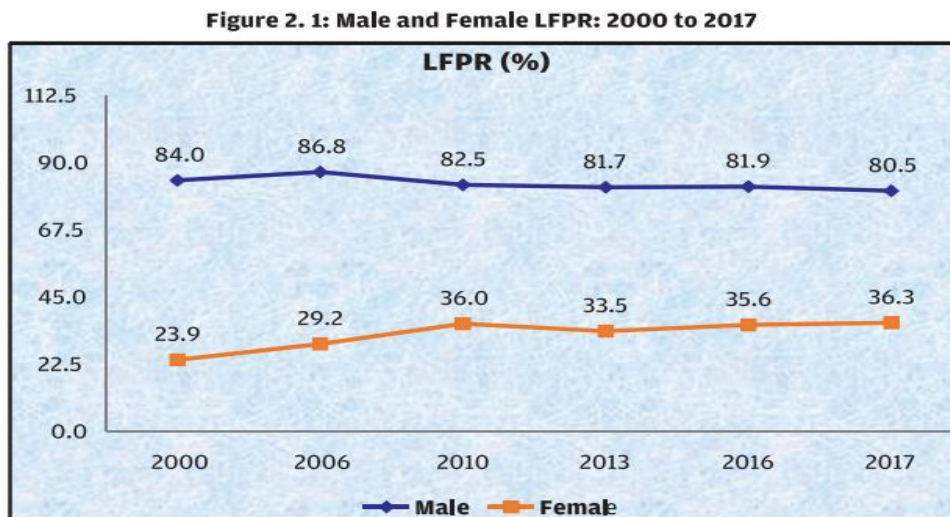
The above figure shows that the gender gap (% of male and female population age 15+) in the labour force was 60% in 2000 and 44.2% in 2017 (Rahman & Islam, 2019). As a result, from 2011 until now, although men's labour force participation has decreased slightly, women's has stayed relatively stable with a slight increase (Bidisha et al., 2022).

Women in Bangladesh have been educating themselves and increasing their participation in the paid labour sector as a form of resistance to patriarchy (Chowdhury, 2009). The literacy rate of 15-year-old girls rose from 72.65% in 2011 to 94.65% in 2017. The adult education rate for women has risen to 72.89% (in 2017) from 47.08% (in 2011). As shown in the bar chart (see Figures 2 and 3), girls have recently outperformed boys in gross enrolment in primary and secondary school.

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[11]Source , Rahman and Islam, 2019, p. 10

Figure 2: Boys' and girls' enrolment rate in primary level education
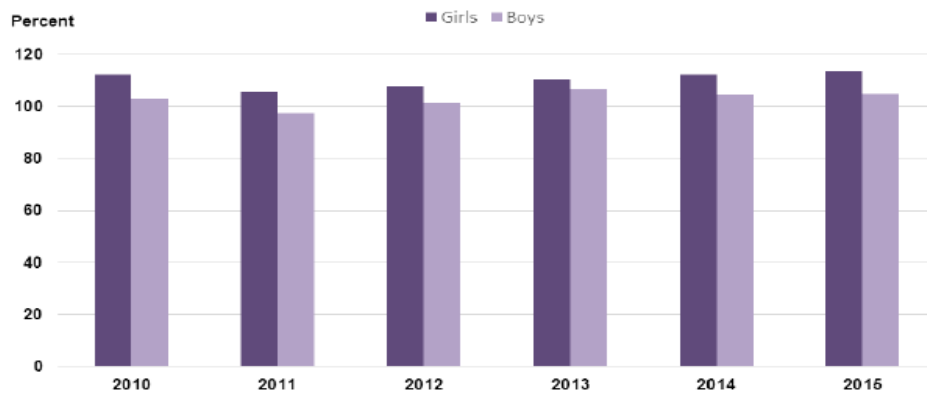
Source: BANBEIS report 2015

Figure 3: Boys' and girls' enrolment rate in secondary level education
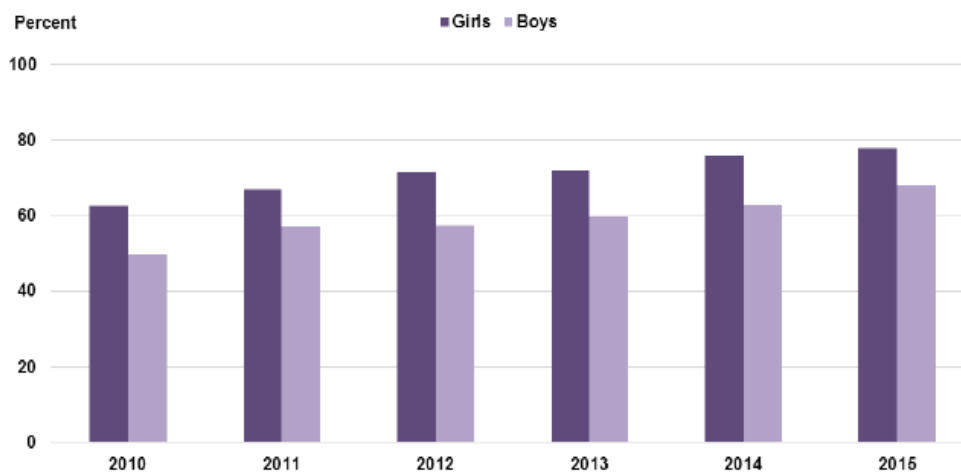
Source: BANBEIS report 2015

As is clear from these data, girls have higher enrolment in primary and secondary levels of education than boys, irrespective of urban, rural, and national categories (Akhter & Islam, 2019), contributing to their labour market participation in Bangladesh since the 1990s (Raihan & Bidisha, 2018). According to Blunch & Das (2015, p. 5), what is interesting about Bangladesh's remarkable surge in girls' education is how it has caused several long-standing tendencies to be reversed. Unfortunately, despite girls' higher gross enrolment rate in elementary and secondary education, there is a positive association between girls' age and their dropout rate compared to boys (as seen in Figure 4).

Figure 4: Girls' and boys' dropout rates[12]
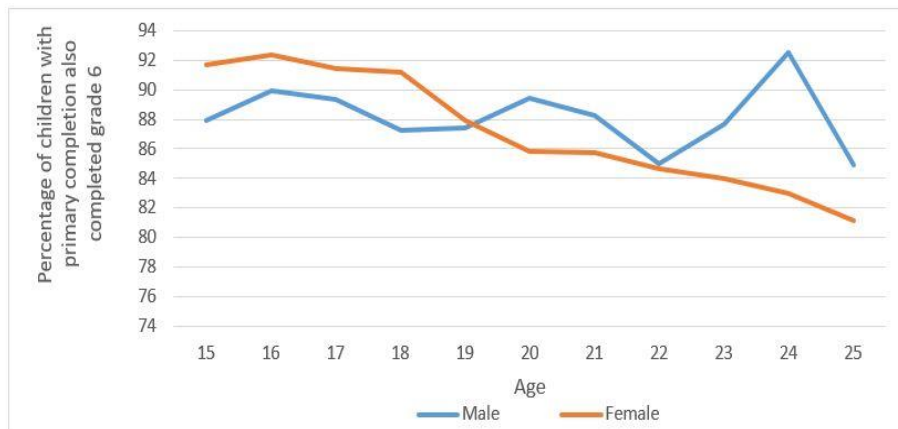
Figure 4 shows that traditionally gendered conventions still constrain females' educational attainment as their age increases. The recent data published by the UGC[13] reveal that the ratio of male and female students in public universities is 52:48 respectively. This ratio for males and females in private universities is 71:29 (Ahmed, 2024). The data indicates that education investment decisions are still gendered in Bangladesh. While the male-female ratio of public universities seems minimal (4%), this gap is 42% in private universities. Due to high education costs in private universities, parents prioritize their sons over their daughters.

Even though Bangladeshi law prohibits it, early marriage is one of the leading causes of girls dropping out of formal education (Dearden, 2017), with Bangladesh being one of the top countries for early marriages (Patoari, 2020). Figure 5 illustrates that girls marry at an average age of 18, while boys typically marry between 24 and 25 (Blunch & Das, 2015). However, the legal marriage ages for males and females in Bangladesh are 18 and 21, respectively.

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[12] Source: Sosale et al. 2019, p. 1
[13] University Grants Commission

Figure 5: Mean age at first marriage 2013-2015

Source: SVRS , 2016, BBS

A woman's 'purity' is a noticeable aspect of marriageability, raising concerns about female attire, whereabouts, and age at marriage, says Adams (2015, p. 4). In traditional Bangladesh, families feel pressure to marry off their daughters early to avoid moral suspicion. Due to the family devotion schema, it is believed that investing in girls' education is a poor investment. After marriage, they will leave their birth families, and the parents' investment in their daughters' education will provide no return. Thus, boys are more likely to get an education than girls, resulting in unequal male and female labour force participation (Blunch & Das, 2015).

3.5. LABOUR MARKET REGULATIONS, MATERNITY AND CHILDCARE LAWS AND POLICIES OF THE STATE

Labour market regulations, maternity leave, and childcare policies vary from country to country because of differences in employment patterns, family labour splits, child and elder caregiving responsibilities, and breadwinner status. Hussein (2017) states that Bangladesh has promoted gender equality and mainstreamed gender issues for 30 years through laws and attempts to incorporate women into its labour force. Article 10 of the Constitution assures women equal legal protection and full participation in national life. Article 20 highlights that citizens must be paid according to their skills for each task, complementing Article 19's equitable opportunity.

A number of workers' and employers' organisations, such as the Bangladesh Employers' Federation, the Garment Sector Union, the National Labour Law Commission, etc., have been established to maintain congenial employee-employer relations. To strengthen industrial

relations smoothly, the government has stipulated the consolidated company act (Company Act 1994) and Labour Law 2006. Given the gravity of gender discrimination, especially sexual harassment in the organisation, in the late 1990s, the government of Bangladesh took the issue seriously and finally formulated the "Oppression of Women and Children (Special Enactment) Act 1995". Per government policy in Bangladesh, all work organisations must establish a cell to comply with this Act (Ali, 2010).

Apart from these domestic laws and regulations, Bangladesh has also ratified different international instruments to comply with the international labour market standard (Ali, 2010). For instance, Bangladesh ratified "ILO Night Work (Women) Convention, 1948" in 1972, "ILO Underground Work (Women) Convention, 1935" in 1972, "ILO Discrimination Employment and Occupation, 1958" in 1972, "ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951" in 1998. Besides these, Bangladesh acceded to the "UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966" in 1998 and "UN Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriage, 1962" in 1998. Furthermore, Bangladesh was one of the first developing nations to establish a Ministry of Women's Affairs in 1998, just three years after the Mexico Conference of 1995, in an effort to raise awareness of gender issues globally (Ali, 2010).

Regarding organisational policies, all employees, regardless of gender, should be afforded the same opportunities concerning hiring, training, promotion, transfer, salary, bonus, sick leave rules, and maternity leave for working mothers. However, Bangladesh has fewer maternity leave options than many other countries. In dysfunctional parental leave legislation or the lack of parental leave policies all together, societal convention dictates that women are viewed as primary caregivers and less ambitious in the workplace. Actual and considerable maternity-related requirements have been overlooked in Bangladesh for years, but the government has tried to resolve them through legal provisions to provide financial security for women and their return to work (Ahmed, 2017; Anam, 2008).

After independence in 1971, Bangladesh preserved its prior laws (President's Order No. 48). Before the Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006, labour laws had not changed significantly. The Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006 codifies existing labour regulations to reduce overlaps and enhance the system. Before the Bangladesh Labour Code 2006, there were three distinct acts regulating maternity benefits for women before and after childbirth. The Maternity Benefits Act of 1939, the Mines Maternity Benefit Act of 1941, and the Maternity Benefits (Tea Estate) Act of 1950 were the three acts in dispute. Three laws were repealed and renamed,

"Maternity Benefits" in Chapter IV of the new labour laws. Chapter IV (Maternity Benefits) remains untouched despite the 2013 amendment (Labour Law, 2006).

The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 (amended in 2013) regulates maternity benefits. Bangladesh's maternity pay outs are regulated by Chapter IV, Sections 45-50. Statute section 46 grants working women four months of paid maternity leave, eight weeks of paid prenatal leave, and eight weeks of paid postnatal leave. Bangladesh's varied execution of this rule has caused diverse industry practices. Public sector workers get six months of paid maternity leave. The Ministry of Education mandated six months of maternity leave for non-government schools in 2012. The Bangladesh Bank[14] also asked all commercial banks and financial institutions to extend maternity leave to six months in the same year. However, though maternity leave in Bangladesh is much less than the world's average (29 weeks), compared to many South Asian countries, it shows considerable progress (see Table 1).

Table 1. Maternity leave, duration, coverage and legislation among South Asian Countries[15]

Countries	Duration	Coverage in law, paid maternity leave	Coverage in practice, paid maternity leave	Amount of benefits (% of previous earnings)	Source of maternity benefit	Legal basis
Afghanistan	13 weeks	10–32%	-	100	Employer liability	Labor Law
Bangladesh	16 weeks	10–32%	-	100	Employer liability	Labor Act
Bhutan	8 weeks	-	-	100	Employer liability	Regulations on Working Conditions 2012
India	26 weeks	10–32%	0–9%	100	Social security	Maternity Benefit Act
Maldives	60 days		-	-	-	Employment Act
Nepal	7.4 weeks	10–32%	0–9%	100	Social security	Labor Act 2017
Pakistan	12 weeks (some provinces more)	10–32%	0–9%	100	Employer liability	Several Acts depending on province
Sri Lanka	12 weeks	33–65%	10–32%	6/7th or 100 depending on the sector	Employer liability	Shop and Office Employees Act; Establishments Code; Maternity Benefits Ordinance

[14]Central Bank of Bangladesh
[15]Waidler et al., 2021, p. 25

The above Table illustrate that Bangladesh offers the second-longest maternity leaves (16 weeks) behind India (26 weeks), while Nepal offers the shortest maternity leave (7.4 weeks) in South Asia. But these 16 weeks are officially for private-sector employees, while government officers get 24 weeks of maternity leave with full pay in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, despite this progress in maternity policy for working mothers, the implementation of these policies for all employees in every working organisation is quite inconsistent (Khatun, 2018; Anam, 2008), as will be explored through interviews.

Paternity leave, on the other hand, is still unavailable in Bangladesh. Bangladesh and several other South Asian nations, including India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, do not offer paternity leave despite mounting pressure (this pressure often comes from mothers, media, civil society, policymakers, NGOs and advocates for female rights) for fathers to take such leave. The patriarchal structure of this society, which makes father involvement in childcare look auxiliary, is one of many factors that contribute to no paternity leave. However, fathers and mothers in Nepal and Bhutan are entitled to paid leave, albeit short-duration for fathers (5 and 3 days, respectively), while working mothers are allowed 8 and 7.4 weeks, respectively (Waidler et al., 2021).

To conclude, despite the fact that maternity leave and childcare policies are in place in Bangladesh, there are concerns regarding the labour laws and policies' persistent inability to challenge a man's position of financial advantage in the workplace and unwavering dominance in the family. As a result, it is crucial to examine how strict compliance with these laws and policies is ensured-the analyses chapters will examine the actual effects of these policies on mothers' labour market participation and key outcomes.

3.6. CONCLUDING REMARKS OF THE CHAPTER

In today's Bangladesh, historically gendered standards are shifting. Higher education and late marriage rates for girls have risen. Girls' obstruction to education, restrictions of movement, purdah culture, early marriage, and the gender pay gap are all being challenged by educated women in a fast-changing Bangladesh. Thus, a young, colonised, underdeveloped country like Bangladesh may continue to drive women's education and employment, resulting in changes in gender relations. However, these shifts may cause conflicts between long-held but shifting gender norms. In particular, "the growth of Bangladesh's new and affluent urban middle class, their contribution to social transformation, their numbers, characteristics,

diversity, and gender dynamics" (Hussein, 2017, p.4) have heightened tensions and conflicts between old-aged gender conventions and new demands for change.

This new image of the professional woman, mostly from the middle class, is defined "as enlightened, highly educated, urban and liberated" (Chowdhury, 2010, p. 302). Traditional gender roles have undergone specific alterations due to the neoliberal nation-state's globalised purpose and the liberal-humanitarian goals of NGO-led development programmes. These changing contexts, especially the increased number of married women in the recent labour market and their emergence in public space as economic agents, might bring significant changes in gender relations.

However, studying how these changes fit into a traditional sociocultural framework such as Bangladesh remains essential. Because gender is a multifaceted system involving individual, organisational and everyday interaction and can be negotiated and contested. The following chapter outlines the methodological approaches used to explore these everyday interactions among middle-class working mothers and fathers in Bangladesh.

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the methodological choices I made to investigate my research questions and the challenges and dilemmas that arose during the fieldwork process. It outlines how I structured my study using a gendered-centred approach and presents my research plan in detail. The chapter begins with a justification for taking a gendered-centred approach to this study before covering the choice of research methodology. It then focuses on the research setting, namely, urban Bangladesh, where the study was conducted, and the sampling procedure employed to reach out to professional middle-class working mothers and fathers who are the research participants. Subsequent sections continue to explain how interviews were conducted and data were gathered, concentrating on recording, transcribing and translating interviews and data analyses. Finally, I discuss ethical issues and my reflexivity and positionality related to my fieldwork.

4.2. GENDERED-CENTRED METHODOLOGY

Gendered-centred methodology (e.g., feminist epistemological perspectives) is a systematic way of examining the underlying causes contributing to gender disparities. Gendered-centred methodologies (e.g., feminist standpoint theory) are the effective alternatives, enabling women to produce knowledge from their own locations and experiences. Gendered-centred epistemological perspectives are varied, including; standpoint, positivist empiricism, and postmodernism, yet they all acknowledge women's lived experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). The present study employs a standpoint epistemology, which "explores the woman's unique perspectives by using a woman's knowledge and experience as a resource to develop knowledge" (Dixon et al., 2013, p. 11). Dixon et al. (2013) further emphasise that a standpoint approach to women's everyday experiences offers an alternative method of knowing and consequently serves as a legitimate foundation for research on and about women. Similarly, Saeidzadeh (2023) maintains that situated knowledge, which reflects the position of the knower-namely, the women and their lived realities is, central to a standpoint methodology. Realising that we are always spatially, temporally, and culturally embedded enables us to use these experiences and facts as

resources. By doing this, one can produce knowledge that is aware of its limitations, thus less partial and highly objective (Harding, 2004).

One of the key goals of applying a gendered-centred methodology is to shed light on the relative power relations between men and women within families or between employees and employers and how each pursues their conflicting interests (Figart, 2005). Similarly, Saeidzadeh (2023) argues further that the fundamental tenet of the feminist method is to acknowledge that women's experiences speak the truth that relates to women (rather than men), which leads to a production of knowledge that reveals unequal power relations between men and women. Within the context of this study, where male and female relations are deeply gendered, locating such power dynamics within family structures is imperative to elucidating mothers' labour market constraints and possibilities.

Notably, in earlier decades, there was extensive discussion regarding methodological and epistemological concerns in the social sciences. In the 1980s, in particular, many of these debates centred on whether feminist social scientists should adopt a unique approach (e.g., feminist standpoint methodology) and whether feminist ideals were compatible with classic positivist methods (Smith, 1987; Harding, 1986). Mainstream sociological methodologies (e.g., positivism) were called into question by many feminist critiques for their non-inclusiveness of women's subjectivity in knowledge production (Cancian, 1992; Smith, 1987). This was because conventional positivist approaches were espoused to accommodate all demographics interests (Harding, 2004). Yet, when attention was directed towards women, they were turned into objects and positioned as victims or vulnerable groups, reinforcing underlying gender inequities. Feldberg and Glenn (1979, p. 524) further suggest that when classical theories are applied to gender inequality of employment, males are viewed through a framework that centres on employment, while women are viewed through assumptions of domesticity. Among other key ideas, feminist scholars argued that the idea of work should be expanded to include unpaid work. As a result, women's specific position or location had to be taken into account and a gendered-centred approach adopted in research that relates to women.

The rationale behind choosing a standpoint methodology for this study is that men and women differ in hierarchical power relations in society, and their life experiences also significantly differ (Collins, 1997). Similarly, Hamersley (1992) argues, "…human social relations of all kinds are heavily structured by differences in the social position of women and men and most important of all by differences between them in power" (p.187). Therefore, to

gain a less distorted version of reality regarding gender beliefs and practices that result in gender inequalities, a standpoint methodology is appropriate for this research (Harding, 2018; Collins, 1997). Given the pervasive gender segregation of Bangladeshi society, applying a gendered-centred methodology enabled interviewed mothers to share not only their own experiences but also their own vantage points. This in turn, contributed to envisioning authentic knowledge regarding their employment chances and difficulties.

To illustrate, the importance of gendered perspectives in research methodologies, Beetham and Demetriades (2007) note that the "consideration of the hierarchical power relations between men and women that tend to disadvantage women throughout the research process involves recognising both gender inequality in the everyday lives of women and men and also the gendered nature of the research process itself" (p. 200). The notion of 'standpoint' is defined by different scholars in different ways. However, in this study, I refer to 'standpoint' as "a critical perspective that marginalised or oppressed individuals may have about the ways in which unequal power relations operate within society" (Edmonds-Cady, 2009, p.15). Swigonski (1994) argues that 'standpoint' means one's position in society, which involves a level of awareness of social position that enables the individual to see something more clearly than others. By applying the standpoint perspective in this study, I argue that it would facilitate mothers' locations in the social structure and develop an understanding of the relationship of the location to their real-life experience (Hartsock, 1983). Thus, a standpoint perspective enabled female interviewees' to raise their voice in this study, as co-creators of knowledge, even with a male interviewer.

In this context, therefore, by adopting a standpoint perspective, the marginalised group (e.g., mothers with young children in the labour market) is given epistemic privilege, as compared to members of the dominant groups (e.g., male employees or fathers). This will enable expression of the complexities of the labour market in contemporary Bangladesh. By adopting a gender-centred methodology in this research, I consciously seek to minimise hierarchal discrepancies between the researcher and the researched. Given that Bangladesh is a male-dominated society and my identity is male, I recognise a hierarchical relationship between the researched (participants) and myself (the researcher). My implementation of the feminist standpoint methodology created room (see more Section 4.6) for participants to be more reflexive of their own experiences and to interpret how they understand their labour market trajectories as mothers and as subjects of this study. This led to a more authentic knowledge construction.

Some working fathers have been included in the present study; however, the study's central focus is working mothers. The underlying premise is that working mothers' experiences do not occur in isolation; rather, they coexist with those of their husbands and other men and women within culturally ascribed gender relations (see Section 4.3.2). While I recognize that applying a standpoint methodology to male participants is not straightforward, I acknowledge the views of scholars who have emphasised and defended its applicability to both genders (see Campbell, 2003; Steier, 1991; Flex, 1990; Smith, 1974). Smith (1987), in particular, cautions against adopting an epistemic perspective that could ghettoize feminist concerns into an all-women camp. Indeed, men's participation in knowledge production is likely to be crucial to complementing women's knowledge. This is particularly so for those who reflect men's power relations with women or men's dominance that undermines women's equal rights. Therefore, inclusion of men and their sharing of experiences are not negated by women's epistemic gains; in fact, their voices being absent may undermine the legitimacy of such epistemological progress. Thus, with the primary focus remaining on the working mothers, the inclusion of working fathers offers a setting that highlights gendered relationality in spaces where power is accessed and exercised in disparate manners.

RESEARCH DESIGN

4.3.1. Selection of Research Method

The qualitative method allows a range of data collection techniques which explore how an individual or a strategically defined group understands, experiences, interprets and produces the context of their social world in different settings (Bryman, 2008; Hammersley, 2014). Esterberg (2002) suggests that qualitative research facilitates social researchers to look beyond anecdotal ways of seeing social life. It enables them to understand how and why social phenomena materialise in more complicated and novel ways. Furthermore, the qualitative approach is discursive. Words or themes, rather than numbers, are qualitative tools that can construct narratives that are not immediately visible to the broader public (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, "qualitative research has multi-methods in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). This allows the collection of rich, comprehensive, and contextual data. However, while qualitative research appears to be the most suited method for the present study, implementing a qualitative approach is not without challenges. The most challenging aspects of qualitative research are those connected to interpretation and data collection (Esterberg, 2002). The

researcher must apply their analytic abilities while accounting for their personal background (see Section 4.6 on positionality of the researcher).

4.3.2. Research Setting and Participants

As has been highlighted in the context of this study (Chapters 1 & 3), Bangladesh is an interesting case for investigating how mothers with small children face the dilemma between the expanded options for labour market engagement while still performing most childcare and household duties. I selected Dhaka, Bangladesh, as my research site. Dhaka is Bangladesh's capital city, and the density of middle-class working mothers is higher than in any other location in Bangladesh. Moreover, the primary working environment in terms of business, employment, and other economic activities is centralised here. It thereby increases the probability of successful participant recruitment. The study has engaged three categories of participants: (1) Mothers employed in the formal economy with young children (i.e., less than school age; the cut-off age is five years); (2) working fathers employed in the formal economy with young children, and (3) key informants, being experts on gender inequality in the Bangladeshi labour market, for example, a female parliament member, activists lawyers, academics, HR experts, working in NGOs and other professionals (see participant profiles, Appendix 5, 6 & 7).

Interviews with working mothers with young children allowed me to understand how potentially changing cultural beliefs, attitudes, and practices both within their families and in the workplace have shaped their involvement in the labour market. Specifically, this exploratory study aims to shed light on how mothers understand work and parenting. It also provides an opportunity for middle-class working mothers to share their perspectives on the norms they experience in the workplace and at home. However, the experiences of working mothers cannot be defined and explained in isolation from the working fathers' experiences, as these also influence family dynamics and career trajectories of working mothers. Research including only working mothers may not illuminate how men perceive ideal notions of the family and in turn construct gendered circumstances that impact women's lives. Theoretically, the family and work devotion schemas also reflect working mothers' and fathers' experiences. Therefore, these conceptual tools will be useful in unpacking the relational ways fathers shape mothers' lives in different settings, and perhaps vice versa (Yoon & Park, 2022; Blair-Loy & Cech, 2017). In short, the inclusion of working fathers as participants allows for a deeper understanding of the complexities of gender dynamics that underpin mothers' employment opportunities and difficulties. In line with Yoon & Park's

(2022) study on the work devotion schema in a South Korean setting, this study will broaden the scope of cultural schema studies with the inclusion of empirical data on men.

The interviews with Key Informants will augment the data with mothers and fathers by bringing perspective on how labour market participation is changing to impact motherhood and fatherhood in contemporary Bangladesh, also providing valuable insights into how the national laws, policies, and workplace rules and regulations affect working mothers and fathers with young children. Since the early 1990s, the expert interview has been an established qualitative tool in political and social research (Doringer, 2020). In terms of socioeconomic status, this study focuses on middle-class participants (i.e. mothers and fathers) in Bangladesh, with "middle-class" in the context of Bangladeshi culture defined as those who have gained access to higher education, both in public and private institutions, leading to paid employment (Hussein 2017; Chowdhury, 2010). Regarding paid employment, I refer to mothers who, as per Bangladeshi labour legislation (Labour Act, 2006), hold a full-time, paid position in the formal labour force.

4.3.3. Strategy for Sampling

The current study used two sampling procedures for the respective cohorts; purposive and snowball sampling (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). According to Newman (2003), purposive sampling occurs when a researcher wishes to discover specific categories of cases for further analysis. As previously indicated, the current study involves three distinct types of respondents; working mothers, working fathers, and experts. Reaching out to these specific categories is well suited to the purposive sampling approach. Purposive sampling depends on the researchers' contextual knowledge of the subject and their relationships with participants in specific networks (Barratt et al., 2015). For instance, as an academic, connecting with the academic's network assisted me in locating participants (the expert participants) through purposive sampling.

The justification for employing a purposive technique is based on the presumption that given the goals and objectives of the study, certain types of people may have essential and distinctive views on the concepts and problems at hand, necessitating their inclusion in the sample (Robinson, 2014). In addition, snowball sampling utilises existing study participants to solicit additional respondents from their acquaintances; a process repeated until data saturation occurs (Heckathorn, 2011). Snowball sampling approaches are essential when looking for respondents from communities with particular features (e.g., working mothers

and fathers) which are well-recognized by the population's individuals (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). Given the nature of this study, which involves different specific participant groups (mothers, fathers, and experts), both of these sampling techniques assisted me in effectively reaching participants.

Following the criterion mentioned above, I recruited a total of 38 participants: 15 working mothers, 11 working fathers, and 12 key informants from various professions with experience in gender inequality in the Bangladeshi labour market. In the case of the recruitment of key informants, personal contact and purposive sampling were followed. No advertisement was made as it is highly likely that they may not have been interested in participating through a public call. Moreover, key informants' schedules were comparatively busier than the mothers and fathers who were interviewed. I also searched for key informants online and emailed them formally as part of the identification and recruitment process. For mothers and fathers, recruitment was completed through personal networks, advertisements in electronic and print newspapers, and online social media (Facebook, Twitter and posts on websites). Finally, two separate advertisements were placed in a commercial e-newspaper to recruit working mothers and fathers (see Appendix 11 & 12). Flyers were also posted electronically to women's virtual networks.

Participants were chosen from both government and non-government working sectors based in Dhaka. The justification for selecting both government and non-government organisations is that these two sectors are markedly different in terms of organisational structure, parental leave rules and regulations and other critical features of employment, such as wages, job security and stability. Mothers, who were unpaid employees, engaged in paid labour but did not have children, had children older than five years or were part-time or informal workers were all excluded from this study. The exclusion criterion for fathers was for those who were unemployed, part-time, or casual workers, had a wife who was not employed in any full-time paid work and did not have at least one child under the age of five years old. Participants were required to be at least twenty years old at the time of their participation in this research, regardless of religion.

Table 1: Participants of different categories[16]

Category	Number
Key Informants (Expert)-Professors, Lawyers, Member of the Current Parliament (MP), Journalists, NGO Professionals, HR Experts, Female Worker & Human Rights Activists, etc.	12
Working mothers engaged in formal paid employment (full-time) and have children under five years old.	15
Working fathers engaged in formal paid employment (full-time) and have children under five years old.	11
Total	**38**

RESEARCH JOURNEY

4.4.1. Conducting Interviews and Data Collection

After receiving approval from the University of Auckland's Human Participants Ethics Committee (Reference Number 023997), the fieldwork preparation began in June 2020. Preparation required considerable time and effort due to the organisation of three different sets of Consent Forms (CF), Participant Information Sheets (PIS), advertisements, invitation letters, interview guides and schedules. Initially, the plan was to conduct face-to-face interviews with all participants in Dhaka, Bangladesh. However, New Zealand's border-enforced travel restrictions in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 global pandemic meant this was not possible. Additionally, the University of Auckland postponed all face-to-face interviews and required me to conduct them online.

Following the semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix 8-10), online interviews were conducted via zoom meetings. These began in August 2020 and continued until the third week of April 2021. Following study protocol, each participant was asked to participate in one interview. Semi-structured in-depth interviews assisted me in guiding the interviews with a set of instructions aligned with research aims and objectives. This also allowed respondents to share their own experiences in detail without major restrictions (Haddon, 2011; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). A number of options were offered to participants to help them feel empowered by their involvement in the study (e.g., they were offered the option to read their transcriptions, be sent the final thesis and other publications, have the freedom to end the interviews at any time, and request that any information and comments be withdrawn).

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[16]See participants' profiles in Appendixes 5, 6 & 7

However, I did not end the interviews until each participant indicated that they were ready to do so, even though I had set a time restriction of between one to two hours. Participants had the option to talk from home or an office. This was to provide a natural setting in which participants could reflect on their lives. Although overlapping, three sets of interview guides/questions were constructed (there were some common questions along with some specific questions, for three different cohorts) to conduct the interview effectively (see Appendices 8-9).

Given my prior experience conducting semi-structured interviews in a research project[17], this project did not require a pilot study. My previous experiences in fieldwork also helped me to develop effective data collection tools. However, the first interview with each cohort functioned similar to a pilot interview. An earlier supervisor, Dr Louise Humpage, initially conducted a 40-minute demonstration interview with me before starting the fieldwork. This was to assess my approach to interviewees and gauge how intensely and effectively data was gathered. Also, after the first few formal interviews were completed, a supervisory discussion occurred on whether revisions, interview tweaks, or notes were needed to acquire richer data. Only a few changes were made to the interview schedules after this process (e.g., allowing interviewees to stop it and make another arrangement at their convenience for the rest of the interviews when they felt it necessary for their children or other important issues). However, some other important issues came up for consideration. For example, mothers were more inclined to discuss family concerns, while fathers were more inclined to discuss work issues. Thus, post-pilot research interviews needed a few checks and balances, such as asking more follow-up questions that tapped gendered trends in our conversations.

I began the interviews with the experts as I wished to gain valuable insights into mothers' labour market trajectories in Bangladesh when reviewing their professional and personal experiences. This first interview phase took place from August to October 2020. As previously mentioned, a total of 12 key informants were interviewed, varying in profession, gender and age (see Appendix 5). Online interviews were challenging due to several unavoidable factors, one being the seven-hour time difference between Dhaka and Auckland. Additionally, because experts were busy at their offices throughout the day, most of them agreed to meet in the evening in Bangladesh local time. However, Bangladeshi evening hours

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[17] For my MSc degree at Lund University in Sweden, I performed one fieldwork in London with Bangladeshi-born UK immigrant working women. I conducted another fieldwork in Dhaka with Bangladeshi male and female Bangladeshi workers for my MPhil degree at the University of Oslo in Norway. The fieldwork I undertook for these two theses provided me with practical experience that I utilised in the present study to gather rich data.

equate to midnight or later in Auckland. I was able to avoid this problem when I travelled to Dhaka and conducted the remaining interviews smoothly, although still online.

With a brief hiatus of one week, I began the second stage of interviews with middle-class working fathers (11 in total) from third week of October 2020 to January 2021. They were comprised of permanent government and non-government employees from various professions (see Appendix 7). All interviewed fathers were third-generation Bangladeshi and had small children under five years old. However, none of those who participated were married to the mothers interviewed in this study. The purpose was to allow them to speak freely, which could have been interrupted if they were husband and wife, as, in Bangladesh, husbands traditionally hold more power than their wives.

Interviews with working mothers of small children (see Appendix 6) were conducted in the third and final stage from February to April 2021. Given the cultural sensitivity of the research topic and my status as a male, I offered the mother interviewees to have a female research assistant present if they wished during the interviews. Although these interviews were also conducted online, this option was provided as a way to make female participants feel more comfortable should they feel anxious about being interviewed by a male researcher. I made the assumption that Bangladeshi women might be hesitant to talk with an unknown man, given the religious prohibitions upholding the purdah will restrict women from meeting or conversing with men outside their families. As a result, the presence of a female research assistant during the interview might make it easier for them to express their ideas openly. After receiving the primary response from the interested participants, I called them on their cell phones to express my gratitude for their interest. I discussed all the terms and conditions, including the female research assistant's information and availability. In the third stage, I emailed participants the CF and PIS once they reconfirmed their participation. None of the mothers interviewed requested that the female research assistant be included in their interviews.

4.4.2. Recordings, Transcription, and Translation of Interviews

All interviews conducted online through Zoom were digitally recorded, which prevented the distortion or loss of data. Recordings were taken with participants' permission given at the beginning of every interview. Participants were allowed a choice regarding preferred language. All interviewees wished to speak in their mother tongue (Bengali), although occasionally they used English words during the conversation, which is a common trend

among the urban educated middle-class people of Bangladesh. Most of the interviews were video recorded. Some interviews were only audio recorded by participant choice. During interviews, some female participants asked to be taken off camera, although these participants showed their faces during introductions. One of the reasons was that many of the mother participants joined the interview from their homes due to the COVID-19 outbreak and they wished to maintain their family privacy.

The most challenging task was translating interviews verbatim and incorporating participants' 'quotes' into the discussion (Point & Baruch, 2023; Clark et al., 2017; Khan & Manderson, 1992). Khan and Manderson (1992) argue that employing qualitative methodologies to portray people's views and opinions accurately is essential yet strenuous, especially when the research project is conducted in one language and subsequently translated and analysed in another. In fact, establishing a comprehensive transcript of the text is challenging because each language may have different interpretations of the same words or phrases, and both interpretations may be beneficial for analysis (Clark et al., 2017). Given these challenges, precautions were taken to ensure the translation's accuracy, reliability, and validity. This was also a consideration in later during analyses.

As transcribing is a complex and time-consuming process (Bailey, 2008), I engaged two professional transcribers who concurrently translated the Bengali scripts into English verbatim (see Appendix 13). One of the transcribers was also my research assistant, who had extensive experience working in similar tasks been recommended by the PYR[18] committee primarily to conduct interviews with female participants given my male gender identity (details are included in the Ethics protocol) and who had prior experience as a research assistant, transcriber and translator working with national and international projects in the social science area. Several earlier studies suggested such outsourcing in transcribing and translation (McMullin, 2023; Point & Baruch, 2023; Emmel, 1998). In this vein, McMullin (2023) suggest that "[i]deally, transcribers should be hired who have specialist knowledge of the subject matter and familiarity with the accents or dialect of the speakers" (p. 145). I hired Bangladeshi citizens as transcribers so that they could comprehend the recorded interviews due to their similar mother language and cultural convenience. In keeping with Ethics protocol, external transcribers signed a confidentiality statement and where possible, the interviews were de-identified and anonymous to the transcribers. When conducting a qualitative study, engaging in meaningful cultural action is essential based on the

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[18] Provisional Year Review Committee at the University of Auckland

interpretation or conceptualization of the findings (Alasuutari, 1992). Therefore, hiring transcribers and translators from where the research was conducted was practicable and efficient.

Following supervisors' advice, I gave transcribers and translators guidelines, encouraging them to contact me before finishing the work if they encountered anything perplexing. Thus, utmost precautions were taken to ensure the accuracy of transcription and translation. After completing transcriptions and translations, I read them thoroughly and revised and verified the interviews to ensure the data's accuracy and validity, particularly those presented in the Results Chapters. My supervisors also read some translated interviews and discussed them in our regular supervisory meetings. Nevertheless, as the primary researcher, it was my responsibility to examine, revise, and compare the translated interviews with the original recordings to ensure the transcriptions' quality (Brennan, 2022; Regmi et al., 2010; Emmel, 1998) and in line with this requirement, I ensured the quality of the transcriptions and translations.

However, some more complex hurdles also needed to be taken into account e.g., producing exact meaning while transcribing and translating from Bengali (interviewees' mother tongue) to English. Local accents differ when speaking Bengali, and colloquialisms are frequently employed in conversation. People frequently utilise examples to define or explain anything from their immediate cultural milieu. Regmi et al. (2010) maintain that "[t]he complicated process of translation of data involves testing for cultural equivalence and congruent value, and the careful use of colloquialisms" (p. 19). However, the transcribers and translator were instructed to cover everything recorded in the interviews and prescient in Standard British English to help readers of different languages understand the conversation clearly. As a result, the translated interviews were extensive and some quotes presented in the findings may seem lengthy and corrected grammatically for English. Linguistic complexities were handled to maintain authenticity and validity of used quotes, which was suggested by several earlier studies (Point & Baruch, 2023; Brennan, 2022; Regmi et al., 2010). In fact, choosing quotes is the only way to convey the participants' voices and experiences while presenting the findings. As a result, meaningful and authentic quotes are imperative and simultaneously challenging when the interviews are translated and transcribed into another language (Brennan, 2022). In meeting such challenges, emphasis was placed on using clear vocabulary and Standard English to make the meaning fully understandable for the reader. For instance, participant-mothers often exclaimed (in Bengali), *"poribarer korta holen sami othoba baba"*

for which "Father or husband is the family's guardian," "father or husband is the family's principal breadwinner," and "father or husband is the family's leader" are all possible English translations of the Bengali quote mentioned above. In this instance, I used the excerpt, "The husband or father is the principal breadwinner of the family", which is more perceivable and in line with my study's goals. Here the key word is "Korta", which literally means "guardian", but in Bangladeshi culture, the family guardian is related to economic roles. Thus, the translator's goal is to restate something to a new culture in a way consistent with the target culture's social representations, values and beliefs, as noted by Brennan (2022).

4.4.3. Data Coding and Analysis

The data collection generated over 58 hours of interviews. Most interviews lasted an average of about 90 minutes, with the longest lasting two hours and the shortest lasting only 58 minutes. As previously explained, the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions were also rechecked for accuracy. During the fieldwork, I also kept a diary of reflections and notes following interviews (Wolfinger, 2002). However, the key sources of data for this study were video and audio recordings, and transcriptions from in-depth interviews with the participants.

While analysing data, I used "thematic analyses" and organised and managed data throughout the analysis using the qualitative data management software NVivo (version 12 pro)[19]. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" and, moreover, is appropriate to "organise and describe data (set) in (rich) detail" (p. 79). As I intended to explore participants' lived experiences in their everyday settings, the thematic analysis allowed me the flexibility to identify essential themes and sub-themes to achieve research aims and answer research questions.

In considering what counts as a 'theme', I paid attention to research questions. As Braun and Clarke (2006) argue, "a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research questions and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (p.78). Despite the fact that I typically followed my semi-structured interview guide, participants were encouraged to speak freely and sometimes jumped across topics or introduced fresh ideas. When emergent ideas came about, I noted them in my diary.

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[19] NVivo is a computer software package produced by QSR International for Qualitative Data Analysis

Keeping in mind the exploratory aims of this study, I followed an inductive, 'bottom-up' approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were primarily data-driven instead of being driven by presupposed theoretical frameworks. However, as themes developed, literature was used to refine codes and themes, which helped to organise "more subtle features of the data" (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 86). Additionally, the 'level' at which themes were explored was in an iterative way, which means participants' individual (emic level) level or micro-level perspectives were focused on first, leading to macro-level (etic level) perspectives. Relevant literature was used to interpret themes derived from participants' own words. Thus, a continuous process from 'part to whole' and 'whole to part' guided the analysis both between data and literature and within data (Thompson et al., 1994).

An index of core themes and subthemes was created and the data were arranged accordingly. Braun & Clarke (2006) recommend six stages in the thematic analysis approach, which were followed in this study. The phases span from getting to know the data to reporting the themes' meaning and content. However, the analysis process was not a straight line from one step to the next. Rather, the process was recursive, requiring moving back and forth. Preparing transcriptions, reading, rereading the data and jotting down initial ideas were all part of the first phase. My second step involved interesting coding features of the data systematically across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.

At this stage, data were imported into NVivo. To determine initial codes, I did a simple run for each participant to capture word frequencies and clusters of words to understand the overall data pattern. The general word frequency and my notes on the data revealed some common patterns across the data set; for example, mentioning (or expressing an idea that equated to) family values, womanhood respectability, childcare, pregnancy, ideal fathers, ideal mothers, ideal workers, maternity laws and policies, cultural norms and values, patriarchy, compulsory motherhood, gendered organisation, labour market key outcomes, state role, domestic tasks, career choice, paid work and persistent gender norms. My next phase involved collating codes into major themes and subthemes. In this phase, I saw that initial codes fell into two broad domains, i.e., family and workplace perspectives affecting mothers' labour force engagement and outcomes. As a result, these two key themes, i.e., family and workplace perspectives were undertaken to present the study's findings.

In phase four, I examined the frequency of codes across all participants' interviews (an example of codes chosen from the data of one interviewed mother (Figure 7). The themes and subthemes were then examined concerning the coded extracts, resulting in the thematic map

of the analysis. Phase five collated and fine-tuned codes, subthemes and themes, resulting in clear definitions and names for each theme and subtheme (e.g., Chapter 5, Tradition, Family Values and Labour Market Engagement (key theme), 5.2. Persistent patriarchy in the household (subtheme) and so forth. Phase six involved the selection of vivid, engaging extract examples, the final analysis of selected extracts, the connection of the investigation to the research topic and literature, and the creation of a scholarly analytic report (this thesis).

Figure 6: Codes and Subthemes
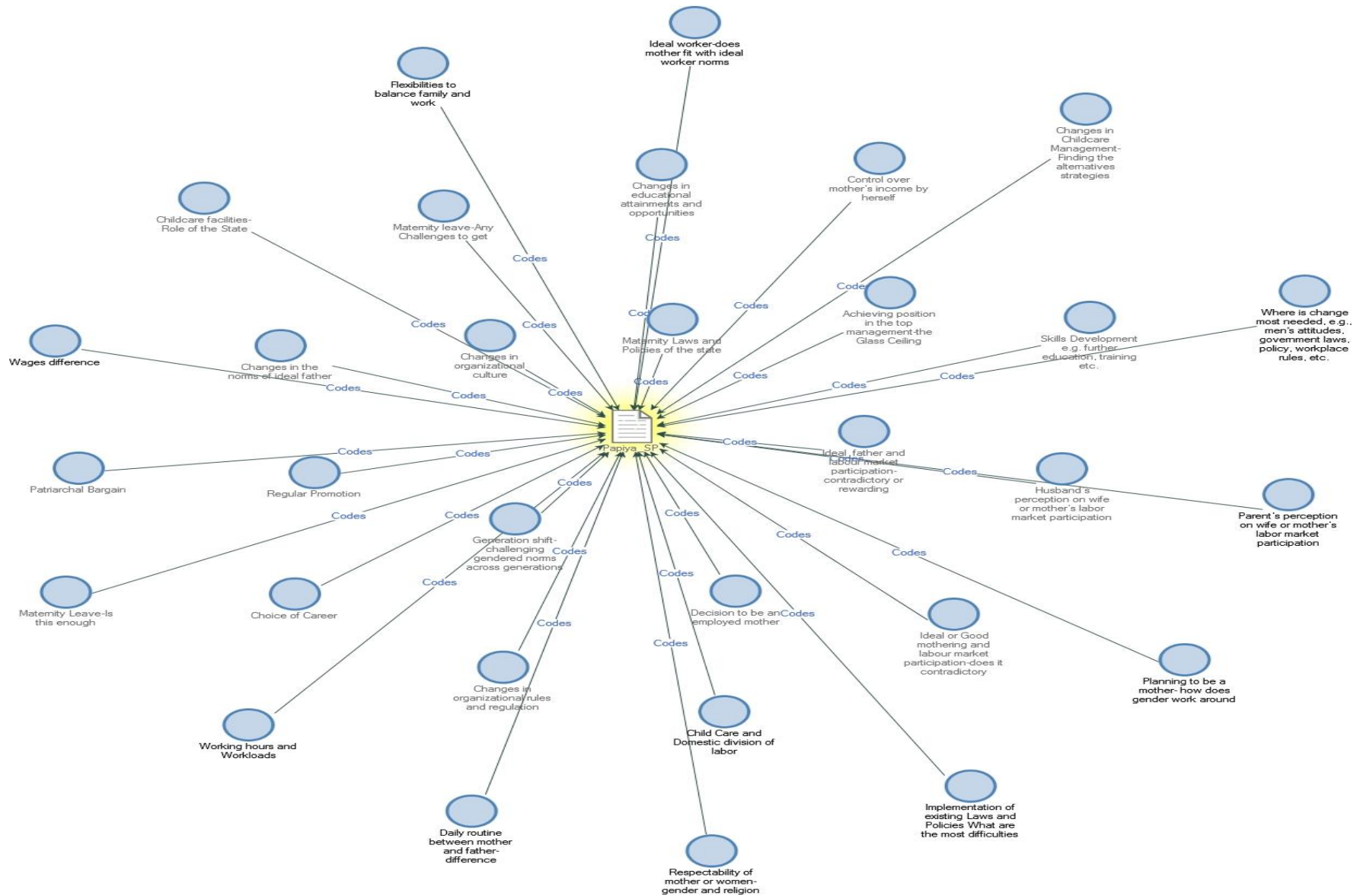
4.5. PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE

This section introduces the study's participants. I previously indicated in Section 4.3.2 the group of participants, i.e., Key Informants, working mothers, and fathers with young children, and a brief description of why they were necessary for this study. The profiles of all participants are provided in the appendices (e.g., those of the experts in Appendix 5, working mothers in Appendix 6, and working fathers in Appendix 7). However, one example of a mother participant's profile is given here:

Pseudonym	Synopsis
Papiya	Papiya is currently 31 years old. She is a devout Hindu adherent. She has been married for more than four years. She is a mother of two children. The oldest is three years old, while the youngest is eleven months old. She lives in a semi-extended family. Her husband works as a physician. Professionally, Papiya has been working as an Additional Police Superintendent (Training and Legal Aid) for the Naval Police of Bangladesh. She qualified in the 31st Bangladesh Cadre Service (BCS).

The following table contains demographic and other pertinent information about the mothers interviewed. The table reveals that all mothers hold at least a master's degree, have an average age of 35, and are predominantly from nuclear families.

While the mothers' profile is provided in Appendix 6, an overview of their demographic and other critical information is presented below.

Table 1: Interviewed mothers' demographic and other critical information

Pseudonym	Age	Religion	Childr.	Child age	Types of Family	Mar. Life	Edu.	Employ. Type	Weekly Hr	Mat. Leav
Nafisa	33	Islam	1	3.5 years	Semi-extended	8 years	Master's	Pvt. Company	40 Hours	4 months
Fariha	35	Islam	2	5 & 2.5 yrs.	Nuclear	10 yrs.	MBA	Internat. Bank	46 Hours	6 months
Cynthia	37	Islam	2	12 &3.5 yrs.	Semi-extended	14 yrs.	MBBS	Pvt. Hospital	40 Hours	4 months
Meher	31	Islam	1	4 years	Nuclear	8 years	Master's	NGO	43 Hours	4 months
Tania	32	Islam	1	2 years	Nuclear	6.5 yrs.	Master's	Pvt.University	40 Hours	6 months
Konika	33	Hinduism	1	2.3 years	Semi-extended	7 years	Master's	School Teach.	40 Hours	4 months
Adiba	35	Islam	2	13.5 &4 yrs.	Nuclear	15 yrs.	MBA	Pvt. Bank	45 Hours	6 months
Liana	42	Islam	2	15 & 5 yrs.	Nuclear	16 yrs.	Masters	Govt. College	40 Hours	6 months
Papiya	31	Hinduism	2	3 & 1 yrs.	Extended	5 yrs.	Masters	Govt. Officer	44 Hours	6 months
Mira	36	Islam	3	11,7&4.5 yr	Nuclear	13 yrs.	Master's	Pvt. Bank	46 Hours	6 months
Nancy	33	Hinduism	2	6yr &10 mo	Semi-extended	7 years	Master's	Interna. Orga.	42 Hours	4 months
Sujana	32	Islam	1	4.3 years	Nuclear	7 years	Master's	Journalism	40 Hours	4 months
Jenifer	40	Islam	2	13 & 3yrs.	Nuclear	14.5 yrs.	Master's	Research Org.	40 Hours	6 months
Rumana	41	Islam	2	12 & 5 years	Semi-extended	15 yrs.	Master's	MNC	44 Hours	6 months
Wahida	36	Islam	3	11,9 &4 yrs.	Semi-extended	13 yrs.	Master's	Pvt. Bank	42 Hours	4 months
Total Part.	Av. Age	%	N/A	N/A	%	Average Mar. Life	N/A	%	Av Weekly Hours	Average Mat. Leave
15	Av.35.13 Y: 31 O: 42	80% (M) 20% (H)	1C33% 2C53% 3C14%		Nuclear (53%) Semi-ex. (40%) Extended (7%)	Av. 10.6Y LD. 5 Y HD. 16Y		Prvt. Org. 86% Govt.Orga. 14%	42 Hours	Av. 5 Mo

*Y-Youngest, O-Oldest, LD-Lowest Duration, HD-Highest Duration, MNC-Multinational Company, NGO-Non-Govt. Organization, 1C-one child family, Av-Average

The table below contains demographic and other pertinent information about the fathers interviewed. The table shows that typically, all fathers with a master's degree have an average age of around 37 and at least two fathers are engaged in government jobs out of 11 fathers.

While the interviewed fathers' profile is given in Appendix 7, an overview of their demographic and other critical information is present below.

Table 2: Interviewed fathers' demographic and other critical information

Pseudonym	Age	Religion	Childr.	Child. age	Types of Family	Mar.Life	Educat.	Employt. Type	Hrs.Weekly	Pat. Leave
Arman	35	Islam	1	3 Years	Nuclear	6 Years	Master's	UNCHR	44 Hours	7 days
Raihan	33	Islam	1	1.9 years	Semi-Extended	4 Years	MBA	Private Com.	48 Hours	4 days
Kawser	35	Islam	2	3 & 1 yrs.	Nuclear	5 Years	MBA	Prvt. University	40 Hours	5 days
Zaman	42	Islam	2	4&1.6 yrs.	Semi-Extended	8 Years	MBA	UNO, HR	40 Hours	6 days
Shamim	37	Islam	2	3.6 Years	Nuclear	6 Years	Master's	INGO	40 Hours	8 days
Abir	32	Hinduism	1	3.2 Years	Semi-Extended	5 Years	MBA	Govt. Bank	46 Hours	6 days
Farhan	43	Islam	2	8.5&3 yrs.	Nuclear	11 Years	MBA	MNC	50 Hours	5 days
Hasan	38	Islam	1	5 Years	Semi-Extended	8 yrs.	Masters	Pvt. Bank	48 Hours	4 days
Imtiaz	42	Islam	1	10 Months	Nuclear	4 Years	MBA	Govt. Officer	42 Hours	5 days
Titas	31	Hinduism	1	2 Years	Extended	7 Years	Master's	NGO	50 Hours	4 days
Muhit	38	Islam	2	6 & 3 yrs.	Nuclear	13 yrs.	MBA	NGO	45 Hours	5 days
Total Participants	Av. age	%		N/A	%	Average Mar. Lif.	N/A	%	Av. Hours	Av. Pat. L
11	Av. 36.6 Y-31 O-43	M 82 % H 18%	1C55% 2C45%		Nucleaer-55% Semi-Ext.37% Extended-8%	Av. 7 Y LD-4 Y HD-13 Y		Pvt. Orga. 82% Govt.Orga. 18%	45 Hours	Av.5 Days

*Y-Youngest, O-Oldest, LD-Lowest Duration, HD-Highest Duration, MNC-Multinational Company, NGO-Non-Govt. Organization, 1C-one child family, Av.-Average

4.6. POSITIONALITY OF THE RESEARCHER: METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL REFLEXIVITY

In recent decades, self-reflexivity in the research process has become an essential concern, especially in feminist methodologies. This is so as to preserve the researchers' own subjectivity within the research process, as well as to nurture a relationship of mutual exchange with participants in terms of trust, rapport, disclosures, privacy, and sensitive information (Thwaites, 2017; Bott, 2010). This is particularly pertinent in a cross-gender fieldwork perspective where men intend to interview women, where men may face many perceived and unforeseen challenges due to their gender identity and unequal power relations with female participants (Hanks, 2019). Similarly, Reinharz and Chase (2011) assert that the scenario of men studying women poses unique concerns about interviewers' and interviewees' social positions and subjectivities.

However, it is also true that some male sociologists noted that they did not find many difficulties when they interviewed women, even on controversial and gender-sensitive issues (Falen, 2008; Padfield & Proctor, 1996; Loizos, 1992). For example, a study conducted by Padfield and Proctor (1996) noted that they did not find significant differences between female and male interviewees' attitudes during the interview, even though the research topic was quite controversial, e.g., feminism and abortion. Similarly, Falen (2008) noted that despite some challenges as an outsider, he completed the fieldwork effectively in West Africa with both male and female participants. However, Padfield & Proctor's (1996) study was conducted in the context of Western culture, which differs from many Asian cultures. As a result, despite such positive assessment in some earlier research, my interviews with female participants were not free from difficulties because, in Bangladesh, women's and men's lives are still dichotomously constructed in terms of gender identity and asymmetric power relations.

In fact, recognising and reflecting on the researcher's position is a necessary component of qualitative research, even more so when the investigation involves a cross-gender perspective and cultural sensitivity (Hanks, 2019; Galam, 2015; Takeda, 2013). Galam (2015) argues that research processes and outcomes are substantially influenced by the researcher's social location, power relations and experiences relative to study participants. Positionality refers to the researcher's background, experiential history, political stances and viewpoints during the study process (Takeda, 2013).

My study's participants and I belong to the same social class (i.e., middle class), culture, language, and national identity. As a Bangladeshi-born man, I was privileged to conduct this research as an insider in terms of our cultural similarity. While my career is teaching and research as a core faculty member in the sociology department of a university, I also work as a gender and human rights advocate. My existing knowledge and experiences aided me in overcoming the difficulties inherent in conducting this fieldwork in a cross-gender setting. Yet, given my identity as a heterosexual male attempting to interview women, my positionality is assumed to have both advantages and disadvantages, as I am simultaneously an insider and an outsider and thus, must be scrutinised.

Maintaining reflexivity is important for a researcher to constantly locate and relocate themselves within the research methodology and in relation to participants (Bott, 2010). Especially from a cross-gender perspective, research design needs to be drawn carefully to facilitate the negotiations of hierarchical power relations between the researcher and researched (Thwaites, 2017; Deutsch, 2004). Deutsch (2004) notes that "[i]dentifying societal power relations are one of the focal points of feminist methodology" (p. 893). Following a feminist standpoint approach, I hoped mothers in this study had fair opportunities to construct their own knowledge authentically, not distorted or influenced by my gender, with their knowledge concerning labour market equality valued and recognised in the research.

To minimise possible difficulties during my interview, especially with mother participants, one of the effective strategies was to hire a female research assistant. Again, all participant-mothers were offered to have my appointed female research assistant present while I interviewed them. The presence of a female research assistant during my interview would be culturally appropriate for female participants. They may feel safer and more comfortable because their views would be adequately understood and would not be misrepresented (Hanks, 2019; Takeda, 2013). Moreover, I also allowed the option for them to undertake the interview only in the presence of my female research assistant if they wished. Despite the option of having a female research assistant, none of the mothers expressed a desire for her presence in any interview. However, I was careful during my interview to allow interviewed mothers to feel comfortable and gave them the option to avoid any questions or discussions as they wished.

Another most crucial strategy in building rapport and trust with participants was allowing them to choose the interview location. Interview setting impacts gender relations as it can intensify participants' insecurity and guilt (Aarntzen et al., 2020; Brandes, 2008). In the case

of women in my study, this may be due to meeting an unknown male in Bangladesh. In the case of my previous master's thesis, I interviewed Bangladeshi employed women in London, in which some women invited me to their house. In a similar experience, I also gathered with some Bangladeshi female participants during my interview in Dhaka for my MPhil thesis at Oslo University. Before holding the actual discussion, they introduced me to their family members, in particular their husbands. To establish rapport for the present study, I introduced myself to the participants by sharing my biography, in other words, where I come from, my profession, the aims of this research and how I maintained the confidentiality of their identity and the information they shared with me (Galam, 2015; Bott, 2010). None of the mothers attempted to introduce their husbands, although a few mothers introduced their children to me during the interview. However, as mothers joined online discussions from their homes at night or weekends due to their work and home commitments, I could sense some of their husbands' presence nearby. I was careful to assure everyone that their presence within the context of the research was acceptable. Thus, choosing the interview setting and reaffirming its appropriateness helped me build rapport and ensure interviewees felt participating in this research in Bangladesh was morally sound.

Allowing mothers to express their experiences and ensuring that their shared experiences are adequately represented in the research conclusions was one of the essential strategies for acknowledging the uneven power relations between them and me (Hanks, 2019; Galam, 2015). As a result, they were given the opportunity to evaluate their interview scripts and to include or exclude any aspect of their talk as they saw fit. They could also refuse to participate in the interview, as stated in the consent form (CF) and participant information sheet (PIS). As a result, one of the significant concerns of feminist research, such as "equitable power-sharing in interviews, that should mean participants are cared for and empowered" (Thwaites, 2017, p.1), was met. These strategies helped to alleviate hierarchal power inequalities between themselves and me (Bott, 2010), given that Bangladesh is a male-dominated society.

Due to my male gender, I also assumed that some female participants might be uncomfortable sharing their personal experiences (e.g., pregnancy experience and difficulties, marital relations, etc.), which invariably affects their labour market participation. To overcome such perceived barriers due to my gender, the reflection of my positionality that I am a married man and a father encouraged them to interact with me from their position of a mother (Falen, 2008). Moreover, my acknowledgement to them that I am a father and have a

wife and children allowed me to draw on some 'shared experiences' with mothers; for example, how my wife is also facing conflicts between being a mother and her career. I also shared with them how my wife met the challenges and left the job to be a mother and sacrificed her career to raise our children. Such an acknowledgement facilitated rapport-building and commonality with mother participants (Bourke, 2014). Additionally, my empathy and respectful position encouraged them to share gendered aspects of their family and professional lives.

However, because of my male gender identity, I knew I could still be perceived as an outsider during interviews, making it challenging to build rapport with interviewed mothers. For example, ultimately, I am unfamiliar with mothers' pregnancy experiences and emotional attachment to their children, which might have affected their professional lives. As a result, I took steps to engage in supportive dialogue about their parenthood experiences and career paths. When their voices were quiet, I showed them empathy, appeased them during any points of high visible emotion, attentively listened to their stories, and expressed respect for their struggles (Bourke, 2014). I have also shared experiences of my own parenting role, stories of my twin babies and their mother's struggle to raise them in my absence while I was in New Zealand.

Being a Bangladeshi national, this culture informs me, and thus, my knowledge of this culture was crucial to my credibility in undertaking this research. For example, my self-reflection as an insider was associated with both male and female participants regarding our shared national, linguistic, and social identity, which affected my fieldwork negotiations more affirmatively. My native language enabled me to grasp the nuances of the responses from participants (Gutmann, 2002). And, as an insider in terms of my shared social and cultural context with interviewees, I could understand their opinions and experiences rather than leave or skip these conversations as allusions or metaphors (Galam, 2015).

After analysing these narratives, it has become clear what genuine challenges Bangladeshi working women experience regarding gender inequalities in the labour market. Finally, because a gendered-centred viewpoint informed this study, it reflected my political commitment to raising awareness of gender inequality. The findings of this study can be used to modify similar societal behaviours that reinforce gender inequality. Simultaneously, from a holistic perspective, there would be an endeavour to alleviate gender imbalance in the labour market, particularly for working mothers of young children.

4.7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All pertinent information was revealed to participants before the interview started, including voluntary participation in maintaining transparency. Even participants could opt out of the discussion at any point. They were provided with PIS, CF, and interview schedules to help them understand the aim of their involvement. They were urged to clarify any issues before and during the interviews. The participants were assured of their privacy and confidentiality. Confidentiality and anonymity surrounding the participants' identities were ensured, with the understanding that no individual or organisation would be identified in any reports, including the study's main thesis (Kvale, 1996). Both mothers and fathers interviewed were given pseudonyms chosen by the research team. While nine key informants allowed us to use their real names, three key informants wished to use pseudonyms. Participants were reassured about the choice of place for the interview, as this affects the interview process (Elwood & Martin, 2000). Finally, my fieldwork design affirmed participants' autonomy and agency by allowing them to communicate whatever they pleased freely.

4.8. CONCLUDING REMARKS OF THE CHAPTER

The methodological journey for this project was challenging due to my male identity as an interviewer of female participants. This was further exacerbated by the shift from in-person to online interviews due to COVID-19, including after I returned to Bangladesh. I acknowledge that although I am Bangladeshi-born and have lived in Europe for a long time, the study's digital recruitment process made participant recruitment particularly challenging. Notably, scheduling and interviewing experts while I was in New Zealand was challenging due to the substantial time difference between Dhaka and Auckland. These challenges notwithstanding, I managed to complete my fieldwork. Furthermore, I gained a better understanding of the influence of culturally conditioned ideals on motherhood, specifically, how they are discursively exposed, embodied in persons, and represented in practice, affecting mothers' labour market engagement and key outcomes. My data analyses have revealed many intriguing findings, which are presented and discussed in the following four chapters (Chapters 5-8).

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This first analysis chapter builds upon the family devotion schema, exploring shifting patterns of the family structure, the value of respectable femininity, and constructions of ideal motherhood and fatherhood in Bangladeshi households, and their implications for professional women who are pressured into respectable femininity (Ansari, 2016; Whiteside, 2007), intensive mothering (Hays, 1996) and other concepts connected to the family devotion schema (or work devotion schema for fathers). These family ideals and values are social constructions founded in traditional Bangladeshi culture centring on ideals of fatherhood and motherhood, often at odds with expectations of the labour market. I explore how Bangladeshi, educated middle-class working mothers' and fathers' normative understandings of the family devotion schema influence their moral judgements and choices around their family and work life. In this chapter, therefore, I show how the patriarchal social structure of Bangladesh organises the family devotion schema for mothers and, in turn, the implications for the work devotion schema.

5.2. PERSISTENT PATRIARCHY IN THE HOUSEHOLD

As detailed earlier, conventionally accepted families in Bangladesh typically reflect heteronormative, patriarchal patterns, consisting of two heterosexual parents: a stay-at-home mother, a working father, and their biological children (Karim, 2022; Iqbal, 2022; Stewart et al., 2000). A semi-extended family often also includes the husband's parents and siblings (Siddiqi, 2009). The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2005) formally recognises extended family members as part of the family unit. It is worth noting that, like many other South Asian countries, extended families in Bangladesh are typically subject to extended kinship norms and values.

However, my findings indicate that some changes in the household composition (e.g., from extended to nuclear) have occurred, which reflect Bangladesh's contemporary shifts towards a more neoliberal society (see Chapter 3). These changes, which are often, spearheaded by middle-class, young, educated working couples, counter to the enduring gender norms that uphold collectivist family standards. Apart from key informants, all participants were considerably young (the average age of interviewed mothers was 35.13 years, and fathers

were 37.81 years (see Participants' Profile, Appendix 6 & 7) who lived in semi-extended or nuclear families. Eight of the fifteen interviewed mothers lived in nuclear families, with six mothers living semi-extended and only one in a larger extended family.

Similarly, six of the eleven fathers interviewed lived in a nuclear family, with four living in semi-extended families and only one in an extended family. Though extended families have been predominant in Bangladesh for years, compositions of current family settings in this study indicate that semi-extended and nuclear families are increasing, especially in urban areas among educated, middle-class, dual-earner families, which is consistent with previous research (Rezvi, 2018; Samad, 2015). The preponderance of families that are smaller in size within my sample presented an opportunity to see if changes in family structure may be related to neoliberal trends (e.g. erosion of the large extended family, see Wilton, 2017) that reconfigure or even dissolve elements of the family devotion schema. Though family devotion schema is largely normative, norms may be challenged by individuals (Mosseri, 2019; Cech et al., 2016) if there are interventions (e.g., childcare support availability) that present alternative pathways or pragmatic demands that may meld or alter devotional schemas (Dean et al., 2013). However, again, these changes occur within the constraints of a larger social structure (e.g., patriarchal pressure) that insists on the persistence of gendered norms limiting mothers' labour market goals.

First, I open by examining shifts in family size and structure. My findings show that the changes in family formation affected working mothers' decisions to navigate their family and work lives. Fariha an interviewed mother of two children who works in a bank, recalls her childhood in a family filled with fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, cousins, siblings, grandmother, and the grandfather-the head of the household. Her family is now reduced to just four members sharing ample space, down from the fifteen-something that once lived under one roof in a much larger extended family. Fariha stated that traditional gender norms persist despite such changes in family structure.

Fariha:

> Before my marriage, I was living with an extended family. But today, I live with my husband and children in a nuclear family. Though it has provided certain benefits for a working mother like me, traditional family values still govern my personal and professional life.

Fariha continued that although she works and contributes to the family income, her family's traditional core values had not changed noticeably. She further said that although her family

has reduced in size, she maintains many gender-specific family roles that still oblige her to extended family members. She mentioned, for example, "…I feel pressured to keep in touch with my parents-in-law on a regular basis, who lives in my husband's hometown." In addition, her husband asks her to visit and look after his parents when she gets time off from work. These culturally specific norms embedded in the family devotion schema in Bangladesh indicate that Fariha's daily workload for the family has not changed significantly; rather, her time has been reduced due to her paid employment. She acknowledges that the pressure to comply with family values has a significant impact on her personal and professional life.

Fariha's experiences are comparable to those of many other mothers interviewed. Nafisa, who works for a private company, echoed similar sentiments:

Nafisa:

> I am now working outside the home; my mother could not, so it is a change. But what my mother did for the family, I also do the same. My paid labour has not coincided with diminished gendered roles, which has impacted my engagement in the workforce.

Contrary to studies that have prioritised paid labour as a means to women's empowerment (e.g. Duflo, 2012), Nafisa's experience indicates the intensity of the family devotion schema is reinforced when women begin to work outside the house.

Blair-Loy (2001) argues that the family devotion schema shapes compulsory heterosexual marital relations, in turn provoking conventional gendered family arrangements. Compulsory heterosexuality or marriage normativity in Bangladesh is widely pervasive, resulting in women's lower autonomy compared to men in the family. This is still evident in the Bangladeshi context, where patriarchal conceptions of heterosexuality and marriage are inextricably linked to mandatory heterosexuality and matrimony. Though there are some changes in this compulsory heterosexuality (see Chapter 3), there is not enough social support for women to remain single or live their own life with complete autonomy. Thus, women's freedom from conventional family norms has not coincided with their increased labour force participation.

Wahida, a mother of three children, stated: "…I had a good opportunity for my career progress, but I found it challenging to avoid a timely marriage [usually between the ages of 20-25] that affected my career seriously…" Wahida wed at the age of 23 and is now the principal officer of a private bank. She claimed that she felt pressure from her in-laws' family

to prioritise her marital relations over her paid work. Because of such family pressure, she had to take three children (though she wished only for two children), which delayed her career progress.

Experiences like those reported by Nafisa and Wahida resonate with earlier studies. For instance, Jensen (2021) demonstrates that working women who live alone are more likely to participate in the labour force than women living in heterosexual families. Doan's and Quadlin's (2018) study in the US shows-heterosexual couples relied heavily on gender differences to decide household and childcare responsibilities. Likewise, Ueno's (2021) study revealed that social expectations for heterosexual marriage limit women's employment opportunities. Clearly, within the heterosexual family arrangement, the family devotion schema is still a dominant influence, unfavourably impacting working mothers' lives more than fathers'. In this vein, Blair-Loy (2001, p.690) argues that the family devotion schema in a heterosexual marriage is predicated on wives relying on husbands for financial support and social standing and husbands relying on wives for personal and familial care, a "symbiotic" relationship that upholds patriarchal lines.

The heteronormativity of the family also informs a gender dichotomy between the public-private spheres of mothers and fathersin terms of physical space. Mira, a mother of two children and senior officer at a bank, stated:

Mira:

> You know…there is little doubt that the number of women working outside the home is rising. But, whenit comes to moving freely, we have not experienced many improvements. They are still dependant on their husbands for permission to do anything or go anywhere.

Mira notes that Bangladeshi families' values imply that women should be restricted in their movements, including the decision to work independently outside the home. If a woman has trouble in public, she is blamed, and her modesty and piety are called into doubt. These are the standards women must navigate, imposed on them by men, regardless of their participation in the labour market. Such restrictions in Bangladesh are the process of implementing patriarchal norms embedded in the family devotion schema, though the application of these patriarchal norms may vary while internalizing by individuals. Konika, also a mother of one child who works as a scholar-teacher, noted that her husband does not tell her about his time outside the family (e.g., with his co-workers, friends, or relatives). However, she needs her husband's permission to do the same things. These gendered norms

indicate that Konika's autonomy or freedom in day-to-day living is constrained by her husband's or in-laws' (e.g., parents-in-law). In such gendered relationships, the wife's subservience to the husband is legitimised in the name of family values, indicating a power imbalance between husband and wife. Konika states: "…Sometimes I feel this is punitive, but [you know], these family norms are unwritten laws, [I] do not follow these means I am arrogant." Konika added that such arrogance may jeopardise her paid work continuation because families often accuse mothers who work outside the home of being egotistical. Konika is a member of the Hindu community, a minority population in Bangladesh. Although this study does not attempt to make comparisons by religion, it was interesting that despite Islamic cultures typically being more restricted concerning women in paid work compared with other religions (see Chapters 2 & 3), in this context, among the women I interviewed, there was little difference between Hindu and Muslim women in how they struggle with family and work devotion incompatibility.

However, interviewed mothers, such as Mira, Fariha, Konika and Nafisa, asserted that their labour market engagement benefited their families and themselves financially. So, despite their difficulties fitting employment within traditional family values, they would continue their paid work, which they consider an achievement. For such achievement, they used their individual agency by engaging with the "patriarchal bargain" in a culturally-specific way, which is one of this study's novel findings, but which also limits women's collective empowerment.

Their negotiating and compromising with the ideals of traditional womanhood illustrates elements of 'patriarchal bargaining', as Kandiyoti (1988) noted for South Asian and African countries, including Bangladesh. Kandiyoti (1988) maintains, "Women strategize within a set of constraints …to maximize security and optimize life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression" (p. 274). The patriarchal bargain refers to individual strategies aimed at manipulating the system to one's personal advantage, although at a broader level, it does not challenge and can even perpetuate the patriarchal system (Gram et al., 2018; James-Hawkins et al., 2017). In short, acceptance of gender rules that disadvantage women collectively in exchange for individual power from the system is known as the 'patriarchal bargain'.

Nancy, a mother of two children who works in an international organisation, was discussing her family's values. She noted that she lives in a semi-structured family[20] with her husband, children and father-in-law, while her mother-in-law passed away a few years back. She stated that though her father-in-law is cooperative, his adherence to certain conventional norms frequently collides with her ideals. He expects Nancy to practice various rites, such as holding "shakha" (branches) in her hands and "shidur" (vermillion) on her forehead, in accordance with their Hindu religious practice. These are required for Hindu married women, according to their religious and family values.

Nancy asserted:

> …I try to avoid transgression with my father-in-law and other community relatives by adhering to these customs [religious or family traditions]. By upholding such family boundaries, I can continue my outside work while also respecting family and religious beliefs.

Despite disliking these conventional family ideals (because they often restrain women's freedom of movement, decision-making, preferences of life goals, etc.), Nancy sticks to them because working women are often accused of breaching family or religious codes in Bangladesh (Patoari, 2019). Thus, Nancy was able to prioritise elements of her working life while also contributing to the maintenance of the traditional norms within the family stressed by her father-in-law. But again, Nancy's choices are constrained by social structure since she is unable to fully exercise her agentic powers; she is still compelled to adhere to her family's values and religious norms.

However, many other mothers interviewed expressed their experiences with the various strategies they used to work outside the home while maintaining and rejecting some family values. Rumana, a mother of two children who works in a multinational company, shared:

Rumana:

> I am a member of a semi-extended family. I need to place a premium on family values e.g., taking care of parents-in-law and children with dedication, maintaining the ties of kin-relationships, attending family programs on different occasions, etc. If I disregard them, I feel pressure. In addition, ignoring family norms can occasionally provoke friction, and in extreme circumstances, it may raise questions about my respectability as a woman. But to be honest, I do not wish to lose my paid employment.

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[20] A semi-structured Bangladeshi family includes a husband, wife, children, and the husband's parent. Sometimes, a husband's sisters and brothers are there.

Rumana also noted that her participation in paid work reflects a generational change compared to her mother, who, while educated, was a homemaker. Rumana echoed: "Behind my education, I had this dream, and I am now at least happy that I have a self-identity as a working mother. My mother does not have such an identity." Many other mothers in this sample (12 out of the 15 interviewed) also noted that their mothers were homemakers and that their (participant mothers') paid employment status was one of the most significant gains in their lives, despite admitting the difficulties they face balancing family and work responsibilities.

Professor Ainoon, an anthropology professor at a top Bangladeshi public university, explained how married women in Bangladesh are emerging from colonial societal beliefs that made women the emblem of domesticity. She comments:

Ainoon:

> Bangladesh is a British post-colonial state where gender-based power and authority structures affected women historically. Bangladeshi women are raised to be suspicious of intellectual or authoritative expressions, especially in front of men, and to remain silent to respect and honour male power. However, education and employment market activity has changed women's situation, though not that much.

Professor Ainoon noted that in contemporary Bangladesh, women's accomplishments in paid work often do not align with conventional gender norms. She continued that most people who were born and raised in Bangladesh continue to have certain assumptions about their family values, as reaffirmed by interviewees like Nancy and Rumana, who both illustrated how bargaining with patriarchy required them to advance in the labour force individually by not challenging the traditional values at home, where patriarchal norms were too overbearing to challenge.

In Bangladesh, 'respectable femininity' can be considered in local vernacular terms as '*vodromohila*' (respectable woman), where women would stay at home, be submissive and loyal to their husbands and practice religion (Hussein, 2017; Blunch & Das, 2015). As explained earlier (Chapter 3), 'respectable femininity' is a gendered construct dating back to the 19th and early 20th centuries, exhibited in behavioural demands in workplaces, streets, and families (Hussein, 2017; Ansari, 2016; Fernando & Cohen, 2014). Participants were asked if they believe that women's career goals intersect with their 'respectable femininity' or 'ideal womanhood' in contemporary Bangladesh. Participants shared varied viewpoints. For instance, Cynthia, a mother of two children, states:

Cynthia:

> Bengali women's respectability is contingent upon their acceptance by 'somaj' [society]. We are frequently concerned about what society will tell, think, and accept. So, whether I work outside or not does not matter. I must remember that I am a married woman who must adhere to family norms and values.

Cynthia's experience parallels that of several other mothers interviewed. Cynthia added that such a boundary of respectability is not applicable to men. She added: "…Though my husband is not accountable to me for his professional and personal life, I must be that. Even my working outside also depends on his will." Bangladesh is a collectivistic society where people are assumed to be loyal to and protective of their groups from birth until they die. A strong sense of kinship, familial bond, communalism and interdependence are fundamental traits of Bangladeshi collectivistic society that dominate people's everyday lives in this collectivistic society (Dutta et al., 2015) but do so in ways that extend gender disparities. For instance, Meher, who works in an NGO, states:

Meher:

> You know…even while engaged in paid labour, the mother cannot fulfil all their desires. For instance, the family's decision-maker is still a father. I needed to obtain permission from my husband before engaging in paid labour. I am accountable to my husband for my daily activities, but he is not accountable to me…

Meher's comment that she is "accountable to [her] husband for her daily activities" while he does not bear the same obligation highlights the normative gender role disparities in contemporary Bangladesh. She further noted that if a working wife does not return home from the office on time, e.g., right after office hours have ended, questions are raised by husband or in-laws. The nature of such questions often involves women's lack of fidelity to their husbands or irresponsibility to children or families. Such questions also relate to social stigmas, e.g., Bangladeshi traditional family norms hold that 'vodromohila' (gentlewomen) do not stay outside the home after office hours end or hang out with friends or colleagues. However, the same questions do not apply when the husband arrives late.

Cynthia, Meher and many other interviewed mothers stressed that maintaining behaviour that reflects 'respectable femininity' is contradictory to their work life. For example, networking with co-workers is essential for professional development (Wanigasekara, 2016; Bierema, 2005). However, Bangladeshi traditional family values for women do not support such networking, though it is not problematic for men. When a similar question was asked to

father participants regarding women's respectability, some of them shared opposing views. Titas, a father of one child who works in a government bank, states:

Titas:

> My wife works in a multinational corporation. She has had many late-night meetings, supper parties, and outdoor visits. I am aware of these official requirements and networking opportunities as a professional. These, however, are incompatible with our family's values. As a result, I requested my wife to either forgo the additional effort and hours required by her professional obligations or quit and find another career that did not require such commitments.

Titas added that his family pressured him to deny his wife's late-night meetings. They prioritised family over personal choice and advantage, which clearly indicates the force to adhere to the family devotion schema. Imtiaz, another father, had a different view. He stressed family values, including dignified femininity for women. However, he allowed his wife to work outside after ensuring she would follow family and society's ideals. Imtiaz was more progressive than fathers like Titas, but he still felt obliged to give his wife permission to work outside of regular hours if she followed other gendered standards (e.g., following Islamic code of conducts). Imtiaz's wife still depends on him, who controls her working conditions and constrains her work-life freedom. Imtiaz continued by stating that his wife wears a headscarf, a symbol of decent women in a Muslim society such as Bangladesh. Though it is unclear whether Imtiaz and his family compelled his wife to wear a hijab or whether it was of her own choice, it is evident that Imtiaz and his family members embrace ideas of respectable womanhood and fully expect women to adhere to these norms.

Regarding religious pressure in maintaining the respectability of women, Sujana, a mother of one child, shared:

Sujana:

> I do not like to wear a hijab. But my neighbours and relatives often raise questions about my piousness and the identity of a "respectable woman". Though my husband has no pressure on me to wear a hijab, my parent-in-law is not satisfied with me in this regard.

Sujana stated that she chose to wear the hijab because she was concerned about her respectability, further illustrating the power that semi-extended families wield in perpetuating gender norms. Barrister Sadia, a key informant in this study, presented an example of women's religiosity and how it is still seen as a mark of respectability for women. She states:

Sadia:

> I observed closely one of my apprentices. She wears a headscarf when visiting her family in her birthplace but not in Dhaka or court. She never wore a hijab to our parties. When asked, she said her family pressures her to wear a headscarf and observe Muslim values. …If not, her neighbours will question her feminine respectability.

Sadia noted that her apprentice struggles with identity due to familial values that limit women's employment. Sadia also discussed her status of never being married. She stated that her relatives and friends often asked about her family life. Most believed she was not an ideal woman for not marrying at 43 and made a big mistake. Sadia[21] recalled her maternal cousin's remark, "…How do you live single at this age?" Sadia is a prominent lawyer and human rights campaigner. Nevertheless, she is undervalued because of the nonconformity of Bangladeshi conventional family values. Although she claimed not to mind such comments, she acknowledged feeling humiliated.

However, my findings also reveal that family normativity around femininity has changed over time in Bangladesh, consistent with the past literature (see Bellani et al., 2023; Heintz et al., 2018; Hussein, 2017). Today, some media portrayals of middle-class Bangladeshi women's duties and functions reflect changing perspectives about women's roles at home and work and how they should negotiate household and economic sites (Hussein, 2017; Azim, 2010). Azim (2010) claims that economic globalisation has given women access to public spaces and changed domestic space, where women reject traditional notions of "stay-at-home mothers". Thus, some aspects of ideal femininity are changing, albeit often times within the confines of patriarchal parameters.

Professor Bidisha, an academic at the University of Dhaka, offers important perspective:

Bidisha:

> Bangladeshi working women could break many cultural taboos that had kept them confined to four walls. For many women, the idea of working outside the home was unthinkable 30 years ago in Bangladesh. The profusion of women's jobs today is commendable. However, such success comes with a slew of negative aspects that obscure many harsh realities still they face.

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[21] I acknowledged that Sadia was a key informant and that her interview was not about her personal life. Yet, I have used her personal experiences. Sadia and other key informants allowed me to draw on their own experiences, while it is necessary to reflect Bangladeshi gender norms.

Professor Bidisha added that 30 years ago, middle-class women's employment was seen as financial incompetence on the part of men and shameful for families. This antiquated mind-set is changing, with some third-generation[22] husbands now proud of wives education, career, and social integration.

However, the nuclear and semi-extended family still exerts significant power over working mothers. Therefore as women negotiate and contest traditional norms around work, they must simultaneously consider their husbands' families' notions of *vodromohila,* and their husbands must do the same. For instance, Farhan, a father of two children whose wife works in a private organisation, stated:

Farhan:

> Despite my family's conventional view, I informed them that my wife is educated and has no excuse to be idle. Working outside is not harmful to a woman. Instead, it benefits the family financially, and she will be more responsible for her family once she gets a job.

Farhan added that they have a better understanding because they are both busy and do not have time to engage in absurd discussions, such as a women's "ideal" place is home, and he expresses reservations concerning conventional feminine respectability. However, in spite of Farhan's more liberal outlook, he (and presumably his wife) must still account for his family's traditional views. Because in another statement Farhan states: "…I assured my parents… that even if my wife worked outside, she would take care of domestic responsibilities and respect family values…". Farhan's shared experience implies that he helped his wife balance career and family dedication rather than selecting one over the other. Several fathers interviewed agreed with allowing their women to work outside, highlighting the integration between family and work devotion schemas.

Liana, a mother of two children, also illustrates how mothers with high occupational aspirations reconfigure their lives around familial expectations:

Liana:

> …I am different from my mother. My mother was more concerned about society's normative expectations of her ideal womanhood. I'm not one of them. Her future children, not her work, were the yardstick she used to judge her achievement. However, I did not think in such a manner. Instead, I place equal emphasis on family and career achievement, and my husband is as supportive.

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[22] Here, the third generation means those who are now adult married people and have their two previous generations, e.g., fathers and grandfathers.

Despite having a respectable profession and being financially secure, Liana further noted that she maintains some conventional family values, such as arriving home on time after work, asking or informing her husband for permission to visit her parents, or doing other activities outside of the family. So, Liana negotiates (as well as other interviewed mothers) her rights inside the family for her paid employment opportunity by engaging with the patriarchal bargain.

The composition of middle-class families in Bangladesh is shifting from extended to nuclear due to the increase of dual-earner parents. Nevertheless, such changes in the family structure caused both opportunities (e.g., diminishing extended family workload) and constraints (e.g., shrinking childcare facilities of family members) for mothers. Moreover, in most cases, mothers have to adapt their behaviours to demonstrate 'respectable femininity' for their husbands and their parents, gaining permission from husbands to work outside. Ultimately, patriarchal power dynamics have not changed significantly, as women in this study indicate on-going bargaining with patriarchy in ways that mainly preserve their subservience to husbands and/or their families.

5.3.1. COMPULSORY MOTHERHOOD: SOCIETAL PRESSURE FOR WORKING WOMEN

Similar to respectable femininity, constructions around motherhood are significant to working women's agency vis-à-vis their professional lives. As emphasised in the prior section, the patriarch enjoys many cultural privileges, including the right to make decisions and control activities in the families, labour, and mobility, illustrating a sense of ownership over 'his' wife and children (Kabeer et al., 2018; Jesmin & Seward, 2011; Nahar & Richters, 2011). Nahar & Richters (2011) argue, "Motherhood appears to be the main or only culturally available social identity for women" (p. 328) in Bangladesh. As 'compulsory motherhood' is a prevalent ideology, married women in Bangladesh are subject to social pressure to become mothers as soon as possible after their marriage is consummated, regardless of whether they are paid employees or homemakers. 'Compulsory motherhood' pressure is embedded with the family devotion schema as this devotion presupposes the cultural process and ideologies associated with motherhood and is central to understanding women's work-family conflict and reproduction of inequality (Dean et al., 2013; Blair-Loy & DeHart, 2003).

My data analysis demonstrates that Bangladeshi middle-class, educated women who enter the labour market marry relatively late because they have spent time completing their studies, leading to increased social pressure to have children quickly. Although a considerable proportion of marriages still take place before the legal age of 18 years, particularly in rural

areas (Streatfield et al., 2015) in Bangladesh, the average age of marriage for educated (i.e., with at least a bachelor's degree) women has grown over time (Hussein, 2017). As a result, employed women, especially educated, middle-class women are subjected to immense social pressure to have children shortly after matrimony. Mira, a mother of three children who works in a bank, stated:

Mira:

> Before my pregnancy, my relatives used to talk about my personal life. They asked me what my husband did and why I was not having a baby. One of my in-laws' relatives told me I should think about being a mother rather than a working woman.

Mira, when she was an undergraduate student aged 22, dreamed of waiting to have babies until she had a good job and was established in her profession, even though she knew she would eventually have to choose between a profession and a family. Mira's ambitions to forge a career were stifled by societal assumptions of "respectable middle-class femininity". In contemporary Bangladesh, even when neoliberalism pressures families to have dual-income earners, career-oriented mothers must still cope with pressures of compulsory motherhood. Mira stated that avoiding compulsory motherhood or delaying childbirth would advance her career. However, Mira agreed to have a baby for her in-laws, again showcasing how a family devotion schema is enforced through family pressures in Bangladesh.

Similar to Mira, Rumana, a 41-year-old service quality specialist for a multinational corporation (mobile network operator), echoed that even though it was not the right time for her to have the child, she felt compelled to do so due to pressure from her husband and in-laws. She noted, "…family members of my in-laws, including my husband, have stated that being a mother is more important to them than being a working wife for me..." Like Rumana, other mothers could not exert control over when to have their babies yet were unsatisfied with such gendered conventions stemming from the family devotion schema. Meher, a mother of two children, was very emotional when describing how difficult it was for her to resist pressure to become a mother soon after her wedding:

Meher:

> …I recall how much pressure I was under to have a child. I was working full-time when I married. Shortly after my marriage, my mother-in-law began to pressure me to have a kid. I needed some time from them to advance in my career before having the first child…

Although Meher agreed that she had the intention to comply with the ideology of compulsory motherhood, she wanted to wait until her profession progressed to a minimum level before having her first child. Even though she was a full-time employee with little risk of losing her job because of maternity leave, she wanted to confirm one more promotion before becoming a mother. Earlier studies (e.g., Biro et al., 2019; Lundberg et al., 2017) found evidence that delaying childbirth or late marriage has a link to the progress of women's labour market key outcomes (e.g., wages, promotion). For example, the impact of having a first child on earnings, labour supply, wages, depression, and divorce was found by Lundberg and colleagues (2017). They also compare estimates for the second child and find that earnings' benefits are more substantial after the firstborn than after the second born. Similarly, Biro et al. (2019) noted that fertility timing trends are closely linked to increases in labour force participation and wages for women, which is consistent with the projected benefits of delaying childbearing.

Interviews from this study exemplify the pressure to have children quickly and comply with other patriarchal family customs, including familial preferences for sons, which is still common in Bangladesh and other South Asian countries (Kabeer et al., 2014). Kabeer and her colleagues (2014) noted that South Asian family customs are changing and that in some contexts preference for sons is shrinking over time. My data analysis indicates that the preference of the husband and in-laws to have a son still problematises Bangladeshi women's labour market goals. Nafisa, an employed mother of one child who works in a private organisation as an account officer, shared:

Nafisa:

> …My husband was the only child of his parents. As a result, my in-laws' family members, particularly my father-in-law, were keen to have our baby soon after our marriage. Furthermore, it was the family's preference that I give birth to a baby boy. I could not help but comply with their wishes and opted to have the baby, which hugely impacted my employment.

Such findings are consistent with earlier research (White, 2017; Nahar, 2011; Chowdhury, 2009), where family status is inextricably linked to their ability to have sons who will carry on the family name and inherit the family estate (Kabeer, 2011). Bangladeshi scholar, Chowdhury (2009), states how preferences toward sons stigmatise women's social position in society, claiming, "I have three daughters, and I am very proud of having three daughters. My husband also feels the same way, but most people in Bangladesh think that we must be

unhappy and disappointed for not having any sons" (p. 599), a perspective that is echoed in this study's interviews. Wahida, who works in a private bank, shared:

Wahida:

> I am the mother of three children. I was happy with just one child. However, I was confronted with son preferences by my in-laws' family and relatives because she was a daughter. Their desire for a son pushed me to have a second child. …so, I had a second child. This time they directly blamed me, claiming that I was unlucky since I could not give birth to a son. My paid work was criticised by many of my in-law's family members. …finally, I had to decide to have a third child, and this time this was a son.

Wahida added that while having three children, including a son, increased her happiness and made her appear morally sound, it also significantly set back her career goals. The research on gendered schemas and motherhood demonstrates how family values support firmly held but flawed maternal ideals that mask crucial realities of professional objectives (Cech et al., 2016; Blair-Loy, 2003). Wahida further noted that her parents supported her work and loved her two girls, but they could not change her in-laws' attitudes. Instead, natal family support might cause conflict with in-law families, affecting a mother's work.

Wahida's experiences and those of other mothers I interviewed demonstrate the tensions that emerge when women's work goals conflict with family devotion schemas. These types of tensions may speak to the number of divorces among working women, which have been increasing in Bangladesh. The divorce rate doubled from 0.7 per 1,000 persons in 2021 to 1.4 per 1,000 in 2022, according to the BBS report (2022). Mannan (2020) argues that women's paid work is considered one of the significant causes of divorces in Bangladesh. My study did not examine divorce, but Bangladesh's growing divorce rate may offer working married women a way out of patriarchy. However, women experience more social stigmas following divorce than men. As a result, working married women often face the dilemma between choosing their autonomy and pursuing a paid job or continuing to be subject to patriarchy.

With both Wahida and Nafisa, I was curious about their husbands' participation in negotiations with parents in the face of such deep-seeded cultural norms of son's preferences. While her husband did not openly inform her of his preference for a son, Wahida believed that her husband was pleased with having her third child and a son. Nafisa added that her husband was afraid of his father's authority and did not like to negotiate the number and sex of children with her in-laws' family. As Nafisa states:

Nafisa:

> … my husband seems like the shadow of his father. When I asked him to negotiate with his parents regarding their pressure to take more babies, he replied he could not. He said he did not support his parents' wishes but could not tell them directly…

Nafisa and her husband's experiences are informed by the unwavering practice of "classic patriarchy" in Bangladeshi families. Patriarchy in Bangladesh has its unique characteristics, although it shares some with patriarchy in many other societies, especially in South Asia. Kandiyoti (1988) argued that family and kinship interactions have many similarities to "classic patriarchy"-a typical form of home arrangements in which authority is vested in a senior male household head. In such cases of "classic patriarchy", the household chief is either the grandfather or father, who sets the limits mostly for women and sometimes also for men; for example, sons. As a result, sons can also be subject of widespread patriarchal family practices (Cain et al., 1979), including those around compulsory motherhood and childbearing.

I asked mothers why they felt so much social pressure and if their husbands also faced similar pressure to have a child. Cynthia, a mother of two children, stated:

Cynthia:

> I faced much [more] pressure compared to my husband because traditional Bangladeshi culture treats mother and father differently. …I cannot ignore my child in terms of his/her proper care due to our cultural ideal that a mother would be dedicated first to her children. As a result, I had the possibility to scale back on my career ambitions. A potential father does not feel similar pressure because our cultural ideals put a father in a position where his duties to children don't affect his career progress.

Cynthia, a doctor who works as a consultant in different private hospitals, shared how difficult it was for her to complete her medical degree while also taking her first baby due to her in-law's pressure. She added it is important for the fathers of working mothers to understand and share such pressure with their wives. This view was supported by some of the fathers I interviewed. While some fathers worried about their wife's career advancement and losing their jobs when they became mothers, others said having a child was more important for them.

For example, Farhan, a father of two children, who works in a multinational company, stated:

Farhan:

> …my wife's employment worried me. Her employer was private. Her job lasted three years until we had the baby. After five years in the workforce, she should become a mother. But my parents wanted our baby early. They wanted their grandson soon after our marriage because they were old. My wife could quit her job if motherhood disrupted her career. As a father, my career was not affected substantially.

When asked why he thought his career would be less affected by a transition to fatherhood, Farhan laughingly replied, "…you know about it as a male member of this society. We are brought up in a way that the mother will take almost all responsibilities in the home. After getting the child, I know many examples of mothers among our relatives who left the job but rarely heard that the father left their job because of becoming a father…." Farhan's experience reflects the work devotion schema, where he prioritizes paid labour, while his wife's aligns with the family devotion schema. Similar empirical evidence was found in earlier studies in both Eastern and Western contexts. For instance, Yoon & Park (2022) found that South Korean fathers value work devotion, whereas mothers are stigmatised as deviants of this devotion. Likewise, Halrynjo & Lyng (2009) maintain that, Norwegian mothers' work-family devotions were conflicted, impacting their jobs negatively.

However, my findings also suggest changes in the expectation of family devotion schema because when cultural schemas are internalised, it can vary for individuals and across cultures (Mosseri, 2019; Blair-Loy & Cech, 2017). For instance, some of the mothers interviewed claimed that they enjoyed some autonomy in the family and could choose when to have their first child. As Nancy narrated:

> …I got married soon after I finished my studies. I began my career in a multinational corporation, but I am currently working in another international organisation. However, after three years of my profession, we decided to have our baby and did so. My in-law family and spouse did not put any pressure on me, although I did have some difficulties balancing my pregnancy-related challenges and work commitments.

Nancy's experience was similar to at least six of the women questioned in this study, indicating some variation in how working mothers responded persistent gender norms, though women like Nancy were not a majority. Still, Nancy's ability to balance work and family reminds us of gendered norms altering as Bangladesh's labour market options for mothers increase. Tania, a mother of one child, expressed that though she had her baby earlier than she had expected, her husband had frequently given her mental and emotional support.

A few fathers interviewed shared a similar opinion, stating that they had extended their cooperation to their wives in ways that challenged traditional family gender norms. For instance, Hasan admits: "…I encouraged my wife to advance her career..." Hasan added that he and his wife were unprepared to have a child despite their parental pressure.

Many other key informants made similar observations about Bangladesh's changing patriarchal structure, which is regarded to be a significant cause of women's oppression and discrimination. Professor Bidisha noted that mothers are subjected to gendered norms that worsen their employment prospects. Nonetheless, a space was created for them, and it is now more usual to be both a mother and a worker, which was culturally restricted in Bangladesh three decades ago. Ridgeway (2009) reminds us however "…that change in the gendered system of a society will be iterative and may not always proceed smoothly" (p. 157), a sobering reality that is clearly reflected through this study's interviews.

5.3.2. IDEAL MOTHERHOOD & WORKING MOTHERS: CONTRADICTION AND CHALLENGES

Historically, Bangladeshi "ideal mothers" have long been associated with patriarchal culture and religion. These values emphasise mothers' care for their children and family dedication (Hussein, 2017; White, 2017). According to White (2017), Bangladesh's gender system of domesticity supports cultural ideals of the ideal mother, including the need to please husbands and raise children. Thus, Bangladesh's cultural imagination of "ideal mothering" has remained strongly gendered over the decades (Kabeer et al., 2021; Bidisha, 2020; Hamadani & Tofail, 2014). Traditional Bangladeshi family beliefs that subordinate women to men underpin these maternal ideologies, which most mothers cannot emulate. This subordination is intrinsically linked to the lack of mothers' involvement in paid labour.

However, a shift in the role of mothers is envisioned with the expansion of neoliberal ideologies affecting the rise of dual-earner and nuclear families in contemporary Bangladesh (see Chapter 3). But again, the aspiration of such a shift was juxtaposed by neoliberal ideologies, which still upheld patriarchal notions of motherhood that emphasise mothers' selflessness and ideal for family and childcare management. Thus, "ideal motherhood" remains a contested identity for many mothers worldwide.

Sujana:

> If we speak about the ideal mother from society's stereotypical view, she must be educated; her age must be 25 when she marries, knows the entire household work, conceived at a correct time, or have the knowledge to foresee the appropriate timing. Later, she must give the family enough time and educate the child to become a perfect human being.

Sujana continued further that such motherhood ideals are not realistic. For a working mother, it is almost impossible to meet all of these demands. As a result, working mothers of young children sometimes feel like fish out of water. Tania another working mother endorsed Sujana's perspectives:

Tania:

> [You know] …A perfect mother, in the eyes of the Bangladeshi people, should work all day, from dawn to dusk. Since she is liable for her kids' well-being, sometimes she is encouraged to give up her job if required. Every time when it comes to working mothers, our society has a very different perspective. This is, in my opinion, a rather erroneous view that our society has. Instead, if they were to appreciate the effort, these mothers would have given their best…

Sujana's and Tania's understanding of society's expectations of the ideal mother is shaped by Bangladeshi patriarchal culture, in which a woman's identity as a good mother is enshrined in family devotion schema that excludes mothers from society's macro-level activities, such as politics and the labour market. Findings demonstrate that one of these patriarchal mechanisms is the allotment of time for mothers, mainly for childcare and household management, while fathers' time is for a paid job and other outside activities. As Sujana and Tania point out, time is a key social construct used to manipulate mothers' experiences and identities. Sujana notes ideal mothers are expected to "give the family enough time," and Tania says that mothers should work for their families from "dawn to dusk." Consequently, mothers with small children engaged in paid jobs face a moral dilemma between their jobs and espoused family responsibilities.

Findings in this line further revealed that manipulation of time and perhaps other elements embedded in the construction of ideal motherhood reflects men's wish to maintain control over women in Bangladesh, as the following extract by Professor Dr Ainoon Naher, a key informant, shows.

Ainoon:

> I believe that developing such an ideal mother aims to keep them under fathers' control in the name of protection. But they are not protected by men. Instead, they are suppressed and victimised by male power. But if the protection comes from the state as an equal citizen, it would be different from how things are now.

The comment above indicates that images of ideal motherhood are developed to maintain power and control, but as Bangladesh modernises through neoliberal expectations, more

women are needed in the workforce and are aspiring for professional careers. Study participants explained that hegemonic notions of ideal motherhood were also upheld through religion, adding to their inability to traverse work and family life. As Mira, a mother of three children who works in a bank, states:

> …I personally think the ideal mother is kind of a social demand, but [we] cannot live ignoring society's values and expectations. Even mothers are not treated equally to fathers in religion. As our society is still patriarchal, if we wish to create a space [working outside], we need to compromise with such values.

Here, Mira very diplomatically asserts the need for society to "compromise" such that religious principles do not restrict mothers to domestic spaces. Nazneen (1996, p. 43) noted that "Bangladeshi society supports and sustains a number of dos and don'ts for women, most of which have a strong religious flavour. If women wish to survive in a rigid patriarchal domain, they must stay well within its boundaries." As a result, the image of an ideal mother or woman in Islamic cultures such as Bangladesh is contingent on mothers' religious fidelities.

One of these religious fidelities is practising "Purdah", which has a long history in Bangladesh, and the practice of sexual seclusion, feminine modesty, and purity has always been highly regarded in Bangladeshi society. "Purdah" as a religious and cultural institution constrains women's and mothers' public visibility, including their labour market involvement. The degree to which 'purdah' is practised varies in Bangladesh across cultures, classes, communities, time, and geographical location (Kibria, 1995), and interpretations of the Holy Qur'an that regulate Islam vary, even among Muslim communities (Islam & Marzia, 2013). However, regarding religious constraints on mothers' labour market participation, findings indicate mixed reactions. Some mothers like Meher: "…If someone wears a hijab (purdah), she may feel ethically sound so that it can safeguard her." Some mothers said it is coercive as even if women do not like it, their husbands can impose it on them.

Findings further demonstrate that motherly sacrifices often go unrecognised. As Liana asserted, familial identity typically runs through patriarchal lines:

Liana:

> …even though the ideal mother would give her all, e.g., time, labour, energy, sacrifice her joy, and be mentally and physically sick for her child, the child is not hers; the child is eventually for her husband and his family. This means the child carries the identity of their father and father's family, but the mother must raise the child properly.

Liana went on to explain that the identity of a mother is implied through identification with her husband in Bangladesh. For example, Liana would be referred to as Mrs Anowar [her husband's first name] or by the names of her children, such as Ayan's [her son's name] mother. Thus, Bangladeshi mothers must undergo socially constructed identities that draw on patriarchy, erasing their own identity development. These experiences underpin a highly culturally specific form of family devotion schema in Bangladesh, suggesting some novel insights of the current study.

Kahu & Morgan (2008), in the New Zealand context, suggest that mothering is often a full-time position in domestic chores, yet it is seen as accomplishing nothing significant. The patriarchal culture promotes the image of a good mother but devalues the time and energy it takes to be a good mother. So, motherhood ideals are fraught in their constellations of patriarchal interests. One of these interests is their unwavering urge to be involved in paid jobs and autonomy over the family.

However, many of today's working mothers actively challenge or contest these dominant norms of motherhood (Padavic et al., 2019; Dean et al., 2013). My findings show that most interviewed mothers contested hegemonic motherhood ideals compatible with family devotion schemas and practised "integrated mothering", where educated middle-class working mothers in Bangladesh feel accountable to both their family and paid work. "Integrated mothering" has also been observed in some previous research on working women (Dean et al., 2013; Christopher, 2012). However, no research has been conducted in South Asia, where neoliberalism is reshaping family life.

Further to this, my findings indicate that integrated family and work life in Bangladesh involve negotiation and contestation among working mothers where family pressures are especially strong. For instance, Papiya, a first-class government officer (Superintendent of Police, SP) and a mother of two children, states:

Papiya:

> In fact, the most valuable gift you can give your children and family is your time, and a good mother is one who prioritises her children and family. You can have a career, but you must strike a balance. However, your family, children, and husband will take precedence over your profession. That is the general expectation of Bangladeshi society from an ideal or a good mother.

Papiya acknowledged her struggle to integrate her job and family. She said her job was time-consuming without office hours. She worked in a male-dominated field. As a dignified officer of higher rank, she often undertook coastal raids to apprehend criminals, which are perilous since they happen unexpectedly, generally at night, and involve security. After finishing her office hours, she sometimes returned to the office to raid offenders.

Papiya continued sharing that she had an extensive family, and her husband and in-laws' parents supported her outside work. Her grandparents and housemaid raised her children. However, her image of an "ideal mother" was called into question by other relatives and neighbours. They often stressed that her career was depriving her children. She recalled receiving one of these typical comments from a relative:

Papiya:

> … how you can leave your children for such a long time, even at night. You are not an ideal mother; rather, you are selfish in that you prioritise your profession over your children. You are robbing your children of their childhood. When my daughter-in-law [was a banker] had two children, she scaled back from her career. She needs to be around them all the time as a mother.

Furthermore, she sometimes felt guilty and suffered emotionally. Her spouse, a physician, is occupied much of the day. In addition to his eight-hour-a-day government hospital duties, he works nights and weekends at the private hospital. However, his lack of family time does not contradict the "ideal fatherhood" image. Papiya concluded that, "…even though I feel pressure, I am integrating my work and family life."

I also asked fathers interviewed in this study about their perceptions of an ideal mother. Some of the fathers interviewed asserted that they did not agree with the ideal image of mothers Hasan, a father of one child who works in a bank, opposed the traditional images of "ideal mothers":

Hasan:

> To my mind, there is nothing ideal about a mother. Among our relatives, I know some mothers who are solely homemakers. Many of our other relatives regard them as less-than-ideal mothers. Rather than that, mothers who work full-time are valued for their financial contribution to the family and the quality time they spend with their children.

Some study participants across all demographics shared Hasan's views. They agreed that the societal construction of the conventional ideal mother is problematic since it has oppressed thousands of Bangladeshi women. To accept that other valid and powerful ways of mothering

are beneficial for women who, as stated, are written outside of the assumed ideal, one might understand that what constitutes a perfect mother on a social and legal level (as a guardian of a child) is neither definitive nor static. My findings prove that many interviewed mothers reframed and contested the image of an "ideal mother". For instance, Konika states:

Konika:

> To me, an ideal mother is well-educated and knows how to balance her personal and professional life. However, such management should be carried out with the help of her spouse and other family members.

Konika continued that a woman should not try to be the ideal mother by fulfilling all her family's and society's expectations. She does not have to be a perfect homemaker at the expense of everything else. She gives the example of how her family caused her a lot of trouble in her professional life, but she did not scale back from her career.

The image of "ideal motherhood" was demonstrated to be a contested ideology in this study as well as in the literature reviewed (see Chapters 2 and 3), demonstrating the incompatibility between the family and work devotion schema as motherhood ideology is embedded in the family devotion schema and contradicts with "ideal worker norms supported by the work devotion schema" (These were covered in Chapters 7 & 8).

5.4. IDEAL FATHERHOOD: CONTRADICTORY OR COMPLIMENTARY?

The assumption throughout this subtheme was meant to draw attention to how "fatherhood ideals" serve as cultural resources for Bangladeshi families' everyday parenting practices, which might have an impact on the labour market engagement of mothers. In Bangladesh, the societal construction of "ideal fatherhood" is congruent with their function as financial providers, making them incompatible with domestic roles. It is worth noting that there is very little empirical research on "ideal fatherhood" in the Bangladeshi context. Hossain & Atencio (2017), who conducted one of the few research projects on fatherhood in Bangladesh, revealed a strong belief that fathers are the primary breadwinners at home even when their wives do paid jobs. According to Seward & Stanley-Stevens (2014), "The roles that a father plays in a family's culture are socially constructed and thus will vary as cultures do" (p. 460). Relative to western societies, eastern cultures normally provide less state support for children (e.g., monthly allowance, childcare etc.). Although financial engagement is often considered the most crucial trait of a perfect father in Bangladesh (Hussein, 2017; Hamadani & Tofail,

2013; Kabeer, 2011), it is important to uncover how fatherhood ideals are produced within a cultural, religious and political context undergoing rapid neoliberal changes.

Titas, a 31-year-old father who works in an NGO and has a daughter of 21-month of age, asserted:

Titas:

> Personally, I feel I would be socially humiliated or bullied if asked why I am sitting jobless at home. It would be worrying for my family if I did not have any economic independence. I believe we have been conditioned to perceive it this way since childhood, and we are not yet ready to acknowledge and accept that father is not the primary economic provider.

Titas's shared knowledge reminds us of how the father's male identity is assumed in Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi father's masculine identity is contingent on showing their financial ability. These findings are consistent with the limited existing literature in Bangladesh. For instance, Ball and Wahedi (2010) observed that fatherhood shapes Bangladeshi male identity by making the most crucial decisions on the family's education, health and social lives. So, even if the father does not want to adopt such a masculine identity, they are under social pressure to do so, which was reflected by Shamim's statement.

Shamim:

> I cannot help but believe that I may be free of the notion that I am not the primary source of income. It has a broader social impact than on the personal. If the husband fails to fulfil this responsibility for his family, he will be socially stigmatised. My manhood and personality are intertwined here. … It is considerably more challenging to think in this manner unless you are compelled to do so for some reasons.

Shamim and Titas's experiences are shaped by Bangladeshi traditional paternal ideals, in which they are both burdened by guilt and a socially stigmatised vulnerability. Earning is a key concern for most of the fathers interviewed. As a result, they are put under heavy pressure to be primary breadwinners and participate only moderately in parenting responsibilities.

When they are unable to meet their financial obligations, it affects their interpersonal relationships as well as their societal image as ideal fathers. Another father, Farhan, shared:

Farhan:

> I once lost my job because of the company's closure. It took six months for me to find new job. In our society, however, it is a disgrace to the husband's wife, family,

neighbours, and relatives if he does nothing. Though my wife worked [her salary was modest], many of my acquaintances questioned why I was so reliant on my wife's income. In both my family and society, I felt a lot of pressure.

Eight of the eleven fathers interviewed shared similar experiences. However, the parenting ideal highlighting fathers' economic responsibilities and stigmatising their poor financial means affects mothers' paid work engagement and disengagement. In traditional Bangladesh, fatherhood norms are widely accepted, creating a communal system of shame. As Farhan mentions, wives, family members, and neighbours will all question a man's value if he cannot support his family financially. This ubiquitous shaming system drives fathers to work devotion and mothers to family devotion schema and is consistent with research in other cross-culture settings. Qiu and colleagues (2013) examined how children in China, Ecuador, Turkey, and the United States defined family. They found that youngsters everywhere except the United States saw fathers predominantly as family providers and wage employees. The current study found strong support for fathers' breadwinning role; given that Bangladesh is still a male-dominated nation.

Though a few exceptions exist, mothers of small children interviewed for this study expressed a desire to continue working, even though fathers' primary economic roles overshadowed their paid work. Most mothers, however, became disinclined to seek or retain paid work due to a lack of family acknowledgement and support. In this vein, Barrister Sadia's comment is significant. She shared: "…One of my junior colleagues resigned from her paid work following the birth of her first child. Her husband was a successful businessman from a financially prosperous family. As a result, they showed little respect for her career, income, or status…" A similar story was shared by, Meher.

Meher:

> One of my maternal relatives, who worked for a multinational corporation of late, resigned from her full-time job. She has a seven-month-old baby. She wanted to come back after maternity leave, but her husband told her that he was financially solvent enough. His wife must place importance on family activities, which includes taking of the child…

Although this study has not covered those mothers who opted out of their paid jobs, some interviewed mothers and experts told stories of such mothers quitting their careers after having their first child or while pregnant. Kalpona shared her knowledge: "Working mothers often contribute as much as fathers, but fathers are still the family's primary providers. …this

misidentification affects both mothers and fathers. Fathers feel pressure to make more money, while mothers are frustrated because their contribution is underestimated." Furthermore, Kalpona stated that paternal values remained the same even when more mothers entered the formal labour force. Thus, all these excerpts from Sadia, Meher, and Kalpona illustrate how manhood and fatherhood are portrayed in a still traditional Bangladesh.

However, mothers with young children are more likely to encounter the rigidity of traditional fatherhood culture because they demand more collaboration and help from their husbands and other family members to combine family and work devotion commitments. And, if conventional fatherhood becomes more salient, supporting the notion that a mother's ideal place is her home, then the mothers' struggles increase, and a lack of recognition of this struggle may eventually motivate them to scale back from their employment (Yoon & Park, 2022).

My findings further suggest that apart from the fathers' income-provider role, "ideal fathers" also influence a child's moral-spiritual growth and development and the establishment of child discipline in Bangladesh (Afrin et al., 2017). For example, some of the father participants in this research believed that the family and society expected them to be strict with their children and, as a result, to be the ones to chastise children physically or verbally if necessary. Muhit, a 38-year-old father of two children, stated:

Muhit:

> If my six-year-old daughter does not listen properly to her mother, her mother often tells me when I come home after evening from the office. I advise my daughter to listen appropriately to her mother. I was tough on what her mother could not do, especially when it was a question of her studies, eating food in a timely way, etc.

The accompanying comment shows that Muhit and other fathers (e.g., Shamim, Imtiaz, Kawser) saw their duties stereotypically. Bangladeshi fathers prefer disciplining over caring. These findings are also consistent with previous literature on Bangladeshi fathers. Stewart and colleagues (2000) note that traditional Bangladeshi fathers are known for being rigid, gruff, and emotionally distant. They add that the ideal father is derived from an image of a man wielding a disciplinary rod. The father's control over his wife and children was maintained through daily routines that required formality and emotional distance, and the children and wife were to respect, filial care, loyalty, obedience, and even fear their fathers and husbands (Hamadani & Tofail, 2013). My findings further reveal that these guiding

principles to control children or wives are heavily influenced by religious values, which are still extensively practised in Bangladesh, as expressed by Daisy, a study key informant:

Daisy:

> An ideal father means he would successfully manage the family. However, such management is mostly tied to his ability to control his family members. Firstly, his economic position empowers him to be influential in the family. Secondly, a father is considered more powerful than a mother in every major religion, including Islam…

Daisy reiterated that, as a father is considered the family's guardian, challenging his power is often difficult. Such challenges also contradict the Islamic principle. However, religion is frequently misunderstood and distorted. Women, mothers, and daughters have special rights under the Islamic faith (Patoari, 2019). But, when it comes to their obligation to be a wife, mother, or a daughter, religion often gets manipulated in a patriarchal society such that fathers wield disciplinary power as moral educators, protectors, and so on, while the mother's roles in the home and the larger community become secondary (Khanum, 2008). Such religious values and beliefs are highly gendered and a significant source of justification of family devotion schema for mothers and work devotion schema for fathers. Imtiaz, a father of one child, shared:

> As a father, I must guide and control my children and wife to avoid Islam-prohibited activities like drinking, gambling, and more. [As a father], I must teach my children Islam. My father taught me these when I was a child.

A similar opinion was echoed by some other interviewed fathers. For instance, Kawser noted that "...Islamic principles are essential to me when it comes to my children... it is claimed in Islam that if you do not correctly guide and raise your children, you will be held accountable to your creator [God]…". In fact, in Islam, the father for the children and the husband for the wife are considered the protector, allowing fathers to be the decision maker even for the wife's engagement to paid employment in Bangladesh (Hamadani & Tofail, 2013; Kabeer, 2011).

However, while some fathers including Imtiaz and Kawser indicate that they would like to see the fatherhood role in terms of their religious values, a few fathers (e.g., Zaman, Raihan, Abir) contradicted them. For instance, Raihan shared: "…I guide my children to build their moral soundness as a good human being, and have no strict religious pressure on them..."

Similarly, Abir asserted: "…my wife and children have no pressure from me on religious grounds. However, they follow moderate Islamic culture according their own will."

While viewpoints like those expressed by Zaman, Raihan and Abir were in the minority, these fathers were aware of the unfavourable perceptions about fathers that exist in some circles and reacted to them accordingly. Zaman is the father of two children, a girl and a boy, and works in UNO, HR department. He used references to traditional and post-traditional concepts of fatherhood to analyse his own experiences and explain his own family bonds in his interview. More personally, Zaman's ideas were clearly influenced by a strong desire to avoid being like his father, who was a distant parent.

Zaman:

> I do not want to be like my father, who was a traditional father. We had more formal than emotional relationships. We needed to remain loyal to our father since he was a more respectable person to us. We asked our mother for anything we needed money for school tuition fees, to buy books, to get our hair trimmed in the saloon, permission to visit our relatives, and so on.

Zaman believed that he and his two brothers were not like stereotypical fathers or the more traditional fathers of the past. Likewise, Arman, a father of one child stated: "…While I spend more time with my children and we have more touching relationships, my father kept a bit of distance with us."Arman's and Zaman's statements illustrate that contemporary fathers are aware of good and bad fathering models, make normative judgements about specific types of behaviour, and want to distinguish their parenting from those they despise as traditional or culturally biased fathers. They might understand their fatherhood by drawing contrasts, often with persons they knew or from past generations.

In response to follow-up questions about the ideal father's position as the family's primary financial provider, several interviewees (from all three cohorts) agreed that the ideal is changing to some extent. For instance, key informant Professor Moinul states:

Moinul:

> Today's fathers differ from past fathers, especially in dual-income homes, albeit not all of them do. In a changing environment where mothers are also employed, fathers appear to be more cooperative than authoritarian in the family for their wives and children. These changes benefit the family economically, to which their wife can contribute.

Moinul's comment, like some of the other viewpoints already mentioned, demonstrates that fathers' adherence to work devotion schema is shifting in contemporary Bangladesh.

Musharraf Hossain, an HR expert, a second-generation father aged over 60 and who participated in this research as a key informant, noted:

Musharrof:

> I am a second-generation father. I can easily understand the differences between my son and me, who is now a father of two children. While my wife did not work, my daughter-in-law is an MBBS doctor. My son does not contribute significantly to childcare or other household responsibilities. But he devotes additional time to his children, spending time with them, being near them, and taking them out of the house on weekends.

However, how his daughter-in-law could advance her career through these changes remains ambiguous, given the scarcity of alternatives in Bangladesh that exempt employed mothers from the "double shift". Nevertheless, this is a departure from the traditional notion of fatherhood in Bangladesh. New cultural images of fathers as active, involved, and equal partners in childcare are evolving, albeit slowly, in Bangladesh, shifting away from the conventional idea of an emotionally absent but physically present breadwinner. These processes may eventually destabilise the image and significance of a breadwinning father, which lies at the centre of traditional masculinity in Bangladesh.

5.5. CONCLUDING REMARKS OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter was centred on family values, informed by key analytical concepts, e.g., cultural schemas of inequality (e.g., family devotion schema), respectable femininity, and the patriarchal bargain. Interviewed mothers shared their experiences, navigating prescribed family values while considering how a constructed feminine respectability interfaces with limited occupational options. The findings reveal that, while being a respectable woman traditionally meant being a faithful wife, mother, and homemaker, young middle-class women in Bangladesh are redefining what it means to be a respectable woman as their country experiences rapid socioeconomic changes, including labour market shifts connected to neoliberalism.

Interviewed mothers discussed being caught in a cycle of rising options and increasing pressure to preserve their "ideal" womanly roles at home. However, working mothers' responses to these ideals are shaped by two patriarchal devotion schemas that are upheld by everyday familial interactions that restrictearning capacities and career progression. Most mothers felt compelled not to openly question the status quo out of fear of breaking gender norms regarding conventional family values. In attempts to exercise constrained agency,

some participants integrated labour market goals with family values or bargained with patriarchy, accepting dominant gendered norms as they attempted to gain modicums of individual success.

The analyses also illustrate that even if women are educated (i.e. in terms of meritocratic achievement, they are equal to their husband) and employed full-time, many working mothers with young children have limited control over when to have children. All mothers felt pressure in some ways to preserve a heterosexual marriage, compulsory motherhood, a preference for sons, and to emphasise domestic responsibilities over their careers. While timely engagement in a marriage relationship, pregnancy, and motherhood is regarded as ideal and boosts women's respectability in the family and community, disobedience to these gender norms stigmatises them socially and culturally. Thus, middle-class married women are encouraged to conform to patriarchal family practices, which in most circumstances restrict their capacity to delay childbearing and advance their desired career goals.

Granted, not all mothers reported feeling equal effects of patriarchal systems, but many, overcoming the ubiquity of patriarchy were virtually insurmountable, as pressures to become and remain intensive mothers came from different social sectors across multiple life stages. Again, even amidst Bangladesh's efforts to compete in the global economy, young women are encouraged to marry, become pregnant early in their marriage, have sons, and focus on raising their sons. These pressures come from wider ideological sources, such as religion, as well as through husbands and in-laws, making contestation of patriarchy extremely difficult. Thus, the underpinnings of "patriarchal bargains" aided me in elucidating how mothers of young children constantly oppose, reframe, and renegotiate their everyday experiences while so often consenting to traditional family norms and professional lives under the patriarchal social structure of Bangladesh. This is not to say young, educated, working mothers lack agency or do not resist. In fact, some interviewees such as Konika made it a point to say "ideal" mothers are well-educated and that management of the home "should be carried out with the help of her spouse and other family members." But considering how patriarchy expresses itself chronically across multiple family and religious domains, "idealised" mothers in Bangladesh worked "from dawn to dusk" and were fully "liable for her kids' wellbeing" (Tania).

The chapter concludes by examining how idealised fatherhood constrains working mothers' labour market goals. Two notable patterns in Bangladeshi ideal parenthood are revealed by three cohorts of qualitative data from my interviews. While the first trend was found with

traditional roles of fathers with masculine qualities (e.g., economic provision, family leadership, decision-makers), the second trend envisions changes in these traditional ideals of fatherhood and advocates for a less conventional model of cooperating parenting or responsible fathers. In the interviews, traditional messages were strongly conveyed by some fathers' narratives, reflecting traditional narratives as unemotional financial supporters, protectors, disciplinarians, and ultimately head of the family integrated with the work devotion schema.

Simultaneously, contemporary Bangladeshi paternal ideals are rife with inconsistencies in behaviours, ambitions, and societal conventions. My findings show that Bangladeshi fathers who reject the century-long fatherhood ideals and wish to be more attentive, engaged, and emotionally connected must constantly fight cultural restrictions that hinder them from accepting cooperative, egalitarian alternatives (e.g., integration between work and family devotion schemas). These discussions have led to a nuanced redefinition of fatherhood, with elements of both previous experiences and contemporary social expectations embraced and rejected. These inconsistencies are at the heart of one of the features of modern industrial societies: As neoliberalism gains traction in countries like Bangladesh, families are under increasing pressure to excel in the workplace. Idealised fatherhood will likely persist in tradition if family values and religion prevent the emergence of new concepts of ideal motherhood (e.g., integrated). Additionally, neoliberalism will pressure fathers to connect with and thrive in the profession, strengthening conventional ideas of manhood.

While the current chapter focused on ideological dilemmas (e.g., motherhood and fatherhood ideals) and how they affected mothers' career goals, the following chapter delineates how these ideals embedded in the family devotion schema affect mothers' pre- and post-natal transitions and impact their work and family life navigation.

6.1. INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Six, I examine how family norms and motherhood ideologies shaped by the family devotion schema influence the career objectives of Bangladeshi working women, particularly during their transition to motherhood. Introducing new duties and increased obligations accompanying the transition to parenthood disrupts the established routines of both mothers and fathers (Levesque et al., 2020; Katz-Wise et al., 2010). However, the transition of working women to motherhood is not the same as the journey of working men to fatherhood because both structural constraints and gendered norms problematise women's transition to motherhood. Such differences in parenthood are gendered and strongly associated with the family devotion schema, which naturalises the mother's role in childbearing and childrearing and the father's role as the family's financial provider (Liu, 2023; Yoon & Park, 2022; Mosseri, 2019; Damaske et al., 2014). During this period, mothers' moral dilemmas become high as their adherence to the family devotion schema is increased by the family's normativity; on the one hand, the stressing pressure from the workplace to comply with the work devotion schema, resulting in the high incompatibility of work and family devotion schema, on the other hand (Moilanen et al., 2019; Blair-Loy, 2010).

This Chapter is divided into four sub-sections: Section (6.2) examines how challenges and moral judgments surrounding pregnant mothers influence their everyday experiences. Section (6.3) discusses the navigation of mothers' work and family life and the impact of childcare management on their career aspirations; Section (6.4) addresses the role of fathers in childcare and other household tasks. The final Section (6.5) ends with a concluding summary of the chapter.

6.2. TRANSITION TO MOTHERHOOD-MORAL JUDGMENTS

As noted in Chapter 2, the motherhood ideal is shaped by the family devotion schema, which stems from gendered family norms that consider mothers' outside work as ancillary to the family. Earlier studies support that a young woman's transition to motherhood is shaped by a set of hegemonic ideologies embedded with the family devotion schema that invariably influences her family and work decision (see Yoon & Park, 2022; Blair-Loy & Cech, 2017;

Damaske et al., 2014; Dean et al., 2013). Working mothers frequently experience moral dilemmas when deciding between job and family due to the stigma attached to breaking family traditions and the fact that childbirth and related difficulties (such as pregnancy) are considered private matters (Williamson et al. 2023; Levesque et al., 2020; Kerry & Murray, 2018). On the other hand, the transition to fatherhood is less impacted because fatherhood ideals are more compatible with the work devotion schema, and cultural norms do not hold the father accountable for his lack of adherence to the family devotion schema (Yoon & Park, 2022). Incompatibility between these two devotion schemas affects the pre- and post-natal experiences of working mothers differently than those of their husbands.

Pregnant women in Bangladesh are usually prohibited from appearing in public (Insan et al., 2022). My study found that dominant beliefs surrounding mothering informed pregnancy-related judgment and decisions in their work life (e.g., pregnant mothers should stay at home; priority should be given to upcoming babies instead of travelling or working outside, etc.). Due to widespread gender asymmetry in Bangladesh, pregnancy is perceived as a distinct identity in terms of how it is performed, how others view it, and how disruptive it is. Pregnant women experience various forms of cultural and religious stigmas during both the pre-and postnatal phases of their lives. Stigmas can make pregnant women ashamed, isolated, or scared to seek medical care, shop, attend social events, or network with friends, family, and coworkers (Insan et al., 2022). Working mothers are more susceptible to such stigmas than non-working mothers because they work in public. However, such antiquated gendered norms have been challenged more recently in Bangladesh (Insan et al., 2022; Hussein, 2017; Kabeer et al., 2014).

Regardless of age, religion, or other socioeconomic circumstances, the majority of the women I interviewed (11 out of 15) spoke of the necessity of on-going support during their pregnancy. In addition to a lack of state or organisational support (I return to these issues in Chapters 7 & 8), the pressure to conform to traditional ideals for mothers remaining at home exacerbated the difficulties of combining work and home life for many working mothers of young children with whom I spoke. Rumana, a working mother of two children, discussed her struggle within her family after learning that she was pregnant.

Rumana:

> My husband asked me to continue the job if I can manage my pregnancy-related difficulties and the job responsibilities together. He further stated that he is ready to accept quitting my job. But he refused to accept any problems with our upcoming

baby because of my job's continuation. This means he implicitly encouraged me to leave my work.

Rumana's quote highlights how her husband was willing to accept her working during her pregnancy, leaving her to decide if she should manage related discomforts. However, the expectation was that she would give up her job for her baby's well-being. The infant's birth corresponded with the loss of personal agency and the move into the 'natural' and exclusive role of motherhood (Williamson et al., 2023; Madray et al., 2022).

Most mothers in this study shared similar experiences, suggesting that working mothers in Bangladesh are expected to adhere to a family devotion schema. Bangladeshi girls are socialised historically and culturally to view their career aspirations as an addition to their family obligations, with the idea that if they choose a career, they should be able to care for a family and use their inherent caring abilities as women and mothers. Contrarily, boys are taught to prioritise family finances. These gender inequality schemas permeate all aspects of their lives and influence how they live in the future.

Rumana was in an ambivalent situation stemming from the moral judgment of whether she should listen to her husband's advice and quit her job or continue working. She initially challenged social expectations and continued her profession for a few months during pregnancy, though after three months, she decided to leave her job and took six months of maternity leave.

Rumana:

> …I was under mental duress because my husband did not fully back my decision to continue working after I became pregnant. So, I reasoned, if anything went wrong with my baby during this period, I would be held responsible for my job's continuation.

The above quote illustrates that Rumana was placed by her husband in a position that would blame her should anything happen to the baby. So while she was given freedom to work, it was constrained freedom and came with social liabilities. Rumana's husband gave her a choice, but it was not an actual choice because Rumana was required to exercise her preferences within constraints, meaning she had little choice. The controlling motivation of Rumana's spouse is also indicative of the power imbalance between husband and wife in traditional Bangladeshi households (Bidisha et al., 2022; Shahen et al., 2020; Chowdhury, 2009). In this vein, Currie (2004) argues that the ability to regulate or control space (e.g., family) through boundaries, restrictions, or obligations is a crucial component of power.

Minor factors like everyday interactions and gender relations are used as means of exerting power over the body and society. However, Rumana's maternity experience was typical of many other mothers I interviewed, though some of them experienced it differently. For instance, Konika, a mother of one child, narrates:

Konika:

> Every month, I had to go to the doctor. …Even though I asked my husband every time I visited the doctor to accompany me, he only came with me three times. As a result, I had to complete a lot of doctor's appointments on my own. His advice to me was to accept that pregnancy-related issues are a natural part of women's life. He thought this is a problem that women can deal with alone…

In contrast to Rumana, Konika's narrative demonstrates how pregnancy became a "woman's issue" that she must independently navigate. During the pregnancy, Rumana and Konika's identities as mothers were increasingly visible at home and work, making it difficult for them to continue their paid work. This carries on into motherhood; once the child is born, the woman has no agency outside her role as a mother, indicating forced allegiance to the family devotion schema. Konika's experience indicates her challenges as she adjusted to parenthood and demonstrated how fathers' preference for the work devotion schema *naturalizes* motherly feminine tasks to be compatible with the family devotion schema (Mosseri, 2019; Blair-Loy & Cech, 2017), rendering such tasks biologically connected to femininity (Williamson et al., 2023). Thus, Konika's spouse thought pregnancy-related duties were for women and not men. Konika had to tackle all pregnancy-related issues alone, including doctor visits, cooking, and other domestic responsibilities.

Many of my other participant fathers valued the mothers' childbearing activities more than their paid employment. Contrarily, some mothers reported how such non-cooperation resulted in varying levels of fear, anxiety, and trepidation during their pregnancy. Adiba, a working mother of two children, comments below typify this struggle: "…I had many complexities during pregnancy. I could not journey from home to the office. I had to rest a lot, and I especially used to vomit multiple times during office hours." It is important to note here that Adiba went through these challenges absent of family support. Tania, a mother of one child who works as a teacher, had a somewhat similar experience.

Tania:

> …I got physically ill during my pregnancy time. I had to get treatment from abroad for many days. Then finally, my baby girl arrived in this world in 2019. Before taking maternity leave, I also sought general medical leave. Sometimes, I also have taken

earned leave. However, my career was seriously affected due to such physical sickness and then mental stress.

Adiba and Tania's transition period experiences illustrate that despite collective judgement (e.g., their in-laws' family did not appreciate their paid job during pregnancy), they battled individually without family support and continued paid work.

The significance of the collective family resurfaced as a key issue here (Kabeer et al., 2014; Cain et al., 1979), in particular mothers-in-law, who, as Kandiyoti (1998) argues, often compel young mothers in South Asian families to bargain with patriarchy in the family. Adiba and Tania both went on to state that while their husbands were somewhat supportive of their difficulties during pregnancy, their mothers-in-law were not. Adiba added: "….my mother-in-law occasionally stressed to me that being a mother is natural, and I should have the capacity and patience".

Both Adiba and Tania attempted to soften the effects of patriarchy by residing in nuclear families, whereas they previously lived with their husbands' families. Consequently, Adiba and Tania now have more freedom in navigating their daily lives than when they lived with their respective husbands' semi-extended families. Tania, for example, states: "…After moving from the extended family, I can now organize my homework how I like, which was impossible when I was with my husband's family."

However, changes in family composition (e.g., from extended to nuclear for young mothers, like Adiba and Tania) are challenging as the husband's family members often oppose or dislike the separation of family. Thus, while neoliberalism is influencing more families to separate and function in nuclear settings, where working mothers enjoy degrees of increased freedom, there is pushback from the in-laws and remains a point of tension. Therefore, even when working mothers enhance the family income and contribute to family necessities like childcare management, in-laws frequently find ways to remain connected and in control of working mothers' lives. Consequently, contemporary working mothers experience culturally specific conflict driven by the old gender norms (adherence to family devotion schema) and the evolving professional opportunities (attraction to work devotion schema). This seems a novel finding for Bangladeshi working mothers where the changes in traditional family values pose, but simultaneously, resistance to this change is also observable. These results imply that working mothers can negotiate and contest the conventional gender norms through the engagement of the "patriarchal bargain".

Kandiyoti (1988) notes that the patriarchal bargain is an on-going process that allows women to exercise elements of agency rather than be treated as passive victims, but again, their agency is constrained by the social structure where their individual gains cannot overthrow the patriarchal system. In the case of this study, Bangladesh's patriarchal family structure still affects working mothers, even if they have transformed their immediate family structure (e.g., the nuclear family). They experience pressure from the husband to adhere to family devotion ideals and even to engage in leisure activities that operate within a patriarchal context, for instance, having a vacation with the husband's kin family.

Getting back to the transition to motherhood, the study findings also revealed constraints to freedom in physical and corporeal respects, highlighting concerns around shaming and freedom of movement. Taboos stemming from religious and cultural stigmatisation (e.g., receiving unpleasant comments about a woman's weight, clothes, or overall appearance) were reported by mother participants to restrict women's movement in public spaces during pregnancy. Sujana's story below reflects how pregnant women's public visibility and the continuation of their careers were stigmatised by relatives and neighbours. Sujana recalls a remark she received from one of her relatives.

Sujana:

> How can you walk out in public with your baby bump? We, the women, should not step out in public at this time; it does not look good. This is contrary to our cultural and religious values. Moreover, staying at home during this time would be beneficial for you…

Likewise, Wahida reported that she frequently received nasty comments in public places. She shared a comment made publicly at her: "...why did this woman come to the market with her baby bump? She should stay at home at this moment…" Tania, another interviewed mother, shared that she faced body shaming by her neighbour for gaining weight during her pregnancy and that she should stay home: "…You seem so much bigger now [indicating over-weight condition], when we are getting treated for your release". Tania said that this comment was made by one of her male colleagues and "…I know it was not a joke or a simple comment, but it was a sexist comment" (Tania). Although Sujana, Tania, Wahida and all other mothers interviewed continued their paid work, they did so under the pressure of social stigmatisation connected to their physical appearance.

Constraints to pregnancy's public visibility are also caused by religious beliefs and practices. As 88% of Bangladeshis are Muslims, Islam is central to men's and women's daily lives.

Purdah, or female seclusion, limits women's public movement and labour market engagement but gives them "protected group status" (Cain et al., 1979). Men have influence over women in Bangladeshi families, but they must also feed, clothe, and house them (Kabeer, 2011; Chowdhury, 2009). But this "protected group status" works as rhetoric as it has many implications, including social class (e.g., poor women are bound to work to support their families financially). This study's empirical evidence does not support such "protected group status" for women. For instance, Nafisa states:

> …every week, I have to visit my mother. I also have a responsibility to look after her, including providing some financial assistance, as my father is not alive. My in-law's family members and my husband do not approve of my weekly visits to my mother. Moreover, they frequently advise me to leave my job. I told my husband that if he gave me Tk.10, 000.00[23] monthly, apart from family expenditures, I could quit my job. My husband, on the other hand, declined.

Though her husband's lack of interest in providing for Nafisa's extra financial requirements, he still exerted control over her. Furthermore, Nafisa's mother-in-law's interfering with her visit to Nafisa's own mother indicates the reinforcement of patriarchy in her in-law's family. As a result, there was a transgression between Nafisa and her mother-in-law (also with her husband).

My findings further found evidence that other interviewed mothers perceived such transgressions, though they did not admit it directly to me. For instance, Mira shared with me that while her financial contribution to the family is crucial, her in-laws are sceptical. Cynthia, another interviewed mother, shared a similar opinion. Mira's and Cynthia's experience reminds us that the failure to recognise the financial contribution of a wife or mother to the family is rooted in a patriarchal social framework in which women's economic autonomy runs counter to male dominance in Bangladesh. Thus, the accounts of most mothers I interviewed reveal how the culturally specific gender norms limit the complete autonomy of working mothers in their day-to-day activities, in making decisions regarding their own lives and in recognition of their paid worker status.

However, even though Nafisa and the other mothers I spoke to had a tough time getting along with their in-laws' families, my findings also reveal that they could gain some constrained autonomy by keeping a paid job, earning some independent money, and even pitching in to help out their birth families financially if needed. These findings are novel in terms of

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[23] Nafisa demanded extra money (apart from family expenditures) for her personal spending, e.g., visiting her mother, relatives, or friends and shopping for something she likes.

culturally specific agencies for Bangladeshi working mothers and women, suggesting a shift in gender norms, though slowly.

6.3. WORKING MOTHERS' NAVIGATING HOME AND WORK

Arlie Hochschild published *The Second Shift* (1989), describing a new dilemma (integrating work and mothering or having to prefer one over another) confronting middle- and working-class mothers with small children. Hays (1996) popularised the term *intensive mothering,* maintaining that in the preceding decades, traditional family structures reinforced norms in which men provided financial support, and women were child-rearing housekeepers who rarely worked outside the home. Likewise, Blair-Loy (2003) found that even though the mother has high work skills, the family devotion schema deeply affects their daily lives and becomes incompatible with the work devotion schema (see Chapter 2). In fact, these devotions are morally challenging to reconcile, making a choice between them more than simply a choice between acceptance and rejection. As a result, many (if not all) mothers of young children struggle to balance their paid and unpaid domestic work (Williamson et al., 2023; Levesque et al., 2020; Blair-Loy & Cech, 2017). My research revealed both similar and novel findings regarding how Bangladeshi working mothers of young children navigate their daily lives between work and family responsibilities and how work and family devotions inform their everyday choices and decisions.

All mothers interviewed reported experiencing varying degrees of pressure arising from the ideology of the good mother, a set of social constructions outlining the expectations for mothers and how they should raise their children. Therefore, working mothers needed to employ various childcare management strategies based on multiple factors, e.g., the composition of their households, family values, income level, socioeconomic status and workplace environment. However, the most commonly stated issue expressed by mothers was that upon arriving home from work, they are forced to take on a 'second shift' of housekeeping and childcare (Sinno & Killen, 2011). The 'second shift' has been widely accepted as the unpaid labour that working mothers do when they get home, which has remained a key factor in their paid work's slower progress or scale back from the paid job (Dugan & Barnes-Farrell, 2018, Cech & Blair-Loy, 2017).

My qualitative data analyses demonstrate that although Bangladeshi working women have changed their economic behaviour, the powerful normative family devotion schema prevent

them from advancing in their careers because of the "second shift" they manage at home. Fariha, a mother of two children, asserts:

Fariha:

> Despite being equally vital, my unpaid domestic service receives less attention than my paid work outside. Food preparation, housekeeping, childcare, and other chores that the wife performs in the household are given priority. It no longer matters whether I work outside or not. It no longer matters whether it becomes overload for me or not. But my husband is not held accountable for these domestic tasks.

Fariha works for a private commercial bank as a senior officer. Her example highlights how the costs of motherhood differ significantly for working mothers with small children in Bangladesh compared to their husbands. Even though she works in a senior banking role, her domestic responsibilities remain unchanged. Many of the other mothers I spoke with had similar experiences juggling their careers and family life. Sujana, another working mother, adds: "…Due to my paid job, I received no exemptions from my housekeeping. As a result, I can now claim to work the 'second shift'. When I am free from office duties, I am overloaded with my home tasks either physically or psychologically, because I need to think about what will be next day's meal, what clothes need to be washed, etc…"

Sujana's experience indicates that she manages the household psychologically as well as physically. The experiences of Fariha and Sujana, including many other mothers I interviewed, elucidate that working mothers with young children regularly work "second shifts" (a phrase Sujana uses herself), including home management, household chores, childcare and routine household tasks. Most mothers interviewed said gendered "second shifts" put time pressure on their personal and professional lives. They added that social stigmas of being labelled "selfish or bad mothers" for not managing domestic and childcare chores contribute to such pressure.

These findings in the Bangladeshi context align with past research in cross-cultural settings (see Dugan & Barnes-Farrell, 2018; Sinno & Killen, 2011; Milkie et al., 2009; Hochschild, 2003; Hays, 1996). Even while women are increasingly racing to the same professional job skills as men, family and childcare responsibilities remain dramatically disproportionate between men and women (Williamson et al., 2023). Milkie et al. (2009) found that working mothers' husbands have better career results than their wives due to the second shift's time constraints and mothers have less leisure time and networking with friends, family, and others. Likewise, Sinno & Killen (2011) maintain that cultural norms are linked to parental responsibilities, with mothers stereotypically performing housework and fathers performing

paid labour. However, while the "second shift" is universally acknowledged among working mothers, the ways they encounter this "double shift" can vary, exemplifying their culturally-specific embodiments. For instance, several interviewed mothers concurred that their image of "successful mothers" is mainly determined by their performance in managing their household and childcare duties. Here, the culturally specific family devotion schema for Bangladesh working mothers implies that, even if mothers can enter the workforce, their social image as "successful mothers" remains dependent on how well they can manage unpaid domestic roles.

My findings further reveal that, in Bangladesh, prevalent mothering ideals place equal emphasis on both individuals (e.g., only parents) and collective mothering (e.g., parents, family members, relatives, etc.). However, mothers are still considered their children's primary caregivers in both circumstances. Regarding individual childcare duties, many mothers noted that the "double shift" has intensified, particularly in the postpartum period. They face significant time pressure balancing home and work. However, their husband's time did not interfere with their professional tasks, as their household engagement level remained almost unchanged after the birth of the baby.

A few mothers reported increased stress from their mothers-in-law (and sometimes from their husbands), who gave more importance to the care and well-being of newborns than the new mothers. In this case, Rumana's story appears worthy of consideration. She noted "…I was sick for about three months after my baby was born, which was so typical for my mother-in-law. She advised me to take care of my child with caution regardless of my sickness…" Rumana's experience exemplifies the normative discourse of "intensive mothering," which is "child-centred, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labour-intensive, and financially expensive" (Hays, 1996, p. 30). However, while Bangladeshi middle-class mothers are not traditionally obligated to provide financial support for their children (as the husband is still regarded as the primary breadwinner), they are expected to be selfless and devoted to their children (even if it means quitting their jobs) and held accountable for their upbringing, welfare and development.

Most of the mothers I interviewed stated unequivocally that motherhood was a demanding role for them, struggling to be ideal mothers, despite their love for their family and their commitment to family members' lives (e.g., husband, children, etc.). Mothers are expected to conform to preconceived notions of parenthood embedded in family devotion schema

(Mosseri, 2019; Dean at al., 2013). However, many interviewed mothers fell short of these unrealistic maternal ideals, resulting in feelings of guilt, irritation, wrath, and low self-esteem.

Data analysis indicates that mothers would forgo many of their personal aspirations to respect the family bond framework defined by traditional Bangladeshi culture. Mothers, not fathers, are the ones who would make sacrifices for their children, even if it meant quitting their paid work.

Jenifer:

> Continuing one's job as a mother means that she can only take advantage of this chance if her commitment to her children, husband, and family remains unaffected. As a result, we, as mothers of small children, must face these realities when we work outside of the family. So, what happens in the end? A working mother must juggle her personal and professional lives.

Jenifer's narrative underlies that mothering practices cause labour market penalties for their greater time commitment to the family, whereas fathering practices are not. Many other interviewed mothers indicated a struggle with intensive motherhood ideologies and expressed experiences consistent with prior research conducted in Bangladesh. For instance, Bridges et al. (2011) examined how cultural norms affect Bangladeshi women's labour market activity using the 2000 Household Income and Expenditure Survey. Both marital status and the presence of small children negatively affected women's labour force participation, suggesting that cultural norms governing married women's behaviour applied regardless of childcare commitments and income potential.

This study also drilled into mothers' daily schedules with more detail to see how motherhood influenced them relative to fathers. We can see Fariha's morning schedule as an example: "before leaving for the office, I have to make the plan for the entire day's activities around the house, such as what to cook today, what to feed the baby, washing clothing, cleaning the house, and whether any relatives would visit us, or we would visit them…" Fariha further noted that while her husband works for around nine to ten hours, mainly in the office, she spends seventeen to eighteen hours every day both in the office and at home. Likewise, another mother (Meher) echoed about how the daily tasks are different between herself and her husband. She states: "We both work full-time…but his [husband] morning means he will be ready for the office, and my morning means I have to make ready everybody for their whole day support. It is not okay, though I cannot but do it."

All other interviewed mothers admitted that household chores and childcare differ from their spouses' everyday schedules. This supports recent Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS, 2019) evidence suggesting women labour eight times more than men. According to the report, women spend 11.6 hours at home daily compared to 1.6 for men. It also says women do 5.6 hours of unpaid housework every day, while men do 0.8. Mothers' labour market results are considerably affected by childcare and domestic task-sharing disparities (p.153). This data supports the global trend that mothers handle most housework, including childcare, despite working outside. The ILO report (2018, p.11) found that women perform 76.2% of unpaid care work worldwide, three times more than men. Asia and the Pacific reach 80%. Men have done more unpaid care duties in several countries in the previous 20 years. Over the past two decades, the gender gap in unpaid care dropped by 7 minutes per day in 23 nations. However, such differences in domestic chores including childcare duties although visible in their everyday experiences, in the broader sense these traditions are shaped by a family devotion schema in which, despite their engagement in the labour market, their familial responsibilities are nonetheless enforced by traditionally gendered ideologies that extend gender disparities (Cech et al., 2016; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

So the mothers' experiences suggest they are forced to give up significant portions of their day, night, or morning to accommodate family needs. In contrast, fathers can devote their time to their work. For example, when participant-fathers were asked about their participation in domestic activities, the gender distribution of housework was unequivocally favourable to men; in fact, to some, it was the mothers' natural responsibility. The fathers took women's unpaid work for granted, offering no justification for women's disproportionately high levels of domestic work and men'srelatively low ones. As Arman, a father of one child, states:

Arman:

> I had never thought I would cook and prepare food for lunch or dinner in the family. She [his wife] usually does it all the time. I believe everyone knows a women's job in Bangladesh is preparing lunch or dinner or getting the kids fed.

When I probed further, "Do you think your role in the family would be different if you lived in another country?" he replied:

> I heard that in western nations, partners split domestic chores. However, I have some relatives who live in London. They shared with me… male participation in household labour is low in Bangladeshi communities [in London].

By asking such a question, I wanted to explore if their family roles are driven by their personal interests or by Bangladeshi traditional gendered expectations, which may change when they relocate. Interestingly, as Arman notes, despite moving to Western societies, "male participation in household labour is low in Bangladeshi communities", implying the dominance of gender relations and established cultural norms.

The feminisation of parenting and refusal to shift from entrenched male-female role expectations in childcare is described by Meher, a mother of one child: "…One day, I asked my husband to change the baby's diaper and put on a new one for him; he refused, claiming that changing diapers is not a man's responsibility. This is something that all women do." A similar story was shared by Rumana:

> When I get home from work, the first thing I do is go to the kitchen. I can't instruct my husband to check the refrigerator for cooking, go to the kitchen, or feed the child no matter if he comes early or we come together. I don't think he [her husband] wants to undertake these duties, and I don't want to tell him to do them.

Rumana and Meher both acknowledged that, they do not support double shifts for working mothers, like them, but they do these to avoid conflict with their partners. Rumana notes: "...you know, if he does something willingly, it is okay, but asking him, like, clean the baby's shits, might affect our personal relations..." Some mothers fear social stigma because Bangladeshi society is not ready to accept fathers sharing home tasks with their wives. Some mothers believed that if their husbands shared household responsibilities, including childcare, they would be condemned for their lack of masculinity and the mothers as bad or selfish mothers. A similar concern was shared by some interviewed fathers. For instance, Hasan, a father of one child, who works in a private company, states:

Hasan:

> This is obvious that as a father, I need to give financial support to my family. So, I would be busy with my job. But domestic chores are not my primary responsibilities. My wife does it, and we also have a housemaid. Now, though my wife works outside, and I respect her career, I cannot replace her in my position by doing her domestic responsibilities. It is a bit complicated you know…

Meher's, Rumana's and Hasan's experiences show how deeply the male-female roles of breadwinner versus carer impact everyday household activities and maintain conventional gender hierarchies. When individuals conform to gender roles, it might be done unquestionably and may occasionally be unintended (Martin, 2003). Martin (2003) states that women are either in inferior structural situations that allow active resistance to the gender

order or are willing to perform gender in expected ways because disrupting it is "deviant" (p. 246-247).

However, the data also highlight some changes in traditional childcare administration. The respondents indicated changes in childcare practice (e.g., employing housemaids) and husbands' and in-laws' assistance for working mothers. The composition of the family unit, particularly as nuclear families, necessitates revisions of gender relations around childcare. Most working mothers and fathers I interviewed are from nuclear families, but they grew up in extended households. These family composition changes affected working parents' childcare management. As Sujana states:

Sujana:

> Now I live in a nuclear family [that includes her husband, one child and herself]. I need someone to take care of my child during my office hours. Therefore, as an alternative, we hired a full-time housekeeper. She watches over my child when I am away.

Sujana continued that she was reared by her mothers, grandmothers, and other relatives. However, Sujana also stated that the shifting family composition has placed her in a precarious situation that she is dissatisfied with the maid's care for her child. Sujana believes that parental or relative care is better than maidservant's care. She also remarked that her maidservant occasionally tormented her child when she failed to manage the youngster owing to a lack of tolerance and childcare skills. Mira, a mother of three children commented:

Mira:

> I lived with my extended family when my first child was born. However, before the birth of my second kid, I switched to a nuclear family. I hired a housekeeper to look after my kids while I work. However, I used a wireless CC-TV camera to monitor my child from my office…

While not directly related to this study's primary purpose, it is interesting to note the on-going feminisation of childcare, where a patriarchal society replaces biological mothers with economised, feminised labour, resulting in childcare inequity. Such alternatives do not challenge the patriarchal system in which fathers' "childcare role" (i.e. breadwinner) is unquestioned. Given Bangladesh's high poverty rate, though this culturally specific childcare option is available comparatively cheaply, hiring a maid for childcare is not a better alternative or a step toward easing the second shift for working mothers.

However, in the case of Sujana and Mira, they both agreed that living in a nuclear family has benefited their job prospects. Because they no longer need to devote time to caring for in-laws regularly (e.g., the husband's parents, his siblings, etc.), allowing them to save time. But again, their nuclear family structure placed them in a challenging situation, finding alternative childcare in their absence. This problem is exacerbated due to a lack of formal care managed by the state or relevant organisations. As a result, Mira, Sujana, and several other mothers reported relocating to their natal family, kin, or in-law family. For example, Jennifer adds:

Jenifer:

> It was practically impossible for me to manage my children while working outside. I never imagined that maidservant could handle my children during my absence. So, I moved next to my mother's house. But it is a bit far from my office, but it's okay, you know, I need a suitable alternative. I can count on my parents for my child's care.

Jenifer dropped off her daughter at her mother's house before work. She felt secure with her baby on her mother's lap. Since her parents live in another city, Mira moved near her maternal aunt's house, while Sujana moved near her husband's cousin's residence. All of them told me that, although this relocation allowed them to raise their children in a safe atmosphere, it was difficult because their offices were distant from their relocated residence. They work the same amount at home and work, even though traffic and commuting times have increased. This indicates that the strength of collectivistic family lives or kinship bonds has not lessened but has been reshaped in Bangladesh, where the culturally specific family devotion schema remains significant in mothers' lives. This fresh insight suggests an interesting paradox regarding how traditional values are utilised by contemporary Bangladeshi mothers to achieve relatively untraditional goals, e.g. mothers' paid employment. Such paradox signifies the changes in gender norms and, simultaneously, the resistance to changes.

6.4. FATHER'S INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDCARE

Noticeably, more households now have fathers and mothers working in Bangladesh or elsewhere. As a result, modern families-especially urban middle-class ones-often faces difficulties in following the historical and frequently stereotypical division of labour. Even though working women place a high demand on fathers to help with childcare, this desire is nonetheless constrained by the gendered work devotion schema that upholds fathers' breadwinner roles intact (Yoon & Park, 2022; Dean et al., 2013). As discussed in the previous section, the family devotion schema consistently normalizes women's care

demands, notwithstanding their participation in the labour market, which can escalate tension among working parents.

Contemporary fatherhood research does highlight men's caregiving, as well as breadwinning experiences, though mainly in the Western context (Cortes & Pan, 2020; Valiquette-Tessier et al., 2019; Acker, 2011; Gregory & Milner, 2011), but little research has looked at the emerging phenomenon of 'involved fatherhood' within diverse cultural circumstances (Trivedi, & Bose, 2018; Kwon & Roy, 2007) particularly for South Asian fathers raised in typically patriarchal contexts. Sabur (2019) points to this gap in the context of Bangladesh, that "Little systematic work has been conducted on fatherhood in South Asia, specifically in Bangladesh" (p. 26).

I recruited eleven working fathers of small children whose wives, apart from two cases, are working women. One was a stay-at-home wife who quit her job when her first child was born, while the other never worked. Although the current study's primary focus was on mothers of young children, working fathers of young children were included to explore whether fathers' engagement in managing domestic responsibilities, including childcare, converged or diverged with the increased rate of working mothers of young children in the current Bangladeshi labour market. While interviewed mothers in this research gave information about their husbands' family involvement, fathers' own stories offered another source of rich data about the ways of navigation concerning their family and paid work responsibilities.

For married couples, the conventional perception is that parenthood entails sacrificing personal and leisure time in favour of greater housework and childcare (Cortes & Pan, 2020). As noted, most mothers of young children experience noticeable change, as they frequently interrupt or substantially curtail their employment often to the detriment of their paid work and income level (Williamson et al., 2023). While several studies in developed nations show that new fathers' household duties and childcare have increased (Jayakody & Phuong, 2013; White, 1994), fatherhood appears to be largely unaffected in Bangladesh, even though mothers have increased their labour market participation (Hamadani & Tofail, 2014; Jesmin & Seward, 2013; Ball & Wahedi, 2010). In fact, how working fathers and mothers divide and adjust their domestic obligations and childcare responsibilities is a significant driver of expanding gender inequalities in the labour market over their lives (Sabur, 2019; Seward & Stanley-Stevens, 2014; Williams, 2008).

Practically all of the fathers I spoke with (except one) have had significant professional success. Raihan, who works in a private firm as an Assistant Manager and is a father of one daughter, shared:

Raihan:

> …of course, I place a higher value on my professional success. My wife can manage the household and children despite working full-time [she is a high school teacher]. My involvement grew slightly after the birth of our child, but I would say it is still not primarily focused on childcare and domestic labour. But I sometimes shop for the daily necessities of the family. I also play with my children on occasion and take them outside on weekends.

Clearly, Raihan thinks his wife can handle most housework and childcare. Despite his wife working full-time, he did not explain why his family maintained such gender norms. Instead, he emphasised his primary breadwinner role, which fits the Bangladeshi fatherhood ideal and is resistant to change. Kawser, another father, echoed:

Kawser:

> …not sure…what to say (laughing). But it [childcare] is not random. My wife oversees 90% of the household chores, I guess… I agree that my prime focus is earning money. I have not thought yet deeply about my domestic obligation. It might be we are used seeing this gender division.

Raihan and Kawser's stories sit firmly within the work devotion schema (Blair-Loy, 2003), wherein both believe their primary duty is to provide for the family's financial well-being (Cech et al., 2016; Bosoni, 2014). None of them even seemed worried about their lesser participation in childcare or domestic chores. The widely held cultural beliefs about mothers' and fathers' different roles in the traditional family structure of Bangladesh are taken for granted as publicly shared knowledge (Sabur, 2019; Hussein, 2017). However, to know more from them in this tandem, I asked follow-up questions, e.g., does the increased number of children also increase fathers' sense of family responsibility? Responses included the following:

Raihan:

> … [to be honest]… I was more serious before having my first child. I assumed my wife had handled paternity-related tasks without my enough assistance during the birth of my second child. But I was aware of everything, despite the fact that I needed to concentrate on my professional achievement.

Like Raihan, Kawser stated that his cooperation did not increase that much with the birth of his second child. They both reported that their overall time spent and participation in family tasks grew marginally after their second child's birth. However, none of them agreed that changing their status from non-father to father or having more children had an impact on their labour market key outcomes, e.g., wages, promotion, and so on. Similar knowledge was also shared by other fathers I spoke with. For instance:

Farhan:

> Before having kids, we had an equal contribution to the family. She used to work 50%, and I used to cover the other 50%, but after having babies, her workload significantly increased. She had more responsibilities for the baby than I did. The workload was around 80% for her, and maybe I did only 20%.

I followed up with Farhan's responses by asking the following questions: "Are these changes due to your lack of cooperation in the family tasks after having the child, or have you become busier with your professional achievement? Have you felt any pressure in renegotiation with your wife regarding these family tasks?" Farhan responded:

Farhan:

> …No, I did not face any pressure in renegotiating. Generally, in Bangladesh, we see that maximum wives or families do not understand this fact or the husband's work, but in my case, I would say I am lucky. My wife and I both are from the same background. …she studied IT at Bengaluru University, and my work was IT-based, so she understood my work pressure and responsibilities. She knew my working pattern, and I knew hers, so there were no problems between us in this case.

However, it was not clear why Farhan felt he was lucky. One of the two options can be true, e.g., his wife's dedication to family and loyalty to him and doing the 'double shifts'. Another option can be even though Farhan has become the father of two children; his career progress remained unaffected. However, more stories revealed how ideal fatherhood in Bangladesh still works, keeping them away from childcare and domestic obligation and not affecting their professional lives. Abir is a father of one child who works for a government bank states:

Abir:

> …nothing much has changed. Only the change is I used to come earlier before office time but nowadays I become late sometimes. But when I am delayed in reaching the office, I usually make up for this by overstaying that amount of time after covering the usual office hours.

I questioned Abir about his concern for the family and the child's care during his delay in returning home due to his prolonged stay on the workplace grounds. Abir replied, "...not that

much...I think I should sacrifice my family for my career advancement." Clearly, Farhan, Abir, and Raihan can all focus heavily on career advancement and there are no significant pressures connected to childcare responsibilities. Further, their expectations that their wives will sacrifice their careers to take care of the family reflect how they prioritize the work devotion schema for them and the family devotion schema for their wives (Mosseri, 2019; Blair-Loy & Cech, 2017).

Another question sought to ascertain whether working fathers were prepared to recognize and accept a reversal of the gender order, where mothers would be the primary breadwinners, earning more than their husbands, with husbands assuming a greater portion of childcare and domestic tasks. Perhaps unsurprisingly, more mothers supported this practice and more fathers opposed this inversion of traditionally gendered parenting ideals in Bangladesh indicating no significant transformation to 'involved fatherhood'. For instance, a father who works in an NGO stated:

Muhit:

> …If I am honest, I would feel ashamed to be at home with no paid work other than to take care of my child. I think we, the male[s] are not ready yet to accept this reversal of gender division. This has more social implications than personal.

Another father I interviewed who is an education officer in the primary and secondary education sector of the Bangladesh government, echoed:

Imtiaz:

> Without a doubt, I would be humiliated. Because our society stigmatises a male who stays at home while his wife works outside. He is shunned and defamed as a result. He is regarded as a male without personality, and he becomes the target of mocking.

Imtiaz's quote illustrates the intense pressure thrust upon men in Bangladesh to maintain a sense of hegemonic masculinity that is connected solely to their economic position within the family. Many fathers expressed concern about their male identity if they cannot financially support their families. Thus, findings reveal that while Bangladeshi society has become more receptive to mothers engaging in the labour market, as long as they do not relinquish family responsibilities, patriarchal culture has not abandoned traditional notions of manhood. Antiquated notions of manhood ensure fathers remain the head of the family, as does a culture of shaming men who engage in "feminine" activities (e.g., doing household work) or other "feminine" stigmas (e.g., not making money).

Thus, the fathers' comments demonstrate how their masculine identity has influenced their allegiances to the work devotion schema, resulting in an active mechanism of gender construction. Most of the interviewed fathers fear losing their status as the family's primary breadwinner. As interviewees Muhit and Imtiaz explicate, an "acceptable" male earns his masculine status or is dishonoured away from it through publicly shared knowledge of socially accepted gender roles. Muhit notes, "I would feel ashamed to be at home with no paid work", and Imtiaz adds that when a wife works and out-earns her husband, the husband is "shunned and defamed." Idealised masculinity in Bangladesh relies heavily on publicly acknowledged working status where husbands out-rank (or out-earn) their wives. These hegemonic gender roles go unquestioned and are quite universal, although other scholars have added cultural interpretations to them.

In Bangladesh, successful males, also known as "sofol purush" are those who are economically stable and successful (Imtiaz, 2022), reflective of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). Executing their main breadwinner position in the heterosexual household is the primary characteristic that defines their status as "sofol purush". Thus a father's function as an economic provider naturalises masculinity in Bangladesh and necessitates a normalized conception of the everyday practices and experiences of *being a man.*

Although the symbolic representation of a "sofol purush" in Bangladesh is perpetuated in many aspects through religious, economic, and political ideologies (Imtiaz, 2022), the current project focuses predominantly on how the work devotion schema is inextricably intertwined with working fathers' masculine identity, thereby affecting the likelihood of mothers' labour market equal participation and outcomes. My findings demonstrate that fathers' work devotion is so hegemonic that it disproportionately hinders working mothers' progress in the labour market. Eight out of eleven interviewed fathers shared that they spend a significant portion of their day labouring away at the workplace, as this is the primary focus of their daily schedule. One father (Hasan) explained, "...I am a man. My status or manhood depends on the success of my career." Another father (Muhit) echoed a similar opinion, "I need to take financial responsibility for my family because I am committed to my family for that. I remain busy for whole day, even after the evening sometimes. So, I cannot take responsibility for domestic tasks or childcare. In Bangladesh, this does not go with a man." Clearly, there is a publicly induced pressure that Bangladeshi men succumb to and that adversely impacts their wives' occupational opportunities.

Although this hegemonic, masculine culture reflects the male breadwinner model in the East and the West (see Ciccia & Bleijendbergh, 2014; Seward & Rush, 2016; Johansson, 2008), Bangladesh carries some cultural uniqueness. Unlike in many Western societies, idealised masculinity here is also shaped by Muslim religiosity (with similarities to Hinduism), where family life must consist of compulsory heterosexual marriage. In Muslim society, the father provides economic support, resulting in heteronormative masculinity (though I agree with cross-cultural variances in different Muslim groups, see Pletz, 2021). The interviewed fathers did not say explicitly, but several said that not supporting the family would violate religious traditions. One of these transgressions is fathers' dread of losing authority over their wives and children if they fail to support the family financially. For instance, Arman states: "…well, I cannot avoid duty to my wife and children, even to parents. As a Muslim, I personally feel this pressure. I cannot pressure my wife to earn money and take our responsibility..." However, Arman allowed his wife to work outside (she is a government employee). If his wife follows religious and family values, Arman is fine with her working for cash. In Islam, husbands or fathers (before marriage) must provide shelter, food, clothes, medical care, and more for their wives and children. Husbands or fathers are also considered their wives and children's protectors and guardians (Hamadani & Tofail, 2014). Therefore, when married men fail to play these duties, especially the role of financial provider in the family, they feel moral and social pressure in Bangladesh. In turn, such failure is also socially stigmatized, affecting their authoritative position in the family, especially over the wife. These findings align considerably with Connell's (1985) earlier approach to hegemonic masculinity, in which men risk losing their superordinate status over women (sometimes even over other men) if they do not conform to the hegemonic system and ideology.

However, the interpretation of such Islamic norms has many critiques. For instance, though men and women have distinct rights and duties to one another, Islam also emphasises equality between men and women. In Islam, it was stated that marrying a woman does not mean hiring a servant. Women are not subject to men's oppression; instead, one will support another and love and respect each other (Bani & Pate., 2015). But as Islamic countries are prehistorically male-dominated and patriarchy is well established, misinterpretation of Islamic norms and regulations often takes place by placing women in secondary positions to men in society. However, there is significant variation in how individuals personally internalise these norms and regulations.The current study also finds varied reactions among

participants regarding the internalization of Islamic norms. For instance, Zaman, a father of two children, noted:

Zaman:

> Both energies are working here, I would say. At one point, I am not able to play my role fully. But for that, I won't say I felt guilty rather than incomplete. The sense of incompleteness works in me. I never think that I am earning, so those are not responsibilities to share with my wife. On the other hand, my wife is making less money, and her role would be different than mine. I feel and think that it is a matter of joint responsibilities.

Zaman, a UN employee in Nairobi, was interviewed while his family was in Dhaka. Stressed that he could not do parenting and home duties, Zaman said it was his incompleteness but not guilt. Despite Zaman's (and some other fathers') empathy for his wife, her capacity for paid employment remained devalued, providing compelling evidence that devotion schemas adversely affect mothers' labour market goals more than those of fathers.

Out of the eleven fathers I interviewed, only one father said that his profession was affected substantially due to family responsibilities and childcare issues. Shamim, a father of one child (3.5 years) reported that he worked in multinational companies (though he resigned later) while his wife worked for an NGO. But when their baby was born, they found it very difficult to navigate their family and work-life as they had expected. As Shamim shared, "…to be honest, we felt guilty about leaving our baby home during long office hours at [8 hours, though it took more due to a traffic jam]. Because getting a job [again] for a mother is difficult, though, for a father, it is not that difficult… [you know]."

Subtle, but perhaps still significant changes in fathers' roles regarding childcare and domestic work were echoed by a few more interviewed fathers. Titas, a father of one child states: "Yes… there are some changes. Especially less sleeping after the child was born. When my son was crying at night, I used to stroll him on my lap and let him fall asleep…" Likewise, Hasan echoed:

Hasan:

> As far as childcare is concerned, of course, I share the responsibilities with my wife. When I do the minor tasks like brushing my son's teeth, washing him and feeding him, and playing with him, my wife could manage her other household tasks faster and have time for resting for a while.

Titas's and Hasan's experiences indicate that the sharing of domestic chores and childcare by Bangladeshi working fathers is changing, positively affecting their wives' labour market, at

least compared to their previous generation. When most mothers similarly questioned their husbands' engagement in childcare management and acknowledged that it was frustrating. However, a few interviewed mothers said that they have a better understanding of the couple's life which helps them to continue their paid work even after being a mother. For instance, Tania, a mother of one child who is an assistant professor at the university, shared: "My husband had a weekend of Fridays and Saturdays, so I took an overload of work on Saturdays. It allowed me to organize my work for the whole week as my husband used to look after the baby…." Similarly, Jenifer noted: "Though not equally, my husband takes some loads. When I have an official meeting during extra hours or have a workload, my husband suggests to the housemaid what to cook, and what the baby's food would be, play with the baby…"

However, these findings contradict most others' experiences shared with me, in which questions were raised about the family's masculine and feminine types of work. For example, some working mothers in this study reported that their husbands like to play with children, take them out for walking or playing, guide their education, etc. Related research over the past few years has identified shifts in gender roles that stem from employment market changes, moves to nuclear families and other social factors (Yoon & Park, 2022; Diniz et al., 2021). Rakotomanana et al. (2020) found evidence of involved fathers who play with children, educate them, change their clothes, and wash their hands, among other roles.

Despite these positive changes, caring work within the family is still gendered, as fathers are less likely to engage in domestic chores that are more challenging and time-consuming, such as bathing and toilet training children. To this end, we are seeing new iterations of masculinised and feminised housework. For instance, more progressive fathers, like Titas and Hasan, are still more likely to engage in easier and less time-consuming childcare work. Thus, there is role division, even when progressive men take on more fatherhood roles and are more likely to engage in easier and less time-consuming childcare work, which is gendered.

Finally, the findings of this particular chapter conclude that, although dual-earner families have become more prevalent in recent decades, culturally specific masculine norms in Bangladesh continue to be evident, e.g., husbands are the principal breadwinners, guardians and protectors of wives or children. These novel findings imply that the family devotion schema for Bangladeshi working mothers and the work devotion schema for Bangladeshi

working fathers are powerful analytical tools, though the reflection of these schemas is culturally specific in Bangladesh.

6.5. CONCLUDING REMARKS OF THE CHAPTER

In this chapter, I focused on the more practical aspects of mothers' and fathers' everyday lives that result from the transition to motherhood and fatherhood, which intersect parental status and influence work goals. Revisiting the concept of "family and work devotion schemas" produced varied responses from working mothers and fathers, e.g., some disagreed, some contested, and still others embraced these schemas. Although the complete reverse (e.g., family devotion for fathers and work devotion for mothers) did not emerge in the study, modest changes in gender norms among a few interviewees indicate decreases in intensity of these schemas affecting mothers' labour market goals affirmatively.

The chapter began by elucidating working mothers' transition with pregnancy challenges rooted in gender stereotypes that limit women's public visibility and labour market engagement. In this moment of transition, there are new obstacles related to constrained freedoms, and for many mothers, motherhood continues to be a barrier to integrating family and work commitments. My findings suggest that though a few mothers felt encouraged by their husbands' and in-laws' families, most felt pressure to choose family over career due to constrained freedom. However, it is also worth noting that pregnant women's visibility in public was nearly forbidden until two or three decades ago in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, such old-age gender stereotypes are gradually challenged and contested by Bangladeshi mothers. As a result, though the mothers' presence is still stigmatised, the growing number of those participating in the public sphere, including their labour market engagement, has enabled alternative life choices and self-fulfilment struggles over time (e.g., being a mother and worker).

Findings also reveal that mothers in Bangladesh, regardless of their socioeconomic status, are aware of and hold themselves accountable to the ideology of 'intensive mothering' and perform 'second shift' irrespective of whether they resist or accept it, having to grapple with rhetoric that still preaches unconditional love, self-sacrifice and undivided care of children indicating their allegiances to family devotion schema. Motherhood clearly has detrimental effects on mothers' career paths and equal outcomes as they feel frequent pressure and stress to comply with family commitments over their career goals during their pregnancy transition. At the same time, discourse on intensive mothering is constructed to appear beneficial for

middle-class women by providing a rationale for their extensive mothering roles to be valued, allowing them paid work outside, albeit constrained paid work. Thus, the trade-off between childcare and career success remains intractable for many mothers I have interviewed in this study.

Regarding fathers, findings suggest that parenting has remained contested between old traditions and new demands of fathering with the rise in mothers' labour market engagement. This contestation was evident to fathers, mothers, and professionals I interviewed. The findings suggest that a change has fragmented Bangladeshi fathers into diverse, somewhat polarised forms of fatherhood: the conventional, who continues to establish his authority in breadwinning, policing, and secondary parenting; and the new, who contribute modestly to housework and childcare. These fragmentations result from inconsistencies between work and family devotion schemas, where workplace culture contradicts family values in Bangladesh. Fathers who reject the traditional image of the peripheral father and wish to be more attentive, engaged, and emotionally connected face cultural constraints ingrained in masculine and feminine roles that restrain them from adopting progressive ways of fathering. These discussions have resulted in a complex redefinition of what it means to be a father in Bangladesh today, incorporating past and present social expectations. But to be clear, this fatherly fragmentation still sits in the past, as even those fathers rejecting traditional parenting roles feel compelled not to jump fully into parenthood and relinquish their identities as workers.

As such, working mothers in this study cared for their children in a very collectivist and self-sacrificing manner, considering and prioritising their children's and their family's interests; fathers remained much more individualistic. Moreover, family and work devotion schemas restrained mothers' agency as they became entangled in a patriarchal bargain. In this patriarchal bargain, the young bride (mother) often competes with her mother-in-law to win favour from or control over her husband. But in such a bargain, the mother-in-law maintains more power and guardianship due to her high rank in the family compared to the young mother or bride. Thus, the mothers-in-law gain authority in the family, and in doing so, they reinforce patriarchy (Gram et al., 2018; Kandiyoti, 1988); it is the young working mothers who pay the patriarchal price. On the other hand, some mothers who were in heavy conflict with their in-law's families (especially with their mother-in-law) left the extended family and formed a nuclear family. In these cases, mothers exercised greater agency, making autonomous decisions to gain more independence. These autonomous and agential pursuits

helped legitimise their class privilege, responding to a structure that constructs them both as mothers and paid workers that is different from previous generations' mothers,

However, mothers' pushes for independence did not operate in isolation. For instance, working mothers who left extended families and formed nuclear families were obliged to restore links with their in-laws or relatives by relocating their residences to them for childcare management, which enabled their paid work retention. Thus, the collectivistic nature of Bangladeshi family values was re-imposed by reshaping the kinship system rather than diminishing it. Similarly, although some working mothers could substitute their childcare responsibilities by using different options (e.g., appointing housemates, putting the child off with relatives during office hours, etc.), they could not avoid domestic chores and childcare obligations fully. Thus, their choices still had occupational repercussions.

Conversely, fathers' narratives demonstrated an exercise of agency in individualistic ways. They did this, for example, by pursuing time with children that best suited their individual needs and preferences but locating them within the interests of their children, family and workplace. For example, those fathers who reported that they were participating heavily in their familial roles also reported that their masculinity was questioned, showcasing the power of Bangladesh's patriarchal culture on men. Although fathers exercised agency in individualised ways, it did not diminish their moral identities as Bangladeshi fathers and family members because they pursued and claimed time with children for the sake of themselves, their children, and their own families, resulting in their wives' labour marketing cooperation.

The next chapter investigates mothers' obstacles to maintaining paid work in Bangladesh, focusing on government policies and parents' lived experiences, mainly considering the work devotion schema.

7.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the challenges mothers of small children encounter in continuing paid work in contemporary Bangladesh, focusing on how labour market laws and regulations ingrained in the work devotion schema both *facilitate and constrain* the professional aspirations of working mothers. As discussed in Chapter 2, mothers of small children, as a particular group, face greater labour market inequalities because the publicly shared knowledge of motherhood is deeply related to the family devotion schema and incompatible with the work devotion schema (Mosseri, 2019; Dean et al., 2013; Blair-Loy, 2003). So, broadly, through this chapter, I investigate how gender norms, parenthood, and work are constructed in public policies, revealing why current public policies in Bangladesh, especially the maternity leave scheme and childcare legislation, are insufficient to achieve mothers' equal labour participation and outcomes.

The chapter is divided into three sub-sections. The first part of the chapter looks at how participants react to state policies and their perceptions of their implications for women's employment (work devotion schema) as balanced against their home life (family devotion schema). It further highlights the limitations and gaps of existing public policies that significantly affect labour market participation and outcomes for mothers of small children. Following this, I draw on my interview data to focus on the particular context of maternity and related policies comparing regulations in the public and private employment sectors. This section also sheds light on how workplace organisations respond to maternity leave policies for their employees and how these responses intersect with gender norms and resource availability through the voices of study interviewees. The chapter's final section examines public and private childcare provisions for working mothers and their career implications. The section concludes with how societal stigmas and gender stereotypes connected with motherhood and fatherhood identities and domestic labour segregation might impact childcare discourses in Bangladesh.

7.2. MATERNITY LAWS AND POLICIES OF THE STATE

Many dual-earner couples struggle to balance work and family in today's society, resulting in poor labour market participation (see Hook & Paek, 2020; Blair-Loy & Cech, 2017; Dieckhoff et al., 2015), involving outcomes such as withdrawal from paid employment, low levels of job satisfaction, income reductions, declines in psychological and physiological well-being, and impaired child development (Busby, 2018; Cech & Blair-Loy, 2014). Mothers of young children are the most vulnerable cohort in facing such consequences, as demonstrated by a growing body of empirical studies conducted in cross-cultural settings (Kuitto et al., 2019; Notten et al., 2017). In fact, state policies that support a dual-career model, such as maternal and childcare services, parental leave programs, health protection for pregnant women, adequate breastfeeding facilities, employment protection, and non-discrimination, may reduce the stress of balancing work and family life (Rocha, 2020; Won, 2016; Smith, 2013). Won (2016) noted that childcare leave, day-care programs, and financial aid have been legislated to help working mothers achieve their career goals. Likewise, Smith (2013) contends that state efforts have embraced paid maternity leave, and childcare accessibility regulations are vital to understanding women's paid employment. Brady et al. (2020) add that governments (in 12 rich democratic countries) have also enhanced work-family policies to address gender-based labour market inequalities. Thus, several studies indicated that the state's incentives, laws, and claim rights to maternity facilities affect women's family formation and work-life balance decisions, though predominantly in Western nations.

However, the extent and nature of support offered by existing state policy packages vary significantly in cross-cultural settings. Particularly, the two most well-known work-family policies, e.g., paid parental leave and publicly supported childcare, exhibit significant cross-national and historical diversity (Tonelli & Huinink, 2021; Kuitto et al., 2019; Kluve & Tamm, 2013). Some countries pay mothers their entire wages for the weeks that they are on maternity leave. Israel, Estonia, Chile, Germany, Costa Rica, Croatia, Mexico, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Poland, and Spain are among these countries. These countries provide working mothers with 100% of their salaries during the required weeks of maternity leave, which range from 6 weeks in Portugal to 30 weeks in Croatia. Other nations, such as Norway, France, and Bulgaria, mandate exceptionally high percentages of total salaries paid to working women during maternity leave, with Norway requiring 94%, France 98%, and Bulgaria 98% (World Population Review, 2022, p.1).

Cross-national diversity in state policies and maternal employment patterns provides a framework for examining policy effects on mothers of young children's job outcomes (Brady et al., 2020; Budig et al., 2012). In fact, the growth in women's labour force participation rates since the 1960s, spurred partly by neoliberal objectives, could reduce gender disparities. Nevertheless, there is still intense criticism over the effects of neoliberal goals with regard to reducing gender disparities in the workforce. Critics contend that measures like those implemented in various countries result in substantial compromises to lessen inequality, which may have varying effects on women from different social classes (Laruffa, 2023; Mandel, 2012; Mandel & Shalev, 2009a). According to these analysts, social programmes often have unforeseen repercussions. For example, they separate women into "female ghettos" in the public sector, ostensibly to reduce work-family problems but without questioning the allocation of childcare between men and women, the growing statistical discrimination among employers, and cementing the glass ceiling (Mandel & Shalev, 2009a; Morgan, 2005). The gains made by such policies in boosting paid employment choices for mothers of small children are, thus, distorted when the same regulations stifle their career opportunities, according to at least some of these analysts (e.g., Morgan, 2005).

In Bangladesh, more women are now employed than in the past (Bellani et al., 2023; Bidisha et al., 2022). Given that Bangladesh is a dominantly heterosexual society and "women's respectability" is associated with motherhood (Hussein, 2017), working women are pressured to either be mothers or be in the process of becoming mothers. Bangladesh has faced significant challenges due to the recent surge in maternal employment because the widely held cultural tradition has unquestioningly accepted a rigid separation between the public (work for father) and private space (family for mother) as the norm. The lack of labour market policies (e.g., maternity leave, state-funded day-care facilities, etc.) might exacerbate the ubiquity of gender norms, causing working mothers to scale back from paid work after the birth of their child.

My data analysis shows that though women were not subject to policy reforms at the very outset of the country's independence in 1971, they were gradually incorporated into a more public and citizen-like position (Rahman & Islam, 2019; Hossain, 2017). However, while it is true that women's citizenship is primarily determined by their existing or future status as mothers of the nation, this nevertheless implies that women are viewed as citizens with significant interests, concerns, and rights, including labour market rights.

Previous literature (e.g., Baker, 1997) notes that government policy on pregnancy and child-rearing in the workplace distinguishes between unpaid leave and paid benefits. The first approach compensates working mothers for lost pay during pregnancy and acknowledges pregnancy's medical effects. The second approach includes gender-neutral programs to compensate lost wages during childbirth and promote collaborative parenting. Third, the laissez-faire view maintains that childbirth is a private duty for which neither employers nor the government are liable for lost wages. Bangladesh practices all models, even though conceptually it adopted the first approach. Bangladesh has gradually changed its maternity policy to promote women's labour market quality and eliminate inequalities between mothers and others (e.g., fathers and childless women). The state's Action Plan prioritizes economic sustainability, work-life balance, and well-being. This study concentrates on the first two approaches since they affect women's careers and families and are directly influenced by work and family devotion schemas.

Participants of all cohorts of the current study generally believed that paid employment played a substantial role in their overall life goals. However, experiences varied across cohorts, namely, the experiences between working mothers and fathers I interviewed. The findings of this study indicate that state legislation has evolved to provide protection and enhanced equality to some extent as the workplace in Bangladesh has transformed over the decades to accommodate a growing number of women. Nevertheless, it is still being determined how these statutory provisions of the labour market provide adequate support to all working mothers and fathers of young children to balance their work and family life.

Questions were asked about how supportive state laws and policies are for working mothers of young children. Interviewees offered a number of opinions, which at times conflicted with one another. Dr Rezwan, an editor of a newspaper who participated in this project as a key informant, noted:

Rezwan:

> …[you know]…state-funded childcare services are typically perceived as government welfare benefits to its citizens. But Bangladesh is still neither welfare nor woman-friendly. After the country got independence in 1971, the economy sank. With the rise of the RMG industry in the 1990s, we began to consider women's employment. Education has advanced significantly for women in the last three decades. The administration updated and enacted new legislation for working mothers. But these are not enough to protect their maternal rights or be equally beneficial to all. The existing maternity legislation is also rather vague.

Dr Rezwan also stated that the current situation for working mothers is chaotic. The State needed to develop long-term policies and goals on maternity benefits for working mothers with small children. However, this has yet to occur. Despite some changes throughout recent decades, Bangladesh's labour legislation has not been particularly robust. Bangladesh's century-old labour law system was adopted in 1881, while the Maternity Benefit Act (Bengal Act No.4) was adopted first in 1939 under the then-British administration. Subsequently, the Maternity Benefits Act underwent several amendments (see Chapter 3). Following independence in 1971, the Bangladesh government preserved the prior rules, and no significant changes to labour regulation occurred until the adoption of *Bangladesh Shromo Ain 2006* (Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006). The Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006 is a comprehensive enactment of the industrial relations system. It codifies existing labour laws to reduce duplication and inconsistency and has resulted in significant improvements to the industrial relations system so far, which I will discuss subsequently in this chapter.

However, the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, which consolidated all former labour laws, has skipped some maternity clauses. For example, current maternity rules have numerous ambiguities that make it difficult to include all employed mothers who require maternity benefits. The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006, Chapter IV, entitled Maternity Benefit, pertains to workers who perform manual labour in factories among other places. This provision was so marginalized that it excluded mothers who were engaged in service or managerial jobs. The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006, Chapter I, Section 2 (Lxv) defines a worker as:

> "Any person including an apprentice employed in any establishment or industry, either directly or through a contractor, to do any skilled, unskilled, manual, technical, trade promotional or clerical work for hire or reward, whether the terms of employment be expressed or implied, but does not include a person employed mainly in a managerial or administrative capacity."

> - (The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006)

Though the Labour Act 2006 increased maternity leave from 12 weeks to 16 which was later increased to 24 weeks (according to the amendment of 2013), it did not do so for every employee. This limited policy capacity of the state created extensive ambiguity among employees across different sectors of the labour market (as the law did not make it clear how the maternity leave would be allocated, especially for white-collar employees in the private sector). In this vein, key informant barrister Sadia shared:

Sadia:

> The current Maternity leave laws (Contained in Labour Act, 2006) are more perplexing than the preceding one [Maternity Benefits Act, 1939].The earlier Maternity Benefits Act (1939) was practised with a subtle explanation, but those have been condensed into only two sections, Sections 45 and 46 of the current Labour Act 2006. These often create ambiguity when practised because many explanations are missing or unclear.

Barrister Sadia added that the previous Maternity Act (1939) covered all categories of female workers, including industrial workers and others. Therefore, the Maternity Act (1939) was more broad and clear than contemporary maternity provisions. Barrister Sadia further noted that such confusion in the maternity laws has resulted in additional confusion at the practice level. Some mothers I interviewed shared similar experiences. For instance, Nafisa, a mother of one child who works in a private firm stated:

Nafisa:

> I was granted four months of maternity leaves. Though I argued for six months as per the government rule, my employer informed me that their policy is for four months, and six months of maternity leave is not mandatory for them.

Several other mothers interviewed reported similar experiences, especially those who work for private organisations. Findings reveal that the existing maternity regulations are not inclusive because they do not protect all employed mothers equally. When I asked why the current maternity policy is not inclusive, some key informants reported that such policy formations are influenced by gender norms in which childcare is still considered a family responsibility. Professor Bidisha believes that "…women's position in top management does not reflect their labour market engagement, and women are mostly excluded from policymaking." She added that apart from such structural problems, our everyday lives are profoundly gendered, with mothers constructed as perfect for domestic tasks. Samia, a key informant, stated that the current maternity laws have several drawbacks. One of them is that they do not include informal workers, despite their abundance in Bangladesh, particularly among poor mothers. Barrister Sadia pointed out that our existing maternity provisions failed to protect employed mothers with maternity facilities engaged in tea-producing industries.

In fact, the overall rule of law in Bangladesh is very ineffective due to its fragile democratic system. Barrister Miti, another key informant noted: "The weaker or more vulnerable people are in today's environment, the fewer legal protections they receive in Bangladesh." So, when state policies are not inclusive and effective, it creates and sustains discrimination.

Additionally, these findings corroborate prior research in a cross-cultural context. For instance, Horwood et al. (2021) highlighted that over 60% of working women globally work in the informal economy, which is growing, especially in low-income nations. Casual workers do not get paid time off, sick, maternity leave, job stability and unemployment benefits. One of the major problematic issues in Bangladesh's labour market is the presence of informal or casual workers, particularly women who lack access to paid maternity leave (Bidisha et al., 2022). However, this study has not focused on these informal workers.

Another concern with Bangladeshi maternity regulations is the limiting of working couples' children. The current maternity regulation indicates that a government employee would be entitled to maternity leave for only two children (a similar limit for private sector employees is not specified). Maternity benefits cannot be used for a third child. This is a discriminatory clause of the existing maternity legislation, as businesses should not determine how many children a couple should have. Liana is a mother of two children and is an academician at a government college, states:

> …I wanted to have another child. But, I would no longer be eligible for government maternity leave benefits. This discriminatory law will affect both my children and me. The youngster will grow up feeling discriminated against because other siblings received government benefits, but he/she did not. [I would say]….this does not make sense.

In fact, when this law was passed, it generated extensive controversy, especially among religious groups in the country, who fiercely oppose any form of artificial birth control, which they believe is against Islam. On the other hand, supporters of this provision, including the government, asserted that it would help stymie overpopulation. Furthermore, they claimed that having fewer children would lead to working mothers accepting fewer cumulative penalties in their labour market outcomes, such as wages. A current parliament representative, Rubina Mira (MP), who also took part in this study as a key informant, advocated the government's maternity policy:

Rubina:

> The government took this decision because of downsizing the population. Bangladesh is an overpopulated country, and this is a message to all concerned so that they do not have many children. Such restriction on maternity leave will indirectly discourage parents from having more children in their families.

Rubina's comments did not explain how a country's population becomes a risk while many countries are experiencing declining birth rates (Bricker, 2021; Headey & Hodge, 2009). In

fact, maternity benefits for working parents aim to boost reproduction (Notten et al., 2017). But, unlike many other countries in the East and West, Bangladesh's policy goals are diametrically opposed to them. So, instead of investing in its people, the policy controls them through restrictive reproductive choices. Rubina further claims that while the government has reduced payments for a third child, a parent can still have children at their own expense. However, some interviewed mothers, fathers, and key informants felt this maternity benefits regulation is discriminatory and has both economic and social consequences on employed mothers.

Professor Bidisha discussed the problematic gender issues of Bangladesh's legal framework. She pointed out that our cultural backdrop of male dominance impacts labour regulations and their ramifications. The government's restriction on couples with more than two children receiving maternity benefits has several adverse effects on mothers. Recall from Chapter 4 the intensity of the patriarchal mind-set; mothers in Bangladesh face familial and social pressure to have children immediately after marriage along with son preference. Mothers with two daughters are under increased pressure to have more children, as a mother without a son is socially stigmatised in Bangladesh. After the daughter marries, sons represent the next generation in Bangladesh (Kabeer, 2011). Thus, when a policy fails to meet family or social expectations, someone must pay, e.g., mothers feel compulsion to have a son. In that case, working mothers may have to quit their jobs to meet their families' preference for sons.

Another deficit in Bangladesh's current family policy is the exclusion of fathers from parental leave. Currently, there are no facilities in place for fathers to take paternity leave. Nusrat, a former senior research and program officer of TIB[24] states, "…As the father is still considered the primary earner of the family, his leave for childcare carries negativity. Such cultural belief also affects our policy formation." Similar opinions were shared by other key informants and mothers.

In many nations, paternity leave regulations are intended to encourage fathers' involvement in childcare duties and eliminate gender specialization. Several countries such as Japan, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, Germany, and Canada have implemented father quotas for parental leave to achieve an equal allocation of childcare, housework, and employment between mothers and fathers (Tamm, 2018; O'Brien & Wall, 2017). Duvander et al. (2017) note that fathers' access to parental leave has been viewed as a necessity for gender equality in society in all Nordic nations, but particularly in Sweden and Norway. These quotas, often

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[24] Transparency International Bangladesh, a Germany-based International Organisation

known as "daddy months", encourage men to take time off and devote more time to childcare (Tamm, 2018). For instance, fathers in Japan are entitled to 52 weeks of benefits, the most substantial in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, representing around 60% of average gross income (Trevedi, 2018).

But again, even affirmative policy changes, e.g., the inclusion of paternity leave in some nations, failed to send strong signals about how work and family obligations have changed in the roles played by fathers as providers and mothers as caregivers. For instance, Halrynjo and Lyng (2009) noted that Norwegian mothers still utilise most of the leave, with 80% of mothers taking a whole year, compared to 82% of fathers taking only five weeks or less despite men having equal access to paid parental leave. They found that neither individual preferences nor external restrictions explain why highly educated women professionals leave lucrative occupations after having children. They concluded that the reasons, limitations, and circumstances of work-family adaptation shifts are firmly rooted in the competing devotions and rationalities of high-commitment employment and involved parenthood.

However, though there are disagreements about the father quota's actual implementation and its imperative effects, certain studies have indicated favourable outcomes when the State's legislation mandates paternity leave (Duvander et al., 2017; Boyer, 2017). Duvander and colleagues (2017) maintain that most fathers' stories revolved around positive experiences with leave, such as atypical caregiving and stepping away from paid work. Some fathers wished the break had lasted longer, but most were satisfied with the duration. Developing nations like Bangladesh have yet to consider this paternity leave. However, all participants in my study were asked why paternity leave is absent and how this legislative gap impacts mothers' labour market objectives in Bangladesh.

Papiya believes that this is a form of discrimination against Bangladeshi mothers. She noted that fathers' exclusion from parental leave policies implies that parenting is primarily the mothers' responsibility. This lack of state policies reinforces gender stereotypes about family culture. Papiya's statement illustrates the pressure on working mothers in Bangladesh to conform to the family devotion schema, given that fathers are not legally liable for neglecting domestic and childcare responsibilities (because fathers' leave is absent in parental policies, allowing them to evade mandatory childcare obligations). The majority of the female participants (some interviewed fathers' statements varied) acknowledged that the State's patriarchal nature is manifested by such policy-driven exemption of paternity leave, where

mothers are still viewed as the children's sole caregivers and the fathers are the primary providers.

Almost all mothers interviewed agreed that paternity leave should be made mandatory in state family policy. Cynthia claimed that the ideological taboo would be shaken when paternity leave is implemented. She further expressed:

Cynthia:

> …though mothers' participation in the job market has expanded, fathers' involvement in sharing family obligations, particularly childcare, has yet to converge in Bangladesh. Policymakers, in my opinion, should give this matter significant consideration.

Fathers were asked a similar question; they had a wide range of responses. Zaman, a father of two children, argues that "…paternity leave is no longer merely a Western trend but rather a necessity in every country, including Bangladesh." Shamim, another father of one child, who works in an NGO noted:

> I believe it is crucial; it is as if there was genuine trust; just getting to know the child 24 hours a day and witnessing her reactions provide more security and confidence.

Shamim added that when his baby was born, he took five days to leave, and his workplace allowed his paternity leave, though they do not have established policies for fathers. Both Shamim and Zaman admitted that they feel paternity leave is imperative in Bangladesh. However, most of the fathers interviewed disagreed with Zaman's and Shamim's viewpoints, claiming paternity leave would not be equally necessary for Bangladeshi fathers. For instance, Abir, a father of one child argued:

Abir:

> [You know]…someone in the family must be the main earner, and their paid job must be stable. Naturally, a mother cannot be since mothers have a stronger emotional and physical bond with their children…

In contrast, all the key informants, except one, believed that paternity leave is vital. Some discussed the operational and ideological difficulties that would impede proper implementation. For example, HR expert Musharrof agreed that we are still unable to provide paid maternity leave to all working mothers; paternity leave may not be a viable option at this time. As Professor Ainoon says:

> I think this is more of an ideological issue than a material one. The government feels the pressure as this public discourse is in the air, but our patriarchal society is not yet ready to accept such radical changes.

Other key informants noted similar opinions. For instance, Professor Bidisha remarked that Bangladesh remains a patriarchal society despite considerable progress in women's labour market participation. Because the glass ceiling prohibits women from attaining senior public policy positions in Bangladesh where laws are created, policies that liberate women from occupational obstacles are rarely created. Professor Ainoon's and Bidisha's realisations point to the patriarchal nature of Bangladesh's larger social structure. However, their realisation has support because the Bangladeshi society, culturally and politically, has yet to change its male dominance over women, even among legislators. For example, a current senior male Member of Parliament (MP) argued during a regular national Parliament session that the government should enact a law banning men from marrying working women.[25] He argued that one of the reasons for the high unemployment rate in the nation is that men are not getting jobs because women are filling those positions. However, his claim was turned down by most other parliamentarians. Nevertheless, his claim against working women exemplifies Bangladesh's pervasive patriarchal beliefs undermining women's equal labour market opportunities.

To conclude, individuals are subjected to enormous pressures because of social constructions of fatherhood in general, including public discourse about what makes "perfect fathering" and related legal frameworks that define fathers' connections with their children (Gregory & Milner, 2011). Attempts to encourage active fatherhood have been made explicitly and purposefully in Western policy debates, though sometimes these debates have little impact on actual practice (Gregory & Milner, 2011). Despite this shift in some nations' fatherhood policies, a new policy agenda has complicated the conflict between fathers' caring and breadwinner duties in contemporary Bangladesh. As a result, though paid maternity leave gained state credibility, father's exclusion remains a significant policy deficit.

7.3. MATERNITY LEAVE-IS THIS EQUAL FOR ALL?

As I stated earlier, Bangladesh is neither a woman-friendly nor a practising democratic state. In fact, Bangladeshi legislation has historically assumed a protectionist posture and

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[25] This news was published in a daily newspaper, "The Business Standard", on September 5, 2021

prohibited prenatal and postpartum employment[26] while providing scant protection for income, benefits, or reinstatement. The ubiquity of the gendered schema of inequality is still a harsh reality in Bangladesh (Heintz et al., 2018; Hussein, 2017; Kabeer, 2011). As a result, a semblance of normalcy has been established in practice, even though existing maternity care should provide equal opportunities to everyone eligible. Whichever model is in place, state policy should benefit working mothers to share their unpaid care and paid labour following shifting prevalent ideologies. However, such policy practicality has been a long way off in Bangladesh for decades. The state's current maternity laws and policies affect working parents differently concerning their class, geography, type of job, and government and non-government sectors. Interviewed mothers indicated a significant difference between government and non-government employees when they practised existing maternity paid leave benefits. Mothers working for the government reported less difficulty obtaining six months of paid maternity leave than mothers working for non-government employers.

For instance, Papiya, a mother of two children who are engaged in the police department of the Bangladesh government states:

Papiya:

> According to government regulations, I was entitled to six months of maternity leave. This leave has not been difficult for me to obtain. I wanted to get one month before the birth of my baby and then rest five months afterward. The office let me do whatever I wanted. So, it went well.

Papiya's stories reflected those of some other working mothers I spoke with, who indicated that taking advantage of paid maternity leave was not difficult at their workplace. I also asked Papiya and other mothers if they believed that the affirmation of their maternity leave negotiations was due to a shift in gender norms or to the statutory achievement of material support, such as paid maternity leave undertaken by the State. Papiya noted that State policies, such as six months of paid maternity leave, supported shifts in gendered norms. She further claimed that employed mothers with young children would find it difficult if the government had not enacted these laws and policies regarding maternity facilities. As a result, she feels that it is a significant step for the State to implement rules that facilitate working mothers to combine their work and family lives. Such findings are consistent with earlier studies. For instance, Chai et al. (2021) maintain that more generous maternity leave

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[26] Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006 illustrates that pregnant women are entitled to take time off work during the 8 weeks preceding their projected delivery date, and they are prohibited from working for 8 weeks after the day of delivery (ILO Report, 2011).

indicates shifting gender norms about paid work and encouraging gender parity in household economic decision-making for parents.

However, although Papiya's experiences, as well as those of a few other mothers who shared similar experiences, indicate that they used maternity leave smoothly, contributing to their work-family balance to some extent. My findings reveal that as government employees are united, powerful and they have strong trade union[27] for bargaining their rights, they enjoy more facilities including stable and extended (24 months) maternity leaves. But again, not all women employed in the government sector equally enjoy their maternity leave rights. For instance, in February 2019, in what became a national issue, Hosne Ara[28], a senior government officer, was compelled by her male boss to cease working on regular duties for an unidentified time due to her pregnancy. Although Hosne Ara eventually returned to her usual tasks in her workplace through the intervention of higher authorities, this discrimination against a pregnant woman portrays the patriarchal attitude and the gendered workplace still dominating in Bangladesh.

On the other hand, women engaged in private firms face more challenges overall than their counterparts in government. Thus the current statutory provisions of maternity leave and benefits do not equally benefit all working mothers. Adiba a mother of two children, who works in a private bank stated:

Adiba:

> It was difficult for me to obtain maternity leave in the way I desired. Though I wanted to get it two weeks before my C-section, my employer compelled me to take maternity leave one and a half months before. Even though I accompanied them through complex negotiations, I could not manage them.

I inquired why her organisation refused to comply with her request for maternity leave in the way she desired. She noted that her boss claimed she could not fulfill all of her duties to the office perfectly since she was pregnant. Instead, she should join soon after the birth of her child, when her performance would be comparable to that of her co-workers. Though Adiba disagreed with the management's opinion, she had to comply with their instructions, which illustrates the gendered power employers have over working mothers. Another mother, Mira, who works in a private bank, shared a similar experience: "When they got to know that I was

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[27] In Bangladesh, the government officers have trade unions which work as political parties' affiliated professional bodies. As a result, they become more powerful, especially while their party is in power.
[28] Hosne Ara was an Upzila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) at Narayanganj Sadar (A district of Bangladesh). Her male executive made her an officer on special duty (OSD), while she was pregnant *(Dhaka Tribune, February 13, 2019).*

pregnant, they did not welcome me. Though my immediate boss did not approach me directly, he implicitly discouraged me from continuing with the work. I was forced to take maternity leave two months before my delivery, though I wanted it before three weeks…" Mira's experience showcases how private employers dictate how much time is allocated for maternity leave. Other employed mothers of young children I interviewed shared similar challenges. Sujana, a journalist for the private TV channel, shared that when her boss heard about her pregnancy, he did not take it as normal:

Sujana:

> My immediate boss mentioned that journalism is challenging and that others might not be eager to share my work during my maternity leave. …Finally, he told me that he would hire someone else to take my position if I could not handle it. I should, therefore, be ready for any adverse consequences of becoming a mother…

Like Mira, Sujana's boss did not look at her pregnancy favourably on the grounds that her productivity might be impacted, threatening that he would hire someone else "if [Mira] could not handle it". The experiences of Adiba, Sujana, and Mira reveal a subtle patriarchal undertone concealed behind the discourse of fairness and productivity (for example, Sujana's supervisor's remark that 'others might not be eager to share my work' or Adiba's concern that 'she would not be able to meet her responsibilities'). These findings align with earlier findings conducted on the Bangladeshi labour market (e.g., Anam, 2008) as well as findings in a cross-national context (Williamson et al., 2023).

Overall, such gaps between the statutory provisions of the state and its proper implementation are caused by both states' and organisations' preferences for working fathers over working mothers, which are broadly divisible by assumptions about work and family devotion schema (Yoon & Park, 2022, Dean et al., 2013). Both policymakers and the personnel in workplaces who implement these policies are predominantly men, who consider maternity issues as mothers' personal matters. This finding is consistent with past studies stating that glass ceiling is one of the major setbacks in the Bangladeshi work organisations (see Ali & Akter, 2021; Habib, 2015). Consequently, even though maternity leave constitutes a good example of how the state can hold or promote gender equality for mothers of young children in the labour market, it depends on who regulates and legislates the matter. One key informant, Nusrat a former TIB researcher sees the issues of maternity policies from the lens of capitalism. Nusrat echoed, "excluding mothers with service-providing firms in the private sector from maternity leave policies is an ill motive of our capitalists, many of whom are also

politicians and policymakers…" Nusrat's remark illustrates how the intention of capitalists to exploit working mothers makes maternity leave policies less inclusive in Bangladesh.

Likewise, Professor Ainoon states:

> When looking at the macro level, our state's mechanism is patriarchal. Therefore, noncompliance with current statutory maternity regulations is being given less attention overall in this context. Working women's maternity issues are still seen as primarily a concern of their own and their families rather than the state's.

Ainoon further noted that current maternity policies do not benefit all working mothers in Bangladesh equally. Professor Ainoon's argument reflects how maternity policies in Bangladesh are shaped by not only the gendered family devotion schema as traditional family values but also actively capitalist.

Barrister Miti added: "Clearly, there are distinctions. These maternity facilities are required of government organisations, and they are being provided....Non-governmental organisations, on the other hand, are found to comply at a disproportionately low rate. We might say that discrimination exists both in law and in practice…" Barrister Miti further stated that when invited to policy forums, she discusses this problem and pushes the government to make maternity benefits equitable for all working women, regardless of employment status. Professor Moinul of Dhaka University made a similar observation, asserting that the government could not avoid such an anomaly because government and non-government personnel provide services that advance the nation. Capitalist pressure on the government to equalise public and private maternity benefits may lead the government to provide subsidies. However, as citizens, all employees should have equal rights and access to work-family policies, which current legal regulations should protect.

7.4. CHILDCARE FACILITIES-ROLE OF THE STATE AND RESPECTIVE ORGANISATION

In Bangladesh, most preschool children were raised at home by their mothers a generation ago (Jesmin & Seward, 2011; Kibria, 2011). However, in recent decades due to changes in various socio-economic variables, such as growth in girls' higher education and rising living costs, an increasing number of mothers of young children have entered the labour market. In fact, a single income could no longer buy the same standard of living as it could in the 1980s and 1990s in Bangladesh. Many developed countries have modified their economic and social programs to accommodate or encourage the increased number of dual-earner families (see Busby, 2018; Kluve & Tamm, 2013; Thevenon, 2011; Ray et al., 2009). Ray and her colleagues (2009) researched 21 high-income countries, demonstrating that every high-

income country's government takes steps to aid parents in their attempts to care for their new-born children. Governments routinely provide employment protection and financial support to parents of new-borns and small children. All 21 countries protected at least one parent's job during childbirth. Parents can take time off to care for their new-born or small child and return to a comparable or the same career after their leave period. Other than these, most countries provide parents with direct financial assistance.

On the other hand, parents in developing nations, such as Bangladesh, are expected to make personal adaptations with little or no state's support (see Liakat, 2022; Tonneli et al., 2020; Won, 2016). Tonneli et al. (2020) argued that the Asian approach to social policy has been narrated in the literature as a ubiquitous traditional collectivist family and a productivity system in which state involvement encourages economic production and growth rather than individual well-being. According to Liakat (2022), childcare is still a parent's prime responsibility in Bangladesh, causing many working mothers to quit their paid employment. In India, Dubey (2021) discovered evidence of gender reinforcement bias and claimed that the country is the only one without paternity or gender-neutral parental leave that either parent can take. She claims that women in India spend 312 minutes daily on unpaid care labour in cities and 291 minutes daily in rural regions. Men spend only 29 minutes in urban areas and 32 minutes in rural areas on outstanding care work.

However, considering the negative consequences of a lack of organisational daycare facilities, the government of Bangladesh has stipulated some rules regarding childcare for working mothers of small children returning from maternity leave. The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 (Section 94) states:

> "In every establishment, where 40 (forty) or more female workers are ordinarily employed, one or more suitable rooms shall be provided and maintained for the use of their children who are under the age of 6 (six) years. These rooms will provide adequate accommodation, must have adequate lighting, ventilated, and maintained in a clean and sanitary condition, and will be under the charge of women trained or experienced in childcare."

However, despite legislation requiring workplaces to provide childcare for working mothers with small children, such arrangements have proven less than ideal in Bangladesh over the years. Noncompliance can be attributed to a range of issues, including a lack of financial capacity of the organisations, a lack of accountability, and/or the salience of gendered norms encouraging contempt for state or workplace-managed childcare for working mothers of young children.

The findings of this study show that, while other factors play a role (e.g., lack of monitoring), traditional gender norms and deficiencies in existing childcare legislation are substantial contributors to the lack of state-managed childcare facilities in Bangladesh. In this vein, Nusrat (pseudonym), a former researcher of TIB[29] states:

Nusrat:

> Returning mothers' challenges remained unresolved due to the workplace's lack of childcare facilities. Though the government enacted that employers would provide at least one room for day-care, only a few workplaces have implemented childcare facilities on their premises.

She also noted that TIB realised that government has no strong monitoring in the implantation of day-care centres. Professor Ainoon states, "…unfortunately, there is no formal initiative by the State to make it mandatory. The state has declared it mandatory, but I have not seen any follow-up of it, ever. As a result, the workplace is not favourable for mothers with young children." Regarding the government steps to ensure daycare centres in the workplace, Professor Moinul, a key informant on adolescent health issues, states:

Moinul:

> The government's efforts to secure childcare centres are insufficient. They are conceptually prepared, but their endeavour to consider how to do so in practice is far behind. Simply passing legislation requiring all businesses to provide childcare for their employees is a sham. Such a system would be unworkable without government involvement.

In fact, the government's failure to execute childcare policies implies undermining the occupational attainment of mothers of small children. Recent research demonstrated that the consequences of State family policies are contingent and dependent on the respective country's entire institutional, cultural, and labour market context (see Chai et al., 2021; Hook & Paek, 2020; Thevenon, 2016; Budig et al., 2012). Chai et al. (2021) argue that the State's self-interest and ideological preferences explain the government's failure to provide childcare for working mothers with small children. Such problems are more acute in developing countries such as Bangladesh due to many structural constraints compared to their Western counterparts.

In principle, the government is responsible for caring for its citizens, including childcare facilities for working mothers with small children. However, Bangladesh's government's

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[29]Transparency International Bangladesh

oversight of private employers has been haphazard and inconsistent. The question is why private organisations would take any responsibility. Private entrepreneurs' prime intention is to make a profit. So, in a practical sense, they would not prioritise the recruitment of women, which involves maternity costs.

However, it is also true that gender diversity in the workplace enjoy various benefits for companies for which women employees need childcare facilities from their employers (see Poduval & Podduval, 2009). Working parents with young children may find that a daycare facility supplied by the organisation makes financial sense because it reduces parental stress and anxiety. Employee retention is a primary concern for many firms, as it is crucial to the long-term growth of any organisation. Effective staff retention leads to more profitable organisations, contented and productive employees, and satisfied customers.

However, while the preceding literature is coherent in the Western context, it may only partially apply to Bangladesh. For example, in Bangladesh's labour market, the supply of human resources exceeds the demand[30]. As a result, a business may wish to terminate or avoid hiring a female candidate, allowing them to maximize their profits through cost-benefit strategies. However, the findings of this research found mixed response. According to HR expert Musharrof:

> The government encourages gender equal-employer recruitment policies. Some organisations, especially the MNCs and internationally funded organisations, emphasise maintaining that. But still, the local companies prioritize recruiting more male workers than females to save money from maternity facilities.

Musharrof acknowledged, however, that local businesses are also under pressure from the government to offer equitable employment opportunities in their recruitment processes. Professor Moinul, on the other hand, did not entirely agree with Musharraf. Instead, Moinul asserted that, "…as girls' tertiary education increases, they also make inroads in our labour market. Some Bangladeshi entrepreneurs are capitalizing on these benefits by hiring women in addition to men. But again, once hired, they exploit female employees." He added that mothers are most vulnerable because many local businesses do not follow the government's maternity amenities legislation, including building childcare centres on their premises. Thus, Moinul feels that both the state and private enterprises are responsible for the lack of day-care centres for working mothers.

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[30] Unemployment rate was 4.7% in 2022, World Bank Report 2023

On the other hand, Rubina Mira (MP) noted that government resources are insufficient compared to women workers' demand. Nonetheless, the government mandated workplace with 40 or more employees to open daycare centres and therefore, all places of employment should comply. However, such assurance of the people's representatives in Bangladesh, like Rubina Mira (MP), is contradicted by many experts and mothers interviewed in this research. They instead said that the state's promises in managing day-care centres for employed parent remains nothing but merely a hope and dream over the years.

Data analysis further reveals that the financial ability of the private organisation is an important factor to arrange childcare facilities for employed mothers. But, even in government organisations, there are not sufficient day-care centres, though ideally, they do not have financial constraints. Despite the government's announcement, most government work stations have yet to install day-care centres. In this regard, Papiya, a mother of two children who is a police officer claims:

Papiya:

> …We have all the legal requirements in place, and there are no budgetary constraints at government offices. However, the concerned authorities [workplace boss or supervisor, who are] overwhelmingly male, disregard this, considering that childcare is a private matter between a parent and his family.

Papiya further noted that the mentality of male colleagues has not converged with the increased number of mothers in the labour market. She stressed that attitudes need to change but having more women in decision-making positions would also help. Thus, the findings of this study demonstrate that the glass ceiling is a significant setback in the Bangladeshi workplace which is consistent with some previous studies conducted in Bangladesh (e.g., Bidisha et al., 2022; Ali & Akter, 2021; Ovi, 2019; Afza & Newaz, 2008). The prevalence of the glass ceiling reinforces gender norms, in turn resulting in unequal labour market outcomes between men and women. Afza and Newaz (2008) noted that the first and foremost variables contributing to creating a glass ceiling in the Bangladeshi labour market are the managerial perspective and work environment. They added that the second most important factors are organisational policy and work-life conflict.

Rubana Haque[31], the managing director of a leading local group of companies, stated in an interview with the *Dhaka Tribune* that "[T]he mind-set of mid-level management is a barrier in bringing more women to managerial and decision-making levels. Business owners should

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[31] Rubana Huq is Bangladeshi University academician, business women and poet

play a role in encouraging women" (cited in Ovi, 2019). My data analysis shows that because men are more often in decision-making positions, they do not prioritize establishing day-care centres on office premises, despite government policies requiring that an office include a day-care centre if it has at least 40 female employees. In a similar spirit, Bidisha et al. (2020) argues that Bangladeshi work cultures are intensely male-dominated. As a result, many organisations shirk their responsibility to carry out the state's recommended childcare policies.

Only three of the fifteen mothers I interviewed said their workplace has a daycare. One mother reported using the daycare when her baby was one year old. The other two mothers informed me they did not keep their kids there because of poor daycare quality. However, most mothers who worked in offices without daycare facilities believed that a lack of women in decision-making positions was a major problem. Tania who is an assistant professor at a private university stated:

> We, the female faculty members, discussed the issue of setting up day-care facilities for our little children several times... On the other hand, our male colleagues have shown no interest in starting a day-care centre. While, the top management, all of whom are men, denied the appeal, informing the day-care centre's high costs and management challenges.

Tania continued that if the senior management team was made up of women, they would be more aware of the need for day-care for working mothers. However, some other interviewed mothers contradicted Tania's assertion that even if one or two women hold the top positions in a work organisation, they will not be able to change the masculine culture. Instead, they emphasised the equal representation of women in middle and upper management. However, my findings demonstrate that gender equality in leadership positions in Bangladeshi organisations has remained a long way off.

However, some key informants stressed that women must also step forward and train for and attain leadership qualities to hold the organisation's top position, though some interviewed mothers' conversations do not seem consistent with this assertion. Instead, they stated that every working woman, with few exceptions, aspires to acquire a leadership position inside the firm. But they cannot be due to the organisation's masculine culture. Additionally, childcare is one of the most pervasive demands in the family and society, impeding mothers to cumulative professional achievement in Bangladesh. Data analysis reveals that while interviewed fathers' average working hours in the office is around 45 hours, interviewed

mothers' average working hours is 42 hours (see table 1 and 2).This means fathers spend only 3 hours more in the workplace than working mothers, though there are huge gaps in the time spent at home for domestic tasks by working mothers and fathers. According to Sujana:

> …two significant problems we are still facing. Husbands have noticeably less share of the domestic chores and childcare activities, and the organisation lacks childcare support for working mothers.

Sujana and many other mothers went on to say that if men do not share equally in the house, women will not have similar progress in their professional lives. A similar opinion was given by Professor Ainoon who believes that the patriarchal social structure is responsible for such negligence in setting up the day-care centre on the office premises, despite state policy having made it specific to arrange day-care centres. She states: "[T]o look after a child means you are raising a citizen of the country. So, it's the State's responsibility as well…" She continued that the cultural barriers are more active than our financial ability to set up childcare in every workplace.

My data analyses indicate another significant setback, e.g., the absence of commercialization in childcare facilities. This lack of commercialization is driven by widely held cultural beliefs that childcare is a private and familial concern stemming from the family devotion schema. Entrepreneurs doubt whether working parents would use a commercial day-care centre. Some interviewed mothers and fathers have shown interest in using privately managed daycare facilities. Professor Bidisha noted that childcare offered by private entrepreneurs would help working mothers who do not have relatives in Dhaka. She has seen many mothers leave their careers due to a shortage of childcare services.

However, Rubina Mira (MP) tried to reify that the current government had taken childcare issues seriously for working couples, mentioning the new daycare policy. She said the new rules suggested four options for daycare facilities. While the first two categories offered government-subsidized daycare facilities provided by statutory agencies or autonomous organisations. The third option promotes commercial daycare centres, while the fourth option promotes non-profitable centres run by individuals, groups, NGOs, corporate, or industrial sectors.

However, despite the government's legal provisions for day-care facilities (though not sufficient); Rubina did not specify how these initiatives would be implemented and ensured throughout all sectors and the preparations for the government to implement all these provisions. In fact, the government has already adopted legislation requiring day-care

facilities for workplaces with at least 40 female employees. But in practice, it did not happen, even in the government's workplace, as this study demonstrates. So, along with the legal provisions, it is also imperative to change gendered expectations that childcare is a familial concern and mothers' sole responsibility.

7.5. CONCLUDING REMARKS OF THE CHAPTER

Parental leave shows how the state can promote or constrain gender equality depending on how it governs and legislates the subject. The "unresolved conflict" faced by many employees, mainly working mothers with young children, while trying to balance childcare and paid employment is still a big hurdle in Bangladesh. Legislative development is caused by codification of the new law and piecemeal changes to past regulations and institutional structures, not systematic redesign to solve work-life difficulties. In a broader sense (macro-level), these policies are formed by work and family devotion schemas devaluing mothers' home responsibilities, including childcare, and prioritising fathers' breadwinner roles. Such gendered policies are also reflected in the absence of paternal leave. The absence of paternity leave means that fathers are not required to manage childcare; instead, it is the mothers' sole responsibility. In Bangladesh, where most policy-makers are men, such policy flaws reflect the patriarchal influence. However, it is also worth noting that the "daddy quota" or paternity leave, whether viable or not, for a developing country like Bangladesh. Unemployment, informal labour, and poverty are just a few structural issues that work in tandem with traditional gender beliefs. Unlike many wealthy nations, Bangladesh, a burgeoning industrial nation, is still fighting for the mass population's basic demands and rights. Therefore, before their implementation, the feasibility of maternity policies must be assessed, notwithstanding their level of demand.

Findings indicate that work-family reconciliation has never been a consolidated governmental objective; instead, it has always been subordinated to broader economic goals, such as increasing women's employment without ensuring their maternity protection. As employees, women described their employment as extremely important, while as mothers, they desired to be good parents and reap the benefits of parenting. Such goals in balancing work and family life require comprehensive family policies, such as maternity and day-care facilities. In Bangladesh, however, dual-earner households in which both parents are full-time employees do not result in such policy support. At the same time, the shift in gender norms regarding fathers' engagement in childcare and housework has not been accompanied by an increase in mothers' labour force participation. As a result, the time and work demands placed on

working mothers have increased, indicating the intensive pressure from the family and society to adhere to the family devotion schema.

My research shows that State maternity policies are inherently exclusive. Employees receive 24 weeks of compensated maternity leave from the government sector. However, its Labour Act, 2006 (Article 45), grants working mothers in the private sector only 16 weeks of paid maternity leave (even though not all of them receive this opportunity equally). This implies the government still needs to specify how many weeks of maternity leave working mothers in private sector will receive. In addition, only manual workers (e.g., RMG workers) can take maternity leave, but white-collar workers are not specified in the laws (see more in Chapter 3). My analysis shows that private-owned firms benefit from these doubts and do not practise maternity leave evenly in Bangladesh. Among the interviewed mothers, 67% received 24 weeks of maternity leave, and 33% got only 16 weeks. Government workers reported receiving maternity leave with comparatively less difficulties. They were allowed maternity leave according to their given time-plan. Over 50% of private-sector working mothers said they struggled to get it, and others said their employers compelled them to take early maternity leave. All interviewees acknowledged that anomalies in maternity legislation and organisational practices discriminate against working mothers and considerably obstruct their labour market outcomes.

Despite the numerous benefits of maternity leave for working mothers—as I have elaborated in this chapter—debates exist concerning the most advantageous maternity leave bundle. Two potential downsides of maternity leave that have sparked these debates are its impact on mothers' consistent career progress and the ability of organisations, especially smaller ones. Furthermore, it may be difficult for private companies to offer their female employees extended maternity leave in nations like Bangladesh, where the government does not cover the costs or give subsidies. Past studies undertaken cross-culturally observed that extended maternity leave may impact mothers' return to the workforce, raise their employment disutility, and diminish their professional experience and social networking (Regmi & Wang, 2022; Low & Sanchez-Marcos, 2015; Gupta et al., 2008). To illustrate, Gupta et al. (2008) noted that the wages of employed mothers in the Nordic countries were impacted significantly by long-term maternity leave. As a result, policymakers and the government must evaluate the potential repercussions of maternity leave, considering the varied outcomes mothers receive from extended maternity leave.

In addition to maternity leave, providing childcare facilities by the State and respective organisations is crucial for employed mothers. The most comprehensive policy package for women with dependent children includes State-subsidised day-care, work protection, and pay restoration during childbirth. My research shows that childcare/day-care facilities for working women with small children in Bangladesh are less optimistic. Findings suggest that employment regulation and protection for working mothers in Bangladesh are currently insufficient. Nonetheless, the government has implemented many measures, including day-care, to comply with neoliberal economic strategy and accommodate working mothers. Current childcare laws require companies with 40 or more female employees to provide a crèche. However, both the government and non-governmental organisations gravely violate this day-care provision for children of working mothers. Only two mothers had worksite childcare among the fathers and mothers interviewed. On the other hand, Bangladesh has not yet experienced the privatisation or commercialisation of childcare. Although there is a handful, their operating costs are so high that middle-class households cannot afford them and many of their quality is below the mark in providing proper childcare facilities.

This study identifies two primary causes for the shortage of institutional childcare in Bangladesh: a lack of financial support or capacity and gendered work and family devotion schemas. However, it was not established wholeheartedly (in terms of participants' conversations) that a lack of funds was a significant reason for not providing childcare for working mothers. While some participants argued that organisations had sufficient financial resources to provide childcare facilities, others argued that the government must share the operation costs with the private sector because the State should raise its citizens. On the other hand, all participants believe that government and non-government businesses avoid day-care/childcare facilities due to gendered notions that childcare is a personal responsibility and that parents, particularly mothers, will handle it. Such gendered attitudes are shaped by the family devotion schema, in which mothers are viewed as the ideal caregivers despite working mothers having difficulties balancing childcare and paid employment duties. Thus, the paradoxical effects of State and organisational policies exacerbate the gender-based inequities in the labour market, to which working mothers of young children are particularly susceptible.

To conclude this chapter, despite tremendous progress over the last two decades, significant gender discrepancies still exist in labour supply, pay, regular promotion, interpersonal relations, and skill attainment. Given that women still take on the majority of childcare in

Bangladesh, motherhood stands out as one of the primary factors driving this inequality. Most of the research into the causal effect of children on mothers' work outcomes has taken place in affluent countries. Those findings may not be extrapolated to developing countries such as Bangladesh. Yet, the outcomes of this research were found to be consistent in some ways while contradictory in others. For instance, many Bangladeshi organisations adopted equal employment policies, prioritising male and female employees equally. Yet, the essential question remains unaddressed: although some mothers are now as busy as fathers in their professional lives, childcare and domestic tasks have not converged. As a result, women in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the world (see Chapter 3) embrace the labour market penalties when they become mothers. However, a similar consequence does not affect men when they become fathers. The reinforcement of this status quo is accountable to gendered policy, policy deficits and lack of implementation of extant policies concerning paid maternity leave and childcare management.

The next chapter looked into the disparities between mothers and others (e.g., fathers, their co-workers, etc.) regarding crucial labour market outcomes such as wages, regular promotion, career advancement and skill development.

8.1. INTRODUCTION

The current chapter focuses on how the work and family devotion schemas influence mothers' and fathers' work-family lives differently, resulting in unequal outcomes in the labour market. This is because the work and family devotion schemas are mutually exclusive rather than inclusive, in which fathers are valued for their consistent devotion to masculine tasks (e.g., family providers), while mothers' are valued for their unwavering devotion to feminine tasks (e.g., care providers).

Given the relational nature of Bangladeshi cultures and the country's collectivist understandings of family and work life, I analyse key factors that shape decision-making processes related to family and work arrangements. To this end, the chapter exposes disparities between mothers and others (e.g., fathers, their co-workers, etc.) regarding crucial labour market outcomes such as wages, regular promotion, career advancement and skill development. Additionally, I shed light on how complicated decision-making processes influence work performance and the social construction of identities – workers, mothers, and fathers – within the contexts of family and work.

This chapter is divided into four sections. In contrast with earlier chapters that unpacked idealised motherhood, this chapter's first section (8.2) examines how Bangladeshi cultural norms, values, and practices shape the norms of ideal workers in ways that produce disparate rewards for working fathers and mothers. In section two (8.3), I discuss the challenges Bangladeshi working mothers confront during pregnancy, considering gender norms and resource limits that problematised their navigation of work and pregnancy-related difficulties. In section three (8.4), I present working mothers' post-maternity leave experiences, illustrating the gendered care arrangements Bangladeshi mothers and fathers pursued for their children. Thus, this section closely examines how mothers' experiences in returning from maternity leave affect their occupational chances at work. Finally, in section four (8.5), I elucidate how Bangladeshi working mothers face challenges in achieving key labour market outcomes that are equal to their husbands and co-workers, both men and women who are not mothers.

8.2. GENDERED ORGANISATION: IDEAL WORKERS

Sociological studies have highlighted the material conditions associated with maternity and the role of male-dominated ideology (e.g., considering women's life fulfilment through their unwavering motherhood role) in influencing the social construction of motherhood over the decades (Tsouroufli, 2020; Delphy & Leonard, 1992). Most workplaces are set up as if paid employment is the only, or at the very least, primary task of employees, emphasising the work devotion schemas for employees (Castro et al., 2022; Yoon & Park, 2022; Sallee, 2012; Blair-Loy et al., 2011; Acker, 2011). According to Castro et al. (2022), 'ideal worker' norms continue to be promoted at organisations and encourage employees to put their paid work ahead of any other aspects of their daily lives, such as domestic tasks and childcare. Sallee (2012) argues, "Organisations are gendered in that they are built on the notion of the ideal worker who has unlimited time to give to work and no distractions in the home" (p. 787). Working for a company as a manager or professional often entails working long hours, juggling other commitments for the sake of the organisation and being willing to relocate or travel (Blair-Loy, 2009). An acceptable amount of dedication to one's profession is demonstrated by these expectations that are anticipated to continue throughout one's career. These 'ideal worker' norms reinforce the precepts of the work devotion schema and, thus, gender inequality in the workplace (Acker, 2011).

Likewise in Bangladesh, professional bodies are distinctly masculine, assuming freedom from caring and parenting (Hussein, 2017). An employee's dedication to the organisation was traditionally demonstrated in Bangladesh by loyalty, which was often rewarded with lifelong employment. Though not explicitly stated by the participants, seniority and gender identity determine (or at least highly influence) career development in Bangladeshi work culture. When it comes to women's subjectivities and career strategies, heterosexual families continue to influence women, especially mothers of young children, by blending old-fashioned family values with today's institutional ambitions of uninterrupted progress. Participants in this study were asked the following question: would it be fair to say that Bangladeshi cultural ideals of motherhood and full-time paid employment are at odds with each other? With some variations, the fathers expressed a particular set of perspectives. Abir, a father of one child who works in a bank states:

Abir:

> To me, an ideal worker must be committed to the organisation's success, regardless of whether the employee is a mother or father. The ideal worker implies that the organisation can depend on them for its perpetual success.

Abir added that in Bangladeshi organisational culture, an ideal worker indicates that he/she would arrive on time, leave on time, and, if necessary, work extra hours. In the event of any additional or unexpected demands, an ideal worker would be available for the organisation and take on any assignment for its benefit. Another father, Farhan, states: "…to grow as a company and as an employee, an ideal worker must first ensure the present and consider the future, then communicate and collaborate with management. Employees, who cannot adapt to these traits …may not be ideal workers, in my opinion." Both Abir's and Farhan's perceptions of the 'ideal worker' were founded on their seemingly gender-neutral approach to heavy work demands. Of course, this is only normal if both mothers and fathers can equally meet such organisational needs. However, past research found that such demands encourage single-minded devotion to work, which is compatible with fathers who escape family tasks and incompatible with mothers who have to work the 'second shift' (Dean et al., 2013; Blair-Loy, 2003; Hochschild, 1989).

As our conversation progressed, Abir and Farhan both stated that they do not believe ideal worker attributes fit employed mothers and fathers of small children equally, noting that the mothers in Bangladesh are expected to sacrifice for the family, while the fathers for professional success. Interestingly, neither interviewee could expand upon *why* these differing gendered expectations exist. Past studies demonstrate why most men support workplace demands and policies reinforcing gender inequity (see Williamson et al., 2023, Padavic et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2012). Padavic and colleagues (2019) claim that work-family conflict has become a hegemonic narrative, justifying ideal worker norms in white-collar business organisations. They believe that because men dominate most power-holding positions, it is up to female workers to adjust rather than the organisation to change its policies. Additionally, adhering to the ideal worker standard is a critical method of enacting masculinity and protecting privileged status in both the workplace and home (Connell & Wood, 2005). Even if men consider themselves to be in an egalitarian relationship where they are involved fathers, they do not relinquish their workplace obligations. As another father, Imtiaz, states:

Imtiaz:

> In all honesty, I have never contemplated sacrificing my career dedication for domestic obligations. After the birth of our child, I am now more committed to cooperating with my wife, but this did not affect my career. Working outside is my identity, you know. People will evaluate me based on my employment, money, and career advancement…

Imtiaz further indicates that he believes it is reasonable because both parents cannot simultaneously devote their full attention to their careers. He also noted the negative stigmatisation of failing to be an ideal professional for a father in Bangladesh. Imtiaz added: "It is the norm in Bangladesh that the father would manage the financial support for the family, even if his wife holds a full-time job..." In alignment with Western scholarships (e.g., Sallee et al., 2012; Emslie & Hunt, 2009), Bangladeshi fathers feel pressured to dedicate themselves to their work and fulfil a masculine identity. Additionally, most businesses continue to operate under the assumption that men are capable and eager to work long hours in the office, with no other obligations at home.

However, the positive outcomes of employees' long hours spent for the organisation have some controversies (see Miller & Riley, 2022; McNamara et al., 013; Kelly et al., 2010). Kelly and colleagues (2010) found mixed evidence regarding long working hours demonstrating males' positive responses and females' more critical responses. The current study holds similar findings. For instance, although some fathers, including Abir and Farhan, supported dedication to their workplace by investing long hours, sometimes extra hours, most mothers and a few fathers offered alternative opinions. A mother interviewed, Mira, states:

Mira:

> Ideal employees should be evaluated based on their performance, not on extra time or excessive hours spent at work. Every day, as I work in a bank, I have specific job responsibilities. Thus, I leave on time if I can complete my work before the office's closing hours. After 3 pm, I see a few of my male colleagues; they work slowly and then extend their hours after closure. However, they perform the same work I do during my office hours.

Mira further noted that although these are the realities, employers acknowledge those who spent extra time in the workplace by rewarding those employees, even if they are not completing more work. Another mother Adiba, who works in a bank, echoed that this evaluation system favours male employees.

Adiba:

> I noticed some of our male colleagues spending time in the workplace premises that had nothing to do with their official duties. For instance, my male colleagues [not all of them] go outdoors at least twice during office hours to sip coffee, tea, or smoke. Additionally, I have heard they occasionally receive personal calls outside of the office. As a result, they require additional time to perform that assigned duties.

Adiba continued that when male employees waste or misuse time, it goes unnoticed, but when mothers converse with their children or go for breastfeeding, they are negatively stigmatised. Adiba argues instead that employees ought to be evaluated based on their level of diligence, integrity, and adherence to their duties to ascertain their efficacy and commitment or lack thereof. In short, employees should be evaluated and valued through non-gendered meritocratic measures, not through time spent in the workplace.

Data analysis shows that some fathers' opinions supported Adiba's views. For instance a father interviewed, Arman, believes that employees should be judged by doing their duties during business hours. Extra time or tasks in a project should be their option and should not determine an employee's value. He added that he sometimes gets offers for field trips for extra money. But, due to his familial obligations, he often turns down such offers. However, unlike Arman, most interviewed fathers complied with organisational demands, working long hours and responding quickly to unplanned work to showcase commitment and productivity. These gendered behaviours and expectations clearly support a workplace environment that favours men who lack family responsibilities and re-invokes men's privilege and power (Kelly et al., 2010).

The workplace's organisational structure has strong symbolic values that reflect an unfair portrait of dedication (Cech et al., 2016; McGinley, 2010). Time in the office stands as a symbolic cultural ideal and serves as a key factor that creates social status hierarchies (Martin, 2009; Ridgeway, 2004). Such factors determine who gets opportunities and rewards (Neely, 2020). Even if women work in male-dominated sectors, they are not ideal employees. As Papiya a mother of two children who is a police officer stated:

Papiya:

> Policing is a difficult profession, and I am now doing it. But, in our country, a woman rarely is a police officer due to cultural constraints. However, many women are now employed as police officers. People would tell you that a woman or a mother can never be a dashing or ideal police officer if you ask them.

Papiya further noted that men are not more productive in policing jobs than women. Instead, men in our society are culturally privileged for some specific jobs, including policing. However, she acknowledged that although there are no legal restrictions for women to work in any domain in Bangladesh, women are still culturally discouraged from taking some specific careers. Papiya and some other interviewed mothers pointed out, that one of the significant reasons for not considering a mother as a perfect worker is that paternal identity does not conflict with the society's notion of the ideal worker, whereas maternal identity does. As a result, even though many mothers are working full-time and taking their profession sincerely, they are not recognized as ideal workers by the organisation.

The paternalistic historical legacy of Bangladesh's century-long feudal and colonial system moulded the country's difficulties in ensuring gender equity (Parameswaran, 2002; Chatterjee, 1989). Gender differences were manifested into several spaces, e.g., spiritual and material, home, and public and private spheres, with feminine and masculine values integrated into these spaces, resulting in women's nonparticipation in the labour force (Chatterjee, 1989). In the post-colonial period, women's feminized participation became increasingly cemented due to the adaptation of neoliberal policies and the growing demand for local marketization, unplanned market expansion, deregulation and the mismanagement of labour relations (Hussein, 2017; Kabeer, 2011).

In Bangladesh, a capitalistic objective that emphasises profit has exacerbated the adoption of neoliberalism and privatization that began in the 1990s. Neoliberal changes have driven more women into service and commerce work than in typically masculine fields such as IT, engineering, construction, law enforcement, and administration. Thus, women's progression has stimulated yet new problematic gender norms in the workplace. Kawser, an interviewee father states:

Kawser:

> ...when a private company has plenty of workforces due to overpopulation to hire hard-working, strong males with a minimum salary, they do not want to recruit females. Since they demand more time and uninterrupted labour for their organisation's profits, they emphasise employees' physical strength and stamina.

Kawser's experiences illustrate how gender inequality in the Bangladeshi labour market is influenced by structural factors (e.g., more human resources than fewer employment possibilities) and widely held gendered stereotypes (e.g., men are assumed to be strong with greater stamina). According to Kawser, recruitment boards believe that males are more ideal

because they are willing and able to put in more effort and time as they remain free from domestic tasks and childcare.

Musharrof (key informant) argues that women (including mothers) face less prejudice in certain government sectors. Kalpona, women's worker leader, added that women are typically considered for recruitment only when men are unavailable, especially in white-collar jobs. She added: "…many local employers do not wish to recruit women to avoid maternity and day-care facilities. Even if women are employed, they are not equally treated in the workplace…" Kalpona's observation suggests that Bangladesh's labour sector is gendered, notwithstanding recent gains in women's involvement.

However, the qualitative data in this study suggest that there have been some changes in the work environment in contemporary Bangladesh in terms of ideal worker norms that favour men. Along with their increasing financial contribution to the family, attitudes towards the paid employment of middle-class mothers have evolved incrementally in recent years. A few fathers and mothers admitted to integrating their work lives due to both material and cultural advancements. For example, Tania, a university assistant professor, stated that she enjoys her professional and family life. She found no substantial discrepancies in assuming ideal worker norms that benefit men, albeit some modest differences still exist in her work environment. She also mentioned how helpful her co-workers were before and after being a mother. She noted that her respectability as a mother and woman was not questioned due to her career. Instead, her career has elevated her and her family's social standing. It should be noted, however, that Tania does not work in the corporate business sector, like other mothers who expressed facing discrimination.

A few mothers claimed that though their paid work roles did not transform into an egalitarian household arrangement, they gained some measures of increased social status. Fariha, a banker with two children, wanted to quit after having her second child. But ultimately, she did not scale back. In fact, Fariha could have quit but chose not to, partly because of her eldest daughter's feelings about her career. Her daughter informed her that she is happy to claim her mother is a banker with her schoolmates. Despite her struggle to navigate her job and family, Fariha continued, stating, "...my paid work role is like my self-identity...my children are proud of me; it's a lot for me…"

HR expert Musharrof shared his family's story regarding changing attitudes toward mothers' paid work.

Musharrof:

> …my wife is a stay-at-home mother, even though I am highly professional. My son and his wife, on the other hand, are both doctors. I admire their career while also being pleased that both my son and daughter-in-law are doctors. This transformation has increased my family status in society.

Musharrof's experience indicates a generation shift in which third-generation fathers and mothers (all interviewed mothers and fathers belonging to the third generation) gained support from their first and second generation's parents. However, this was not the case for all mothers and fathers interviewed. As noted in Chapter Six, there are conflicts among these generations indicating how patriarchal bargaining positioned first and second-generation mothers to dominate their third generations' daughters-in-law.

It is also worth noting that ideal worker norms favouring men have changed to some extent in recent times. Many Bangladeshi firms, for instance, have adopted employment practices that prioritize male and female employees equally. Yet the essential question remains unaddressed: although some mothers are now as busy as fathers in their professional lives, childcare and home responsibilities have not converged. As a result, women in Bangladesh and throughout the world must navigate the labour market disadvantages associated with motherhood. However, men who become fathers do not have a similar impact on their labour market outcomes.

8.3. PREGNANCY AND THE WORKPLACE

The most challenging time for the mothers interviewed was during their pregnancy when they had to deal with significant mental and physical changes (Gilbert et al., 2023; Sabat et al., 2021; Jones, 2017; Gatrell, 2013). Sabat et al. (2021) notes that pregnant women are often assumed to take time off work to give birth and care for their children and become less involved in their jobs, which might disrupt organisational functioning. Likewise, Gilbert et al. (2023) maintain that misconceptions about pregnant workers could include being viewed as illogical, too emotional, and less capable in paid work roles. The findings of this study show that women were subjected to both material and cultural constraints and challenges throughout this time, causing them to struggle in their professional life. Mothers who were interviewed indicated a range of negative experiences following the announcement of their pregnancy, ranging from subtle kinds of discrimination such as a shift in bosses' or co-workers' attitudes to more obvious actions such as being shut out of choices over which they would have previously had a say. The adverse treatment meted out to some of the mothers

interviewed was frequently subtle. Nonetheless, it contributed to an oppressive experience that they were less respected, valued, or accepted at work due to their pregnancy. Wahida shared her experience:

Wahida:

> During the days I was pregnant, I felt alone and isolated. In fact, our cultural taboo still works with certain people, particularly men, when it comes to tolerating pregnant women in their midst. I felt that I was an outsider and ignored by them. They used to avoid me in the conversation or attend their informal meeting, etc.

Wahida's experience reflects how the social stigma revolving around pregnancy in public places undermined her social networking results in her professional life, aligning with Western literature (see Wanigasekara, 2016; Gatrell, 2013; Singh et al., 2006). This sense of isolation makes pregnant mothers feel alone in managing maternity issues, and career success remains a personal responsibility, evoking mothers to struggle with the pressure to fit in with the masculine expectations of corporate culture. Another mother, Adiba, shared her experience when she was pregnant and continued her work.

Adiba:

> ...because it was such a male-dominated workplace, I felt like a fish out of water. Due to my pregnancy, I felt as though I had lost some respect from my colleagues. My co-workers, particularly the men, appeared to view me differently after learning of my pregnancy. It was really awkward and frustrating for me.

Wahida's and Adiba's experiences were also similar to those of some of the other mothers I spoke with, consistent with previous research conducted on the Bangladeshi labour market spotlighting male dominance (e.g., Bidisha et al., 2022; Hossain, 2016). Coupled with the dominance of masculine norms are the disproportionately high numbers of men in the workplace, especially men who wield power. This combination of gendered factors resulted in mothers feeling neglected, alienated, and disrespected throughout their pregnancy, and made to feel like a fish out of water adding to their mental anguish and frustration.

Professor Ainoon observed that male attitudes toward women's pregnancies remain almost unchanged.

Ainoon:

> …though the number of women working in Bangladesh has increased in recent years, the working environment has not changed simultaneously. Pregnancy in a public place is treated as taboo. Many former students shared with me that they felt embarrassed to work while pregnant.

Professor Ainoon further pointed out that our traditionally male-dominated culture constrains women's movements in various ways. For example, once a woman is pregnant, she is generally not expected to be visible in public. But, working women who become pregnant cannot meet this goal because they can only take six months of maternity leave (sometimes less in private organisations). Thus, they cannot take time off during the first few months of their pregnancies since they require time to breastfeed. On the other hand, Bangladesh is a compulsory heterosexual society, making it hard for women to stay unmarried and childless (Chowdhury, 2009). This means men and women must marry in adulthood, the only acceptable way to form a family in Bangladesh. However, outcomes of matrimonial relationships differ between men and women regarding labour force participation, with women often experiencing a lower priority for career goals than domestic responsibilities. These contradictory circumstances arise from the work and family schemas (Mosseri, 2019; Blair-Loy, 2003), making it a dilemma for many working mothers to decide between working and taking time off. Many working mothers scale back from their careers while pregnant, and those who continue working face unequal career outcomes (e.g., slower career progress, lack of leadership positions, etc.).

My data analysis shows that mothers' engagement in Bangladesh's labour market is also impacted by the conservative backlash against women's equal rights with regard to labour market participation. Bangladesh is a Muslim-majority nation. Therefore, family values—which are closely associated with religion and patriarchy—often restrict women's freedom of movement, particularly during their pregnancy (see Chapter 5). In Bangladesh, the impact of religion on the workplace is highly contested. While some companies reject workers because of their Islamic outfits or because they have stronger allegiances to religious norms, others promote religion by recruiting individuals who can demonstrate greater allegiances to religious norms (e.g., maintaining purdah). However, my findings show that religious impacts on Bangladeshi working women vary by business type (national or international) and employer, manager, and coworker attitudes towards religious norms and values. As an illustration, Rumana, a mother of two children working in a multinational company, states: "... frankly speaking, I do not feel any pressure from my employer to follow particular religious norms (e.g., regular praying, wearing purdah, or keeping a distance from male colleagues) while in the office." In this similar vein, Adiba's comment seems a bit different. She echoed: "…I think my employer and most of my coworkers encourage an Islamic culture

in various ways (e.g., celebrating different religious occasions, having a specific corner for regular prayers, etc.) in our working environment".

The accounts of Rumana and Adiba imply that religious influence is present in Bangladeshi workplaces but that it does not affect everyone equally. Constitutionally, Bangladesh is a moderate Muslim nation, though Islamic principles have a substantial impact on the daily lives of its citizens, given that Bangladesh is a Muslim-majority nation. This is further supported by the findings of this study, which suggest that most working mothers perceived religious influence either in their households or the workplace (or even in both settings). My data analysis further reiterates the findings of most recent studies that women feel more pressure at home than at work, indicating a shift in religious influence is taking place (though slowly) in public spaces of Bangladesh (see Bellani et al., 2023; Hussein, 2017; Rozario & Samuel, 2010).

Findings further illustrate that to some extent employers made adjustments to mothers' jobs to assist their situations while pregnant, though these changes were undertaken without sufficient consultation with pregnant women. For instance, Konika, an accountant of a private company states:

Konika:

> I was in the account section from the beginning of my work. But at the disclosure of my pregnancy, I was transferred to the administration section without my prior concern. This sudden change in my duties pressured me mentally and physically.

Konika added that when she asked her boss about these changes, he said accounting jobs needed more time, which she might not have due to her physical and mental stress. Konika felt her administrative tasks were more challenging than accounting tasks. Previous research (Gatrell, 2013) found that mothers felt demoralized during their pregnancies due to changing their working roles. Such treatment of a pregnant mother by her boss serves as an example in Bangladesh, where a male holds power in the workplace and determines a woman's occupational chances once she becomes pregnant. These discriminatory attitudes exist despite Bangladesh's constitution, which says gender-equal rights must be guaranteed in all aspects of life (Article 28, Bangladesh constitution). Article 28 (1, 2, 3, 4) states:

> "28. (1) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.
> (2) Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life.

(3) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction, or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institution.

(4) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens."

-Bangladesh Constitution, 1972

While such principles in the constitution were supposed to empower women, they have generally gone unrealized in Bangladesh over its last fifty years of independence. Unfortunately, in practice, women in both the private and public spheres are considered less capable (Hussein, 2017; Sultana, 2011). Sultana (2011) noted that powerlessness, stereotypes, low self-esteem, and self-confidence subordinate women in a patriarchal Bangladeshi society. In fact, women's subordination is a core component of all interpersonal dominance structures, though some scholars choose alternative locations and causes of subordination. For instance, de Beauvoir (1949) famously stated that women are reduced to the status of the second sex because men see them as fundamentally different from themselves, which reflects the experiences of so many women in this study.

As alluded to earlier, another common occurrence for interviewed mothers during their pregnancy was a shift in attitude from employers and co-workers once their pregnancy became public. This shift in attitude was often abstruse, but they perceived it as a sign of ignorance and disrespect by their employers and co-workers. As Cynthia echoed:

Cynthia:

> When I became pregnant, their attitude toward me began to change. They doubted I would not be able to work efficiently and would be in breach of my obligations. The authorities told me to take early maternity leave, which put me under additional stress.

Cynthia noted that managerial and peer attitude changes put her under mental pressure during her pregnancy. Mira, another mother, also saw different attitudes from co-workers and bosses. She said she was well and wanted to work as late as possible to spend more time with her infant later. However, her male boss told her that her co-workers were embarrassed to tell her they thought her job had slowed and were unhappy working with her. Three months before her due date, she started maternity leave. Although forcing early maternity leave is

against State law, other women (for instance, Sujana, Wahida, and Konika) in my study have had similar experiences.

My findings demonstrate that their co-workers' and immediate managers' lack of cooperation often forced them to take early maternity leave, affecting their career progression. Some mothers opined that going against the company's expectations was problematic since they could lose their jobs, compelling them to comply with workplace demands. Additionally, fear of reprisal and a lack of employer and law enforcement assistance prevent many female employees from accusing male co-workers or superiors. Rumana reported some similar experiences.

Rumana:

> Once in a regular meeting of staff, I asked for extending facilities during the pregnancies of female workers, e.g., making their time schedule a bit flexible. The authority later issued me a show-caused notice to explain why I asked to extend facilities for pregnant women.

While Rumana's job provided six months of paid maternity leave, the authorities informed her that she could not receive any additional benefits throughout her pregnancy. One of her male co-workers agreed with the organisation's viewpoint, saying, "…you should not have such a high level of privilege. You have the option of taking maternity leave, if necessary," The remarks made by Rumana's co-worker and supervisor reveal their patriarchal mind-set, which views mothers as the privileged group in terms of maternity and flexible work schedules in the organisations. The 'welfare queen', who is more than simply a cliché, is a public discourse in many Western nations (see Burns, 2020; Foster, 2008; Hancock, 2004). Instead, they have come to represent all welfare recipients in the public eye (Hancock, 2004). Foster (2008) contends that class-based sexist and racial stereotypes about the welfare mothers' alleged behaviour and moral failings are utilized to support the shared identity of the welfare queen. However, unlike in many Western countries, Bangladeshi mothers do not receive such benefits from the government. Still, organisational culture frequently calls them a "beneficiary group" due to their fully paid maternity leave facilities. Consequently, some employers may refuse to hire women, or even if they do, some lose their jobs after becoming pregnant or fail to return after their maternity leave expires because many employers believe that leaving mothers' children at home may distract them from doing their jobs effectively in the office (see Akhtar & Khan, 2020).

Findings also indicate that not all interviewed mothers could challenge gendered norms or discriminatory practices equally; instead, some have shown repressed behaviour. They (for instance, Mira and Fariha) stated that they had been treated to jibes and harsh comments throughout their pregnancy and felt compelled to begin their maternity leave early because of the stress they faced.

Mira:

> When I explained to one of my colleagues (a man) that I had a doctor's appointment and needed to leave early, he answered that he could not handle some of the customers for the remainder of the hour. And my pregnancy difficulties and a visit to a doctor was not his headache.

Mira's colleague's attitude disrespected her, and she felt guilty about being a mother. Similarly, Fariha echoed: "…my next desk co-worker one day told me that when he became a father, he was more serious about his profession. But I am more serious about my child and family, so I should quit the job." Fariha said she was continuously under pressure and sometimes was asked by her boss to work unpaid hours. Such desire from pregnant women was typically compared to male colleagues or fathers. This comparison between working fathers and mothers is biased because both should have family commitments apart from paid work. Such pressure and gendered behaviour pushed many interviewed mothers into an ambivalent space of work and family life.

In addition to cultural restraints, material obstacles hampered pregnant women's careers. Lack of transportation was a significant barrier, which is typically less likely in Western countries. Poor transit facilities affect women more. In particular, pregnant women's access to public transportation is challenging. Most public services need juggling to get a vehicle, something pregnant working women usually cannot do. Many of the organisation's transport facilities for pregnant women are either absent or lacking. Two mothers said they changed residences to live closer to their workplace. The rest said they had to manage difficult transport challenges personally. For instance, Adiba narrated:

Adiba:

> It was challenging to find Uber or other forms of transportation in the morning. As a result, I frequently failed to get to the office on time. One day, my supervisor reacted angrily and verbally attacked me in front of other colleagues.

Another interviewee, Wahida, reported: "…my boss shouted at me that if I could not come on time to the office, I could not continue my job and that I should begin maternity leave as soon

as possible". Wahida did not take early maternity leave because of her financial situation; however, the tension of being pregnant in an unsupportive workplace led to mental and physical stress throughout her pregnancy.

At the same time, study findings also indicate that some changes in cultural beliefs and the allocation of resources (e.g., increased transport facilities) for pregnant workers have occurred in Bangladesh. A few interviewed mothers stated that they received support from their co-workers and bosses during their pregnancy. Nancy, for example, worked for an international organisation when her first child was born, and she took maternity leave three weeks before her due date. Her supervisor understood enough to respond to her on every critical occasion she faced. She remembers one particular incident:

Nancy:

> One day during my pregnancy, I was in such a horrible situation that I couldn't stay at the office. My next desk co-worker informed the manager, who immediately arranged for me to be transported home. Our work environment was quite women-friendly, and I never felt undervalued or disrespected due to my motherhood status.

Nancy currently works for a different international organisation and has a second child. She mentioned that her current employer upholds supportive standards, and she received all the services she needed during her pregnancy. Liana, a government college teacher, had a similar experience, noting that her relationship with her colleague and department chairman was empathetic during her pregnancy. Some of the men interviewed indicated they were supportive of their female co-workers. For instance, Abir stated, "When I was a bank branch manager, I gave pregnant women most of the opportunities, including the maternity leave they desired." An NGO worker, Arman, similarly explained that they have a policy that if a female employee falls pregnant; they will help her with anything she needs. They used to share their workloads with pregnant women receiving a lower workload.

The experiences of Nancy, Abir, and Arman suggest that a change in organisational culture and employee attitudes toward pregnant mothers is possible in current Bangladeshi workplaces. Several other mothers (e.g., Papiya, Sujana, and Jenifer) noted that they could alter their work schedules slightly (e.g., coming in the morning at 10:00 instead of 9:00, and leaving a bit early, avoiding the extra office hours, changing duty station or work, etc.).

However, Bangladeshi employees generally do not provide mothers with flexible hours, part-time options, reduced hours, work from home, etc., during pregnancy or after the birth of their child. New mothers must either work full-time, scale back from their job or take leave.

Both gendered norms (such as intolerance or lack of respect for their needs) and material considerations (e.g., abundant labour supply) shape these constraints. In addition, a few mothers revealed that some male co-workers offered assistance out of condescension rather than respect or collaboration when they needed help.

8.4. RETURNING TO WORK: THE BIG HURDLE

Labour market inequality for employed mothers with young children based on pregnancy and maternity is a complicated issue that can be characterised and understood in many ways. They need to make critical decisions about their employment behaviour in the years following their child's birth. Typical of these decisions is whether or not to resume employment.

Earlier research shows it is mothers who need to change their job status from full-time to part-time (see Costantini et al., 2022; Rouse et al., 2021). Some working mothers might need to take long intervals after the first or second child's birth. These decisions are not mutually exclusive; some women make all three, while others only make one or two of them over time (Rimmer, 2014). However, the current study only included the mothers who returned to their previous job after their maternity leave ended and were working full-time at the time of the interview.

Although the experiences of the interviewed mothers varied by a wide margin when it came to obtaining maternity leave, as I stated earlier in this chapter, their experiences with the decision to return were strikingly similar. Most interviewed mothers informed me that returning to their work after their maternity leave expired was not an individual choice. Instead, it was constrained or facilitated by the material and cultural factors embedded in Bangladesh's family and organisational context. Conflicts between work and family responsibilities and choosing between the two disproportionately impact working mothers' labour market engagement and retention.

Many mothers expressed their uncertainty about returning to a paid job after maternity leave ended, though eventually, they returned. As maternity leave ended, 11 mothers acknowledged feeling anxious or unsure about returning to work. These apprehensive feelings were shaped by the gender schema of inequality in which mothers felt the pressure of both domestic and work commitments (Blair-Loy & Cech, 2016; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004), findings that are consistent with cross-national settings (Dean et al., 2013; Blair-Loy, 2003).

Regarding organisational constraints, though according to the State laws and policies, the organisation cannot deny mothers' re-entry to their previous job; interviewed mothers' experiences indicate that many mothers were not welcomed back by their organisation. For instance, Fariha states:

Fariha:

> My immediate supervisor and several of my co-workers did not greet me warmly upon my return from maternity leave. One of my male co-workers questioned how I could re-join while still caring for my three-month-old child. That crushed my heart since I had hoped they would encourage me.

Fariha's experience aligns with many other interviewed mothers' experiences. In fact, such comments from a male colleague towards a working mother of small children are especially noteworthy since the mother's planned course of action (e.g., returning to paid work while "abandoning" their infants) violated public notions of acceptable motherhood.

Numerous mothers noted that returning to the labour market and leaving their children at home was not easy. The collective experience of interviewed mothers revealed that they contested and challenged traditionally gendered norms embedded in the patriarchal social structure of Bangladesh in making their decision to return to their full-time employment. As Wahida, a mother of one child, states:

Wahida:

> Due to childcare concerns, my husband refused to allow me to return to work when my maternity leave ended. But I assured him that I would be responsible for the childcare even if I restarted my full-time job. Thus, I reassured him about my family role, even though performing both tasks was challenging. But I wanted to continue my employment.

However, these accounts of middle-class, educated working mothers (Fariha, Wahida and some others) affirm their everyday renegotiations in the workplace as they returned and continued their work despite such unpleasant behaviour and lack of cooperation. Fariha added: "I previously observed that my colleague faced unpleasant behaviour from her supervisor when she returned to work…" Yet I returned, and I was ready for this. If all mothers experience these difficulties and raise their voices... this discrimination may change…"

However, the findings also indicate that a few women who returned from maternity leave received sufficient cooperation from their employers and co-workers. They claimed that their

co-workers did not mistreat them when they needed a bit of scheduling flexibility to meet the needs of their new-borns. For example, Adiba states:

Adiba:

> My co-workers were supportive of me as a new mother and understood my emotional attachment to the child. …I used to see my child through a video call while I was in the office. My co-worker supported the client at that time...

Some interviewed mothers also reported that caring for their children had added a new dimension to their lives. They gained confidence in communicating that they would not forsake family to return to work in the same capacity as before maternity leave. Several mothers stated a desire to maintain consistency at work while also caring for their families, including children. However, those welcomed and struggling to return to work faced lower outcomes than their husbands and male colleagues.

My analysis further reveals that mothers have other motivations for returning to work, though they needed to take the 'double shifts'. Wahida stated that taking the double shift was better than scaling back from her job. If she did quit her job, it would be more difficult for her to return to the workforce. Wahida also admitted that she was unprepared to embrace her mother's fate, who was a housewife despite having a college degree. Another mother, Konika, believes educated women should take on the challenge of integrating family and profession to dilute their reliance on their husbands' income sources. She added that mothers' financial independence would also empower them in their families and society. Likewise, Cynthia states:

> "Economic autonomy helps women obtain household power. I observed my housewife mother. My father made all family decisions. However, my husband consults me before making significant decisions. We purchased a condo last year. ..My spouse chose to buy it close to his parents' home. My preference, however, was a different location. My husband finally agreed with me…"

Cynthia clearly sees her personal agency linked to her paid economic activity, demonstrating her resistance to the trenchant family devotion schema that limits mothers' economic role in the home (Moilanen et al., 2019; Halrynjo & Lyng, 2009). Like Cynthia, some other interviewed mothers stated their position or participation in family decision-making has increased. Still, others said their in-laws' families have not recognised their role as the economic provider. Their financial support to the family was secondary. These mothers also said their husbands' and in-laws' families opposed their post-maternity leave to return to work.

Thus, despite the pressure of 'double shift' or intensive mothering, many mothers found it worth returning to their paid work because avoiding paid work might worsen their position, making them more vulnerable in terms of exploitation or dignity. They stressed that the work environment is still gendered, and employers moderately protect the rights of working mothers due to the recent legal protection (e.g., after the end of maternity leave, no organisation has the right to deter mothers from re-joining) fostered by the government. However, many organisations, especially private sector ones, need to fully apply government legislation impacting working mothers before and after childbirth. Many employers still discourage mothers from returning to work after maternity leave because they used to assume that working mothers might be more connected with their babies and may not serve the organisations effectively. A similar gendered assumption does not work for working fathers in Bangladesh.

8.5. KEY CAREER OUTCOMES FOR WORKING MOTHERS

This section explores how the women's maternal status impacted their key labour market outcomes (e.g., income level, promotion, glass ceiling, skill development, work quality, career progress, and so on) during and after maternity leave. This discussion also compares the challenges of achieving key outcomes between interviewed mothers and others (e.g., fathers, co-workers-both, males and non-mothers). The key outcomes, especially the level of income disparity, are almost inevitable for employed mothers with small children, irrespective of developed and underdeveloped countries (Low & Sanchez-Marcos, 2015). However, the magnitude of these gaps varies greatly across countries.

The fact that mothers face a wage penalty in addition to the gender penalty raises concerns about governments' capacity to balance the economic objectives of active female participation in paid labour and social goals of equitable income distribution for reproduction and child-rearing. Some family policies have been lobbied for and enacted in Bangladesh over the past two decades in recognition of mothers with small children's difficulties when juggling family and paid work. The advancement of women's political and social rights, access to education, and participation in the labour market has changed women's societal roles. Despite this significant convergence of men's and women's responsibilities, considerable gaps in key outcomes persist, especially in the income level between working mothers and others.

Although most interviewed mothers and their male counterparts had equivalent academic qualifications, interviewed mothers reported lower salaries. This indicates that the meritocratic disparities or even equality among men and women workers is insufficient for gauging gender inequality in the labour market. Instead, social expectations about work and family commitment embedded in work and family devotion schemas harm working women and others despite their equal education and job skills.

The demographic background of the interviewees (both mothers and fathers) shows that all of them were equally qualified in terms of their educational degree at the entry-level (e.g. meritocratic, see Chapter 2). The eleven fathers and the fifteen mothers interviewed had both completed their Master's degrees. However, one of the key findings of this study revealed that most of the interviewed mothers (all but two) received a lower salary than their husbands (even those who started their careers together with their husbands or in consideration of time difference). Questions were asked to all three groups of participants about why mothers of small children earn less compared to their husbands and co-workers whose entry-level qualifications were similar. Adiba, a mother of two children, states:

Adiba:

> …definitely, I make less money than my husband. In fact, we have the same qualification. But while my husband did his job consistently, I could not do that due to my maternity leave and childcare responsibilities.

Adiba noted that they had been married for fifteen years. Adiba and her husband are employed in private banks, though not in the same bank. However, when she married, she was a first-year Master's student. She gave birth to her first child in the following years, and she was unemployed then. She entered the labour force five years after marrying her husband. Additionally, she was required to take maternity leave for her second child. Adiba's experiences, like those of some other mothers, reflect Bangladesh's traditional, compulsory heterosexual marital culture, in which age gaps between husband and wife are maintained strictly. As a result, mothers are more likely to enter the work market later than their spouses. The age gap between bride and bridegroom is culturally legitimised in Bangladesh. Such cultural legitimation derives from the family and work devotion schema, in which mothers' labour market participation is not an essential consideration in marital culture (Mosseri, 2019; Dean et al., 2013).

However, the consequences of marriage on mothers' labour markets are well-known, albeit at differing rates worldwide. One widely held belief is that motherhood is a devalued social status, while fatherhood is rewarding in relation to couples' labour market participation and key outcomes (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Coltrane, 2004). Furthermore, employers may show a bias against mothers in recruiting, promotion, and compensation decisions due to the prevailing notion of family and work devotion schemas affecting mothers and others differently (Yoon & Park, 2022; Cech et al., 2016).

Adiba, for example, had previously stated that her supervisor and co-workers had welcomed her return to work. But that did not help her with the same advancement as her male counterparts in her position. She continued "…we, a group of men and women, joined together; we are all parents now…but our income levels as mothers are lower than those of our male co-workers" (Adiba). Adiba believes that while being a mother prolonged her career advancement, her male colleagues who have become fathers remained unaffected.

My findings reveal that having a child was associated with many unfavourable stereotypes, which impacted their equal labour market outcomes. One of these was changes in employers' attitudes when they became mothers. Fariha's comment was significant.

Fariha:

> I was assigned crucial responsibilities, such as meeting with outside merchant partners to negotiate business. After returning from maternity leave, I was no longer assigned these tasks. I asked my branch manager, and he informed me that as a mother, my top priorities are my child and my family and that I am not the best candidate for these duties.

Other mothers (Rumana, Wahida, Jenifer) had similar experiences. They informed me that they were dedicated to their jobs and ready for any challenge after returning to work. However, such mistrust in their ability penalized them because their KPI[32] was less appreciated at year-end. All the interviewed mothers reported varying consequences in the years after returning to paid work, including no regular increment, promotion or wage increase. However, this false dichotomy (mothers' competency and mistrust) is shaped by the constructions implicit in the family devotion schema in which mothers are considered less competent in the workplace (Oleschuk. 2019; Blair-Loy & DeHarts, 2003).

Unlike many developed nations, Bangladesh's government sector and many non-government limits the age to only 30 years for recruiting employees at the entry-level. Due to cultural and

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[32]Key Performance Indicators

material constraints, young Bangladeshi women start their careers and marriages almost simultaneously, compounded by patriarchal expectations to have children quickly after marriage. Thus, educated, middle-class Bangladeshi women work behind their husbands. This scenario increases when they have children soon after marriage and starting work. A mother of two children, Jenifer, states: "…I had no choice but to accept a sporadic professional career. Our organisational support for combining family and work-life is weak. To avoid having to pick between the two, [you] will have to be content with making slower progress in your professional life."

Jenifer added that she married and had a baby within 1.5 years. While her spouse is a government deputy secretary, she quit her full-time job after 13 years. Her prior 13 years were difficult, she added. She worked for an international organisation in Bangladesh as a researcher. The primary reason for quitting her job was to provide time for her second child, who was four years old at the time of this interview. She is currently working as an independent consultant for different projects. Jenifer admitted that Bangladeshi mothers' family commitments force them to lag behind their husbands in work advancement and earn less. In this vein, Barrister Miti's comment seems significant.

Miti:

> …By law, organisations cannot offer less salary between genders. However, motherhood impacts labour market outcomes in terms of the formal and informal job, class, locality, number of children, education, etc. Specially educated, middle-class mothers' wage penalty stemmed mainly from a lack of childcare support from organisations and the state.

Miti continued that many mothers' wages are considered supplementary in the family due to cultural differences in childcare and household division of labour. So even mothers earn less compared to their husbands; it is taken for granted as usual.

Professor Ainoon similarly emphasised that when mothers are treated equally as family breadwinners, they may overcome organisational barriers that stifle their job advancement and disproportionate pay. Because legally, they are allowed to have maternity leave and return to their previous job. Working mothers may fight back to their consistent income level if these conditions are supported, including arranged childcare.

Findings further revealed that even couples who started their careers with husbands and had comparatively less age difference also had to face a cumulative wage penalty as the number of children increased. This finding is consistent with previous research, which found that the

more children a mother has, the more significant the negative wage effect (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015; Aguero et al., 2011; Davies & Pierre, 2005). After controlling for marital status, human capital, and work characteristics, Budig & England (2001) found evidence of wage penalties of 3%, 9%, and 12% for mothers with one, two, and three children, respectively. Most working mothers in the current study acknowledged that additional children affect their job success, yet Bangladeshi male-dominated culture and family values encourage more children (see Chapters 5 & 6).

This study also found that the cumulative wage penalty affects the age at which a mother has her first child. Mothers who delayed childbirth had higher wages than mothers who had their children early, especially at the start of their married and working lives. My findings also suggest that the motherhood pay gap is comparatively smaller among government employees than the nongovernment counterparts in Bangladesh. Barrister Sadia weighed in on this, claiming that while collective bargaining benefits government workers under political parties' influence, nongovernment workers often fear losing their employment because of such actions. She noted that woman's networks (e.g., nurturing relationships with professionals in the same field, co-workers, friends, relatives and acquaintances, keeping a presence on different occasions with co-workers and other social gatherings) had been badly eroded in Bangladesh due to the country's male-dominated culture.

The interviewed mothers raised another most common concern relating to their other financial benefits apart from basic salary, working conditions, and their rights while pregnant and after returning to work from maternity leave. As a mother, several cases looked to be the product of the employer's negligent actions rather than wilful ones, which may have been due to administrative mismanagement. For Konika,

Konika:

> I was out of work for 14 days because of a pregnancy-related ailment and did not get paid. It was a fight to acquire maternity leave and get paid from them. But, you know, fighting against a male-dominated work culture is really difficult...

A few other mothers had similar bittering experiences, but the majority said they received maternity leave and sick leave benefits (though not equally). A handful, however, stated they were entitled to earn a hefty bonus (e.g., festival bonus) and other fringe benefits (e.g., health care benefits) because maternity legislation mandates that women receive 100% of their salary while on maternity leave. But more than 50% of interviewed mothers reported that they did not receive such benefits.

Mothers were affected by the unpredictability of job promotion in their work organisation. Some mothers said work and family pressures made regular promotions difficult, although their experiences varied. Ten of fifteen mothers indicated their regular advancement was delayed after becoming mothers; the rest said it did not matter. For example, Mira works as a banker and has taken three maternity leaves for her three children, which has slowed her career advancement. She explains:

Mira:

> We 3 women and 6 men joined at a time. Three men left this bank with promotions and now earn more money than I do. The other 3 men are now competing for the position of AVP[33]. Contrary, I am just a senior executive officer. Among the other 2 women colleges, one of them quit her job after becoming a mother. Another is a senior officer.

Mira's story shows how motherhood adversely affects women's career progression. Nafisa, a private company account officer, experienced a similar predicament. She has been in the same rank for four years, but a junior male co-worker got promoted to executive accounting officer. She claims she was not promoted regularly because of her six months of maternity leave, which were not included in her job, and her performance was penalized due to her motherhood status.

Motherhood also appears to have a more detrimental impact on women's skill and professional development (e.g., training, further studies, attending a seminar or conference, etc.). Cynthia, a physician, and mother of two children admitted that completing her FRCS while juggling her professional and personal lives were challenging. She echoed:

Cynthia:

> …you know being a doctor means putting extra labour. But, juggling my profession, studies, and domestic responsibilities, including kids, proved difficult. As a result, I had to miss additional training, courses, and degrees, such as the FRCS, which was essential for my career. FRCS took a long time for me to accomplish, and my career as a doctor took much longer.

Some other interviewed mothers noted similar experiences. For instance, Papiya, a police officer, and a mother of two children, similarly emphasised the inconsistency in career progress. She states:

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[33]Assistant Vice President

Papiya:

> … my career progress was inconsistent. I skipped three trainings abroad: in Italy, Australia, and India. I also turned down the UN peacekeeping mission twice because I was considering who I would entrust with the care of my children. What would I do if I couldn't be with them? I'm staying away from government scholarships and similar programs…

Papiya stated that UN peacekeeping offers professional dignity and financial benefits. Yet, she could not avail of this opportunity as social stigmas constrain mothers to stay attached to the family while fathers are not victims of such social stigmas. Papiya's experience illustrates how family devotion unwaveringly restricts mothers' career progress while fathers are beneficiaries of the work devotion schema.

At least three mothers interviewed were offered overseas higher education. Their compulsion to follow the family devotion schema prevented them from taking advantage of them. Tania, an Assistant Professor, noted she could not use an overseas scholarship because of her child and husband. Her husband refused to leave work and accompany Tania for her overseas studies. The experiences of Cynthia, Papiya, and Tania reflect how Bangladeshi maternal ideas permeate our culture and become aspects of institutions. The gendered employment structure outside the house is based on an anti-maternal ideology. Constrained by the family and work devotion schemas, these working mothers faced an ambivalent situation in juggling their families and careers.

Past cross-cultural studies demonstrate that good workers symbolise good husbands and fathers (see Padavic et al., 2019). In Bangladesh, fatherhood is culturally legitimised, emphasising a more significant role as a breadwinner once they become fathers (Strier, 2014). Thus, masculinity is entwined with fathers' occupational earnings, again reflecting the work devotion schema (Yoon & Park, 2022), in which they are not held accountable for family responsibilities. The current study's findings reaffirm this cultural schema of inequality. Several fathers acknowledged that they appeared to gain more financial success in their careers when they became fathers. Zaman, a father of two children states:

Zaman:

> …I spend a considerable amount of time away from the family, making it impossible to keep the children without both parents. As a result, my wife gave up her career to care for my children. My wife now works as a freelance researcher with a modest income.

Several interviewed fathers shared similar experiences and informed me that their wives

sacrificed their career ambitions to support the success of their husband's careers. For instance, Raihan echoed: "…I agree that my participation is minimal in childcare. When the baby feels sick, my wife usually takes her to the hospital. I typically do not grant my leave from the office as it might negatively impact my career… [you know] …as a main economic provider, I need to maintain consistent progress in my career..." Raihan did not explain why his wife sacrificed her work goals for the family, but his talks implied that his wife's career was secondary to him and his family.

Several interviewed mothers also related similar stories about how anxious they felt when they needed to request leave from their manager to take their children to the doctor or stay at home when they are ill. They reported that such excessive absence or casual leaves impacted their labour market key outcomes (e.g., the yearly increment was delayed). Mira's comment seems crucial:

Mira:

> I had to take 15 days' leave within the first three months of my return to work after maternity leave ended. My supervisor, who was a male, granted me leave, but in the KPI[34], he mentioned this leave negatively, and my promotion and increment were withheld for that year…

She continued that she was reassigned to the deposit and credit division and given a high target for next year to achieve promotion and increment. However, she failed to reach the target due to her intensity of 'double shift' as a new mother, resulting in her previous year's increment being a penalty. Many women interviewed said their improvement was delayed for at least two years after maternity leave. No interviewed father claimed a career disadvantage for being a father.

However, findings also indicate a more diverse picture in which some fathers' narratives revealed their cooperation with their wives in achieving career goals. They assisted their spouses with domestic chores, such as shopping for daily essentials, cooking, cleaning, spending time with children, taking care of them, etc., which could positively affect their wives' careers to some extent. Shamim, who works in an INGO, states:

Shamim:

> After the birth of our child, I changed my daily schedule. These days, before I leave my workplace, I ask my wife whether [there is] anything I can bring from the grocery store. I also spend time playing with and occasionally teaching children.

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[34]Key Performance Indicators

Shamim added that they negotiate and solve childcare and housework issues cooperatively. Some interviewed fathers, like Shamim, said they increased their domestic participation after becoming fathers but kept their professional lives unchanged. This indicates that fathers' involvement is primarily individualistic and in a manner that is suitable for them without generating weighty challenges that can alter the maternal and paternal devotion schemas significantly.

Some mothers, in contrast, defied the idealized notion of motherhood by engaging in an unorthodox form of motherhood enabled by their privileged social positions, gendered family support networks, and updated State legislation regulating labour market equality. One of the advantages for Bangladeshi mothers is that although there is no public support for day-care for children, they can depend on their kin members or paid housemaids to some extent. Unlike many working mothers in the West, this is a culturally specific approach to managing children and household duties for middle-class working mothers in Bangladesh. Most working mothers I interviewed had full-time or part-time housemaids, which gave them an advantage over those who could not afford them. However, although relying on family members reduces their autonomy and employing a housemaid reproduces gender and class inequalities (see Andrew & Newman, 2012), some mothers had no choice but to embrace such strategies to maintain a tenable work-life balance.

Though still unlikely in Bangladesh, my findings demonstrate that two mothers earn more than their husbands. Konika is a music instructor, and her spouse works for an NGO. Sujana, a journalist, narrated a similar situation in which she had a set paycheck because she worked full-time, but her husband sacrificed, leaving his job to care for their four-year-old son. Sujana mentioned that they were both journalists, which was challenging and time-consuming. They are from outside of Dhaka, and as a result, they only have a few relatives on whom they could not rely. Sujana noted: "...my husband told me he can manage some earning source as a male. So, I should continue my permanent job." Sujana's experience suggests that a modest shift in the rigidity of work and family devotion schemas is possible, even though Sujana, one of the fifteen mothers in this study, was the only one to receive such support from her spouse.

Some mothers reported improved sources of gratification for returning to work to continue earning and having a baby, fulfilling personal and family life. Such self-actualisation

underpins their integration of work and family devotion schema, a novel finding in the Bangladeshi setting.

These mothers argued that efficiency at work meant getting off the job on time and returning to their children. After having children, time management and productivity improved for many mothers. Working smarter, putting more effort into keeping focused and on track, and learning how to prioritise better activities were all mentioned as ways to improve time management at work. Some mothers also made up for lost work time by working through lunch breaks or limiting lunch break time. Adiba, a mother who works in a Bank stated:

Adiba:

> I was aware that I needed to return home as soon as possible. As a result, I made every effort to complete my tasks as swiftly as it was possible. It occurred to me that it might be doable. In the office, we occasionally relax. However, after becoming a mother, I tried to devote more time and attention to myself.

A few mothers also mentioned that their cooperation with senior and younger co-workers was mutually beneficial. They assisted one another and created a pleasant work environment to minimize their home and work life balance. Nancy states: "…A good worker is someone who is prompt, adheres to deadlines and submits given reports on time....I always try to cooperate with others; they also extend their assistance when I need it. Such cooperation helps me to manage my official duties a bit stress-free." Adiba's and Nancy's experiences indicate changes in the Bangladeshi organisational culture, though most mothers' narratives contradict them.

A few interviewed mothers travelled abroad for professional advancement, including overseas higher education. Besides her master's in public administration from the University of Dhaka, Jenifer, one of the mothers interviewed, has an overseas master's from the University of Antwerp in Belgium. Jenifer said she wished to receive her PhD. However, family obligations and organisational limits on work-life balance prevented her from doing so. She noted that her two year overseas stay and one year of maternity leave were not credited toward her career, impeding her expected advancement.

Jenifer and some other mothers' experiences demonstrate that family and work devotion schemas anchored in family and corporate culture substantially impede Bangladeshi working mothers' financial and professional growth. However, in today's Bangladesh, some mothers also eventually navigate their families and careers, signalling early integration between work and family devotion.

8.6. CONCLUDING REMARKS OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter focuses on practices of gendered organisations informed by the "ideal worker norms" and "work devotion schema". Findings indicate that Bangladeshi workplace expectations are highly gendered and embedded within the work devotion schema. Most interviewed mothers and experts noted the intensity of the masculinised ideal worker norms and related practices. Even in the face of a workplace right (e.g., paid maternity leave) that directly challenges gendered organisations, the ubiquity of gendered practices in the workplace persists. Male-dominated organisations support a career identity separate from childcare and family duties, as reported by many participants. Such ideal worker norms are often imaginary but get taken for granted as widely held cultural beliefs and publicly shared knowledge. Bangladeshi workplaces are established as if paid employment is the only, or at least, an essential obligation of employees. Idealised worker norms stress that employees will work long hours, schedule their outside obligations around their paid work, and be willing to relocate or travel as needed. As a result, many interviewed mothers reported that they felt intense pressure due to their lack of adherence to this work devotion schema, resulting in less career progress than their male colleagues.

Most interviewed mothers believed they could work as productively as before having children. However, this belief was unrealistic when time constraints, unexpected accommodations, and emotional challenges were weighed and impacted by unwavering work devotion schemas judging mothers as incompetent workers. Material limits (e.g., lack of transport, medical facilities, and emergency responses) and gendered policies and practices (e.g., not offering flexible time or reducing workloads) define workplace hurdles in achieving equal key outcomes for mothers. Some mothers reported being forced to take early maternity leave or layoffs, though a few said supervisors allowed them to take maternity leave two to three weeks before their C-section. This latter group of mothers indicated changes that brought in gendered norms related to pregnancy taboos, in which mothers were forbidden to appear in public in the past. However, today, they can work outside while pregnant. The workplace in Bangladesh thus maintains the status quo of gendered norms through the interplay of old traditions and new norms, indicating the changes in the work and family devotion schemas.

Each mother's reintegration into the workforce after maternity leave was handled differently, but all the mothers stated that the most challenging task was leaving their baby home while going to the office. Except for two, none of the working mothers had on-site childcare

facilities. Although the government has rules requiring day-care facilities, most Bangladeshi workplaces do not adhere to them. This noncompliance in the male-dominated workplace reaffirms the broader patriarchal culture, which sees childcare as the mothers' and the family's responsibilities. This also implies that fathers are devoted to their work roles and take the leverage of avoiding childcare and domestic obligations. No interviewed fathers were found to be anxious about childcare while at work since they felt their wives or relatives would handle it.

On the other hand, the mothers expressed a strong desire to keep working but not at the expense of avoiding family obligations. Though challenging, they juggled numerous roles (mother, paid worker, wife, etc.) and delineated a work-life balance by combining work and parenting. These working mothers pushed the boundaries of ideal mothers' and ideal workers' norms by adopting various alternatives such as hiring housekeepers and relocating closer to parents' or relatives' homes in childcare management, indicating they have used their agency to be both a mother and a worker. This work-life balance can be viewed as an alternate form of respectable femininity against the prevalent trend of prioritising family over work in South Asian literature (see Chapter 3). It also represents the gendered advancement of working women in contemporary Bangladesh through their growing engagement in paid employment (see Hussein, 2022). My research shows that working mothers can negotiate and outsource their home duties or childcare (using relatives or housemaids) to bargain for paid jobs and replace some home responsibilities.

Such negotiations and uses of their agency affirm and reaffirm my theoretical assumption that South Asian women should not only be seen as a symbol of capitalist and patriarchal repression but instead recognise their agency and autonomy. Such changes also affirm that gender is not a static, monolithic concept but a fluid, constructed, and contentious one that is constantly evolving (Risman & Davis, 2013; Connell, 2005; Greenstein, 1996, p. 587).

However, employing such agency does not signal an overthrow of the patriarchal system or complete autonomy on the part of educated, middle-class working mothers. Despite having paid employment, working mothers seem unable to alter gendered norms aligned with work and family devotion schemas in an environment where patriarchy rules the workplace. With two exceptions, all returning mothers acknowledged that they had unequal key labour market outcomes, even in the presence of gendered or moderated workplaces. Findings in this chapter reveal that employers expect all employees to work hard while sacrificing time at

home. This is the political and occupational culture in middle-class workplaces connected to neoliberalism and these norms have clearly infiltrated Bangladesh.

However, such infiltration has intensified the dilemma for mothers, creating both opportunities and constraints. For instance, although the paid work opportunities have increased for mothers, capitalist exploitation has remained strong concomitantly because despite having laws, the workplace still needs to provide childcare or equal maternal advantages to all working mothers. These neoliberal workplace expectations (e.g., 24/7 working hours motivation, competitive work ethics, unwavering dedication to work, prioritising career over family lives) also function within a masculine mindset, where childcare, housework and eldercare (all feminised tasks) are erased from managerial consciousness. As such, there is a common misconception that all employees are treated the same and, therefore, equally. All middle-class employees, both men and women, are expected to push the business forward, irrespective of gender. Of course, things are hardly equal because, following childbirth; female employees are torn between work and home. Male employees are not.

Despite their occupational aspirations, talent and drive, most mothers in this study reported being unable to fulfil their work duties upon returning from giving birth to a child. However, what makes the Bangladesh context different are the expectations thrust upon mothers from a concentrated collectivist family framework shaped by the family devotion schema and rigid religious constraints. Thus, although patriarchy is a global phenomenon, it persists in a neo-liberalising Bangladesh through the informal but highly significant interplay of workplaces and family obligations. While workplaces make greater demands of all employees (under the guise of gender equality), they neglect the ongoing familial responsibilities placed on mothers by gendered family and organisational norms.

9.1. DISCUSSION

This research was an exploration of the barriers and challenges for middle-class, professional mothers in Bangladesh, a country struggling to compete in an ever-expanding neoliberal political climate. My work aimed to fill a critical gap in the sociological literature, specifically in the context of Bangladesh. The particular area researched was labour market inequality for middle-class women, especially working mothers of young children, which has received little attention in Bangladesh and other South Asian countries.

The family and workplace are two key domains that influence working parents' lives through normative ideologies of gender that define institutional structures. In order to demonstrate the impact of the work and family devotion schemas on women, my thesis details the everyday experiences of women as mothers and paid workers in the face of various cultural, institutional, legal and policy limitations. The research has highlighted the often invisible, ubiquitous and also contradictory impacts of institutions, such as the family and the labour market, on the career goals of mothers. Some facets of institutions continue a legacy of historically persistent norms, much like a snail carrying its home. Other facets aim to transform women's roles in keeping with the needs of a society in transition. Together, these contrasting forces influence working mothers' long-term expectations of their professional lives, as well as how they perceive the interplay between their responsibilities to their families and paid work. .

The early chapters of the thesis set the scene for the empirical analyses. Chapter 2 outlined cultural schemas as the primary theoretical framework. It pointed to the social constructedness of the family and work devotion schemas and their ability to govern individual behaviours as well as societal structures and relationships. Chapter 3 provided a background to Bangladesh, where this thesis was undertaken. It described some of its enduring traditional societal conditions as well as post-independence geopolitical and developmental changes. Chapter 4 explained the methodology of the thesis and the decisions underpinning the qualitative research design, data collection and analysis methods.

The first finding Chapter (Chapter 5) highlighted contemporary transitions in family composition, in both extended and nuclear families, among middle-class, educated, young

working couples. Interviewed mothers shared their experience of navigating prescribed family values, while reflecting on how constructions of *traditional feminine respectability* intersect with often limited occupational choices. Undoubtedly, in recent times, Bangladesh has seen changes in family formation, particularly the growth of nuclear families that, at face value, signals greater freedom and independence for working mothers. However, despite this, as my empirical evidence suggests, influences stemming from the family devotion schema still have profound effects on the work lives of professional mothers.

My research also raises broader questions about the construction of *feminine respectability* in contemporary Bangladesh. The interviews revealed *'ideal motherhood'* and 'compulsory motherhood' as powerful, dominant discourses. Influence on the construction of the family devotion schema, stereotyping mothers' responsibilities as homemakers and primary caregivers for children, affirms previous findings in this realm cross-culturally (Williamson et al., 2023; Schmidt et al., 2022; Blair-Loy & Cech, 2017; Dean et al., 2013). These narratives on motherhood are closely tied to workplace ideologies, which together frame the dominant ideologies influencing women. According to my research, Bangladeshi society views childbirth as the pinnacle of feminine identity and authentic womanhood, conflicting with employment commitment; a tension between work and family devotion schemas. Such findings are consistent with prior research across a range of cultural settings.

Notably, my findings add to the literature by highlighting the ways that *intensive mothering materialises in Bangladesh,* specifically, how it is cast upon professional mothers from multiple angles, by a range of parties: husbands, mothers-in-law, in some cases, a woman's own parents and in broader public spaces. The pressures of coercion are so multi-faceted that their collective power can be overbearing. Nevertheless, at the same time, their ubiquity is normalised and rendered invisible. Working mothers with high occupational goals often *become socially isolated* in their husband's family setting and find little support, even in their extended networks. This is a key difference in Bangladesh compared with the dominant research conducted largely in Western countries, where public discussions of feminist progression are more common. Women in Western countries are less frequently pressured to live with their husbands' family, again a common practice in Bangladesh which bolsters the family devotion schema (Hussein, 2017; Samad, 2015; Chowdhury, 2009). My findings indicate that even in a nuclear family, women in Bangladesh are still subject to family pressures that only allow them *constrained freedom and choice.*

Chapter 6 focused on the more practical aspects of mothers' and fathers' everyday lives that result from *transitions into motherhood and fatherhood*, which intersect parental status and influence work goals. The Chapter began by elucidating how working mothers cope with *pregnancy challenges* rooted in the gendered family devotion schema, limiting women's public visibility and labour employment activities. Many mothers struggle to balance family and career at this time of change due to *restricted freedoms.* Building on Chapter 5, findings here revealed that while some mothers felt supported by their husbands' and in-laws' families, most sensed pressure to choose family over profession due to *restricted freedom.* The findings also show that mothers in Bangladesh, regardless of socioeconomic status, are aware of and accountable for performing the *'second shift'*. This is irrespective of whether they resist or accept such gendered obligations, having to grapple with rhetoric that still preaches *unconditional love, self-sacrifice, and undivided care of children*. Thus, the trade-off between childcare and career success remains intractable for many mothers in present day Bangladesh.

Regarding fathers, the findings suggest that with the rise in mothers' labour market engagement, parenting is only mildly contested between old traditions and new demands of fathering. In other words, change has fragmented Bangladeshi fathers into varied, somewhat *polarised fatherhood* between the conventional fathers, who take charge of breadwinning, policing, and secondary parenting, and the new type of fathers, who help to some degree with housework and childcare, but still not as much with domestic tasks that require extensive time and effort (Atkinson, 2022, Tanquerel & Grau-Grau, 2020; Williams, 2008). This fragmentation results from inconsistencies between work and family devotion schemas in Bangladesh, where workplace culture contradicts family values. Thus, fatherhood narratives reflect a complex redefinition of what it means to be a father in Bangladesh today, incorporating past and present social expectations.

Further, while working mothers care for their children in a very collectivist and self-sacrificing manner, prioritising their children's and family's interests, fathers remain much more individualistic. Thus, the collectivistic nature of Bangladeshi family values was re-imposed by reshaping and ultimately reproducing the kinship system rather than diminishing it. This is despite the ethos of neoliberalism that has intensified nuclear families. In contrast to mothers, fathers' narratives demonstrated an individualistic agency. They did this, for example, by pursuing time with children that best suited their individual needs and

preferences but locating them more fluidly across the interests of their children, family, themselves and the workplace.

Turning the focus to the state and workplace perspectives, I examined the challenges mothers of small children face in continuing paid work, highlighting the interface between government policies and working parents' real-life experiences (Chapter 7). In fact, how maternity leave can impede or promote gender equality depends on how the State administers and legislates the matter. My findings indicate that *work-family reconciliation* has never been a consolidated governmental objective; instead, it has always been subordinated to broader economic goals, such as increasing women's employment without ensuring maternity protection or childcare facilities.

The current Labour Law promotes gross deficiencies concerning maternity leave policies and regulations, affirming extant literature on the Bangladeshi context (Khatun, 2018; Ahmed, 2017; Ali, 2010; Anam, 2008). Legislative development occurs through codifying updated law and piecemeal revisions to earlier principles and institutional structures, not a systemic redesign to solve work-family difficulties. For instance, *the absence of paternity leave* in the current legislation suggests that Bangladeshi labour regulations were and still are shaped by patriarchal control that undermines fathers' child-rearing obligations. This indicates the influence of the work devotion schema.

Another significant shortcoming of the current maternity policy is that it does not apply equally to everyone. The state's current maternity laws and policies have varying effects on working parents, depending on their class, location, type of job, and employment in the public or private sectors. As a result, inequalities have been normalised in practice, even though existing maternity care should provide equal opportunities to all those who are eligible. Mothers who were interviewed stated unequivocally that there was a considerable disparity between government and non-government workers in receiving equal paid maternity leave. The findings reveal that interviewed mothers had a better probability of getting 24 weeks (much longer than the world average of 12 weeks) paid maternity leave if they worked for the government. In contrast, maternity leave conditions were unclear for employees working for a private company (as the law did not clarify it). As a result, private employers frequently reap the benefit of the doubt of these *ambiguous maternity policies*, depriving working mothers of maternity benefits.

The findings further illustrate broader support for the work devotion schema vis-à-vis the Bangladeshi government's maternity policy of 'two children maternity benefits' and the unwritten, but very real, penalty for a third child. Although a few interviewees supported the policy of *'two children maternity benefits'*, most participants reported that it is inconsistent with the cultural codes of Bangladesh, as the *son's preference* for this patriarchal society is still a dominant family custom. As a result, this gendered policy obfuscates the labour market participation of some working mothers who face irreconcilable demands between competitive career prospects and family pressures for a son's preference if they already have two daughters. This *'two-child maternity policy'* has amplified the patriarchal fertility discourse, reflecting citizen rights and obligations on the one hand and the profoundly ingrained power of *patriarchal descent* (Sultana, 2011; Kabeer, 1998) on the other.

Regarding childcare facilities, parents in the global South, like Bangladesh, were expected to make personal changes with little to no governmental help. My findings demonstrate that the gendered approach to social policy that is most prevalent in South Asia is one in which the state prioritises economic growth and output over the welfare of the individual, and in particular, women. Despite government initiatives, my research demonstrates that the family devotion schema remains fully ingrained in formalised childcare management. Government legislation mandating businesses with 40 or more female employees to set up childcare remains largely ineffective. Moreover, government and private sector antagonism disrupts public childcare facilities in Bangladesh. The government believes private enterprises should provide childcare for their working mothers, while the employer argues that the government should subsidise childcare as it is costly. This antagonism results in dysfunctional childcare management for which working mothers are real victims since fathers are far less likely to take childcare responsibilities at home in Bangladesh.

In terms of organisational culture and practices (Chapter 8), labour markets regulate and sustain an occupational status based on the assumption that all parties will contribute to institutional advancement (Gamble, 2020; Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015; Kruger & Baldus, 1999). In practice, however, labour market mechanisms underpin the asymmetric link between family and paid work. It is because these occupational scripts require that family work be completed predominantly by mothers in every society. Across developed countries, gender discrimination in the workplace still exists (e.g., gender pay gap, glass-ceiling, penalties attached to motherhood, etc.). In Bangladesh, these forms of discrimination appear comparatively intensified. In my research, we see working mothers in Bangladesh straddling

a workplace culture that calls for *neoliberal norms* which completely ignores extended family pressures that drive mothers into highly intensive mothering. These *institutional constraints*, brought on by harsh gender stereotypes, further problematise mothers' career goals. Therefore, working mothers in these regions generally face greater, more complicated challenges than their counterparts in the West.

Returning to professional workplace conditions, within Bangladesh's evolving neoliberal environment, '*ideal workers*', as the participants agreed, would be productive, have career goals, control their emotions in stressful situations, have good social skills within the business sphere and perhaps most importantly, '*ideal workers*' would have time for work, including during odd hours of the day or early evening. These *ideal worker norms* are strongly tied to the work devotion schema and diametrically oppose the attributions of the family devotion schema.

My findings show while most interviewed fathers agreed with their organisation's *ideal worker* values, most interviewed mothers did not. Rather, these working mothers asserted that the characteristics linked with the *ideal worker norms are gendered*, ingrained in the work devotion schema, and have no actual impact on organisational growth. They admitted that, notwithstanding the interruption of their paid job (due to maternity leave), their productivity is on par with that of their male co-workers. Unfortunately, workplaces suggest treating all workers (irrespective of gender) equally, imposing the same expectations upon men and women under the guise of equality (Sallee, 2012; Acker, 2011). Such occupational impositions completely ignore the coercive family context, where the patriarchal family structure pressures mothers to stay home and relinquish their careers. Thus, as Bangladesh workplaces try to compete globally and treat all their workers accordingly, middle-class professional mothers are left to navigate both sides of the patriarchal workplace and the family, and individual sacrifices are virtually inevitable, embracing the unequal outcomes of their participation.

Indeed, all interviewed mothers encountered material and cultural restrictions and hurdles, resulting in diminished outcomes, e.g., wages, skill development, regular promotion, etc. Following their pregnancy announcement, individuals experienced discrimination that was communicated subtly but was significant in effect, such as a shift in supervisors' or co-workers' perspectives and being excluded from decisions they would have previously made. Most businesses did not make particular provisions for mothers, such as transportation, a sick room, or quick hospital transport. In addition to a lack of practical help, pregnant women

faced sexist attitudes at work. They were disregarded in official and casual events. Several mothers reported verbal harassment from their superiors and male co-workers. All of these forms of workplace discrimination exacerbate the gender discrimination working mothers face at home and align with previous findings (see Liu, 2023; Hsu, 2021; Gatrell, 2013). Liu (2023) reports that working mothers have spoken about being placed in a *'pregnancy queue'* so that they cannot all take maternity leave at once, being passed over for promotions, and being openly discriminated against and mocked for their diminished abilities due to having children.

The broader Bangladeshi labour market has some structural features affecting mothers severely, e.g., more labour supply than demand, lack of availability of part-time jobs, flexible working hours and wage protection. My research suggests that child-bearing and rearing cause professional mothers *to accumulate a wage penalty* in Bangladesh that intensifies with the birth of every successive child. A mother's earnings are decreased after having her first child, and this effect persists over time and with the birth of more children. Fathers' wages or career progress, on the other hand, demonstrates no evidence of decline. In Bangladeshi workplaces, glass ceilings remain a significant barrier for working mothers seeking managerial roles. Many interviewed mothers asserted that they had the opportunity to achieve further degrees or training for professional development. Still, they could not pursue these goals due to childcare and domestic obligations. The findings, thus, imply that working mothers with small children are constrained from advancing their careers due to persistent gender norms and structural barriers that exist both in the workplace and home, informed broadly by the work and family devotion schemas.

However, the current research also provides evidence that individuals may partially challenge these schemas and that cultural shifts can lead to resistance, contestation and challenges over time (Liu, 2023; Davis & Risman, 2015; Hennessy, 2009). My findings demonstrate that individuals make strategic moves to negotiate the gendered discursive structures regulating their daily lives by *integrating two devotion schemes* rather than choosing one over the other. This is a novel insight compared to the earlier proponent of work and family devotion schemas. For instance, Blair-Loy (2001) found that highly professional women remain childless or never married or alternatively, scale back from their paid work role once they become mothers.

Based on my results, multiple identities for working mothers (e.g., mothers, wives, workers, etc.) are possible and present. The image of many middle-class, educated working mothers is

no longer seen as merely passive and vulnerable to exploitation, though they continue to be confined by structural forces, patriarchy and religious norms. One of the agencies enabling mothers' multiple roles and coping strategies is their engagement with the "patriarchal bargains," wherein some mothers can gain comparative advantages despite the possibility of patriarchy being reproduced as an exploitative system (e.g., by compromising gender role division in the family, they might achieve the family's permission to enter the labour market). To this end, my findings illustrate how the local iteration of "bargaining with patriarchy" enables the utilisation of pre-existing social structures and the discursive significance of the work and family devotion schemas. Thus, conceptually, the current study unmasks the details of middle-class, educated working mothers' various rationales and strategies for the engagement with "patriarchal bargains".

My analyses show that some mothers (and a smaller proportion of fathers) challenge and resist the conventionally prescribed forms of gender, marriage, and family values; a study of these variations, ambiguities, and agential decisions is essential to the larger study of labour market gender inequality. Findings reveal that mothers' narratives challenge stereotypical perceptions that the family is only a site of gender discrimination, dominance, and exploitation. Instead, middle-class families create varied gender spaces where individuals can pursue *'constrained choices'* from stereotypical social expectations, norms, and vigilance, allowing them to explore their own selves and self-worth. I note that my findings align with recent observations (see Williamson et al., 2023; Liu, 2023; Mosseri, 2019). For instance, Liu (2023) observes that mothers may express a cohesive socioeconomic and status self-worth characterized by their professional accomplishments and monetary benefits, placing higher importance on their identities as professional women than traditional stay-at-home mothers. However, my findings indicate that although such *'integration of devotion schemas'* energizes mothers' agencies to some extent, they find it difficult to more completely challenge the patriarchal system or gain equal outcomes through their labour force participation. Nevertheless, the achievement is that they could continue their earning role while mothers, unlike their own mothers and grandmothers.

Revisiting maternal ideals demonstrates that interviewees' views of 'good' and 'bad' mothers mirror contemporary Bangladeshi mothers' perceptions of *modified motherhood* (although more slowly and on a smaller scale), pointing to a generational shift. For example, most of the interviewed mothers expressed that they felt they need not stay home to be good mothers

like previous generations (Schuler & Rottach, 2010), even though they emphasised quality time with their children and husbands.

This study reveals the depth of working mothers' justifications and strategies for bargaining with patriarchy, both theoretically and empirically. Although patriarchal bargaining has some critical consequences (e.g., sometimes mothers were victimised when their mothers-in-law became actual beneficiaries), several working mothers were found to take advantage of familial situations for individual gain while reaffirming elements of the patriarchal system (Mohsin & Syed, 2021; Kandiyoti, 1988). For example, some middle-class mothers demonstrate agency by relieving themselves from assigned home duties by hiring maidservants, thereby also reinforcing patriarchy (and class divisions) by hiring a less privileged woman to replace her in the home. In this bargain, despite the time-saving benefit of relieving working mothers of household chores, the patriarchal family arrangement system that frees fathers from home duties remains unchallenged and a new woman (the maidservant) is exploited.

Revisiting *respectable femininity* and its changing effects on mothers' labour market participation indicates that this ideal is not entirely reversible because modification of this ideal still materialises within a patriarchal system. For instance, Bangladeshi men are not ready to alter their image of '*sofolpurush*' (successful man), though they allow their wives paid work opportunities. This implies that working mothers could partially gain autonomy (e.g., returning to work after having children). Nevertheless, they are constrained by gender norms (e.g., taking double shifts) and structural barriers (e.g., lack of publicly subsidised childcare-social security).

My findings further demonstrate that normative expectations of the *'ideal worker'* are subject to change. The government, for example, has firm policy supporting gender equality in hiring and employment benefits, yielding occasional changes. For instance, some mothers claimed that their co-workers and bosses offered them support and cooperation during their pregnancies, which helped them overcome the challenges associated with pregnancy and their job commitments. Additionally, 24-week maternity leave allowed certain mothers to return to work postpartum (albeit not all working mothers received it). Furthermore, women's presence in police, administrative cadre, lawyer, professor, bank officer, army, navy, and airforce commander positions indicates a shift in Bangladeshi labour norms. Other mothers also reported that their KPIs were based on performance, not motherhood status. Unfortunately, while signs of progress emerged to some extent, many studies, including

mine, indicate that government labour market policies are *exclusive and ineffective*, and that *broader cultural norms* around gender equality are shifting slowly at best and only for a small proportion of families and workplaces.

Regarding theoretical contributions, mothers' labour market disparity has plagued social science scholars for decades. Several plausible theoretical assumptions have been made to analyse workplace discrimination against working mothers, both in the workplace and their families. The current study used the theoretical framework of 'cultural schemas' (e.g., family and work devotion schemas), to conceptualize shared knowledge derived from broader cultural beliefs about gender that inform individual thought processes, perceptions, and actions (Liu, 2023; Yoon & Park; Mosseri, 2019; Blair-Loy & Cech., 2017; Cech et al., 2016; Damaske et al., 2014; Blair-Loy, 2003). Work and family devotion schemas, primarily studied in Western societies (the US, Canada, and Western Europe), illuminate a work-family landscape driven by cultural tensions and governed by historically built and highly institutionalized gender views. These devotional schemas affect how we use our time, labour, interests, and passions to achieve meaningful life goals (Mosseri, 2019; Blair-Loy, 2003). A traditional obligation for women, the 'family devotion schema' provides marriage and parenthood purpose, emotional vitality and required substantial time spent on these responsibilities. In contrast, the 'work devotion schema' held that men were traditionally hardworking and family breadwinners (Yoon & Park, 2022; Reid, 2015; Damaske et al., 2014). The heteronormative masculinity-based work commitment paradigm implies a dedicated worker (Mosseri, 2019). Every schema defines a meaningful life with clear incentives for family and job, but as the research shows, they are driven by dichotomized and distinctive gendered constructs.

However, the application of the schema framework to the context of middle-class, highly educated Bangladeshi mothers and fathers and a few key informants indicate, contrary to the framings of meaningfulness and reward, that the pressure from adhering to the 'family devotion schema' as well as exclusions from the contemporary structures of the work devotion schema significantly limits mothers' careers. In contrast, adhering to the 'work devotion schema' is rewarding for fathers' career pathways. Here, the point of departure is that when mothers work, they face a dilemma between work and family, while fathers are culturally legitimised to prefer work over family. Theoretically, my research highlights the contradictions in the interfaces between collective dimensions of the family and Islamic

cultural values governed by the family devotion schema and a work devotion schema in a country undergoing neoliberal transformations.

Another crucial contribution of this study is the inclusion of fathers in the sample and the examination of their labour market experience underpinning the cultural schema studies. While fatherhood is not the centrepiece of the current study, interviews with fathers have further showcased the difficulties professional mothers experience as they straddle their domestic and professional lives. Highlighting the relative ease that fathers experience in their workplaces shows how easy it is for them and other family members to normalize domestic spaces as women's spaces. Theoretically, then, this research speaks to the hegemony of work and family devotion schemas, where so many parties (fathers, in-laws, employers, policymakers) unconsciously take for granted women's restrictions in domestic spheres. Aside from Yoon and Park's (2022) analysis of Korean fathers, no prior research has looked at working fathers' organisational or family responses to family or/and work devotion schemas.

9.2. LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

Despite the fact that the thesis has provided significant insights into the experiences of Bangladeshi women and men as they become mothers and fathers and the trade-offs they face between work and family life, the study has some limitations and areas for future research. The current study concentrated on the content covered in interviews that each lasted one to two hours. As a result, the data obtained from these interviews was limited and selective. Furthermore, I do not imply that the findings presented here tell the whole story of the lives of the individuals. The results provided insight into what the interview subjects found most important.

The findings in this research claim to be generalisable to only some middle-class couples in Bangladesh. Due to the limited sample size, this study's conclusions and findings reflect the experiences of the Bangladeshi mothers and fathers in one major city who participated in this study. Moreover, the sample was drawn from a specific social class, the middle-class, university-educated mothers and fathers of relatively young and middle-aged groups. However, future studies with a larger sample size and a wider range of demographics—possibly in quantitative form—may increase the chances of making generalisations to a broader audience.

As indicated earlier, I have focused solely on employed mothers and fathers from the workplace perspective, limiting my research to a cross-sectional comparison of findings by excluding supervisors or managers. Therefore, future research on workplace culture and policies involving managers or supervisors may provide insights into the difficulties in implementing organisational culture and policy changes.

Again, this research focused on a homogenous socioeconomic group, e.g., the middle class. I acknowledge that this study's key informants are selected from numerous professions and backgrounds, such as legislators, lawyers, academicians, research professionals, human and labour rights activists, women worker leaders, etc., reflecting diverse educational backgrounds (e.g., four experts having PhDs abroad). Mothers and fathers have similar education and employment histories, usually in white-collar service jobs. A more extensive study is needed to determine how 'class' affects working mothers' labour market participation (e.g., wealthy, middle-class and poor). It is not unexpected that the social and institutional support and the values and expectations of mothers from other classes may differ from those of the mothers who participated in the present study.

Despite the fact that every participant in my study identified as being from a Bangladeshi ethnic group, there is still extensive variation and variability among Bangladeshi people and cultures that have not been illuminated. For instance, a family's location, whether in urban or rural areas, has a substantial impact on childcare management. Such a line of future investigation might have uncovered different challenges between working mothers living in metropolitan regions and those living in rural ones.

Methodologically, although in-depth interviews produced a rich data set, I acknowledge that a longitudinal study conducted over several years might provide additional insight into the ways in which working mothers negotiate changes in their household and care obligations. Other research techniques, such as journaling, holding focus group discussions with participants in informal support networks, or conducting observational studies that look at the dynamics of mothers juggling work and family life, could glean more insights regarding mothers' labour market disadvantages.

Lastly, the social milieu in which the subjects and I reside constrained the results. It is likely that other researchers with different gender and ethnic backgrounds, educational backgrounds, and socioeconomic backgrounds different from mine may have approached different questions from different perspectives and come to different conclusions.

9.3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Gender discrimination in the workplace is a widespread occurrence. Nonetheless, its intensity remains strong, indicating an overarching demand for an investigation. My study's findings frame women's lives in Bangladesh's growing labour market as complicated and nuanced, with experiences of disjunction, hope, and opportunity. However, this study also demonstrated integration between two overarching devotions. This indicates a slow and gradual shift in attitudes towards labour market equality. Moreover, state policies and practices have both facilitated and worsened mothers' labour market participation and key outcomes. Put succinctly, this research exemplifies how beliefs about gender, deeply ingrained with the work and family devotion schemas, are the primary roadblocks to labour market equality.

In order to create a supportive atmosphere for working mothers to effectively balance their personal and professional lives, gender-sensitive policies and best practices must be put in place. Comprehensive and gender-sensitive regulations may lessen the biases that prevent working mothers from participating equally in the workforce and getting the same results. However, in the current labour legislation, there are no provisions for paternity leave. This is regardless of the fact paternity leave improves dual-earner parents' work-life balance, eliminates inequities between couples and encourages a shift towards gender equality through a caring parenting model that includes fathers in care duties (though I agree that paternity leave options escalated debate about its actual effectiveness for the childcare). In addition to the personal liberties it grants men, a 'fatherhood quota' is crucial because it symbolises the importance put on family and fatherhood. Furthermore, it could accelerate the shift towards more egalitarian gender beliefs and practices. Lastly, widely held cultural beliefs frequently make it difficult for fathers to take desired time off work (see Rocha, 2020; Hass & Hwang, 2019; Fox et al., 2009); compulsory paternity leave can override social norms that discourage fathers from taking time off work.

Another significant difficulty of the current maternity leave policy is that it is not similarly practised in the private and public employment sectors. The government agency implementing maternity legislation should monitor the private sector to ensure accountability and subsidise businesses that cannot otherwise afford to offer maternity leave. According to my findings, currently, no subsidies are offered, and the oversight of implementing maternity legislation in the private employment sector is appalling.

Regarding childcare policies and facilities, the public and private job sectors provide a similarly bleak picture, notwithstanding differences in maternity leave benefits. My findings show that the negligence of childcare has been accompanied by the noncompliance of existing policies, both in the public and private sectors. These findings add to the body of research by highlighting policy-makers' active agency or responsiveness in understanding the durability of family policies, the gradual growth of formal childcare in Bangladesh, and its mass practices. Further, the government should encourage the commercialization of childcare by offering flexible laws policies for private entrepreneurs.

The paucity of public transport and its mismanagement in Bangladesh is one of the country's most pressing issues. Pregnant mothers, especially, suffer more because most companies do not provide transport for their employees. Such structural constraints need to be addressed in future research so that policymakers, government and non-government employers consider this problem and facilitate transport support.

Regarding gender normativity at home and in the workplace, the image of the 'ideal mother', positing the mother as the sole caregiver and the epitome of every other domestic unpaid task, is deeply entrenched in the work devotion schema, directly contradicting their paid work roles because achieving these cultural expectations is nearly impossible for a working mother. Gendered ideological pressure primarily from in-laws' families, such as the son's preference, the mother should stay at home, or pregnancy taboos must be uprooted as they directly contradict mothers' career aspirations. This research emphasises the significance of fathers' involvement in child caregiving and the need for employers to adopt more egalitarian attitudes towards working mothers to uplift their equal labour market outcomes.

To conclude, I leave open the possibility for future research to examine the work-family association across various contexts to gain a deeper understanding of why the characteristics of work and family devotion schemas may lead to varied outcomes in their professional aspirations between mothers and others.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (PIS)
EXPERTS, MOTHERS, AND FATHERS

Department of Sociology
Level 9, Human Science Building
10 Symonds Street, Auckland
T +64 9 373 7599, Ext. 88614
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland 1142
New Zealand

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (PIS)

Project title: Gender, Motherhood and Labour Market Inequality in Bangladesh
Supervisors: Dr David Mayeda and Dr Louise Humpage
Name of Researcher: Shafiqul Islam

Researcher Introduction

Good day, my name is Shafiqul Islam. I am from Bangladesh and work as a faculty member of the United International University. I am currently on study-leave and pursuing a PhD in Sociology at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, under the supervision of Dr David T. Mayeda and Dr Louise Humpage.

Project description and invitation

My PhD study explores how labour market participation and key outcomes for Bangladeshi middle-class, educated women are affected by having young children. It aims to shed light on the ways these cultural beliefs and practices support ongoing gender inequalities for mothers in the labour market. To achieve this aim, I intend to speak to three kinds of participants: mothers employed in the formal economy with young children (i.e., less than school age); husbands of mothers employed in the formal economy with young children; and key informants (expert on gender inequality in the labour market of Bangladesh e.g., an activist working in NGOs, a professional advocating on behalf of working mothers). Given your relevant experience and knowledge as a mother/father, I believe your insights would be valuable for my study and I would be grateful for your time and assistance with this project.

Project Procedures

Your participation in this study is voluntary. At the time of participation, you must be at least 20 years old. If you agree to be a participant, I will schedule an interview with you at a time and place of your convenience. The interview will take approximately one hour. The mode of interview will be either online or face-to-face. The interview will be conducted in English or Bengali as you prefer. I will then translate all interviews conducted in Bengali into English for use in my thesis. You can also stop the interview and/or have the recorder paused at any stage during the interview without

questions. If you do not wish to be audio recorded, I will manually record the interview in my field notebook. You will be invited to review your interview transcript. If you wish to review your transcript, you will have four weeks to review your interview transcript following its receipt. After the elapsing of four weeks, the researcher will assume no corrections are necessary. You will be also offered a copy of an executive summary of the findings of this research.

Data storage/retention/destruction/future use

After I return from fieldwork, all data will be stored and saved confidentially for six years, and all signed consent forms will be in a locked drawer in the PI/supervisor's office at the University of Auckland. The electronic storage of data will remain saved and secured in a password-protected computer of the University of Auckland. During my fieldwork in Dhaka, all gathered data will be stored in a password-protected laptop and will be saved and stored on the University of Auckland server through the Web Drop Off Box and hard copies will be stored in a locked-drawer either at my home or in the faculty office at the United International University, Dhaka.

All digital copies of data will be deleted after six years. All hard copies will be destroyed using a shredder at the same time. I will also make sure that interviews saved on the audio-recording device used in the research are properly deleted following their transfer to my password-protected personal laptop.

Data gathered from your interview will be used in my doctoral thesis, and in academic presentations, reports, and articles in the future.

Right to Withdraw from Participation

At any stage during the face-to-face interview, you will have the right to stop or pause the interview without giving a reason. After the completion of your interview, you will have the right to withdraw part of or your entire interview from this research project, if you wish without giving a reason, as long as you inform me within four weeks after you have received the interview transcript. You can contact me by email at sisl543@aucklanduni.ac.nz or by phone at +8801994071671 (Bangladeshi number to be supplied) to inform me of your decision. However, if you do not wish to receive the interview transcript, the researcher will assume that you also do not wish to withdraw part of or your entire interview from this research project.

Transcriber

Your interview will be transcribed either by me or by a professional transcriber. The professional transcriber will sign an agreement of confidentiality before transcribing your interview.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Your data will be kept securely in order to minimise the possibility of it being accessed by a third party other than the researcher and supervisors. Both of you and your organisation's identity in all research outputs will be confidential through the use of a pseudonym.

Gift

The researcher intends to exchange a gift with the participants as a gesture of appreciation for their help with this research project. However, the receipt of this gift does not affect your ability to withdraw in part or in whole data from your interview in this research.

Funding

This project is funded by DRF (Doctoral Research Fund).

Contact Details
Researcher:
Shafiqul Islam
PhD Student
Department of Sociology
Level 9, Human Science Building
10 Symonds Street, Auckland
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland1124, New Zealand
Phone: +64 9 373 7599, Ext. 88614,
Mobile: +01194071671 (BD number), +64 0 22 540 9745 (NZ)
Email: sisl543@aucklanduni.ac.nz

Supervisors:
Dr David T. Mayeda (Principal Supervisor)
Email: d.mayeda@auckland.ac.nz
Phone: +64 9 923 4519
Department of Sociology | Faculty of Arts
University of Auckland Private Bag 92019
New Zealand
Dr Louise Humpage (Co-supervisor)
Email: l.humpage@auckland.ac.nz
Phone: +64 9 923 5115
Department of Sociology | Faculty of Arts
University of Auckland Private Bag 92019
New Zealand

Head of School
Professor Dr Simon John Holdaway
Email: sj.holdaway@auckland.ac.nz
Phone: +64 9 923 3947
School of Social Science| Faculty of Arts
University of Auckland Private Bag 92019
New Zealand

If you have any ethical concerns about this research, please contact:
The Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee,
The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142.
Telephone 09 373-7599, Extension 83711. Email: humanethics@auckland.ac.nz

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 24 February 28, 2020 for three years. Reference Number 023997

THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
Te Whare Wananga o Tamaki Makaurau
N E W Z E A L A N D

ARTS

Department of Sociology
Level 9, Human Science Building
10 Symonds Street, Auckland
T +64 9 373 7599, Ext. 88614
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland 1142
New Zealand

CONSENT FORM
(For Key Informants)

Project title: Gender, Motherhood and Labour Market Inequality in Bangladesh
Supervisors: Dr David T. Mayeda and Dr Louise Humpage
Name of Researcher: Shafiqul Islam

- I agree to take part in this research.
- I (agree/do not agree) to be recorded by a digital voice recorder.
- I understand that even if I agree to be recorded, I may choose to have the recorder turned off at any time.
- I understand that I have the choice of having a female research assistant be present at the interview and I: want her to be present □ do not want her to be present □ (tick whichever applies)
- I understand that, if recorded, the interviews will be transcribed either by the researcher or by a professional transcriber and that the professional transcriber will have signed a confidentiality agreement with the researcher.
- I understand that interviews in Bengali will be translated into English by the researcher.
- I understand I will be offered the chance to review my interview transcript and, if I choose to review my transcript, I will have four weeks within which to do it. After the elapsing of four weeks, the researcher will assume no corrections are necessary.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw part of or the entire interview from this research project, without giving a reason, within four weeks of receiving the interview transcript from the researcher. However, if I do not wish to receive the interview transcript, the researcher will assume that I also do not wish to withdraw part of or my entire interview from this research project.
- I understand that I have the option of being identified by my name in research outputs or, if I don't want to be identified, a pseudonym will be used to maintain confidentiality both for me and for my organisation's identity. Please tick the appropriate box below:
  - I am willing to be identified by name in all research outputs linked to this research □
  - I would like to be identified by a pseudonym in research outputs linked to this research □

- I understand that the researcher intends to exchange a gift with me as a gesture of appreciation for my help with this research project. However, the receipt of this gift does not affect my ability to withdraw in part or in whole data from my interview in this research.
- I understand that all data will be stored for six years. The electronic data will remain saved on a password-protected computer of the University of Auckland and all hard copies will be stored in a locked cabinet at the University of Auckland. After six years, all paper and digital copies of data will be destroyed and deleted.
- I wish/do not wish (circle one) to receive a copy of the executive summary of the findings of this research, which can be emailed to this address: _____

Name:_____**Signature**:_____**Date**:_____

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 24 February 2020 for three years. Ref. Number 023997.

THE UNIVERSITY OF
AUCKLAND
Te Whare Wananga o Tamaki Makaurau
N E W   Z E A L A N D

ARTS

Department of Sociology
Level 9, Human Science Building
10 Symonds Street, Auckland
T +64 9 373 7599, Ext. 88614
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland 1142
New Zealand

CONSENT FORM
(For Mothers)

Project title: Gender, Motherhood and Labour Market Inequality in Bangladesh
Supervisors: Dr David T. Mayeda and Dr Louise Humpage
Name of Researcher: Shafiqul Islam

- I agree to take part in this research.
- I (agree / do not agree) to be recorded by a digital voice recorder.
- I understand that even if I agree to being recorded, I may choose to have the recorder turned off at any time.
- I understand that I have the choice of having a female research assistant be present at the interview and I: want her to be present □ do not want her to be present □ Interview only with a female research assistant □ (tick whichever applies)
- I understand that, if recorded, the interviews will be transcribed either by the researcher or by a professional transcriber and that the professional transcriber will have signed a confidentiality agreement with the researcher.
- I understand that interviews in Bengali will be translated into English by the researcher.
- I understand I will be offered the chance to review my interview transcript and, if I choose to review my transcript, I will have four weeks within which to do it. After the elapsing of four weeks, the researcher will assume no corrections are necessary.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw part of or the entire interview from this research project, without giving a reason, within four weeks of receiving the interview transcript from the researcher. However, if I do not wish to receive the interview transcript, the researcher will assume that I also do not wish to withdraw part of or my entire interview from this research project.
- I understand that I have the option of being identified by my name in research outputs or, if I don't want to be identified, a pseudonym will be used to maintain confidentiality both for me and for my organisation's identity. Please tick the appropriate box below:
    I am willing to be identified by name in all research outputs linked to this research □
    I would like to be identified by a pseudonym in research outputs linked to this research □

- I understand that the researcher intends to exchange a gift with me as a gesture of appreciation for my help with this research project. However, the receipt of this gift does not affect my ability to withdraw in part or in whole data from my interview in this research.

- I understand that all data will be stored for six years. The electronic data will remain saved on a password-protected computer of the University of Auckland and all hard copies will be stored in a locked cabinet at the University of Auckland. After six years, all paper and digital copies of data will be destroyed and deleted.
- I wish/do not wish (circle one) to receive a copy of the executive summary of the findings of this research, which can be emailed to this address: _____

Name:_____**Signature**:_____**Date**:_____

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 24 February 2020 for three years. Ref. Number 023997.

APPENDIX 4: CONSENT FROM (CF) FATHERS

THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
Te Whare Wananga o Tamaki Makaurau
NEW ZEALAND

ARTS

Department of Sociology
Level 9, Human Science Building
10 Symonds Street, Auckland
T +64 9 373 7599, Ext. 88614
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland 1142
New Zealand

CONSENT FORM
(For Fathers)

Project title: Gender, Motherhood and Labour Market Inequality in Bangladesh
Supervisors: Dr David T. Mayeda and Dr Louise Humpage
Name of Researcher: Shafiqul Islam

- I agree to take part in this research.
- I (agree / do not agree) to be recorded by a digital voice recorder.
- I understand that even if I agree to being recorded, I may choose to have the recorder turned off at any time.
- I understand that I have the choice of having a female research assistant be present at the interview and I: want her to be present □; do not want her to be present □ (tick whichever applies)
- I understand that, if recorded, the interviews will be transcribed either by the researcher or by a professional transcriber and that the professional transcriber will have signed a confidentiality agreement with the researcher.
- I understand that interviews in Bengali will be translated into English by the researcher.
- I understand that I will be offered the chance to review my interview transcript and, if I choose to review my transcript, I will have four weeks within which to do it. After the elapsing of four weeks, the researcher will assume no corrections are necessary.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw part of or the entire interview from this research project, without giving a reason, within four weeks of receiving the interview transcript from the researcher. However, if I do not wish to receive interview transcript, researcher will assume that I also do not wish to withdraw part of or your entire interview from this research project.
- I understand that my identity and the identity of my organisation will be known to the researcher only and a pseudonym will be used in all research outputs to maintain confidentiality both for me and for my organisation's identity.

- I understand that the data will be used to inform the researcher's thesis and may also be used for presentations, reports and publication (e.g. journal articles) that result from this research.

- I understand that the researcher intends to exchange a gift with me as a gesture of appreciation for my help with this research project. However, the receipt of this gift does not affect my ability to withdraw in part or in whole data from my interview in this research.

- I understand that all data will be stored for six years. The electronic data will remain saved on a password protected computer of the University of Auckland and all hard copies will be stored in a locked cabinet at the University of Auckland. After six years, all paper and digital copies of data will be destroyed and deleted.

- I wish/do not wish to receive a copy of the executive summary of the findings of this research, which can be emailed to this address:_____

Name:_____**Signature**:_____**Date**:_____

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 24 February 2020 for three years. Ref. Number 023997.

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APPENDIX 5: PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE: KEY INFORMANTS

Name Original/ Pseudonym	Synopsis
Ainoon	Dr. Ainoon Naher is a professor at the Department of Anthropology at Jahangirnagar University. She has been working here for the last 28 years. Her areas of interest are Identity Politics, Islam, Migration, Ethnicity, and so on. As she indicated, her research endeavor was comparable to mine. She used to reflect the postmodern theoretical approach.
Rezwan	Dr. Rezwan Kabir is a journalist by profession. He is the chief editor of a daily newspaper. He was a scriptwriter for the former prime minister of Bangladesh for four years, from 2002 to 2006. He was also a managing director of the Bangladesh Press Institute for a couple of years. He takes part in TV talk shows very often.
Miti	Barrister Miti Sanjana is a renowned Lawyer of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. She is also a columnist and a well-known media figure. While her primary concentration is on Corporate & Commercial Laws, Banking Laws, and Property Laws, she also practices Muslim and Hindu Family Law, which includes marriage, divorce, custody, and interfaith marriages, among other things. She also is an expert on maternity laws and regulations.
Musharrof	Musharrof Hossain is an HR expert. He works with ICDDR'B, global health, and population research organisation, as the head of HR. He also works as a Guest Faculty member at some universities. He founded the Bangladesh Society for Human Resources Management (BSHRM). For 4 years, he served as President of the Asia-Pacific Human Resources Federation.
Rubina	Rubina Mira is a current Parliament Member of the Bangladesh Parliament and Advocate of Dhaka Judge Court. She is a member of the ruling party's central committee, the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL). She began her political career as a student when she was quite young. She is a strong advocate for women's rights in Bangladesh.
Moin	Dr. Moinul Islam is a professor and currently also the Chair, of the department of population science, at the University of Dhaka. He did his bachelor's and master's in sociology from the University of Dhaka, and PhD from Peking University in Demography. H also did a Global Health Research Capacity Strengthening Program (GHR-CAPS) Postdoctoral Fellowship at McGill University, Canada. In brief, his research includes female reproductive health, early marriages, violence against women, etc.
Sadia	Barrister Sadia Arman is a lawyer of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. She is also a human rights and social justice campaigner. She is a poet and writer. She takes part in different events and conversations to promote fundamental rights and civil liberties.
Bidisha	Dr. Bidisha Haque is a professor at the Department of Economics of the University of Dhaka. She earned her PhD in labor economics from Nottingham University in the United Kingdom. Women's and children's rights, Bangladesh's formal and informal labor markets, early marriages, violence against women, women's empowerment, and labor rights are among her areas of specialization.

Kalpona	Kalpona Akter is the CEO of the "Bangladesh Center for Workers Solidarity" (one of the most prominent NGOs for labor rights in Bangladesh). She began her career as a child worker in Bangladesh's textile industry when she was 13 years old. She was sacked from the factory because she organized workers to raise awareness of their rights. Factory owners, trade union activists, human rights activists, diplomats, United Nations agencies, European Unions, and worldwide brands and buyers were among the people she met. The Alison Des Forges Award was given to her by Human Rights Watch.
Samia (Pseudonym)	Samia works as a consultant on gender, human rights, constitutional rights, and marginalized people's rights in Bangladesh. She most recently served as a principal consultant for Comic Relief on a Context Analysis of women working in non-food supply chains in Bangladesh in three Factories from 2019 to 2020.
Nusrat (Pseudonym)	Nusrat was a Senior Research and Program Officer at Transparency International, Bangladesh (TIB). Currently, she is living in Canada. Her expertise includes the awareness of women's rights, especially on their domestic violence, empowerment of women, and human rights of the citizen.
Daisy (Pseudonym)	Daisy is the Senior Program Coordinator for International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) funded by Germany and Denmark. This INGO works basically for the land rights of women. In addition, she used to write academic and opinion articles on women's rights in Bangladesh.

APPENDIX 6: PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE: MOTHER

Participant (Pseudonym)	Synopsis
Mothers' Biographies	
Nafisa	Nafisa is 33 years old now. She is an adherent of the Islamic faith. She earned a bachelor's degree in accounting and a master's degree in finance from a public university. He has been married for around 8 years. She is the mother of a three-year-and-five-month-old child. She lives with a semi-extended family. Her husband is a banker. Regarding her profession, Nafisa works for a private corporation as a senior accountant. She must work for at least 8 hours every day, from 9 am to 5 pm. However, she works more than 40 hours per week on occasion when necessary for the organisation.
Fariha	Fariha has reached the age of 35. She is an adherent of the Islamic faith. She and her husband have been married for around 10 years. She's the mother of two children. The oldest is a 5-year-old, while the youngest is a 2.5-year-old. She lives in a nuclear family. Her husband's profession is teaching at a university. Fariha's occupation is that of a Senior Officer in an International Bank. Every five days of the week, her office hours are 9:30 am to 5:30 pm. However, she sometimes requires work outside of normal office hours on occasion. As a result, she works 46 hours per week on average.
Cynthia	Cynthia's age is 37. She is an adherent of the Islamic faith. She and her husband have been married for around 14 years. She is the mother of two young children, ages 12.5 and 3.5, respectively. She lives with a semi-extended family. Her husband works with the Bangladesh Army Engineering Core as a professional engineer. Regarding her profession, Cynthia is a physician with an MBBS degree. She works as a senior consultant at a private medical hospital. She works roughly 40 hours every week.
Meher	Meher is a 31-year-old woman. She is a Muslim woman. Her academic credentials include a bachelor's and master's degree from a private university. She and her husband have been married for around 13 years. She is the mother of one child, who is now three and a half years old. She lives in a nuclear family. Her husband works for an INGO. Regarding her profession, Meher works for an international NGO as WP Manager (Women Protector). She usually works for at least 8 hours every day, weekly, for five days. So, she works 40 hours weekly.
Tania	Tania completed her bachelor's and master's in public administration from the Jahangir Nagar University. She is 32 years old. She follows the Islam religion. She has been married for around 6.5 years. She has only one child, who is now more than 2 years old. She lives in a nuclear family. Her husband works as a senior officer in a state-owned bank. Regarding her profession, Tania is an Assistant professor at a private university. She does not require maintaining office hours. On average, she works for 40 hours five days a week.

Konika	Konika is a 33-year-old mother with one child of 2.3 years. She follows Hinduism. She did her bachelor's and master's in music. She and her husband have been married for around 7 years. She lives in a semi-extended family. Her husband works for a Non-governmental Organisation (NGO). Konika is a music teacher at a school. So, her working hours are from 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. or 1:00 p.m. Furthermore, she used to attend music tutoring courses regularly. She earns some extra money by attending music programs occasionally. As a result, it's difficult to say how long she works daily or weekly. However, it is undeniably more than 40 hours.
Adiba	Adiba is a 35-year-old mother. She is an adherent of the Islamic faith. She and her husband have been married for around 15 years. She is a mother of two children aged 13.5 and 3.5-year respectively. She lives in a nuclear family. Her husband works for a bank as a branch manager. Adiba is also a banker. She is a senior officer of a local bank. Her office hours are from 10 am to 6 pm every five days of the week. She works 42 to 47 hours per week on average.
Liana	Liana earned a bachelor's and master's degree in political science from the University of Dhaka. She is now 42 years old. She is a devout follower of the Islamic faith. She and her husband have been married for around 17 years. She is the mother of two kids aged 15 and 5 years respectively. She lives in a nuclear family. Her husband runs his own business. Liana's occupation is that of an Assistant Professor in a government college. In 2005, she qualified in Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) education cadre and began teaching. She works an average of 40 hours per week.
Papiya	Papiya is currently 31 years old. She is a devout Hindu adherent. She's been married for more than 4 years. She is a mother of two children aged 3 years and 11 months respectively. She lives witan an extended family. Her husband works as govt. physician. Regarding her profession, Papiya has been working as an Additional Police Superintendent (Training and Legal Aid) of the Naval Police of Bangladesh. She qualified in the 31st Bangladesh Cadre Service (BCS). Policing job in the context of Bangladesh is a very challenging job. She does not have any limit on working hours. There is no fixed timetable. Sometimes duty time starts at 8.00 am, and she can go back home at 9.00 pm or even often at midnight. However, she works an average of 45 to 50 hours every week.
Mira	Mira is currently 36 years old. She is an adherent of the Islamic faith. She has been married for around 13 years. She is the mother of 3 children. Her elder son is 11 years old. The younger son's age is 7 years, and the youngest daughter is 4 and a half years old. She lives in a nuclear family. Her husband is a commissioned officer in Bangladesh Army. Maria's occupation is that of a Senior Officer in a reputed bank. Although Mira is officially entitled to work 40 hours weekly, it takes more because of workloads. As a result, she works 45 to 50 hours per week on average.

Nancy	Nancy, a 33-year-old mother earned her master's in Development Studies. She is an adherent of the Hindu religion. She has been married for 7 years. She is the mother of two children. The oldest is a 6-year-old, while the youngest is only 10-month-old. She lives in a nuclear family. Her husband works in an international donor's organisation as an International Operation Manager. Currently, his posting is outside of Bangladesh. Nancy works as a project manager at an international organisation. She has long career history. She worked at UNDP, FAO, and UNFPA previously. She works 40 hours per week.
Sujana	Sujana is 32 years and a mother of one child of 4.3 years old. She has completed her bachelor's and master's in journalism from Chittagong University. She and her husband have been married for almost 6 years. She lives in a nuclear family. Her husband is a journalist, though currently, he is out of a full-time job. Sujana is a journalist. She works for a major daily newspaper as a junior sub-editor. She works an average of 42 hours every week.
Jenifer	Jenifer completed her master's from the University of Dhaka and later did another master's from Belgium in Governance and Development Studies. She is a 40 years old mother of two children aged 13 and 3 years, respectively. She lives in a nuclear family. Her husband is a first-class government officer engaged in foreign affairs. Jenifer works as a consultant and researcher though she worked full-time in Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) for around 13 years. Recently she left that job and started doing independent research as a consultant. Currently, she has been running a small project under UNDP. She has a long struggle in life as her first child is a special child. She works around 4 hours per week.
Rumana	Rumana is a 41 old mother of 2 children aged 12 and 5, respectively. She is a Muslim. She has a couple of life 15 years. She lives in a semi-extended family. Her husband's profession is business. She works as a Specialist in Service Quality in a multinational company. She works 44 hours per week on average.
Wahida	Wahida, a 36-year mother of 3 children, is a Muslim. She has a couple of life of 13 years. She lives with a semi-extended family. Her husband works in an international bank located in Bangladesh. Wahida is a Principal Officer in a reputed private bank. Although she is officially entitled to work 40 hours weekly, it takes more because of workloads. As a result, she works 42 hours per week on average.

APPENDIX 7: PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE: FATHERS

	Father's Biographies
Participant (Pseudonym)	**Synopsis**
Arman	Arman is a 35-year-old Muslim father of one child aged 4 years. He has been married for six years. He has one son of 3 years old. He completed his master's in Development Studies. He lives in a nuclear family. His wife is a government employee. Arman is a program coordinator at the UN Human Rights Council in Dhaka, though he frequently visits Cox's Bazar for official needs. He works for around 45 hours every week.
Raihan	Raihan, 33 is a father of one daughter of 1 year and 9 months old. He is a devout follower of Islam. He has been married for more than 4 years. He earned MBA in Marketing. His wife's profession is teaching at a school. He lives in a semi-extended family. Raihan is an Assistant Manager of a private company. He works for around 48 hours and five days a week.
Kawser	Kawser is a Muslim man 35 years of age. He has been married for 5 years and has a daughter of 2 years old. He earned an MBA in Management. His wife's profession is teaching and engaged in university. He lives in a semi-extended family. Kawser is an Assistant Professor at a private university in management. He works for around 40 hours per week.
Zaman	Zaman, 42, earned an MBA in management from Dhaka University. During his 8 years of a couple of life, he was blessed with two daughters aged 5 and 2 years old respectively. He lives in a semi-extended family. His wife is self-employed and does not work full-time. However, she works as a freelancer in research and other creative endeavors. Zaman has been working with the United Nations in the field of human rights for nearly 13 years. After joining the United Nations, since he works in the conflict zone, he cannot be with his family all 30 days of the month. He works around 40 hours weekly.
Shamim	Shamim, 33 is a Muslim father who has a child of 3.6 years old. He has been married for more than 6 years. His academic qualification is a master's degree in Social Work. His wife is a textile engineer who is engaged in an INGO. He lives in a nuclear family. Shamim is a Protection Associate in an international organisation under the UNO. His job location is in Dhaka, though he frequently visits outside of Dhaka for official needs. He works for 42 hours and five days a week.
Abir	Abir is 32 years old. He is inclined to the Hindu religion. He has been married for more than 5 years. He has one son of 3 years of age. He is a third-generation father. He earned an MBA in Finance. His wife works in a private organisation. He lives in a nuclear family. Abir is the Branch Manager at Sonali Bank (a government-owned bank). He is

	supposed to work 8 hours per day and 5 days weekly. He works around 46 hours on an average weekly.
Farhan	Farhan, 43, graduated in Computer Engineering in India. Later, he also completed an MBA in Marketing in Bangladesh. He is a Muslim. He has been married for around 11 years and has two children aged 8.5 and 3 years respectively. He lives in a nuclear family. His wife works in a multinational company. Farhan works for a multinational telecommunications business as the Head of Innovation and Digital Product. He works roughly 50 hours each week.
Hasan	Hasan is 38 years old. He is inclined to the Islam religion. He has been married for more than 8 years. He has one son of 5 years of age. He did a master's in economics. He lives in a semi-extended family. His wife is a govt. employee. Hasan is a banker. He is the Branch Manager at a private bank. As a result, he works roughly 48 hours each week.
Imtiaz	Imtiaz, 42 earned an MBA in management. He also did another master's program in the UK. He follows the Islam religion. He has been married for around 3 years. He confessed that it was his late marriage. He has only one child who is now around 10 months old. He lives with a semi-extended family. His wife is a schoolteacher. Imtiaz is a government officer whose position is an "education officer and master trainee." Usually, he works 8 hours per day so for 40 hours per week as per the government rule.
Titas	Titas is now 31 years old. He follows the Hindu religion. He has completed his master's in Anthropology. He has been married for around 7 years. He is a father of a daughter of around 2 years old. He lives with an extended family. His wife also works in an NGO. Titas works in a renowned NGO that works to give legal and social support to the destitute. He works for 40 hours per week.
Muhit	Muhit, 38, a Muslim father completed his master's in Social Work. During his 13 years married he was blessed with two sons now aged 6 and 3 years respectively. He lives in a nuclear family. His wife works in a private organisation. Muhit works as a Program Coordinator in an NGO. He works around 45 hours every week.

APPENDIX 8: INTERVIEW GUIDE: MOTHERS

Interview Questions (Participants-Mothers)
(Bengali translation was provided)

Project title: Gender, Motherhood and Labour Market Inequality in Bangladesh
Supervisors: Dr David T. Mayeda and Dr Louise Humpage
Name of Researcher: Shafiqul Islam

1. Please say something about yourself, e.g., what is your name, age, religion, education, and where you come from?

2. What does your family look like?

How long have you been married? How many children do you have and their age? Do you live in a joint family or a single-family? What has influenced you to live in a single or a joint family?

3. Please tell me something about your professional life/paid work.

What you do in your profession, and what is your current designation? How many hours do you usually work per week? How did you choose this job? Is this your first job, or did you have to change your career for any reason? If so, why? I wonder if you are willing to share your level of income compared to your husband.

4. How did motherhood affect your work and family life?

How did you make your decision to be an employed mother? Was this a difficult decision to make? Please explain.

Do you think Bangladeshi 'respectable femininity' contradict mothers' labor market participation? Please explain.

In particular, I am interested in the idea of 'respectability-how do you maintain this within your family/community? How do you think your husband/father might do this differently than you?

#How did having your child affect your work experiences? E.g., how much time off from work did you take when your first child was born-and for any subsequent children? Who did you have to negotiate/discuss this time off with (including employers, family members, etc.)? Were there any challenges in negotiating this? Why/why not?

#What are the most difficulties/challenges you face/have faced in your professional life for being a mother? For instance, what practical problems have you had to resolve (e.g., how to get to work safely, how to ensure the kids were cared for?)? How-if at all has to be a working mother changed your relationships with family members/employers/work colleagues? How do you see yourself being perceived by family members/employers/colleagues/society differently now you are a mother that is working?

#How do these challenges make you feel? (More follow-up questions in this regard)

#Has your husband also faced similar difficulties/challenges? If not the same, why? If you think there are differences here, how does that make you feel?

5. How do you and your husband balance work and family life?

I wonder if you could discuss your daily routine? E.g., when do you leave for work, when do you come back home, what do you do once you return home, who performs the majority of the household chores (e.g., child caring, cooking, etc.), who takes your child/ren to and from school, etc.?

Do you think your daily routine is different from your husband's? If so, how and do you explain these differences (personal choice, family expectations, the result of Bangladeshi culture or religious beliefs etc.?

If you think Bangladeshi culture/religion helps shape these different roles for you and your husband, have you noticed any changes in expectations about these roles in recent years? If so, how?

6. Do you think your key labor market outcomes, e.g., wages, profession choice, progress in your careers, etc., are negatively affected by being a mother? If yes, how? How does this make you feel?

#Do you think your husband also faces/have faced similar negative consequences for being a father? If not, how and why? How does this make you feel?

#Do you have many opportunities that are different from your previous generation in maintaining/combining your housework and paid job when compared to your mother or grandmother? What are these opportunities?

7. Let's discuss 'ideal' understandings of motherhood and fatherhood in Bangladesh.

If you were to think of the 'ideal mother' according to our Bangladeshi culture, how would you describe her? What shapes this ideal?

If you were to think of the 'ideal father' according to our Bangladeshi culture, how would you describe him? What shapes this ideal?

#Do you think there have been any changes in the idea that the father or husband is the main or only breadwinner in Bangladesh, especially within a dual-earner family, like yours?

In what ways do you think culture or religion shapes mothers and fathers' ideal roles in Bangladesh?

What pressures do you personally feel to live up to these ideals of a good mother/father?

8. Let's discuss changing mother and father roles in contemporary Bangladesh.

#Looking back over the past 20/30 years, what have been the most significant changes for women in general and mothers in particular regarding labor market participation in Bangladesh?

#Do you think mothers' roles in parenting children are changing or have changed over time in Bangladesh? If so, how are they changing, and how are they different from their previous generation? # For instance, in what ways do you think Bangladeshi women and mothers might consider themselves as 'new women' in which they may maintain their respectability of womanhood in a new way that is different from the previous generation? Can give an example of such alternatives.

Do you think father's roles in parenting children are changing or have changed over time in Bangladesh? If so, how are they changing, and how are they different from their previous generation? e.g., from their father/grandfather. Please relate examples from your own family.

Do you support these changes in roles/attitudes or do they make you feel concerned or worried?

Are there further areas where you think father or mother roles need to change to achieve greater gender equality for mothers in the Bangladeshi labor market? If so, where is change most needed? E.g., men's attitudes, government laws/policy, workplace rules, etc.

9. Can you think of any examples where you yourself have resisted or renegotiated expected norms about your roles as a mother, wife, and paid employee? Can you give me some other examples to illustrate this resistance or renegotiation?

10. How have state laws and policies (e.g., maternity leave, childcare, etc.) affected mothers of young children labor market participation? Can you provide any examples where they have limited/or enhanced your ability to be a mother of young children AND hold a paid job? What factors do you think shape these state laws and policies?

11. Have you noticed any changes in your organisation (or Bangladeshi organisations more generally) in recent years that enable mothers to participate in the labor market more equally with fathers? If so, please tell me about these changes. How does this make you feel?

12. Thinking specifically about your workplace, how would you describe the 'ideal worker'? How easily do you fit that ideal? How easily do you think employed fathers fit that ideal? Why?

13. Please think about the everyday interactions that occur within your family and working-organisation between husband and wife or male and female colleagues -in what ways do the understandings of a good mother/father we discussed earlier shape these interactions? # Can you please give some examples of such interactions where you think gender inequalities are being challenged or gender equality is being promoted, if any?

14. Do you have any specific suggestions to the policymakers or employers about how mothers of young children can achieve equal opportunities in terms of their participation and key outcomes (e.g., wages, career development and choice) in Bangladesh's labor market?

15. Is there anything else you would like to add, or do you have any questions for me.

APPENDIX 9: INTERVIEW GUIDE: KEY INFORMANTS
Interview Questions (Key Informants)
(Bengali translation was provided)

Project title: Gender, Motherhood, and Labour Market Inequality in Bangladesh
Supervisors: Dr David T. Mayeda and Dr Louise Humpage
Name of Researcher: Shafiqul Islam

1. Please tell something about you e.g., your name, where you come from, where you live, your work and profession, experience, etc.
2. In your opinion, what are the greatest difficulties that educated, middle-class women, especially mothers face in achieving equal labour market in Bangladesh in terms of their participation and key labour market outcomes e.g. wages, choice of profession, career progress etc.
3. How do these difficulties around participation affect labour market outcomes for Bangladeshi women as a whole?
4. Do you think any of the same issues are also faced by educated, middle-class fathers? If these are not the same, how do you think Bangladeshi patriarchal social structure and masculine influence shape these differences?
5. Please tell me about how parenthood culture in Bangladesh shapes educated, middle-class mothers' labour market experiences in terms of their participation and key labour market outcomes e.g. wages, choice of profession, career progress, etc.
6. Do you think the same parenthood culture similarly or differently shapes the labour market experiences of educated, middle-class fathers? If not the same, how do you think Bangladeshi patriarchal structure and masculine influence shape these differences?
7. In your opinion, what changes have occurred in the Bangladeshi labour market in the past 20 years that particularly affect mothers with young children? (For example, gender un/equal opportunities in both participation and in key outcomes e.g. wages, career choice and progress especially for mothers with young children?) What factors caused these changes and how have these impacted labour market participation and key outcomes?
8. Do you think these changing circumstances affect employed fathers similarly or differently? Have there been any noticeable changes in patriarchal culture among fathers in contemporary Bangladesh?
9. Please tell me about how today's Bangladeshi middle-class, educated employed mothers resist, contest and renegotiate their role both as mothers and paid employers. Can you give me some examples to illustrate this resistance, contestation, and renegotiation?
10. Please discuss if any changes have occurred amongst men, especially husband/father's attitude and behaviour in relation to their partners' (wife and mother) labour market participation/decision making? What changes do you think have had the greatest impact on the work experiences of middle-class mothers?
11. Do you think there are further areas where you think the change in men's attitudes is necessary to achieve greater gender equality for women?
12. How do you think state laws and policies in relation to maternity facilities e.g., maternity leave, retention of jobs, childcare facilities, etc. shape the labour market experiences of employed mothers?
13. How do you think state laws and policies shape the labour market experiences of employed mothers and fathers differently?
14. Do you think that there are differences between the maternity laws of government and non-government organisations in Bangladesh? If so, how do these differences affect employed mothers and others (e.g., employed non-mothers and employed fathers) differently?

15. Do you think that the implementation/practicing aspects of maternity leave, childcare, and other facilities (e.g., retention of jobs) vary between government and non-government organisations in Bangladesh? How do these differences affect mothers' labour market participation and key outcomes?
16. Do you think Bangladeshi workplace rules and regulations affect employed mothers with young children? Do these rules and regulations reflect Bangladeshi patriarchal social structure and masculine influences in the organisation's culture?
17. What are your suggestions/recommendations to policymakers (both at the state and organisation level) to minimize gender gaps in terms of participation and key outcomes between employed men and women in general and between employed mothers and others in particular?
18. What do you think will need to change in Bangladeshi society to minimize gender inequality in everyday life for parents?

That was the last of my questions: is there anything else you would like to add? Thank you very much for your participation in this research?

APPENDIX 10: INTERVIEW GUIDE: FATHERS

Interview Questions (Employed Fathers)
(Bengali translation was provided)

Project title: Gender, Motherhood, and Labour Market Inequality in Bangladesh
Supervisors: Dr David T. Mayeda and Dr Louise Humpage
PhD Candidate: Shafiqul Islam

1. Please tell me something about you.

- What is your name, age, and where you come from? Can you briefly describe to me what you do in your profession? How many hours do you normally work per week?

2. What does your family look like?

- How long have you been married? How many children do you have? Do you live in a joint family or in a single-family? What has influenced you to live in a single or a joint family?

3. How did fatherhood affect your work and family life?

- How did having your first child affect your work experiences? For E.g., did you take time off when the child was born-if so, and for how long? Do you still work the same number of hours? *(If they have more than one child: Has having further children affected your work experiences in similar or different ways?)*

- If you took time off to spend with your child/ren, who did you have to negotiate/discuss this time off with? Were there any challenges in negotiating this? Why/why not?

- Please tell me about how having a child/ren affected your daily life at home e.g. eating dinner earlier, sleeping less, doing more child care, etc.?

- How have any of the changes you just discussed made you feel?

4. How do you and your wife balance work and family life?

- Does your wife work? If so, in what occupation does she work full or part-time? If she does not work, why not?

- Has your wife faced any challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities? If so, how?

- Who does most of the childcare and housework in your household? Did this change at all after you had children? Why/not?

- How do you explain the way in which childcare and housework is shared in your household? E.g. is this related to Bangladeshi patriarchal culture or your family's particular expectations etc.?

5. Do you have any concern about your wife's working outside the home? E.g. her ability to keep up with the household chores, safety if working at night, uses of public transport etc.

6. Let's discuss 'ideal' understandings of motherhood and fatherhood in Bangladesh.

- If you were to think of the 'ideal mother' according to our Bangladeshi culture, how would you describe her? What shapes this ideal?

- If you were to think of the 'ideal father' according to our Bangladeshi culture, how would you describe him? What shapes this ideal?

- In what ways do you think culture or religion shape the ideal roles of mothers and fathers in Bangladesh? Would you feel shame if you were to share more childcare/household responsibilities or if your wife was the primary breadwinner in your family? Why/not?

- If you lived in another country where Bangladeshi culture was not important, how (if it all) would this change the way in which you and your wife share childcare and household responsibilities?

7. In Bangladesh, when a couple has a child, how does this affect fathers' career choice and progress?

- Does birth of a child impact mothers' career choice and progress differently? If so, how, please explain.

8. Do you think father's roles in parenting children are changing or have changed over time in Bangladesh? If so, how are they changing and how they are different from their previous generation? e.g. from their father/grandfather.

- How do you feel about these changes? *(If the interviewee says father's roles in parenting have changed over time)*

9. Are there further areas where you think change in father's roles is necessary to achieve greater gender equality for mother in Bangladeshi labor market? If so, where is change most needed? E.g. men's attitudes, government laws/policy, workplace rules etc.

10. How do you think state laws and policies shape the different experiences that mothers and fathers have of parenthood? E.g. maternity leave, childcare etc. Do you think these differences are shaped by Bangladeshi patriarchal social structure?

11.Thinking more specifically of workplace rules and regulations (including *your* workplace), how do these shape the experiences of employed mothers' with young children? What factors shape these rules and regulations?

- How do you feel these rule and regulations influence families in Bangladesh? *(If the interviewee discusses significant workplace rules and regulations)*

12. Have you noticed any changes in your organisation (or Bangladeshi organisations more generally) that enable mothers to participate more equally with fathers?

13. Thinking specifically about your workplace, how would you describe the 'ideal worker? How easily do you fit that ideal? How easily do you think mothers fit that ideal? Why?

14. Please think about the everyday interactions that occur in your working organisation between male and female colleagues-how do you think dominant cultural understandings of masculinity and femininity shape these interactions?

That was my last question. Do you want to add anything more?

Thank you very much for participation in this research.

APPENDIX 11: ADVERTISEMENT FOR MOTHERS

শিক্ষাবিষয়ক বিভাগ

পিএইচডি গবেষণা প্রকল্পে অংশ নেওয়ার জন্য চাকুরিজীবী মায়েদের প্রতি আহবান

এড়ুকেশন ওয়াচ অনলাইন। শনিবার, ২০ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২১

শফিকুল ইসলাম, পিএইচডি গবেষক

শফিকুল ইসলাম, পিএইচডি গবেষক

বাংলাদেশের শ্রমবাজারে লিঙ্গ বৈষম্য নিয়ে পিএইচডি গবেষণা একত্রে অংশ নেওয়ার জন্য চাকুরিজীবী মায়েদের প্রতি আহবান।

আপনি কি একজন চাকুরিজীবী মাতা, যার বয়স নূন্যতম ২০ বছর এবং আপনার সন্তানের বয়স ৫ বছরের বেশি নয় । তাহলে আপনাকে বাংলাদেশী শ্রমবাজারে লিঙ্গ বৈষম্যের একটি গবেষণায় অংশ নিতে আমন্ত্রণ জানানো হচ্ছে।

আপনাকে আপনার কাজের এবং পরিবারের অভিজ্ঞতা সম্পর্কে জিজ্ঞাসা করা হবে। সাক্ষাতকারটি প্রায় এক ঘন্টা চলবে এবং এটি অনলাইনের মাধ্যমে হবে।আপনার অন্তর্দৃষ্টি আমার অধ্যয়নের জন্য মূল্যবান হবে এবং আমি এই প্রকল্পে আপনার সময় এবং সহায়তার জন্য কৃতজ্ঞ থাকব।

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APPENDIX 12: ADVERTISEMENT FOR FATHERS

এডুকেশন ওয়াচ

অনলাইন শিক্ষা

বাংলাদেশের শ্রমবাজারে লিঙ্গ বৈষম্য নিয়ে পিএইচডি গবেষণা প্রকল্পে অংশ নেওয়ার জন্য পিতাদের প্রতি আহ্বান

এডুকেশন ওয়াচ অনলাইন | শুক্রবার, ৪ সেপ্টেম্বর, ২০২০ →

বাংলাদেশের শ্রমবাজারে লিঙ্গ বৈষম্য নিয়ে পিএইচডি গবেষণা প্রকল্পে অংশ নেওয়ার জন্য পিতাদের প্রতি আহ্বান

আপনি কি একজন চাকুরিজীবী পিতা, যার বয়স নূন্যতম ২০ বছর এবং আপনার সন্তানের বয়স ৫ বছরের বেশি নয় !

তাহলে, আপনাকে বাংলাদেশী শ্রমবাজারে লিঙ্গ বৈষম্যের একটি গবেষণায় অংশ নিতে আমন্ত্রণ জানানো হচ্ছে। আপনাকে আপনার কাজের এবং পরিবারের অভিজ্ঞতা এবং সেইসাথে আপনার স্ত্রীর শ্রমবাজারে অন্তভুক্তির সম্পর্কে জিজ্ঞাসা করা হবে। সাক্ষাতকারটি প্রায় এক ঘন্টা চলবে এবং এটি অনলাইনের মাধ্যমে হবে। আপনার অন্তর্দৃষ্টি আমার অধ্যয়নের জন্য মূল্যবান হবে এবং আমি এই প্রকল্পে আপনার সময় এবং সহায়তার জন্য কৃতজ্ঞ থাকব।

আপনি যদি এই গবেষণার অংশ নিতে আগ্রহী হন বা কোনো প্রশ্ন থাকে তবে দয়া করে আমার সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন:

সফিকুল ইসলাম, মোবাইল: +64 22 540 97 45 (WhatsApp)

Email: sisl543@aucklanduni.ac.nz

Doctoral Candidate, Sociology, School of Social Science

The University of Auckland

Auckland, New Zealand

২০২০ সালের ২৪ ফেব্রুয়ারি অকল্যান্ড বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের হিউম্যান পার্টিসিপেন্টস এথিক্স কমিটি তিন বছরের জন্য অনুমোদিত হয়েছে। রেফারেন্স নম্বর ০২৫৯৯।

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APPENDIX 13: TRNSCRIBER AGRREMENT

THE UNIVERSITY OF
AUCKLAND
NEW ZEALAND

ARTS

Department of Sociology
Level 9, Human Science Building
10 Symonds Street, Auckland
T +64 9 373 7599, Ext. 88614
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland 1142
New Zealand

Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

I have been contracted by Shafiqul Islam, the University of Auckland to transcribe digital recordings of the interviews conducted as part of the research project entitled 'Gender, Motherhood and Labour Market Inequality in Bangladesh'.

I hereby agree to protect the confidentiality of the participants involved in the interviews by ensuring that no information digitally recorded is passed on or discussed with anyone but the researcher, Shafiqul Islam, and the respective project supervisors Dr David T. Mayeda and Dr Rachel Simon-Kumar. This includes any information that may inadvertently identify a participant to myself or others.
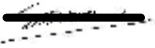
In addition, I agree to delete any digital files from electronic devices and shred any hard copy files upon satisfactory completion of the assignment.

Signed:

Transcriber's name: Shahreen Tasdique   Date: 23/07/2020

Transcriber's signature:

Researcher's signature:

For any queries regarding ethical concerns, you may contact the Chair of the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland, New Zealand 1142. Telephone 064 9 373-7599 ext. 83711. Email: ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 24 February 2020 for three years. Reference Number 023997.