



Research Article

Navigating Multiple Burdens among Women in Government Service

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Abstract

This study investigates the lived experiences of government-employed mothers in Sabangan, Mountain Province, Philippines, who juggle work, family, and community roles without domestic help. Employing descriptive phenomenology and thematic analysis, the research examines the effects of these multiple burdens on nine participants from various government institutions. Findings highlight both positive outcomes, like happiness and fulfillment, and negative impacts, such as exhaustion and stress. The study reveals strategies these women use to mitigate adverse effects and suggests policy changes for better government support. Recommendations include extended parental leave, more holidays, reduced work hours, and accessible childcare. The study underscores the need for shared familial responsibilities and legislative backing to aid working mothers in managing their multifaceted roles.

Keywords: Multiple Burdens; Working Mothers; Roles; Effects; Management

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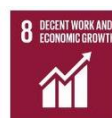
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Introduction

Women today balance their time between their families and their careers, all while pursuing personal growth. Many mothers now work to support their families while meeting their needs and taking on additional responsibilities through community involvement, resulting in a triple role or multiple burdens. Multiple burdens refer to the three aspects of work – reproductive, productive, and community management and governance (GERC Inc, 2011). First, women's reproductive role, according to Fajarwatia (2015), encompasses responsibilities such as child-rearing and household tasks, including family health care, that ensure the continuation of the family. This role results in women's household contributions that often go unacknowledged and uncompensated (Manandhar, 2008). Second, the productive role involves work paid in cash or producing goods not consumed by the woman. Lastly, women also participate in community management, acting as resource managers (Magdaraog, 2013). This role includes volunteer and unpaid activities in solidarity with the community, such as participating in social events, ceremonies, and other gatherings (Fajarwatia, 2015).

Despite the prevalence of nonworking family members taking care of children in Asian countries and joint family systems, research shows that women still perform a disproportionate amount of household labor, regardless of their employment status (Diefenbach, 2002; Habib et al., 2006). This trend can be seen across different cultures, including Vietnamese, Japanese, Jewish, and Arab women (Teerawichitchainan et al., 2009; Strober & Chan, 1998; Kulik & Rayyan, 2003), and in societies with varying levels of gender equality (Diefenbach, 2002). This circumstance may be attributed to gender ideology. Gender ideology, defined as societal beliefs and values about appropriate behaviors for men and women, shapes how a society evaluates individuals' conduct. According to Gerstel and Sarkisian (2006), this discourse holds those differences in men's and women's involvement in home and work stem from personal choice. It is believed that men and women have inherent differences in their ability to perform household tasks and work outside the home, leading to separate job preferences, with women opting for home over work.

A study conducted by Manandhar (2008) in India and Nepal showed that poor women bear an excessive workload. The study also recommended increasing gender awareness among men to share household responsibilities with women. In Japan, there is a deeply ingrained traditional gender expectation. According to Schneider and Silverman (2010), women in Japan were traditionally seen as subordinate partners to men and expected to take care of the family, including elderly parents and in-laws, even while working outside the home. In Australia, a study by Baxter (2002) revealed that women still bear the majority of household tasks, including two-thirds of childcare duties and three-quarters of daily indoor household responsibilities. Likewise, according to Sarkar, S. (2020), there has always been a shockingly large gender gap in average hours spent on domestic work in India. Lastly, in the Philippines, the time spent on unpaid domestic work is often overlooked and underrepresented in official national statistics (Abrigo, 2019). A study found that women in their mid-30s spend an average of a full day of their week on housework alone, with even more time dedicated to caring for children and the elderly. This situation of women led them to be referred to as working mothers, women who balance their jobs by raising children and caring for elderly parents or ill family members while also taking on household chores (Poduval et al., 2009). Working mothers often experience high-stress levels,

which can impact their relationships at home. They are constantly juggling the demands of work, children, and household tasks, leaving them little time to take care of themselves (Poduval et al., 2009). Their additional responsibilities lead to sleep deprivation, affecting their ability to perform at work (Deng & Cherian, 2022). The result is a constant struggle to meet deadlines and maintain balance in their personal and professional lives.

It is common for working mothers to wake up early and balance household chores, work-related activities, and family responsibilities. This overwhelming workload leads to a lack of leisure time for these women. Despite this, studies have shown that employment can positively impact mothers (Barnett, 2004). However, the combination of being a mother, wife, and employee can lead to high stress levels for women, as the employee's role is seen as unnatural and more demanding compared to the traditional roles of mother and wife (J. Poduval et al., 2009). This stress can result in women taking more sick days than their male counterparts, who also face work and childcare responsibilities.

Several efforts have been made to address the struggle and distress of working mothers who are engaged in multiple burdens. For instance, the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 aims to reconcile workplace demands with family needs, thereby promoting family stability and economic security and preserving family integrity. It grants employees the right to take reasonable time off for medical reasons, the birth or adoption of a child, and for caring for a child, spouse, or parent with a serious health condition to achieve equal employment opportunities for women and men. (J. Poduval et al., 2009). Moreover, Norway's government has implemented a comprehensive program for full economic and gender equality, including access to daycare for children and care for elderly, sick, and disabled family members. Women are entitled to 44 weeks of maternity leave and can reduce their work hours without salary reduction until their child is two years old (Kangas & Palme, 2009).

At the local government unit of Sabangan Mountain Province, Philippines, there is a lack of policy addressing the issue of multiple burdens experienced by women. The Human Resource Department is unaware of the term and does not have a way of identifying those who might be facing it. However, they have an internal arrangement that allows extra hours for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers caring for a sick family member to mitigate the impact of multiple responsibilities.

Many women who work in the government sector in Sabangan experience multiple burdens and are often referred to as "superwomen" as they manage household tasks and childcare while working full-time. This observation has motivated the researcher to conduct a study on multiple burdens. Despite the prevalence of this phenomenon in the municipality, there have been few studies specifically within the government sector.

This study aimed to investigate the experiences of women with multiple burdens employed in a government agency in Sabangan. Further, the study aimed to increase awareness of multiple burdens and contribute to policymaking efforts to address the issue to raise awareness and provide interventions to tackle the challenges faced by women with multiple burdens.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of the Study

Two theoretical frameworks served as the backbone of this study. First, the Gender Schema Theory, introduced by psychologist Sandra Bem in 1981, suggests that individuals learn about gender roles and norms from the culture in which they are raised. This theory posits that children develop a mental framework for what is considered "masculine" and "feminine" based on the observations and experiences they have from an early age (Kendra & Cherry, 2020). Women's behaviors, thoughts, and actions are largely shaped by the cultural norms they are exposed to, dictating what they perceive as acceptable or unacceptable in terms of their gender role.

The second theory is based on Sister Callista Roy's Adaptation Model, which posits that a person is a biopsychosocial being constantly interacting with a changing environment. According to the model, women's roles are external stimuli that may either threaten or enhance their well-being and maintain their integrity. Their coping mechanisms and control processes influence their ability to adapt to these changes, which can help overcome multiple burdens. Roy's theory holds that a person's ability to adapt is key to their ability to withstand multiple burdens, and failure to do so can lead to negative effects. Women strive to be loved, respected, and valued in their homes, workplaces, and communities.

Methods

The study adopted a descriptive phenomenology study design to capture the lived experiences of women in Sabangan with regard to multiple burdens. It was conducted in Sabangan, Mountain Province, for a period of four months. The 9 participants of the study were selected based on the following criteria: (1) of legal age; (2) resident and employed in the government sector in Sabangan, Mountain Province; (3) working either part-time or full-time; (4) mother of one or more child or children, i.e., the child or children are 17 years old and below; (5) and assigned to take care of a sick or elderly family member. Women with a full-time nanny who takes care of the children/sick or elderly family members and performs household chores were also included. Participants who had other family members take care of the children and household chores were excluded unless the working mother still performed the household chores and cooked meals for the family. Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants who met the specific criteria, and referrals were used to identify additional participants.

The study was carried out following established research protocols and guidelines. After selecting eligible participants, the researcher contacted the participant personally or via call to schedule the interview. The date, time, and location were agreed upon based on the participants' availability and preferences. Before the interview, a letter and a consent form were given to the participant, explaining the risks and benefits of participating in the study, as well as their right to withdraw at any time if they felt uncomfortable. The researcher employed a semi-structured interview consisting of several guide questions aimed at exploring the daily routines, awareness, and management of multiple burdens, as well as the factors that contributed to these burdens. The interview was conducted in person, and the conversation was recorded with the participant's permission, with confidentiality assured. The participant's name and personal identifying information were kept confidential. The interview questions were focused on the participant's

profile and experiences as a working mother facing multiple burdens. Data collected was kept secure, with audio recordings stored on a password-protected laptop. The study continued until the researchers reached the point of data saturation. Morse thematic content analysis was used to analyze the data.

Results and Discussion

The results and findings of this research study are presented in this section, along with a thorough analysis. Four main themes were identified: the roles of working mothers, the impact of multiple burdens, the methods used by participants to manage these burdens, and their suggestions for alleviating the negative effects of multiple burdens. It was observed that most of the women participating in the study undertake both reproductive and socio-cultural functions without compensation.

Roles of Working Mothers

The participants in the study were working mothers who performed three key roles: reproductive, productive, and socio-cultural. All nine participants were employed in a government institution and were also responsible for their reproductive and socio-cultural duties. As per Fajarwatia (2015), the reproductive role of women involves caring for children and handling household tasks, which are necessary for maintaining and perpetuating the family. The majority of the participants reported waking up as early as 5 am or earlier to get breakfast ready and take care of their families' needs before heading to work and school. Most of them were responsible for household tasks such as cooking, caring for their children, and doing chores. Only one participant woke up later to do household duties since her workplace was close to home. The participants' typical morning routine involved preparing breakfast, packing lunches for their children, and getting ready for work. As noted by one participant, their day starts as early as 4 am with cooking, cleaning, and other household tasks. This is evident when participant Cymbidium said that she wakes up at 4 am to start her daily routine. She prepares breakfast, cleans the house, does the laundry, and packs lunch for the kids. If her kids wake up, they assist her with some tasks. Once everything is completed, they leave for work or school. This practice is deeply ingrained in our cultural belief that women should be responsible for household chores and child-rearing (van der Gaag, 2017). It has been observed that women perform these duties due to the influence of their mothers, aunts, and female neighbors who have modeled similar behaviors. The Gender Schema Theory (1981) states that children internalize societal gender roles based on the cultural norms they are exposed to.

The study participants usually engage in various household tasks such as washing clothes, cleaning the house, grocery shopping, and assisting with their children's homework. Only two participants reported that their partners help with the children's homework and laundry, while half reported splitting grocery shopping. Rosal said, "My husband and I both assist our child with his homework". The non-participation of partners is attributed to the traditional gender roles where women are expected to take care of the household and child-rearing responsibilities. According to participant Gumamela, she said that it's a cultural expectation for mothers to take care of their

children. Even if a man tries to care for the child, they will give it back to the mother if the child cries. The Gender Schema Theory suggests that children adopt gender roles from their cultural environment from an early stage of social development (Kendra, Cherry, 2020). Women tend to act based on what they have seen and experienced and are heavily influenced by cultural norms regarding what is expected of them.

The productive role of these women demands their presence in the office for 8 hours daily. Six participants are permanent employees, while 3 are hired on a job order basis. The latter group demands the same benefits as permanent employees, especially in terms of maternity leave, given that they, too, are women. Rosal divulged: 'Job order employees should also be entitled to the maternity benefits provided to full-time working women since they are also mothers. When I was hospitalized, my bill was as much as 70,000 pesos, but thankfully the "malasakit" program covered it.' "Malasakit" is a built-in hospital program funded by outside stakeholders or politicians aimed to cater to and help patients who are unable to pay their hospital bills. Orchid expressed her agreement with the call for equal benefits, adding that while they receive a monthly incentive, permanent employees still receive a higher amount despite both groups performing similar tasks. She said that they have an incentive provided every month, but it's higher for permanent employees even though they do not do as much work as the job orders do. It can also be deduced that two of these participants, who are on a contractual basis, claimed that they have less stress when multiple burdens are tackled. This is attributed to the fact that they have less than 2 children. In contrast with those who are working full time, they claimed that stress and exhaustion are inevitable. According to the data gathered, full-time employees with more than 2 children have the same stress as that of permanent employees with 2 or fewer children.

Participant African Violet said, "It's a good thing that sometimes, the children understand me. They clean, cook and wash their own clothes. At least they are already old enough and they look after their younger siblings". This is also supported by Cymbidium's claims, where she said that her older children look after their younger siblings. There was also no difference in experiencing stress for mothers who have a part-time nanny and those who have family members who are taking care of the children.

The socio-cultural roles that most of the participants attend are social events such as weddings, funerals, and wakes within their community and political participation. These roles include activities built together in solidarity between people and to maintain the community's needs, volunteer and unpaid (Fajarwatia, 2015). All of the participants have participated during the elections process, as evidenced by the statement of Orchid, "I've never missed elections. I am always present". Most of the participants, too, stated that they attend such events if someone looks after their children, so it is commonly reported that most of them attend wakes and funerals during office hours when their office allows them to go. Gumamela said that she cannot attend social commitments, such as batch meetings, or attend to far-off social obligations, but she stays updated through Facebook. One challenge one of our participants experienced while performing her social obligation was when African Violet disclosed: "One time, I had to leave a wake because my child texted me to come home and found my youngest child alone in the house, which upset me". Sometimes, some roles overlap with each other, and dilemmas may arise.

Effects

Having multiple burdens has both positive and negative effects. It is well known that employment positively affects the mother (Barnett, 2004). One of the positive effects is evident in the statement of participant Rose, who answered that being a working mother is fulfilling. She further explained that even if she is exhausted and stressed sometimes, she is still thankful for being a mom and the happiness that goes with it. Two participants also admitted that they are not stressed despite the roles that they are performing. Red Campfire, in her statement, said, "I don't find it stressful because I only have one 5-year-old son. Maybe our supervisors are stressed at work because they attend to series of meetings and different programs and activities". Orchid also said that she feels stressed if she is alone with her children, as it can be difficult to attend to her personal needs like going to the toilet. These statements indicate that they are not experiencing the drawbacks of multiple burdens.

The downsides, on the other hand, are exhaustion and stress. Participants reported feeling exhausted, deprived of sleep, and as if they had no break from the daily grind. This led to tardiness at work, difficulties with job performance, early weaning of infants, and sacrificing leisure activities. Additionally, they felt guilty and remorseful.

Exhaustion

Most participants shared that they were exhausted from performing those three roles. Participant Geranium affirmed this when she said that it is exhausting, but it is part of being a working mother. Cymbidium also backed this by saying, "Every time I go home, I am exhausted. Sometimes, I suffer from headaches". Due to the overlapping responsibilities that these mothers take on, they experience exhaustion by the end of the day yet still fulfill their maternal duties until their children are asleep. Sari (2018) suggests that holding multiple roles can lead to conflicts for these women, as they face pressure to excel in both their jobs and parenting while also dealing with fatigue and limitations. In addition to experiencing exhaustion, 2 participants added that they are deprived of sleep and tend to have no rest day. Participant Gumamela mentioned that she is deprived of sleep due to her breastfeeding routines at night; she said, "When I get sick, I cannot say no to breastfeeding my child because I have to. There is no rest day". When individuals are involved in any of these spheres, it can reduce their personal time and limit their ability to do things they enjoy. (GERC Inc, 2011). African Violet and many participants also mentioned that they struggle to sleep when their family members are sick, causing them additional worry and insomnia. Research shows that working women sleep 25 minutes or less per night due to their domestic duties. Despite having to stay up late and wake up early for household chores, they are already accustomed to the routine and can get 6-7 hours of sleep. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that adults ages 18 to 60 get at least 7 hours of sleep per night.

The participants reported that exhaustion impacts their performance at home. They become easily annoyed, irritable, and talkative. Some of them even admitted to hitting their children. Four participants revealed that they become more talkative when they are exhausted and the house is messy, and they typically instruct their kids or spouse to clean up. However, two participants disclosed that even if they are tired from work, they still need to do household chores as it is their responsibility. Geranium affirmed this by saying, "If the day is over, you feel exhausted, you'd like

to rest but you cannot because the chores are waiting. Have to be patient. It is difficult but it is part of being a mother”.

Stress

Based on the interview, stress is also inevitable for these working mothers. Three participants identified stress as a problem in performing these roles. Sunflower said that she gets stressed but only once a while. She added that this usually happens every quarter of the year when they are so entangled with the submission of reports and compliances in the office. This sentiment is also similar to Rose, who experiences stress during the last two days of their duty. According to her, “I observe that during the last 2 days of duty, I become talkative and subsequently get stressed”. Geranium divulged that so much stress greatly affects her mental, physical, and social disposition. More so if it happens at once. Women experience stress from both household chores and work demands. While stress is typically seen as a negative emotion, it has been found that women who face these challenges are often mentally healthier than those who don't.

Some working mothers are often late because of childbearing and child-rearing, especially those who are breastfeeding. Gumamela quoted that she is always late. “Good thing there is the Civil Service policy on breastfeeding moms”. Participant Orchid admitted to being tardy for work on occasion because she needed to take care of her child before reporting to her job. Sunflower and Rose also acknowledged that they sometimes arrive late but have made arrangements with their workplace to compensate for overtime. Despite this, they still have to complete household tasks, care for their children, and get them to school. In the Philippines, women are responsible for 84% of household time spent on child care (Asian Development Bank, 2013). However, their contributions within the household are often unrecorded, unrecognized, and unpaid (Manandhar, 2008). The Civil Service RA 10028 has provided nursing women with an additional 40 minutes of break time during an 8-hour workday.

Six of the participants also stated that having multiple burdens is difficult. “It is difficult, but that's part of being a working mother”, Geranium said. Rosal also said that it was difficult, so she had to give the babysitting to her mother. The other participants revealed that they also face challenges due to the remote nature of their work assignments, making it difficult for them to attend to their families daily. For instance, Gumamela had to bring her ten-month-old child to the seminar and stay in a hotel room as she was solely responsible for her job. Cymbidium expressed difficulty with work demands and pressure from clients and superiors, while African Violet and Rose cited breastfeeding and training requirements as obstacles to their work. Despite these challenges, the participants manage to handle their responsibilities and care for their families. However, it can result in stress, sleep loss, and other health-related problems if not addressed promptly (Sari, 2018). To support their work and caregiving responsibilities, the participants rely on support from non-working family members, such as parents, in-laws, and husbands, who take on child-caring duties while the mothers are at work (J. et al., 2009). Some participants also have stay-out babysitters but still have to manage household chores and child care before and after work hours.

Participant Gumamela shared feelings of regret and guilt. She said, “Sometimes, I feel regretful and question my life choices, especially when my kids are difficult”. In addition, she also disclosed that she always feels guilty. According to her, she feels confident in her work but is not sure about her parenting skills. She said, “I feel confident in my work, but I'm not so sure about my parenting

skills. I don't want to hurt my children, but sometimes, due to exhaustion, I end up speaking harshly to them and then feel guilty about it".

Management

Red Campfire remarked, "Sometimes, whoever wakes up first with my husband will do the cooking. Sometimes, he helps me with the laundry too". Orchid also explained that her husband or mother-in-law does the groceries and cooking if she cannot. As for Gumamela, she divulged that she called for her mom after she gave birth via Cesarean section, so she is looking after Gumamela after her and her baby. She is also thankful for the presence of her in-laws. Meanwhile, African Violet claimed that her children do their laundry except for her last child, who is still six years and they also help her with the general cleaning and cooking of some dishes. The existence of assistance and division of tasks in the family shows that gender relations are no longer in the traditional form but already in the modern state (Sari,2018). We can see that husbands nowadays are ready to participate in the traditional mother's roles and are open to transition to modernization, where husbands and wives share almost all responsibilities.

The participants have found ways to manage their multiple responsibilities. These include sharing responsibilities with their partners, family members, and children, arranging their work schedule, planning effectively, maintaining a positive mindset, relying on faith and confidence, getting adequate rest, pursuing their passions, and socializing with friends. Six participants mentioned that they receive help from their husbands, while three mentioned their mothers, two mentioned their mothers-in-law, and three mentioned their children. For instance, Red Campfire said: 'Sometimes, whoever wakes up first, we take turns with my husband doing household chores such as cooking and laundry. Orchid relied on her husband or mother-in-law for grocery and meal preparation. Gumamela divulged: 'I turned to my mother for support in caring for my children". African Violet's children also help with household tasks like laundry and cleaning. The division of labor and support in the family highlights the shift from traditional gender roles to a more modern approach where both partners share responsibilities (Sari, 2018). This shows that husbands are now more willing to take on tasks traditionally assigned to mothers and are embracing a more equal division of labor in the household.

The government agencies seem to acknowledge the challenges faced by working mothers. They offer internal arrangements, particularly for mothers who need to breastfeed and care for their sick family members. Five of the participants stated they had taken advantage of these internal arrangements provided by their workplaces. Sunflower said, 'We have internal arrangements, but they're not always guaranteed due to consideration for others". Rosal shared that they assigned her paperwork instead of field work when she returned to the office. Gumamela added that the internal arrangement is granted as long as you fulfill your job responsibilities, but if it's urgent, she brings work home and do it when her baby is sleeping. Lastly, Rose mentioned *that* their male colleagues and boss are understanding, so they cover for them when needed. This is only an internal arrangement in their workplace. The ability to use flextime has been shown to increase positive work-life balance, job satisfaction, and overall life satisfaction, according to a study by Pruchno, R. (2000)

The 105-day Expanded Maternity Leave has been utilized by 4 of the participants in this study. Some participants were on a job order basis at the time of their delivery, while others took advantage of the previous maternity leave package. As mandated by the Republic Act 11210, this leave promotes and protects the rights and welfare of working mothers. The Municipal Health Office is also required to conduct postpartum visits for new mothers. However, as stated by Gumamela, "Postpartum mothers do not seem to receive regular visits, although some are, and I am one of them. They should include educating the husbands on postpartum care". According to the World Health Organization, at least 4 postpartum visits are necessary to evaluate the new mothers' physical and emotional well-being.

The participants emphasized the importance of self-reliance and having a positive mindset. African Violet and Geranium stated that they take responsibility for their roles and obligations. At the same time, Geranium added that it is also crucial to take breaks, rest the body, and spend time with friends. Cymbidium shared: "During times of stress, having a good strategy, faith in God, and confidence can help deal with multiple burdens." Sunflower emphasized the importance of effective time management and being a planner. She said that if you need to complete a work in advance, do it so you can go home earlier. You also need to have a planner and manage your time wisely". The participants' positive attitudes and proactive planning helped them effectively manage the challenges of multiple burdens. According to research, maintaining a positive outlook can help alleviate stress, improve immunity, and reduce the risk of premature death (Cherry, 2022). Sister Callista Roy's Adaptation model states that individuals are biopsychosocial beings constantly adapting to changing environments (Apil et al., 2020). This helps to explain the participants' ability to adapt to their multiple roles and responsibilities.

Suggestions

During the interview, the participants also provided suggestions that could benefit other working mothers. Two of the participants suggested extending the maternity leave to a 1-year period, similar to Canada, while the rest recommended a 6-month leave so that the mother has fully recovered from childbirth and the infant is ready for supplementary feedings. They also stressed the importance of extending paternity leave for fathers who support and assist the mother after delivery. Additionally, they proposed more holidays, making family day and women's day into days off, and equal benefits for job order employees during delivery. African Violet suggested having facilities within the workplace and reducing the working hours to 5 hours for teachers. Geranium added that teachers should only focus on teaching without dealing with paperwork. Rosal recommended that the government provide affordable daycare facilities within the community.

Multiple burdens refer to the balancing of reproductive, productive, and social responsibilities, which can have both positive and negative effects. These participants have successfully managed their multiple burdens and suggested government interventions to help future working mothers cope with their responsibilities and avoid potential drawbacks.

Conclusion

The findings from the interview with working women in Sabangan revealed the following insights:

1. The impact of multiple burdens was both positive and negative, with some participants feeling a sense of fulfillment and a stress-free life while others experienced exhaustion and stress.
2. The participants suggested ways in which the government can provide support to alleviate the negative effects of multiple burdens.

In conclusion, these working women manage their multiple burdens and fulfill their reproductive and social responsibilities to provide for their families. However, they stressed the importance of sharing responsibilities within the family and government support through legislation.

Recommendations

The researchers recommend the following to support working women managing multiple burdens:

1. The HR department or agency head should:
 - a. Raise awareness of the effects of multiple burdens
 - b. Promote the mental health of working women
 - c. Implement policies to reduce stress among personnel
2. Encourage men to break the stereotype that household and childcare tasks are only for women and actively participate in these responsibilities.
3. The government should consider the needs of working women when creating policies.

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