

Influence of Work-Life Balance among Employed Mothers on Children's Cognitive Performance and Emotional Regulation: A Cross-Sectional Study in the Darbhanga Region of Bihar

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Abstract

Growing female participation in paid work has raised interest in how mothers' work-life balance affects child development. Nevertheless, there is scarce evidence from semi-urban and rural India, such as Bihar. A cross-sectional study explores the work-life balance of employed mothers and its impact on their school-going children's cognitive performance and emotional regulation in Darbhanga district of Bihar. This study focuses on employed mothers with school-going children and analyses their work-life balance and children's cognitive functioning, and emotional regulation indicators. Contextual factors also include sociodemographic and family-related characteristics, including household income, occupation of the parents, family structure, childcare arrangements, and time spent with the child. In a thorough manner using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, the relationship between maternal work-life balance and child outcomes is studied. The research further investigates whether certain demographic and familial characteristics are associated with these outcomes. This study aims to generate evidence which is useful to families, educators, workplace stakeholders, and policymakers by examining the link between maternal employment experiences and child development in a regional Indian setting. The results have implications for family-supportive practices, workplace policies, and efforts to promote healthier work-family conditions and positive child development.

Keywords: Work-life balance; employed mothers; child cognitive performance; emotional regulation; school-going children; maternal employment; Darbhanga; Bihar

1. Introduction

In previous decades, there has been a continuous rise in paid employment of women in developed and developing economies alike. And, mothers of young children are a sizable share in the workforce. For working mothers, the balance in work-life refers to the ability to continue working while being available for care. The interference of work with the family environment is shaped by working hours and workload, occupational demands and fatigue; domestic and childcare responsibilities; time and psychological energy available for children; and family support to manage the worker and the maternal role. When stresses are out of balance, mothers may experience role strain, guilt, and less availability for the consistent, responsive interactions on which children's development depends – pressures which are especially acute in India, where only a small minority of working women claim adequate support for keeping things in balance (Hepsiba & Swetha, 2025).

Maternal work-life balance has been theorized to be consequential for children's development because family processes are sensitive to the nature of parents' work-family experience. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that maternal employment does not in itself do any harm. After examining 40 years of research, the large meta-analysis turns out non-significant overall association of maternal employment with children's achievement and behavioural issues. Only family structure makes a significant impact on children (Goldberg et al., 2008; Lucas-Thompson et al., 2010).

The research in this literature draws a distinction between employment itself and the quality of work-family balance surrounding it. Plus, plausible pathways connect mothers' work-family experiences with cognitive performance and emotional regulation among children. Either work-family conflict or exhaustion spills over into the home. As a result, it reduces parents' psychological availability and the warmth and consistency of parenting. Such processes, in turn, affect the child's attention, learning, and memory. Moreover, the processes also impact a child's problem-solving. Besides, it also has implications for emotional adjustment, coping with frustration, and regulation of emotion. On the other hand, low risk is evident when the family has sufficient resources and the employment of the mother is flexible as the mother will then add resources that are beneficial for the children (Hosokawa & Katsura, 2021; Lim et al., 2025; Matias et al., 2017).

In the Indian context, the changing family structures, increased prevalence of nuclear families, and unequal access to affordable child care compete with challenging work environments and gendered labour markets, gives an edge to these questions. A qualitative and quantitative research focused on Indian working women shows that time constraints, maternal guilt, role strain, and anxieties over the safety of children and spousal support still persist. However, the research also found that family support helps battle resilience and adaptive time management (Böhmer & Schinnenburg, 2020; Shukla et al., 2025; Travasso et al., 2014).

Evidence from Western or high urbanisation populations could, however, not be assumed to generalize to semi urban or rural other regions such as Darbhanga in Bihar. The results of these meta-analyses indicated that the family structure, socioeconomic circumstances, and cultural composition moderated the association between maternal work and child outcomes. For example, this association was influenced by living arrangements, family support systems, occupational profiles, and access to formal child care services (Goldberg et al., 2008).

Families in the Darbhanga region are significantly different in these respects from metropolitan Indian families, but there is currently no direct empirical evidence on maternal work-life balance and children's cognitive-emotional outcomes in this region. This study attempts to fill the present gap through a cross-sectional study of employed mothers of Darbhanga region of Bihar to find out maternal work-life balance, and its correlation with the cognitive functioning and emotional regulation of children. The aim of the study is to ascertain whether the associations documented in international and urban Indian studies hold for semi-urban and rural families context by positioning the question in an under-researched setting. This will also promote evidence based workplace and family support and policies for working mothers.

2. Review of Literature

Maternal Work-Life Balance among Employed Mothers. Research conducted on working mothers consistently identifies "time pressure", "workload", "fatigue" and "strain from multiple roles" as the core dimensions of an imperfect work-life balance. An empirical qualitative study of working mothers in Lucknow and Kanpur provided structural time management, workplace flexibility, and family support to mitigate the impact of maternal guilt, emotional conflict, and career sacrifices. According to the studies related to working women in India, it was found that there is not enough organizational support and a heavy dual burden. On the other hand, qualitative evidence shows that low income working mothers in bengaluru are often concerned about childcare safety, nutrition and unsupportive spouses. Research on employed women in India finds that inflexible, male-dominated workplaces are barriers to combining employment with caregiving. Meanwhile, mixed-methods evidence from 400 households show that mothers' paid employment positively affects children's nutrition, health and education. However, reduced parental attention and poor quality of childcare may have risks (Shukla et al., 2025; Hepsiba & Swetha, 2025; Travasso et al., 2014; Böhmer & Schinnenburg, 2020; Wadei et al., 2026)

Maternal Work-Life Balance and Children's Cognitive Performance. The literature calls for a distinction between maternal employment on its own and the work-family experiences that surround it. The NICHD Study of Early Child Care found that full-time employment of mothers in the first year was associated with somewhat lower cognitive scores at 15, 24 and 36 months. This was partly mediated by the home environment. Subsequent analyses showed that these associations were specific to particular groups with the link explained by maternal sensitivity and quality of child care. A meta-analysis of 68 studies (770 effect sizes) found no significant overall

effects of maternal employment on the achievement of children. It did find small positives for part-time employment. A second meta-analysis of 69 studies came to a similar conclusion: early maternal employment was mostly unrelated to later achievement and behaviour problems. What matters seems to be the work-family context. Children of mothers working nonstandard shifts show poorer cognitive outcomes. In addition, parental work schedules predicted cognitive trajectories of children through the home environment they shape. According to evidence from the India Human Development Survey, mothers' work patterns especially the ability to combine paid work and care shaped mothers' contribution to children's school activities and children's cognitive achievements among 8- to 11-years' children (Brooks-Gunn et al., 2002; Brooks-Gunn et al., 2010; Goldberg et al., 2008; Lucas-Thompson et al., 2010; Han, 2005; Han & Fox, 2011; Vikram et al., 2018)

Maternal Work-Life Balance and Children's Emotional Regulation. A converging set of studies show that work-family conflict relates to children's emotional functioning through parenting processes. Within the context of 138 dual-earner couples, it was found that work-family conflict is negatively related to the parents' psychological availability. In turn, this psychological availability predicted children's emotion regulation and lability. In addition, parental work-related exhaustion has likewise been linked to young children's emotion regulation. A study over time of 214 dual-earner families found that work-family conflict predicted maternal relational frustration. Maternal relational frustration in turn was associated with lower child self-control over time. Research that looks at parental-child relationships found that the conflicting demands of mothers and fathers at work and home predicted problems in the emotional and behavioural problems of children. Other evidence shows that parental work-family conflict is linked to children's emotional and behavioral difficulties through parental stress (including depressive symptomatology), while work-family conflict is linked to children's emotional well-being partially through parenting, especially among mothers. Maternal work-life balance is associated with children's social adjustment through mothers' perceived stress and parenting practices. (Matias et al., 2017; Melim et al., 2019; Ferreira et al., 2020; Yücel & Latshaw, 2020; Dias et al., 2026; Lim et al., 2025; Hosokawa & Katsura, 2021)

Indian and Regional Evidence. Research conducted in India has found similar pathways with a family contextual effect. In urban India, the working hours of mothers are linked with emotional problems of preschoolers. At the same time, work-family conflict partly mediates this association. The family support buffers both the direct path and the indirect effect. The joint family structure also provides a buffer. Together with survey-based evidence about work activities, children's school-related cognition, and qualitative and household-based evidence about availability anxieties and employment benefits, this literature shows that family support and compatibility with childcare are important in India. Nonetheless, this evidence has been reported for urban and corporate population only, and there is no study published that has examined maternal work-life balance in relation to children's cognitive performance or emotional regulation in Bihar's (India) semi-urban and rural population, including in Darbhanga. (Barik & Sharma, 2026; Vikram et al., 2018; Travasso et al., 2014; Wadei et al., 2026)

Critical Synthesis and Research Gap. Evidence across themes consistently indicates that the quality of work-family balance – rather than employment per se – is the salient influence on child outcomes. Beyond this agreement, the studies differ in sample (i.e., dual-earner urban couples vs. low-income mothers), measurement (i.e., self-report conflict scales vs. parent-report child outcomes), and design, with cross-sectional data predominating, and a number of meta-analytic moderators e.g., family structure and socio-economic status accounting for more of the inconsistency than agreement would suggest. Family support and family structures function differently in Indian joint households and semi-urban/rural households, and as there is no direct evidence for Darbhanga, the study of employed mothers and school-going children from Darbhanga is clearly warranted, which is what the present cross-sectional study does. (Goldberg et al., 2008; Lucas-Thompson et al., 2010; Barik & Sharma, 2026; Vikram et al., 2018)

3. Objectives and Hypotheses

The present study pursues six objectives:

1. to assess the level of work-life balance among employed mothers with school-going children in the Darbhanga region of Bihar
2. to assess the cognitive performance of their children
3. to assess the emotional regulation of these children
4. to examine the relationship between maternal work-life balance and children's cognitive performance
5. to examine the relationship between maternal work-life balance and children's emotional regulation
6. to examine the role of relevant demographic and family factors in these relationships.

Hypotheses:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between maternal work-life balance and children's cognitive performance.

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between maternal work-life balance and children's emotional regulation.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design. The study used a quantitative and cross-sectional survey to assess the association between mothers' work-life balance (WLB) and cognitive performance (CP) as well as emotional regulation (ER) of children. The information regarding the maternal work-life balance and the selected child outcomes were collected at one single time. The design of the cross-sectional is considered appropriate to examine the relationship among study variables. Since exposure and outcomes were measured simultaneously, the results should be interpreted as associations not temporal causation.

4.2 Study Setting. Research in the area of Darbhanga, Bihar, India. The researcher studied employed mothers having school going children from the study area. During the study period, data were collected from eligible participants within the study area.

4.3 Study Population and Participants. The mothers that participated in this study were employed and had school-going children. They belong to the Darbhanga region of Bihar. The study had 150 employed mothers as participants. Every mother that participated had to provide information about her work-life balance, and one school-going child that she had selected. This included information about the child's cognitive performance and emotion regulation.

4.4 Sampling Technique and Sample Size. A study was conducted on 150 eligible employed mothers. Participants were selected based on eligibility criteria in the study as well as willingness. The reporting of the sampling technique for participant recruitment should comply with the actual procedure used for data collection.

4.5 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria. Mothers who were currently employed, were residing in the Darbhanga region of Bihar, and had at least one school-going child were eligible to participate. The study excluded mothers who were not currently working and those who did not have school going children.

4.6 Measures/Instruments. A structured questionnaire developed by the researcher was used to collect data. The questionnaire contained information on demographics and families and also included three main sections. The assessment of a maternal work life balance was carried out using an 18 item researcher designed scale consisting of time availability, energy, work family responsibilities, work family conflicts, satisfaction with work family balance, and perceived support for the use of scale. Responses were collected on 5- point Likert scale where 1=Never and 5=Always. For negatively worded items, reverse coding was done at the time of scoring.

The cognitive performance of children was assessed using a 12-item screening section (parent-report) that examined attention, memory, learning, problem solving (reasoning), knowledge application and series completion of age-appropriate tasks. The section was developed by the researcher and was not presented as a standard IQ or objective cognition test. The assessment tool consisted of a newly developed researcher-created parent-report 18-

item section dealing with the emotional expression, calming down, handling frustration, controlling emotion, and reactivity to emotion of the children. The sociodemographic and family background information included mothers' age, education, occupation, employment type, working hours, working days, household income, family structure, number and age of children, school type of children, childcare arrangements, family support and time spent with the selected child.

4.7 Data Collection Procedure. The structured questionnaire was used to collect data from submitted employed mothers. The participants supplied information about their sociodemographic and family details, the work-life balance of mothers, and cognitive performance and emotional regulation of the chosen school-going child. Those taking part gave their responses to the experiment voluntarily after being informed about it. The information was stored using participant codes and was kept confidential for this research's purpose.

4.8 Ethical Considerations. Joining in the study was voluntary. Participants were informed of academic intent of the research and their responses would be kept confidential. Mothers who took part signed a consent form for themselves and for eligible children information/assessment to be included in the study. Responses were identified by participant codes, and information was collected for research purposes only.

4.9 Statistical Analysis. IBM SPSS Statistics software was used to analyze data. Descriptive statistics was used to summarize the demographic characteristics and main study variables. Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were presented. The internal consistency of the study measures was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. We used Pearson's correlation coefficient to assess the relationships of maternal work-life balance with children's cognitive performance and emotional regulation. The association between maternal work-life balance and children's cognitive performance and emotional regulation were examined through linear regression analysis separately. Statistical significance was evaluated with p value < .05.

5. Results and Interpretation

5.1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The study consisted of 150 employed mothers from Darbhanga region of Bihar. The demographic variables had complete responses with no missing cases in the frequencies analysed. The demographic profile is determined through educational qualification, employment type, household income, and family structure.

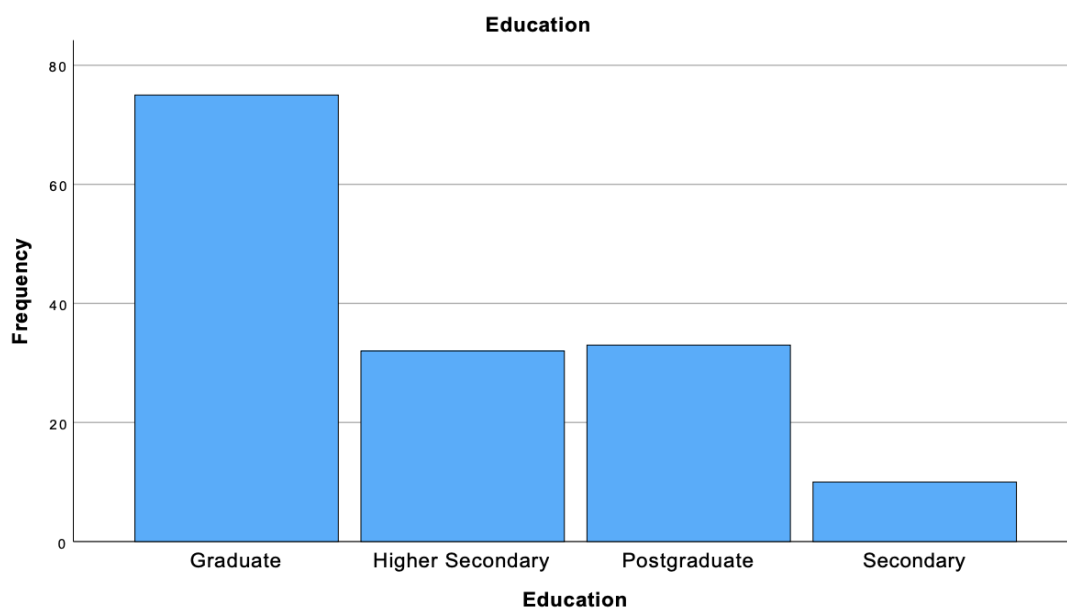


Figure 1: Educational Qualification of Mothers

Half of the participants (50.0%) being graduates constituted this educational group. A total of 22.0 percent of postgraduates, 21.3 percent of higher secondary and 6.7 percent of secondary. As a result, the sample was mainly mothers having graduate or postgraduate degrees.

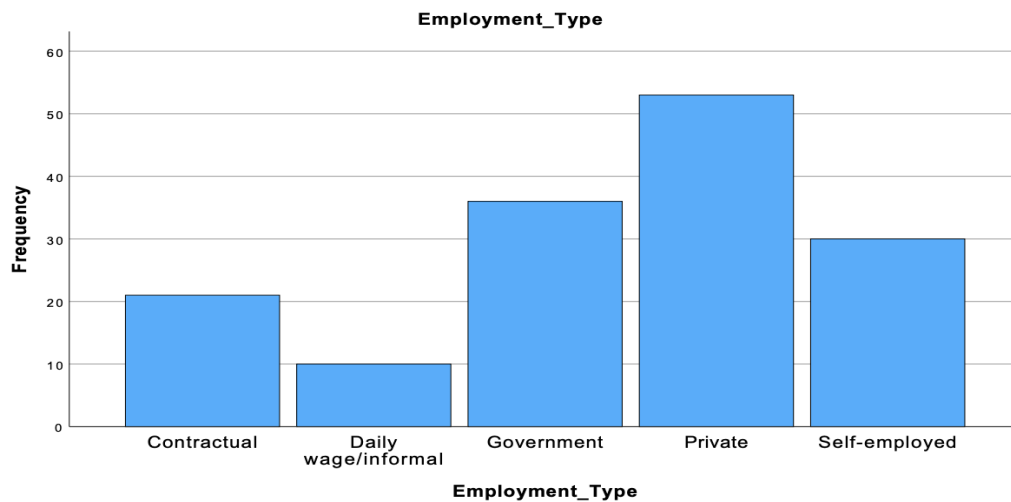


Figure 2: Employment Type of Mothers

The most participants were in private sector employment. The percentage was 35.3. Government jobs made up 24.0 %, followed by self-employment at 20.0 % and contractual employment at 14.0 %. Daily-wage/informal employment was 6.7 %. It reflects a representation of mothers in various categories of employment, with private sector employment being most common.

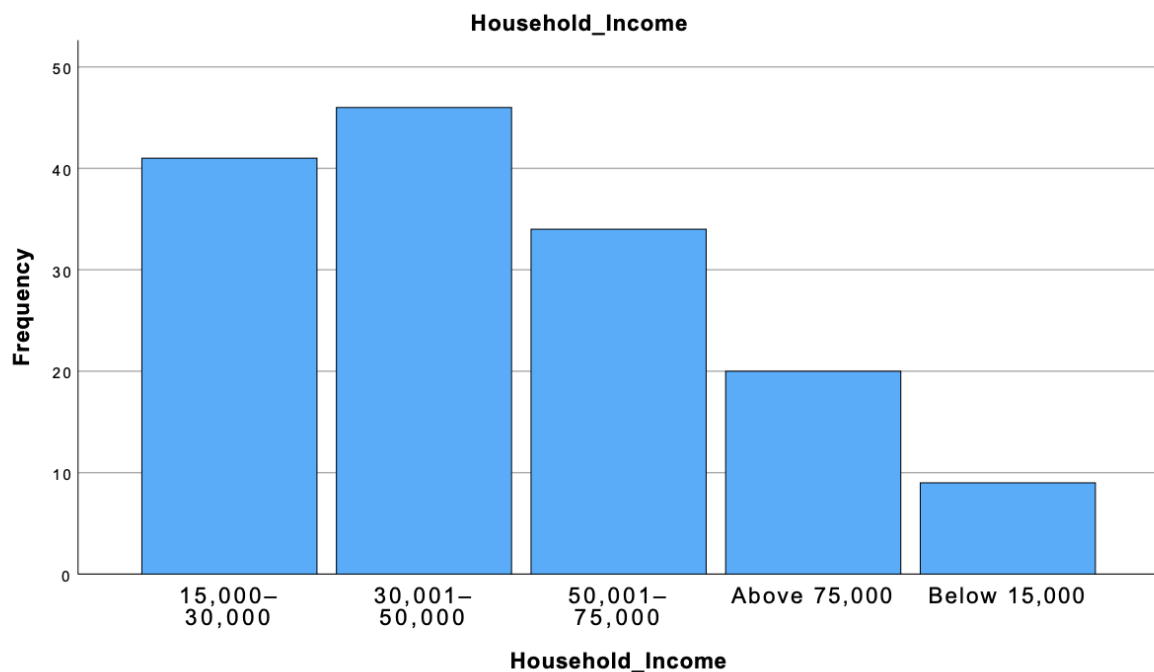


Figure 3: Household Income of Participants

The majority of mothers (30.7%) stated that their monthly household income was ₹30,001–₹50,000. The ranges ₹15,000–₹30,000 and ₹50,001–₹75,000 followed at 27.3% and 22.7%. An additional 13.3 percent reported income above ₹75,000, while 6.0 percent reported income under ₹15,000.

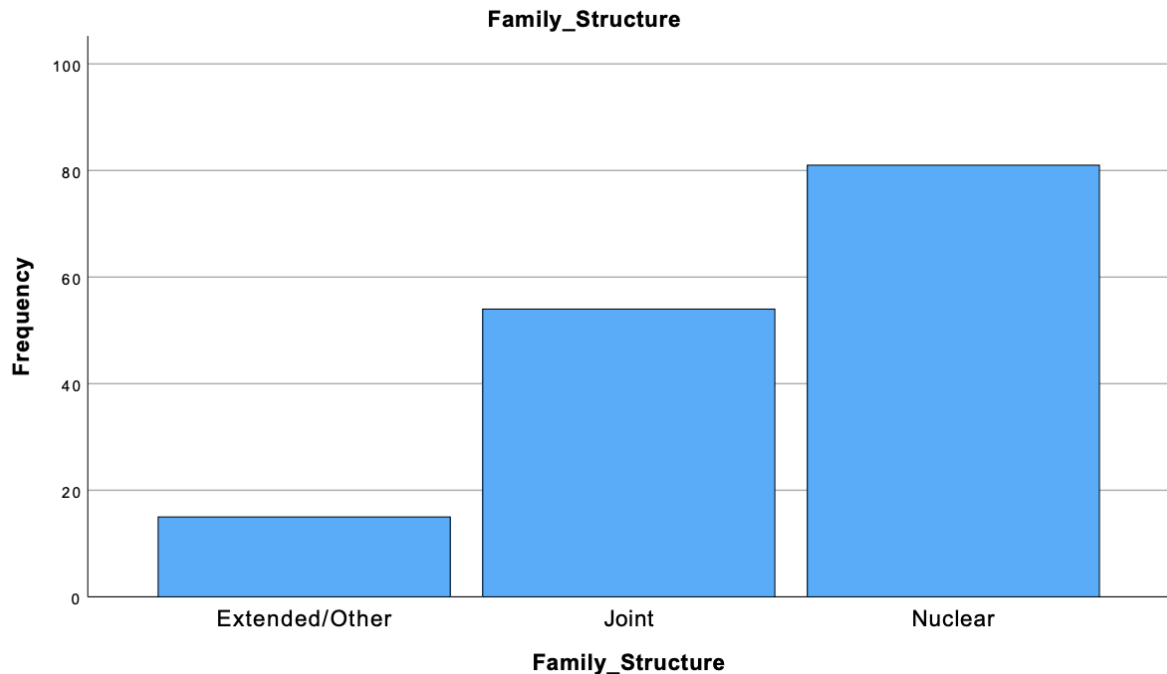


Figure 4 :Family Structure of Participants

The maximum sample (54.0%) was that of nuclear families and the least was of joint (36.0%). The other 10.0% reported an extended or other family. Thus, more than half of participating mothers belonged to nuclear families.

5.2 Descriptive Statistics

Maternal work-life balance, child cognitive performance, children's emotional regulation and child–mother interaction were computed descriptive statistics. 150 participants had valid observations on all four variables. The mean score on maternal work-life balance was 58.81 (SD = 12.29), cognitive performance was 41.54 (SD = 8.16), emotional regulation was 62.02 (SD = 11.80), and child–mother interaction was 20.99 (SD = 4.36).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Minimum	Maximum
Maternal Work-Life Balance	150	58.81	12.291	24	85
Child Cognitive Performance	150	41.54	8.162	17	60
Children's Emotional Regulation	150	62.02	11.798	28	89
Child–Mother Interaction	150	20.99	4.359	11	30

Note. *N* = 150.

5.3 Reliability Analysis

A measure of test reliability, Cronbach's alpha, was evaluated for the study. The Maternal Work-Life Balance scale is highly reliable as it has internal consistency of .945 with 18 items. The Child Cognitive Performance scale also had a good reliability $\alpha = .922$; 12 items. The Children's Emotional Regulation scale has excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .942$; 18 items) whereas the Child–Mother Interaction scale has good internal consistency ($\alpha = .866$; 6 items). All reliability analyses were conducted with the full sample of 150 participants.

Table 2 Internal Consistency Reliability of the Study Measures

Scale	Items	Cronbach's α
Maternal Work-Life Balance	18	.945
Child Cognitive Performance	12	.922
Children's Emotional Regulation	18	.942
Child–Mother Interaction	6	.866

Note. Reverse-coded items were recoded before reliability analysis: B6–B12 for Maternal Work-Life Balance and D13–D18 for Children's Emotional Regulation.

5.4 Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlations were performed to investigate relationships between study variables. The work-life balance of mothers was not linked significantly with cognitive performance of the child, $r = -.017$, $p = .838$; emotional regulation of the child, $r = -.103$, $p = .209$; and the child-mother interaction, $r = .113$, $p = .168$. The relationships between the three child-related measures were also weak and statistically insignificant.

Table 3: Pearson Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Maternal Work-Life Balance	—	-.017	-.103	.113
2. Child Cognitive Performance	-.017	—	-.041	.059
3. Children's Emotional Regulation	-.103	-.041	—	.025
4. Child–Mother Interaction	.113	.059	.025	—

5.5 Linear Regression Analysis

Three bivariate linear regressions were run using the mother's work-life balance as a predictor. Balancing work and family life by mothers is not a significant predictor of child cognitive performance, $F(1, 148) = 0.042$, $p = .838$, $R^2 = .000$, $\beta = -.017$.

The effect of maternal work-life balance on children's emotional regulation was not significant $F(1, 148) = 1.591$, $p = .209$, $R^2 = .011$, $\beta = -.103$. The maternal work-life balance did not significantly predict child-mother interaction in Model 3, $F(1, 148) = 1.922$, $p = .168$, $R^2 = .013$, $\beta = .113$.

Table 4: Linear Regression Results for Maternal Work-Life Balance Predicting Study Outcomes

Predictor	Outcome	R^2	β	t	p
Maternal Work-Life Balance	Cognitive Performance	.000	-.017	-0.204	.838
Maternal Work-Life Balance	Emotional Regulation	.011	-.103	-1.261	.209
Maternal Work-Life Balance	Child-Mother Interaction	.013	.113	1.386	.168

Note. $N = 150$. β = standardized regression coefficient. None of the regression models was statistically significant at $p < .05$.

5.6 Summary of Findings

In summary, all four study measures had good to excellent internal consistency. Yet, cognitive performance, emotional regulation, and child-mother interaction were not matters of maternal work-life balance. The regression analyses revealed that there were no maternal work-life balance effects in the present sample for any of these outcomes. Consequently, the results do not support any of the hypothesized significant relationships between maternal work-life balance and the child outcomes examined.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Discussion

The 150 employed mothers of the Darbhanga region of Bihar were examined for maternal work-life balance in relation to children's cognitive performance and emotional regulation. The initial analysis found that the four study measures had an internal consistency that was good to excellent. The analysis gave it a Cronbach's alpha score of .866 to .945. Nevertheless, children's cognitive performance ($r = -.017$, $p = .838$) and emotional regulation ($r = -.103$, $p = .209$) were not significantly correlated with maternal work-life balance.

Results from the regression analysis yielded similar results as the ANOVA, as maternal work-life balance was not a significant predictor of cognitive performance ($R^2 = .000$, $p = .838$) or emotional regulation ($R^2 = .011$, $p = .209$). The child-mother interaction was not significantly associated ($r = .113$, $p = .168$; $R^2 = .013$, $p = .168$). In other words, the two principal findings did not support the hypothesized significant positive relationships between maternal work-life balance and the two principal child outcomes.

The lack of clear associations in this study are consistent with the ambiguous associations found in the literature on this topic. The reports that were studied suggest that maternal employment does not always cause negative child outcomes. It has been reported in a meta-analysis that mothers with employment were low on engagement with their children which resulted in poor achievement and behaviour in children. However, it has varied with family circumstances and SES. The present findings provide relevant information about these mothers within a certain region and family context and does not treat maternal employment as one exposure.

While this study's findings do not correspond with all previous evidence, it is aligned with the bulk of evidence. Research conducted by the NICHD Study of Early Child Care reported links between certain forms of maternal employment and early cognitive outcomes. Further analyses showed that maternal sensitivity and child care quality were important explanations for associations. Research on nonstandard maternal work schedules has shown poorer cognitive outcomes (e.g. Felfe et al 2016; Hill et al 2005). There is also evidence from India that the compatibility of mothers' work patterns with childcare may influence children's cognitive achievement. Findings infer that the association in earlier studies may have been due to nature and timing of employment, type of childcare and the home environment rather than employment status alone.

The evidence on emotional regulation should also be interpreted against the secondary evidence. Studies reviewed in the present research found relationships between work-family conflict, psychological availability, parental exhaustion, maternal relational frustration, and children's emotional functioning. On the other hand, various studies have suggested that parental behaviours could result in the emotional adjustments of children through stress, perception and family experience. On the contrary, the present study did not observe any significant relationship between maternal work-life balance and emotional regulation. The greater difference may be due to the nature of the constructs that were measured. Previous research has frequently targeted work-family conflict, stress or exhaustion in more detail. In contrast, our study looked at the broader concept of maternal work-life balance.

Indian literature highlights the need for contextual factors as well. Research into the lives of Indian working mothers has revealed that time constraints, maternal guilt, role strain, childcare worries and lack of organisational support are constant issues. Family support and workplace flexibility, however, mitigate these stresses. Research indicates that family support in urban India can mask the association of maternal working hours; work-family conflict with children's emotional difficulties. Of the mothers in the present sample, 54% belonged to a nuclear family whereas 36% stayed in a joint family. Participants are from varying strata of occupation and income categories. A family and socio-economic context interpretation of the nonsignificant primary findings shows relevance of these features.

The general results do not indicate any direct link between maternal work-life balance and child outcomes in this sample. They do not contradict the secondary literature; rather, they add evidence that relationships between mothers' work experiences and children's development are variable across populations and contexts. The current research provides some evidence from Darbhanga, a less represented setting. Future research should look at contextual and intervening factors.

6.2 Conclusion

According to our study, the measures had good to excellent reliability. Maternal work-life balance was not significantly associated with children's cognitive performance, emotional regulation, or child-mother interaction. The results suggest that in this sample the expected relationships were not found. It is also important to interpret maternal work-life experiences in family, occupational and socioeconomic context.

6.3 Limitations

The cause-and-effect relationship cannot be inferred from this. The fact that the sample consisted of 150 employed mothers from Darbhanga limited generalisability. The cognitive performance of children was assessed by researcher-developed screening measures- a parent report and not by a standardized objective cognitive test. Self-reported answers could also have reporting bias.

6.4 Implications and Recommendations

Employment mothers balancing competing priorities may benefit from family-friendly workplace practices, flexible working arrangements and childcare and family support. Future studies ought to utilize bigger and more representative samples, longitudinal designs, and standardized cognitive assessments. Research should look into maternal stress, parenting practices, quality of childcare, family support, work schedules and work-family conflict as potential mediating or moderating factors.

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