

# Beyond Employment Status: A Psychosocial Framework for Understanding Well-Being among Married Women

Dr. Juhi Kumari

Independent Researcher, Ph.D. in Home Science, V. K. S. University,  
Arrah, Bihar, India

## *ABSTRACT*

Women's well-being is often studied by comparing working and non-working married women. However, employment status alone does not capture the complexity of women's psychological and family experiences. This conceptual paper proposes a psychosocial framework integrating emotional resilience, marital adjustment, social support, autonomy, role experiences and life satisfaction. Employment may provide income, social interaction and opportunities for personal development, but may also increase work-family demands. Similarly, homemaking and unpaid family work may provide meaning and family belonging, while sometimes limiting independent income or personal choice. The issue is particularly relevant to Bihar, where women's experiences vary by rural-urban setting, education, family structure, socioeconomic conditions and employment opportunities. PLFS 2023-24 reported female and male labour force participation rates of 10.2% and 47.2%, respectively, in Bihar under usual principal status among persons of all ages. NFHS-5 reported that 86.5% of currently married women aged 15-49 participated alone or jointly in three specified household decisions. These indicators reflect different aspects of women's social and economic lives. The paper therefore proposes that women's well-being should be understood through the interaction of personal resources, marital relationships, family environment, role demands and opportunities for agency. The proposed framework provides a basis for future empirical research among married women in Bihar and other Indian contexts.

**Keywords:** *Married Women, Psychological Well-Being, Emotional Resilience, Marital Adjustment, Social Support, Autonomy, Role Strain, Life Satisfaction, Bihar*

**Received :** 7/9/2026      **DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23096021>      **Acceptance:** 15/9/2026

## **Introduction:**

Women's well-being is shaped by their relationships, responsibilities, opportunities and social environment. Married women often manage household and caregiving responsibilities along with paid or unpaid work. These experiences may influence stress, marital adjustment, life satisfaction and personal autonomy. Employment may provide income, social interaction, occupational identity and opportunities for personal growth. However, it may also increase role demands when women continue to carry major family responsibilities. Similarly, non-employment is not a uniform condition;

homemaking and unpaid family work may provide meaning and satisfaction, while limited income or decision-making opportunities may affect autonomy.

Indian research has reported associations between employment, marital adjustment and subjective well-being. Nathawat and Mathur (1993), for example, found better marital adjustment and some indicators of subjective well-being among working women than educated housewives. However, such findings do not suggest that employment alone determines well-being.

This issue is particularly relevant in Bihar, where women's experiences vary by rural–urban location, education, socioeconomic conditions, family structure, type of work and social support. PLFS 2023–24 reported female labour force participation of 10.2% in Bihar, while NFHS-5 reported that 86.5% of currently married women aged 15–49 participated alone or jointly with their husbands in selected household decisions. These indicators highlight the importance of examining economic participation and decision-making as related but distinct aspects of women's social position.

From a theoretical perspective, Diener (1984) viewed subjective well-being through life evaluation and affective experiences, while Ryff (1989) emphasised autonomy, positive relationships, environmental mastery, purpose in life, personal growth and self-acceptance. These perspectives provide a useful basis for understanding married women's well-being as a multidimensional outcome of personal, relational and social experiences.

### **Women's Well-Being Beyond Employment: Indian and Bihar Context**

Women's well-being includes emotional functioning, life satisfaction, relationships, autonomy and the ability to manage everyday challenges. For married women, emotional resilience, marital adjustment, social support and personal agency are important psychosocial dimensions. Employment may provide income, social interaction and occupational identity, but it may also increase work–family demands. Similarly, women engaged in homemaking or unpaid family work may experience meaning and flexibility while having fewer opportunities for independent income or occupational interaction.

Indian research suggests that work–family conflict may reduce well-being, while family and

organisational support can act as protective resources. Therefore, employment should be understood within the wider family and social context.

This perspective is particularly relevant to Bihar. PLFS 2023–24 reported female labour force participation of 10.2%, compared with 47.2% among males under usual principal status among persons of all ages. NFHS-5 reported that 86.5% of currently married women aged 15–49 participated alone or jointly with their husbands in three selected household decisions. These indicators reflect different aspects of women's social and economic lives and should not be treated as direct measures of autonomy or psychological well-being.

Thus, women's well-being is better understood through the interaction of employment, family relationships, role demands, social support, autonomy and personal resources, along with factors such as education, family structure, rural–urban location and socioeconomic circumstances.

### **Marital Adjustment and Psychological Well-Being**

Marital relationships are an important part of married women's emotional and social lives. Communication, mutual understanding, emotional support and adjustment to changing family circumstances may contribute to well-being, while persistent conflict and unequal expectations may increase psychological strain.

Marital adjustment involves continuous adaptation to issues such as employment, parenthood, finances, caregiving and extended-family relationships. Nathawat and Mathur (1993) reported better marital adjustment and some indicators of subjective well-being among working women than educated housewives. However, work–family conflict and inadequate support may reduce these benefits.

Thus, marital adjustment should be examined together with employment, household responsibilities, communication and social support.

### **Emotional Resilience:**

Emotional resilience refers to the ability to cope with difficulties and adapt to stressful circumstances. It does not mean the absence of stress but the capacity to maintain or regain psychological functioning during challenges.

Married women may face demands related to household work, caregiving, employment, finances and relationships. Resilience may influence how these demands are managed, but it is also shaped by social support, family relationships and opportunities for personal control. In the proposed framework, resilience is therefore viewed as a psychological resource that interacts with family and social conditions to influence well-being.

### **Social Support and Family Environment:**

Social support provides emotional, practical and informational resources. Support from spouses, family members, friends and colleagues may help women manage household, caregiving and work-related demands. For married women, practical assistance and emotional support may reduce stress and strengthen a sense of belonging. Research among Indian women has also highlighted the role of family and organisational support in managing work–family conflict and promoting well-being.

The family environment is therefore an important psychosocial context rather than simply a background characteristic. Its influence may differ across families, communities and rural–urban settings.

### **Role Strain and Role Enhancement:**

Married women may perform multiple roles as wives, mothers, daughters, daughters-in-law, homemakers, caregivers and, in some cases, employees or professionals. Managing several roles

may create strain when demands compete for time and resources.

At the same time, multiple roles may provide benefits such as achievement, social interaction, financial resources, belonging and a sense of purpose. Therefore, multiple roles may have both stressful and supportive effects depending on the circumstances.

This is particularly relevant in Bihar, where women's contributions extend beyond formal employment. Research should therefore distinguish between paid employment, unpaid family work, homemaking, informal work and unemployment rather than treating all non-employed women as one group.

### **Autonomy, Decision-Making and Personal Agency**

Autonomy refers to the ability to exercise choice and maintain personal control. Ryff (1989) identified autonomy as an important dimension of psychological well-being. For married women, autonomy may involve decisions about education, employment, finances, health, mobility, parenting and household matters. It is therefore broader than employment status.

The Bihar findings from NFHS-5 illustrate this distinction: participation in selected household decisions and labour-force participation represent different aspects of women's social and economic position. Research should consequently assess autonomy directly rather than using employment as its substitute.

Overall, these dimensions suggest that women's well-being is best understood through the interaction of employment, marital relationships, resilience, social support, multiple roles and personal agency.

### **A Bihar-Based Psychosocial Perspective:**

A Bihar-based understanding of married women's well-being should recognise differences across social and family settings. Rural–urban location, education, socioeconomic conditions,

family structure, migration, type of work, social support and household expectations may shape women's experiences.

Women's educational and occupational aspirations are changing, while marriage, household responsibilities and caregiving remain important in many families. These changes may create both opportunities and role tensions.

Therefore, research should look beyond whether a woman is employed and consider the type of work, income control, household responsibilities, decision-making, marital support, social support and opportunities for personal development. A culturally sensitive approach is important because the meaning of work, family responsibility and autonomy may differ across communities.

#### **Proposed Psychosocial Framework:**

The proposed framework views women's well-being as the result of interactions among contextual, role-related, personal and relational factors. Employment, type of work, family structure, education, socioeconomic conditions and rural-urban setting form the broader context.

These conditions may influence role strain and role enhancement arising from employment, household and caregiving responsibilities. Emotional resilience, autonomy, marital adjustment, social support and family environment may influence how women manage these demands.

The relationships may also be reciprocal. For example, supportive marital relationships may strengthen coping, while greater autonomy may contribute to life satisfaction. Thus, well-being is understood as a multidimensional outcome of women's roles, relationships, resources and opportunities.

#### **Implications for Home Science:**

The framework is relevant to Home Science because the discipline examines individuals within family, household and community settings.

Research should therefore consider employment, family relationships, household responsibilities, social support, autonomy, resilience and life satisfaction together.

This approach may be useful for understanding homemakers, women in informal or self-employment, first-generation educated women, women engaged in unpaid family work and women entering professional employment.

The framework may also inform family counselling and community programmes focusing on marital communication, sharing of household responsibilities, coping skills, social support and decision-making. However, intervention priorities should be based on evidence from specific populations.

#### **Future Research:**

Future studies can examine the relationships among emotional resilience, marital adjustment, social support, autonomy, role strain, role enhancement, employment and life satisfaction among married women in Bihar and other Indian settings.

Research should distinguish between paid employment, self-employment, informal work, unpaid family work, homemaking and unemployment. Comparative studies may examine rural-urban differences, education, socioeconomic background, family structure and occupational groups.

Mixed-method studies can combine quantitative measures with qualitative accounts of women's experiences. Longitudinal research would be useful for examining changes during marriage, parenthood, employment and caregiving transitions. Multivariate approaches such as structural equation modelling may also be used to test the proposed relationships.

## Conclusion:

Married women's well-being cannot be understood through employment status alone. Employment may provide economic and personal resources, but its effects depend on working conditions, family responsibilities and social support. Similarly, women outside paid employment may experience meaningful family roles while having different levels of economic independence and personal choice.

The Bihar context highlights the need to examine employment, family roles, autonomy and decision-making as related but distinct dimensions. The proposed framework brings together contextual conditions, role experiences, resilience, marital adjustment, social support, autonomy and life satisfaction. Future empirical research can test these relationships and contribute to a more culturally sensitive understanding of married women's well-being in Bihar and other Indian contexts.

## References:

1. Diener, E. (1984). Subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin*, 95(3), 542–575.
2. Darolia, S., & Darolia, C. R. (2017). Work-family conflict, psychological distress and well-being among Indian women: Moderating effect of social support. *Indian Journal of Health and Wellbeing*, 8(2), 160–166.
3. Ghosh, A., & ... [additional recent literature should be added according to the target journal's reference requirements].
4. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. (2021). National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), 2019–20: Bihar Fact Sheet. Government of India.
5. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. (2024). Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS): Annual Report, July 2023–June 2024. Government of India.
6. Nathawat, S. S., & Mathur, A. (1993). Marital adjustment and subjective well-being in Indian-educated housewives and working women. *The Journal of Psychology*, 127(3), 353–358. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.1993.9915570>
7. Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(6), 1069–1081.
8. Thoits, P. A. (2011). Mechanisms linking social ties and support to physical and mental health. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 52(2), 145–161.
9. World Health Organization. (2021). Guidance on community mental health services: Promoting person-centred and rights-based approaches. World Health Organization.

