First-Generation Married Women in Changing Social Roles: An Integrative Theoretical Perspective on Emotional Resilience, Marital Adjustment,Wellbeing and Life Satisfaction

Rimpa Kumari
Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, V. K. S. University, Ara, Bihar
Dr. Sujit Kumar Yadav
Senior Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, M. V. College, Buxar

ABSTRACT

Women's growing participation in higher education and paid work has changed family and gender roles in India. These changes are especially important for first-generation educated women, who enter higher education and professional life without a similar educational background in their families. After marriage, they often manage expectations related to work, household responsibilities, caregiving, marital relationships and personal growth.This theoretical paper develops an integrative psychosocial framework linking emotional resilience, marital adjustment, psychological well-being and life satisfaction. Drawing on resilience theory, stress and coping, conservation of resources, role theory, work–family conflict and enrichment, and models of psychological well-being, the paper argues that employment status alone cannot explain women's psychological functioning. Well-being is shaped by the interaction of role demands, personal resources, marital relationships, social support and autonomy. First-generation status is viewed as an intergenerational educational transition that may influence identity, aspirations and social mobility. Emotional resilience acts as a personal resource, while marital adjustment and social support provide important relational resources. Employment may create both stress and opportunities for growth depending on working conditions, family support and role flexibility. The paper presents an integrated framework and suggests directions for future empirical research in diverse Indian settings.

Keywords: ***First-Generation Women, Married Women, Emotional Resilience, Marital Adjustment, Life Satisfaction, Work–Family Conflict, Work–Family Enrichment, Autonomy, India***

Received : 18/8/2026 **DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23096145** **Acceptance: 15/9/2026**

Introduction

Marriage and family remain important parts of women's lives in India. At the same time, greater access to higher education and employment has created new opportunities for autonomy, career development and personal identity. These changes, however, also bring new responsibilities and expectations. Research does not show a simple difference between working and non-working women. Nathawat and Mathur (1993) reported better marital adjustment and some indicators of well-being among educated working women, while later studies have found mixed results, including advantages for non-working women on some measures (Rajora, 2019). These differences suggest that employment status alone cannot explain women's well-being. Marital quality, household responsibilities, social support, autonomy, socioeconomic conditions and coping resources are also important. The issue is particularly relevant for first-generation educated women. Higher education may bring new aspirations,

occupational opportunities, confidence and social mobility, while family expectations may continue to reflect traditional gender roles (Wadhwa, 2018). After marriage, women may need to balance these new identities with domestic responsibilities and family expectations. Their experiences therefore depend on the resources available to them and how well their different roles can be managed. This paper proposes an integrative framework linking emotional resilience, marital adjustment, psychological well-being and life satisfaction among first-generation married women.

Conceptualising First-Generation Married Women

In this paper, a first-generation educated woman refers to a married woman who is among the first members of her family to attain higher education beyond the level normally achieved by her parents or immediate family. First-generation status does not necessarily indicate poverty or disadvantage. It mainly represents an intergenerational educational transition. This transition may bring new knowledge, aspirations, occupational opportunities, social networks and expectations of autonomy. At the same time, women may need to negotiate these changes within existing family systems. Research on first-generation students suggests that they may have less access to educational and institutional knowledge within their families (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Wadhwa, 2018). In India, educational mobility may also involve negotiations around gender norms, marriage, family expectations and occupational choices. Thus, first-generation status is better understood as a social and developmental context rather than a psychological deficit.

Changing Social Roles of Married Women

The roles of married women have changed considerably. A woman may now be a wife, mother, professional, caregiver, household manager and community member. The psychological effect of these roles depends not only on their number but also on how well they fit together. Managing several roles may create stress when the demands of one role interfere with another. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) described this as work–family conflict. However, multiple roles can also provide financial security, confidence, social identity, support and personal growth. Greenhaus and Powell (2006) described this positive process as work–family enrichment. For educated married women, employment may increase responsibilities but can also provide financial independence, self-confidence and a sense of achievement. Marriage may involve adjustment while also providing companionship and emotional support. Thus, changing roles can produce both role strain and role enhancement.

Emotional Resilience as a Psychological Resource

Resilience refers to the ability to adapt to stress, adversity and difficult life situations. Contemporary approaches view resilience as a dynamic process influenced by both personal and social factors (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Masten).

For first-generation married women, resilience may help in managing educational aspirations, work demands, family responsibilities and marital expectations. It can support emotional regulation, problem-solving and help-seeking. However, resilience should not mean that women are expected to tolerate excessive demands. Individual resilience must be considered along with family, social and economic resources. According to Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002), people try to gain and protect valued resources such as education, income, social support, autonomy and self-efficacy. Loss or lack of such resources can increase stress, while adequate resources can support adjustment.

Marital Adjustment as a Relational Dimension

Marital adjustment involves communication, negotiation of expectations, decision-making, management of differences and satisfaction within marriage (Locke & Wallace, 1959).

For first-generation educated women, marriage may require adjustment between new educational and occupational aspirations and family expectations. Marital adjustment should therefore not be understood simply as a woman's ability to adjust to

her husband or marital family. It should include mutual understanding, emotional support, shared decision-making, respect for aspirations and fair distribution of responsibilities. A woman may have strong personal resilience but still experience poor well-being if the marital environment is marked by conflict, low support or restricted autonomy. Marital adjustment can therefore act as an important link between family experiences and psychological outcomes.

Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being goes beyond the absence of symptoms. Ryff's model includes autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, purpose in life and self-acceptance (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 2008). This model is useful for educated married women because education may influence autonomy, identity, personal growth and future aspirations. A woman may have no clinical symptoms but still experience limited autonomy or personal growth. Similarly, family responsibilities do not necessarily prevent a woman from having purpose, positive relationships and personal agency. Studies using Ryff's scales have reported differences between working and non-working women on particular domains rather than consistent overall differences. This supports the multidimensional nature of psychological well-being.

Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction refers to a person's overall evaluation of life according to personally meaningful standards (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1985). It is different from satisfaction with a particular area such as marriage or work. A woman may be satisfied with her marriage but dissatisfied with her career, or the reverse. Life satisfaction therefore reflects the overall balance of psychological resources, relationships, role experiences and opportunities for personal development. The framework is supported by several theories.Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping explains how appraisal and coping influence responses to life demands. Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002) highlights the importance of gaining and protecting personal and social resources. Role theory explains conflict between family and professional responsibilities (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), while Work–Family Enrichment Theory explains how experiences in one role can benefit another (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Ryff's model adds the importance of autonomy, growth, purpose and positive relationships.Together, these perspectives provide a useful basis for understanding women's well-being and life satisfaction.

An Integrative Psychosocial Framework

The well-being of first-generation married women can be understood through the interaction of contextual conditions, role experiences, psychological resources and relational resources. Contextual factors include first-generation educational status, socioeconomic background, family structure, rural–urban location, education, employment, income, husband's education and occupation, and cultural expectations. These factors shape the resources and demands experienced by women. Role experiences include work–family conflict and enrichment, domestic responsibilities, caregiving, occupational autonomy, family expectations and negotiation between personal and family needs. Psychological resources include emotional resilience, self-efficacy, autonomy, coping and personal agency. Relational resources include marital communication, emotional support, mutual respect, shared decision-making and family support. These factors are related to psychological well-being, marital adjustment, life satisfaction, emotional functioning and perceived quality of life. These outcomes are related but should not be treated as identical.

Role Strain and Role Enhancement

Changing roles may create both difficulties and opportunities. Role strain can arise from excessive workload, limited time, unequal household responsibilities, occupational insecurity, lack of support and conflicting family expectations.

Role enhancement may occur when employment provides financial independence, education strengthens self-efficacy, professional work gives meaning and social recognition, and family support helps women manage their responsibilities. Therefore, the important question is not simply whether a woman is employed. It is how her work, family and personal roles interact and what resources she gains or loses through these roles.

Autonomy,Decision-Making and Personal Agency

Autonomy is an important part of the adjustment of first-generation married women. Education may increase participation in decisions about employment, finances, children, health and family planning. However, education does not automatically ensure autonomy. The psychological benefit of education depends partly on whether women can use their knowledge and abilities in meaningful ways. A gap between educational achievement and actual decision-making power may create frustration and reduce life satisfaction. Research in India has also linked college education with greater autonomy in areas such as marriage and spouse choice (Vikram, 2024).

Social Support and the Marital Relationship

Social support is another important factor in women's well-being. Spousal support may include emotional encouragement, help with household and childcare responsibilities, acceptance of employment and respect for personal decisions.Support from other family members may reduce role strain through practical help, although family relationships may also create additional expectations. Therefore, support should be considered in terms of its quality and adequacy, not only its availability.

First-Generation Status and Intergenerational Identity

First-generation status may involve a change in aspirations, social networks, occupational expectations and self-identity. Such changes can create both satisfaction and tension.A woman's educational achievement may be viewed positively by her parents, while her marital family may have different expectations regarding employment or autonomy. First-generation status may therefore influence well-being through changing aspirations, identity, family negotiation and role experiences.

The possible pathway can be understood as:

Educational mobility '! changing aspirations '! identity development '! family negotiation '! role experiences '! psychological outcomes. This pathway requires empirical testing rather than assuming that first-generation status is either positive or negative.

Integrative Propositions

The framework suggests that emotional resilience, marital adjustment, spousal support and perceived autonomy may be positively related to psychological well-being and life satisfaction. Work–family conflict and role strain may be associated with poorer outcomes, while work–family enrichment may support well-being. Resilience may reduce the negative effects of role strain, while marital adjustment may partly explain the relationship between family experiences and life satisfaction. The relationship between employment and well-being is likely to depend on working conditions, household responsibilities, marital support and autonomy rather than employment status alone. First-generation status may influence psychological outcomes indirectly through educational mobility, family expectations, autonomy, available resources and family negotiation.

Proposed Empirical Model

The proposed model views well-being as the result of interactions among background conditions, role experiences, psychological resources and relational factors. First-generation status, education, socioeconomic background, family structure and employment may shape work–family experiences. These experiences are related to resilience, autonomy, social support and marital adjustment, which in turn may influence psychological well-being and life satisfaction.The model is conceptual rather than causal. Empirical research is needed to determine

the direction and strength of these relationships. Structural equation modelling may be useful for examining direct and indirect pathways.

Implications for Psychological Research

Research should move beyond simple comparisons between working and non-working women. First-generation status should be clearly defined and measured rather than inferred from income, occupation or location. Marital adjustment should be studied as a mutual relational process, not simply as a woman's ability to adjust. Psychological well-being should also be distinguished from life satisfaction, as they represent different aspects of functioning. Resilience should be examined within the social and family context rather than treated only as an individual quality.

Implications for Family Counselling and Women's Well-Being

Interventions should not focus only on individual coping. Where appropriate, counselling may include communication, couple-based problem-solving, sharing of household responsibilities, strengthening social support and improving work–family boundaries. For first-generation educated women, counselling may also address identity changes and conflicts between personal aspirations and family expectations. Education, employment, resilience and social networks can be viewed as potential strengths for both women and families.

Research in the Indian Context

Women's experiences differ across regions, family structures, socioeconomic groups and occupations in India. Future research should therefore examine factors such as rural–urban location, nuclear or joint family structure, employment sector, occupational flexibility, income, number of children, years of marriage, autonomy, social support and husband's education and occupation.Research in states such as Bihar may be particularly useful for understanding how increasing educational mobility interacts with traditional family expectations.

Suggested Methodological Approach

A quantitative or mixed-method design may be suitable. Standardised measures may include the Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (Connor & Davidson, 2003), Locke–Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959), Ryff's Psychological Well-Being scales, Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985), and established measures of work–family conflict and enrichment.

Qualitative interviews can further explore women's experiences of education, marriage, employment, autonomy, family expectations and changing identity. Structural equation modelling can examine relationships among contextual factors, role experiences, resources and outcomes. Longitudinal studies would also help understand changes across marriage, childbirth and career development.

Limitations

This paper is theoretical and does not provide empirical evidence for the proposed relationships. First-generation status may also be defined differently across studies, so researchers should clearly state their criteria. First-generation married women are not a homogeneous group. Their experiences may differ by region, class, family structure, occupation and stage of marriage. A purely individual-level approach may also overlook economic conditions, gender norms, workplace conditions and family structures. Future research should therefore consider individual, relational and social factors together.

Future Directions

Future research should develop clear definitions of first-generation married women and examine the processes linking education, marriage, work and well-being. Longitudinal and mixed-method studies can provide a better understanding of changing identities, autonomy, family expectations and coping. Research should also examine whether established psychological models adequately explain women's experiences across different Indian social and cultural settings.

Conclusion:

The psychological experiences of first-generation married women cannot be understood through employment or marital status alone. These women may simultaneously manage educational mobility, career aspirations, family expectations, marital responsibilities and personal autonomy.

The proposed framework brings together contextual conditions, role experiences, psychological resources and relational factors. Emotional resilience, marital adjustment, social support and autonomy may shape how women experience work and family roles and, ultimately, their psychological well-being and life satisfaction. First-generation status should not be viewed as a deficit. It represents an intergenerational educational transition that may create new opportunities as well as new forms of family and social negotiation. The well-being of these women is therefore best understood through an integrated psychosocial perspective that considers both personal resources and the social environment.

References:

1. Locke, H. J., & Wallace, K. M. (1959). Short marital-adjustment and prediction tests: Their reliability and validity. Marriage and Family Living, 21(3), 251–255.
2. Diener, E. (1984). Subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin, 95*(3), 542–575.
3. Greenhaus, J. H., & Beutell, N. J. (1985). Sources of conflict between work and family roles. *Academy of Management Review, 10*(1), 76–88.
4. Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The Satisfaction With Life Scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 49*(1), 71–75.
5. Hobfoll, S. E. (1989). Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress. American Psychologist, 44(3), 513–524.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. Ryff,C.D., & Keyes,C.L.M. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being revisited. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69(4), 719–727.
9. Hobfoll, S. E. (2002). Social and psychological resources and adaptation. Review of General Psychology, 6(4), 307–324.
10. Connor, K. M., & Davidson, J. R. T. (2003). Development of a new resilience scale: The Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC). *Depression and Anxiety, 18*(2), 76–82.
11. Greenhaus, J. H., & Powell, G. N. (2006). When work and family are allies: A theory of work–family enrichment. *Academy of Management Review, 31*(1), 72–92.
12. Engle, J., & Tinto, V. (2008). *Moving beyond access: College success for low-income, first-generation students*. The Pell Institute.
13. Ryff, C. D., & Singer, B. H. (2008). Know thyself and become what you are: A eudaimonic approach to psychological well-being. Journal of Happiness Studies, 9(1), 13–39.
14. Wadhwa, R. (2018). Related work on first-generation students in Indian higher education (as cited in widening-participation literature).
15. Rajora, P. (2019). A comparative study of life satisfaction and marital adjustment of employed and unemployed married women. The International Journal of Indian Psychology, 7(3).
16. Vikram, K. (2024). Modern marriage in a traditional society: The influence of college education on marriage in India. Journal of Family Issues, 45(5), 1116–1141.