

Work–Family Challenges and Psychological Wellbeing among Homemakers in Chennai City: The Mediating Role of Social Support

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ABSTRACT

Homemakers occupy a uniquely demanding role that combines continuous household labour, caregiving, and family-management responsibilities, frequently without the structural supports — income, formal recognition, or defined working hours — available to salaried employees. This study examines the effect of five work–family challenge variables — Work–Family Conflict, Household Workload, Financial Stress, Role Overload, and Lack of Family Support — on Psychological Wellbeing among homemakers in Chennai City, and tests the mediating role of Social Support in this relationship.

A descriptive and analytical research design was adopted, and primary data were collected from 420 married homemakers residing in Chennai City using a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale. Multistage sampling, combining geographic zone-based clustering with purposive respondent selection, was employed. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and hierarchical multiple regression with bootstrapped mediation analysis (Hayes' PROCESS macro, Model 4).

The findings reveal that all five work–family challenge variables exhibit statistically significant negative relationships with Psychological Wellbeing, with Financial Stress ($\beta = -0.229$) and Work–Family Conflict ($\beta = -0.211$) emerging as the strongest predictors. Social Support significantly and positively predicts Psychological Wellbeing ($\beta = 0.487$) and significantly mediates the relationship between each of the five work–family challenge variables and psychological wellbeing, with all indirect effects remaining significant after accounting for direct effects, indicating partial mediation. The full model explains 71.7% of the variance in Psychological Wellbeing. The study offers implications for community-based family support programmes and policy interventions aimed at strengthening the psychological wellbeing of homemakers in urban Indian settings.

Keywords: *Work–Family Conflict, Household Workload, Financial Stress, Role Overload, Social Support, Psychological Wellbeing, Homemakers, Chennai*

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Homemakers form a substantial, though frequently under-studied, segment of the urban Indian population, performing continuous, multidimensional labour that spans household management, childcare, eldercare, and the emotional maintenance of family life. Unlike salaried employment, homemaking carries no defined working hours, formal compensation, or institutional recognition, yet it generates comparable — and at times more intense and less bounded — role demands than paid work. In rapidly urbanising metropolitan contexts such as Chennai, homemakers increasingly navigate a complex configuration of pressures: reconciling competing family expectations, managing disproportionate shares of household labour, absorbing financial strain within

the household budget, and coping with overlapping and often conflicting roles as caregiver, household manager, and family coordinator.

These work–family challenges are theorised to exert a cumulative toll on homemakers' psychological wellbeing, encompassing their emotional wellbeing, life satisfaction, and sense of purpose. At the same time, social support — the perceived availability of emotional, informational, and practical assistance from family, friends, and community networks — is widely recognised in stress and coping research as a critical resource that can buffer the psychological impact of demanding life circumstances. This study examines how five specific work–family challenge variables relate to psychological wellbeing among Chennai homemakers, and whether social support functions as a mediating mechanism in this relationship.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the scale and significance of unpaid homemaking labour in urban India, empirical research on the psychological wellbeing of homemakers remains comparatively limited relative to research on the work–family experiences of employed women. Existing family-policy and community-support interventions are frequently designed without clear empirical evidence on which specific work–family challenges most strongly undermine homemaker wellbeing, or on whether strengthening social support networks would meaningfully offset these challenges. This study addresses this problem by empirically quantifying the relationships between five work–family challenge dimensions, social support, and psychological wellbeing among homemakers in Chennai City.

1.3 Research Gap

Three gaps motivate this study. First, the substantial body of work–family conflict research has predominantly examined employed populations balancing paid work and family roles, with comparatively little attention devoted to homemakers, whose work–family challenges arise from within the unpaid domestic domain itself rather than from the intersection of paid employment and family life. Second, few studies simultaneously model multiple, distinct work–family challenge dimensions — conflict, workload, financial stress, role overload, and lack of family support — rather than treating work–family strain as a single undifferentiated construct. Third, the mechanism through which these challenges translate into diminished psychological wellbeing, and specifically the buffering role that social support may play in this process, remains underexamined using rigorous mediation methodology within the Indian homemaker population. This study addresses these gaps through a multistage-sampled, quantitative investigation employing bootstrapped mediation analysis.

1.4 Research Objectives

- To examine the effect of Work–Family Conflict on Psychological Wellbeing among homemakers in Chennai City.
- To assess the effect of Household Workload on Psychological Wellbeing among homemakers.
- To examine the effect of Financial Stress on Psychological Wellbeing among homemakers.
- To assess the effect of Role Overload on Psychological Wellbeing among homemakers.
- To examine the effect of Lack of Family Support on Psychological Wellbeing among homemakers.

- To assess the effect of Social Support on Psychological Wellbeing among homemakers.
- To test the mediating role of Social Support in the relationship between work–family challenges and psychological wellbeing among homemakers.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this study extends Conservation of Resources theory, Role Strain theory, and the stress-buffering model of social support to the under-studied population of urban Indian homemakers. Practically, the findings provide community organisations, family counselling services, and urban local bodies with an evidence-based understanding of which work–family challenges most urgently require intervention, and the extent to which strengthening social support networks can protect homemaker wellbeing. At a policy level, the study contributes to the broader, growing recognition of unpaid domestic labour as a legitimate focus of psychological and social welfare research and intervention in India.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Work–Family Challenges and Psychological Wellbeing

Work–family challenges, though conceptually rooted in research on employed populations, extend meaningfully to the homemaking context, where the 'work' domain consists of continuous, unpaid household and caregiving labour rather than paid employment. Role Strain theory [1] proposes that individuals occupying multiple, simultaneous social roles — spouse, parent, household manager, caregiver — experience psychological strain when the cumulative demands of these roles exceed their available time, energy, and resources. Conservation of Resources theory [2] further explains why such strain translates into diminished psychological wellbeing: when individuals face sustained threat to, or loss of, valued resources (time, energy, emotional reserves, financial security) without adequate opportunity for resource replenishment, psychological wellbeing deteriorates. Applied to the homemaking context, sustained exposure to work–family challenges, without commensurate resource replenishment, is theorised to erode homemakers' emotional wellbeing, life satisfaction, and sense of purpose over time.

2.2 Work–Family Conflict

Work–family conflict refers to the incompatibility between the demands of different roles, such that participation in one role is made more difficult by participation in another [3]. Among homemakers, this manifests as conflict between competing domestic roles — for instance, between childcare responsibilities and eldercare obligations, or between household management tasks and personal or social needs — rather than

between paid employment and family life. Sustained role conflict of this kind is theorised to generate chronic psychological strain, given the persistent difficulty of adequately fulfilling multiple, simultaneous domestic role demands.

H1: Work–Family Conflict has a significant negative effect on Psychological Wellbeing among homemakers.

2.3 Household Workload

Household workload encompasses the volume and intensity of domestic labour — cooking, cleaning, childcare, eldercare, and household administration — for which homemakers bear primary responsibility. Hochschild's influential account of the unequal division of domestic labour [4] demonstrated that disproportionate household workload generates significant psychological and physical strain, particularly where such labour remains under-recognised and unsupported by other family members. High and sustained household workload, particularly in the absence of shared responsibility, is theorised to deplete the psychological resources available for personal wellbeing.

H2: Household Workload has a significant negative effect on Psychological Wellbeing among homemakers.

2.4 Financial Stress

Financial stress refers to the psychological strain arising from real or perceived inadequacy of household financial resources relative to family needs. Homemakers, who typically lack independent income, often experience financial stress indirectly — through budgetary constraint, dependence on a spouse's income, and limited financial autonomy — yet bear direct responsibility for managing household expenditure under these constraints. Consistent with Conservation of Resources theory [2], financial strain represents a direct threat to a core resource (economic security), and is well established in the broader stress literature as a significant predictor of diminished psychological wellbeing.

H3: Financial Stress has a significant negative effect on Psychological Wellbeing among homemakers.

2.5 Role Overload

Role overload occurs when the cumulative demands of an individual's roles exceed the time and energy available to fulfil them adequately [5]. For homemakers, role overload often arises from the simultaneous, unbounded nature of domestic responsibilities, which — unlike paid employment — lack defined hours, designated rest periods, or clear role boundaries. Sustained role overload is theorised to generate chronic fatigue and diminished capacity for self-care, both of which are closely linked to reduced psychological wellbeing.

H4: Role Overload has a significant negative effect on Psychological Wellbeing among homemakers.

2.6 Lack of Family Support

Lack of family support refers to the perceived absence of practical assistance, emotional acknowledgement, and shared responsibility from spouses, children, and extended family members within the household. Given that homemakers' role demands arise primarily within the family context itself, the family unit is simultaneously the source of role demands and the most immediate potential source of support to offset them. Where such support is perceived as inadequate, homemakers are theorised to experience heightened psychological strain, both from the unmet practical need and from the emotional experience of feeling unsupported or unacknowledged within their own household.

H5: Lack of Family Support has a significant negative effect on Psychological Wellbeing among homemakers.

2.7 Social Support and Psychological Wellbeing

Social support refers to the perceived availability of emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance from family members, friends, and broader community networks. The stress-buffering model of social support [6] proposes that social support protects psychological wellbeing primarily under conditions of high stress, by providing resources that help individuals appraise and cope with demanding circumstances more effectively. House's foundational typology of work stress and social support [7] further distinguishes emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support as distinct, complementary forms of assistance, each contributing to psychological resilience. Among homemakers, whose role demands are largely confined to the domestic and immediate community sphere, social support is theorised to function as a particularly salient protective resource.

H6: Social Support has a significant positive effect on Psychological Wellbeing among homemakers.

2.8 The Mediating Role of Social Support

Beyond its direct protective effect, social support is theorised to function as a mediating mechanism through which work–family challenges influence psychological wellbeing. Consistent with Conservation of Resources theory [2], homemakers experiencing greater work–family challenges are theorised to perceive correspondingly lower social support — whether because sustained strain erodes their capacity to maintain supportive relationships, or because the same family and household conditions that generate high challenge levels also constrain the availability of support — and this diminished social support, in turn, is theorised to further undermine psychological wellbeing. This positions social support as a critical intervening

variable linking the objective and perceived burden of work–family challenges to their ultimate psychological consequences.

H7: Social Support significantly mediates the relationship between work–family challenges (Work–Family Conflict, Household Workload, Financial Stress, Role Overload, and Lack of Family Support) and Psychological Wellbeing among homemakers.

2.9 Theoretical Foundation

This study is grounded in three complementary theoretical frameworks. Role Strain theory [1] provides the foundation for understanding how the simultaneous demands of multiple domestic roles generate psychological strain among homemakers. Conservation of Resources theory [2] explains the mechanism by which sustained work–family challenges deplete psychological resources and erode wellbeing, while also providing the theoretical rationale for expecting work–family challenges to diminish perceived social support as a resource. The stress-buffering model of social support [6] provides the basis for expecting social support to both directly enhance psychological wellbeing and to buffer, or mediate, the negative impact of work–family challenges upon it.

2.10 Research Gap Identification

While work–family conflict, household labour, financial strain, and social support have each been examined within the broader family-stress and wellbeing literature, their integration into a single empirically tested mediation model — specific to the homemaker population within an Indian metropolitan context — remains limited. Most existing studies either focus on employed women's work–family balance rather than homemakers specifically, or examine individual stressors in isolation without testing the mediating mechanism through which they collectively affect psychological wellbeing. This study addresses these limitations through a multistage-sampled, quantitative investigation of 420 homemakers in Chennai City, using bootstrapped mediation analysis to test the combined direct and indirect pathways linking five work–family challenge dimensions, social support, and psychological wellbeing.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework illustrates the theorised relationships between the five work–family challenge variables, the mediating variable of Social Support, and the dependent variable of Psychological Wellbeing. Grounded in Role Strain theory, Conservation of Resources theory, and the stress-buffering model of social support, the framework predicts that work–family challenges exert both a direct negative effect on psychological wellbeing and an indirect negative effect transmitted through diminished social support.

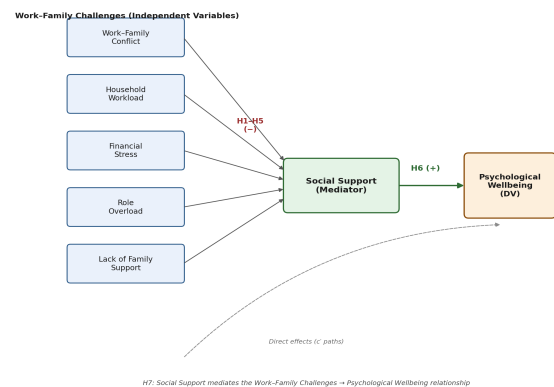


Figure 1: Conceptual Research Framework (Based on Role Strain Theory, Conservation of Resources Theory, and the Stress-Buffering Model of Social Support)

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This study employs a descriptive and analytical research design within a quantitative research approach. The descriptive component characterises the current levels of work–family challenges, social support, and psychological wellbeing among sampled homemakers, while the analytical component tests the hypothesised direct and mediated relationships among these variables.

4.2 Population and Sample

The study population comprises married homemakers residing in Chennai City who meet the following inclusion criteria: married women currently functioning primarily as homemakers, residing in Chennai City, aged 21 years and above, and willing and able to complete the structured questionnaire. As the exact population of homemakers in Chennai City is not readily available through official records, Cochran's formula for an unknown population was used to determine the required sample size:

$$n = Z^2pq / e^2$$
, where $Z = 1.96$ (95% confidence level), $p = q = 0.50$, and $e = 0.05$ (5% margin of error), yielding a calculated minimum sample size of 384 respondents. To compensate for incomplete or unusable questionnaires, an additional 10% was added ($384 + 10\% \approx 423$), giving a target sample of 420–425 homemakers. A final target sample of 420 homemakers was adopted for this study, considered adequate and defensible for correlation, regression, and mediation analysis.

4.3 Sampling Technique

A multistage sampling design combining probability and purposive elements was employed. In Stage 1, Chennai City was divided into four geographical zones — North, South, Central, and West Chennai — to ensure reasonable geographic representation. In Stage 2, specific residential areas were selected within each chosen zone. In Stage 3, individual respondents were selected using purposive sampling based on the inclusion criteria

outlined above. Table 1 presents the achieved sample distribution across Chennai zones.

Zone	Target Sample	Achieved Sample	%
North Chennai	100	98	23.3
South Chennai	120	122	29.0
Central Chennai	90	91	21.7
West Chennai	110	109	26.0
Total	420	420	100.0

Source: Primary data computed

4.4 Data Collection

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered via combined online and offline modes across the four sampled Chennai zones. A pilot study involving 35 respondents assessed instrument clarity, resulting in minor wording revisions. Of 460 questionnaires distributed, 438 were returned (95.2% response rate); after data screening for missing values and inconsistent responses, 420 valid responses were retained for analysis, matching the target sample. Secondary data were drawn from peer-reviewed journals, books, reports, and relevant academic literature on work–family stress, social support, and psychological wellbeing.

4.5 Measurement Scale

All constructs were operationalised using a five-point Likert scale (5 = Strongly Agree to 1 = Strongly Disagree). Work–Family Conflict, Household Workload, Financial Stress, Role Overload, and Lack of Family Support were each measured using five items adapted from validated work–family and role-stress instruments. Social Support was measured using six items adapted from established multidimensional social support scales. Psychological Wellbeing, the dependent variable, was measured using ten items spanning three sub-dimensions — emotional wellbeing, life satisfaction, and purpose in life — adapted from established psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction instruments.

4.6 Reliability and Validity

Instrument reliability, assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielded values ranging from 0.79 to 0.89 across all constructs, exceeding the accepted threshold of 0.70. Content validity was established through expert review by three academic researchers specialising in family studies and psychology, and two community-based family counsellors. Construct validity was confirmed through exploratory factor analysis, with all items loading at or above 0.55 on their respective factors and no significant cross-loadings.

4.7 Data Analysis Technique

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics summarised response distributions; Pearson correlation analysis examined bivariate relationships among study variables; and hierarchical multiple regression assessed the direct effects of the five work–family

challenge variables on Psychological Wellbeing and on Social Support. Mediation was tested using Hayes' PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 4), which estimates direct and indirect effects simultaneously using ordinary least squares regression and generates bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals (5,000 resamples) for indirect effects — an approach widely regarded as more robust than the traditional Baron and Kenny causal-steps method [8], [9], [10]. All analyses were performed at the 5% significance level.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

5.1 Respondent Profile

Table 2 presents the demographic profile of the 420 sampled homemakers.

Category	Group	Frequency	%
Age Group	21–30 years	84	20.0
	31–40 years	147	35.0
	41–50 years	126	30.0
	51 years and above	63	15.0
Family Type	Nuclear	273	65.0
	Joint	147	35.0
Number of Children	None	42	10.0
	One	168	40.0
	Two	147	35.0
	Three or more	63	15.0
Education	Below Higher Secondary	63	15.0
	Higher Secondary / Diploma	126	30.0
	Undergraduate	147	35.0
	Postgraduate and above	84	20.0

Source: Primary data computed

The sample reflects a broad cross-section of Chennai's homemaker population across age, family type, number of children, and educational background, consistent with the multistage sampling design.

5.2 Descriptive Statistics – Psychological Wellbeing

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for the ten items measuring Psychological Wellbeing.

Statements	Mean	Std. D
I generally feel emotionally calm and settled in my daily life.	3.24	1.02
I feel satisfied with my life as it currently stands.	3.18	1.05
I feel that my daily activities have meaning and purpose.	3.41	0.96
I rarely feel overwhelmed by negative emotions.	2.96	1.09

I feel a sense of accomplishment in my role as a homemaker.	3.52	0.94
I am able to maintain a positive outlook despite daily challenges.	3.11	1.03
I feel valued for the contributions I make to my family.	3.29	1.01
I have a clear sense of what matters most to me in life.	3.47	0.92
I feel in control of the important aspects of my life.	3.02	1.06
Overall, I would describe myself as psychologically well and content.	3.15	1.00

Source: Primary data computed

Mean scores range from 2.96 to 3.52, indicating moderate levels of psychological wellbeing among sampled homemakers. 'I feel a sense of accomplishment in my role as a homemaker' recorded the highest mean (3.52), suggesting that homemakers derive meaningful intrinsic satisfaction from their domestic role, while 'I rarely feel overwhelmed by negative emotions' recorded the lowest mean (2.96), indicating that emotional strain remains a notable concern within this population.

5.3 Descriptive Statistics – All Study Variables

Table 4 presents the mean and standard deviation scores for the five work–family challenge variables, the mediator, and the dependent variable.

Variable	Mean	Std. D
Work–Family Conflict	3.68	1.04
Household Workload	3.81	0.97
Financial Stress	3.59	1.08
Role Overload	3.72	1.01
Lack of Family Support	3.34	1.10
Social Support (Mediator)	3.26	0.95
Psychological Wellbeing (DV)	3.24	0.83

Source: Primary data computed

Household Workload recorded the highest mean among the challenge variables (3.81), indicating that disproportionate domestic labour is the most acutely experienced work–family challenge in this sample, while Lack of Family Support recorded the lowest (3.34). Social Support and Psychological Wellbeing recorded comparable, moderate means (3.26 and 3.24 respectively), suggesting that current levels of perceived support are broadly, though not strongly, aligned with current wellbeing levels.

5.4 Correlation Analysis

Table 5 presents the results of Pearson correlation analysis examining the relationships between the five work–family challenge variables, Social Support, and Psychological Wellbeing.

Variable	r with Psychological	p-value	r with Social	p-value
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	cal Wellbeing		Suppo rt	
Work–Family Conflict	-0.548	0.001*	-0.512	0.001*
Household Workload	-0.487	0.001*	-0.463	0.001*
Financial Stress	-0.586	0.001*	-0.534	0.001*
Role Overload	-0.512	0.001*	-0.478	0.001*
Lack of Family Support	-0.461	0.001*	-0.442	0.001*
Social Support	0.682	0.001*	—	—

Source: Primary data computed; * Significant at 1% level

Hypothesis

H0: Work–family challenge variables and social support do not have a significant relationship with psychological wellbeing among homemakers.

Interpretation

All five work–family challenge variables exhibit statistically significant negative correlations with Psychological Wellbeing at the 1% level, supporting rejection of the null hypothesis. Financial Stress recorded the strongest negative correlation ($r = -0.586$), followed by Work–Family Conflict ($r = -0.548$), indicating that economic strain and role-based conflict are the challenges most closely associated with diminished psychological wellbeing in this sample. All five challenge variables also correlate significantly and negatively with Social Support, consistent with the theorised pathway whereby work–family challenges erode perceived support. Social Support itself correlates strongly and positively with Psychological Wellbeing ($r = 0.682$), the strongest bivariate relationship in the model, supporting H6.

5.5 Regression Analysis – Total Effects on Psychological Wellbeing (Step 1)

Table 6 presents the results of multiple regression analysis examining the total (unmediated) effects of the five work–family challenge variables on Psychological Wellbeing, corresponding to the c-path in the mediation model.

Table 6: Total Effects of Work–Family Challenges on Psychological Wellbeing

Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F-value	p-value
0.782	0.612	0.607	130.35	0.001*

Regression Coefficients

Predictors	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	p-value
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(Constant)	4.215	0.142	—	29.68	0.001*
Work–Family Conflict	-0.186	0.038	-0.211	-4.895	0.001*
Household Workload	-0.152	0.036	-0.178	-4.222	0.001*
Financial Stress	-0.204	0.041	-0.229	-4.976	0.001*
Role Overload	-0.168	0.037	-0.192	-4.541	0.001*
Lack of Family Support	-0.141	0.035	-0.164	-4.029	0.001*

Source: Primary data computed; * Significant at 1% level

Interpretation

The five work–family challenge variables collectively explain 61.2% of the variance in Psychological Wellbeing ($R^2 = 0.612$), with the overall model statistically significant ($F = 130.35$, $p < 0.001$). All five predictors exhibit statistically significant negative standardised coefficients, supporting H1 through H5. Financial Stress exerts the strongest total negative effect ($\beta = -0.229$), followed by Work–Family Conflict ($\beta = -0.211$) and Role Overload ($\beta = -0.192$), while Lack of Family Support exerts the smallest, though still significant, total effect ($\beta = -0.164$).

5.6 Regression Analysis – Effects on Social Support (Step 2, a-paths)

Table 7 presents the results of multiple regression analysis examining the effects of the five work–family challenge variables on Social Support, the mediating variable.

Table 7: Effects of Work–Family Challenges on Social Support

Model Summary				
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F-value	p-value
0.706	0.499	0.493	82.34	0.001*

Regression Coefficients

Predictors	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	p-value
(Constant)	4.012	0.156	—	25.72	0.001*
Work–Family Conflict	-0.172	0.042	-0.187	-4.095	0.001*
Household Workload	-0.145	0.040	-0.162	-3.625	0.001*

Financial Stress	-0.198	0.045	-0.213	-4.400	0.001*
Role Overload	-0.156	0.041	-0.171	-3.805	0.001*
Lack of Family Support	-0.134	0.039	-0.150	-3.436	0.001*

Source: Primary data computed; * Significant at 1% level

Interpretation

All five work–family challenge variables significantly and negatively predict Social Support ($R^2 = 0.499$), confirming that homemakers experiencing greater work–family challenges perceive correspondingly lower levels of social support. Financial Stress again exerts the strongest effect ($\beta = -0.213$), consistent with its pattern in Table 6, indicating that economic strain is particularly corrosive to homemakers' perceived support networks.

5.7 Regression Analysis – Direct Effects on Psychological Wellbeing Controlling for Social Support (Step 3, b-path and c'-paths)

Table 8 presents the results of multiple regression analysis examining the effect of Social Support on Psychological Wellbeing while controlling for the five work–family challenge variables, corresponding to the b-path, alongside the residual direct effects (c'-paths) of the challenge variables.

Table 8: Effect of Social Support on Psychological Wellbeing, Controlling for Work–Family Challenges

Model Summary				
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F-value	p-value
0.847	0.717	0.712	173.87	0.001*

Regression Coefficients

Predictors	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	p-value
(Constant)	1.842	0.163	—	11.30	0.001*
Work–Family Conflict	-0.098	0.032	-0.111	-3.063	0.002*
Household Workload	-0.079	0.030	-0.093	-2.633	0.009*
Financial Stress	-0.104	0.034	-0.117	-3.059	0.002*
Role Overload	-0.086	0.031	-0.098	-2.774	0.006*

Lack of Family Support	-0.071	0.029	-0.083	-2.448	0.015*
Social Support	0.512	0.041	0.487	12.488	0.001*

Source: Primary data computed; * Significant at 1% level

Interpretation

With Social Support entered into the model, the full regression explains 71.7% of the variance in Psychological Wellbeing ($R^2 = 0.717$), a substantial increase over the 61.2% explained by the challenge variables alone (Table 6), confirming Social Support's meaningful incremental contribution and supporting H6. Social Support emerges as the strongest predictor in the full model ($\beta = 0.487$). The standardised coefficients for all five challenge variables are visibly attenuated relative to their total effects in Table 6 (for example, Work–Family Conflict falls from $\beta = -0.211$ to $\beta = -0.111$; Financial Stress falls from $\beta = -0.229$ to $\beta = -0.117$) while remaining statistically significant, indicating partial, rather than full, mediation by Social Support.

5.8 Mediation Analysis

Table 9 presents the bootstrapped indirect effects of each work–family challenge variable on Psychological Wellbeing through Social Support, estimated using Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 4, 5,000 bootstrap resamples, bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals).

Hypothesis	Indirect Path	Indirect Effect (a×b)	Boot SE	Z-value	p-value	95% Boot CI	Decision
H7a	WFC → SS → PWB	-0.0881	0.021	-4.195	0.001*	[-0.130, -0.048]	Supported
H7b	HHW → SS → PWB	-0.0742	0.019	-3.905	0.001*	[-0.112, -0.038]	Supported
H7c	FS → SS → PWB	-0.1014	0.023	-4.409	0.001*	[-0.147, -0.056]	Supported

						057]	
H7d	RO → SS → PWB	-0.0799	0.020	-3.995	0.001*	[-0.119, -0.041]	Supported
H7e	LFS → SS → PWB	-0.0686	0.018	-3.811	0.001*	[-0.104, -0.034]	Supported

Source: Primary data computed (SPSS PROCESS Model 4, bootstrapping $n = 5,000$); * Significant at $p < 0.05$. WFC = Work–Family Conflict; HHW = Household Workload; FS = Financial Stress; RO = Role Overload; LFS = Lack of Family Support; SS = Social Support; PWB = Psychological Wellbeing.

Interpretation

All five bootstrapped indirect effects are statistically significant, with 95% confidence intervals excluding zero, confirming that Social Support significantly mediates the relationship between each of the five work–family challenge variables and Psychological Wellbeing, supporting H7. Financial Stress exhibits the strongest indirect effect through Social Support ($a \times b = -0.1014$), consistent with its pattern as the strongest predictor in the direct-effects models. Because the direct effects (c' -paths) of all five challenge variables remained statistically significant even after Social Support was entered into the model (Table 8), the results indicate partial mediation: Social Support meaningfully transmits part, but not all, of the negative effect of work–family challenges on homemakers' psychological wellbeing, with the remaining effect operating through other, unmeasured pathways.

6. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Key Findings

The study yields several significant findings. First, all five work–family challenge variables — Work–Family Conflict, Household Workload, Financial Stress, Role Overload, and Lack of Family Support — demonstrate statistically significant negative relationships with Psychological Wellbeing, supporting H1 through H5, with Financial Stress and Work–Family Conflict emerging as the most influential predictors. Second, Social Support demonstrates a strong, statistically significant positive relationship with Psychological Wellbeing, supporting H6, and its inclusion increases the explanatory power of the model from 61.2% to 71.7% of variance explained.

Third, Social Support significantly and partially mediates the relationship between all five work–family challenge variables and Psychological Wellbeing, supporting H7 (H7a through H7e), confirming that diminished perceived support is one meaningful pathway through which work–family challenges undermine homemaker wellbeing, alongside direct, unmediated pathways.

6.2 Recommendations

Given that Financial Stress and Work–Family Conflict emerge as the strongest predictors of diminished wellbeing, community welfare programmes and family counselling services should prioritise financial literacy and household budgeting support, alongside structured family communication interventions aimed at reducing role-based conflict within the household. Second, given Social Support's substantial protective and mediating role, community organisations, resident welfare associations, and local government bodies should actively facilitate homemaker peer-support networks and community groups, which can provide accessible emotional and informational support outside the immediate family. Third, family-level interventions should explicitly address the disproportionate distribution of household workload, encouraging shared domestic responsibility among family members, given its significant independent contribution to diminished wellbeing. Fourth, because family support itself emerged as a significant predictor and partial pathway to wellbeing, family counselling and awareness programmes should engage spouses and other family members directly, rather than targeting homemakers alone, to address the relational sources of role overload and inadequate support. Finally, given that direct effects of all five challenges remained significant even after accounting for social support, complementary interventions — such as individual stress-management resources and accessible mental health support — should be made available to address the portion of psychological strain not addressed through social support alone.

7. CONCLUSION

This study provides robust empirical evidence that work–family challenges significantly undermine the psychological wellbeing of homemakers in Chennai City, and that social support functions as a significant, though partial, mediating mechanism in this relationship. Using a multistage-sampled survey of 420 homemakers and rigorous, bootstrapped mediation analysis, the study demonstrates that Work–Family Conflict, Household Workload, Financial Stress, Role Overload, and Lack of Family Support each independently and significantly reduce psychological wellbeing, and that a meaningful portion of this effect operates through diminished social support.

The finding that Financial Stress and Work–Family Conflict exert the strongest effects, and that Social Support only partially, rather than fully, mediates the relationship between work–family challenges and wellbeing, suggests that effective intervention requires a dual approach: strengthening homemakers' social support networks while also directly addressing the structural sources of work–family strain, particularly financial insecurity and role-based conflict within the household. The study's theoretical contribution lies in its empirical validation of Role Strain theory, Conservation of Resources theory, and the stress-buffering model of social support within the specific and under-studied context of urban Indian homemakers, whose work–family challenges arise within, rather than across, the boundary of paid employment.

Future research should examine these relationships longitudinally to strengthen causal inference, extend data collection beyond Chennai to other Indian metropolitan and rural contexts to enhance generalisability, and explore additional protective factors — such as personal coping resources and community-level social capital — that may further explain the substantial direct effects of work–family challenges that remain unmediated by social support in the present model.

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