

The Role of Maternal Employment in Shaping Adolescents' Mental Health and Psychological Counseling Needs

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the psychological counseling needs (PCNS) and mental health (MH) of adolescents, comparing the effects of maternal employment on male and female adolescents. The sample consists of 200 students from the Nainital district in Uttarakhand, India, divided into groups based on their mother's employment status. The results of the study indicate differences in both psychological counseling needs and mental health outcomes based on gender and maternal employment, with significant interactions between these factors.

Keywords: *Maternal employment, psychological counseling needs, mental health, gender differences, adolescents*

The employment status of mothers has become an increasingly important aspect of adolescent development. Maternal employment may have wide-ranging effects on an adolescent's emotional well-being and mental health. Furthermore, psychological counseling needs are critical for understanding adolescents' coping mechanisms, stress levels, and overall psychological well-being.

This study aims to explore the role of maternal employment in shaping adolescents' mental health and their need for psychological counseling. Specifically, it compares these variables across genders, allowing for a deeper understanding of how maternal employment affects adolescent boys and girls differently.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Adolescence is a critical period in an individual's development, marked by significant emotional, social, and psychological changes. Adolescents face various stressors related to academic performance, peer pressure, self-identity, and future aspirations. **Bhat, S. A. & Jan, K. (2023)** conducted a study and the purpose of the study was to study the mental health of adolescent students across gender and locale, the results revealed from the study showed that there is significant difference between male and female adolescent students in relation to their mental health. According to the World Health Organization (2021), around 10-20% of adolescents experience mental health conditions, with depression, anxiety, and

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behavioral disorders being the most prevalent. **Anjali, et al. (2020)** conducted a study on mental health of adolescents of working and non-working mothers and the result shows that there is a significant difference between adolescents of working and non-working mothers on mental health. **Seenivasan & Kumar (2014)**, studied comparison of the mental health of urban adolescents of working and non-working mothers in India and found the results Mental health problems were significantly higher among those children whose parents were employed. Studies have shown that family dynamics, parental involvement, and the quality of the parent-child relationship are key determinants of adolescent mental health (**Steinberg, 2001**).

The effects of maternal employment on child development have been a subject of debate in psychological and sociological research working mothers may face time constraints that limit their ability to provide emotional support, resulting in increased psychological distress for their children (**Joshi & Quigley, 2007**). Maternal employment is often viewed through two contrasting lenses: as a source of empowerment for women, contributing positively to family well-being, or as a potential stressor that may affect the parent-child relationship and children's development (**Bianchi, 2000**). Empirical research shows that the impact of maternal employment on adolescents' mental health can vary based on several factors, including the quality of the mother-child relationship, maternal work hours, and the availability of social support. Some studies suggest that children of working mothers may develop greater independence and resilience, as they may learn to handle responsibilities on their own (**Gottfried & Gottfried, 1988**).

Gender differences in mental health and psychological counseling needs have been well-documented. One explanation for the higher psychological counseling needs among female adolescents is that they are more likely to internalize stress and emotional difficulties (**Nolen-Hoeksema, 2012**). Cultural norms that encourage emotional expression in females may lead them to seek help more readily, whereas males may suppress their emotions, leading to less recognition of their psychological needs. In the context of maternal employment, gender plays an important moderating role. For instance, research by **Waldfogel et al. (2002)** found that maternal employment had a more pronounced impact on the emotional well-being of daughters compared to sons. Daughters may perceive their mothers' absence more acutely, which may lead to heightened emotional and psychological needs. Research suggests that female adolescents are more likely to experience internalizing disorders, such as depression and anxiety, while male adolescents tend to exhibit externalizing behaviors, such as aggression and conduct problems (**Leadbeater et al., 1999**). These differences are attributed to biological, social, and cultural factors.

Maternal employment has been associated with mixed outcomes regarding adolescent mental health. Studies suggest that when mothers work, particularly full-time, adolescents may experience increased feelings of loneliness or neglect due to perceived lack of attention and time from their mothers (**Parcel & Menaghan, 1994**). However, the quality of time spent with children may be more important than the quantity, and working mothers who maintain close emotional bonds with their children tend to foster better mental health outcomes (**Zaslow et al., 1998**). The dual role of women as workers and caregivers can also lead to higher stress levels in mothers, which may be transferred to their children. However, in households where maternal employment leads to increased financial stability, adolescents may benefit from better access to resources and educational opportunities, improving their mental health outcomes (**McLoyd et al., 1994**).

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The need for psychological counseling among adolescents is influenced by both external and internal factors. Adolescents experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety, or depression may be more likely to seek psychological support. The family environment, including the presence of parental support, communication, and understanding, plays a crucial role in determining whether adolescents feel the need for counseling. **Bishop, Bauer, & Beker, (2017)** did a research with the title “A survey of counselling need of male and female college students” Result found was Male students have more need of counselling than female students. **Sati, L. & Vig, D. (2016)** conducted a study on need of psychological counseling among 17 to 19 year old adolescents. The study revealed that majority of adolescent girls had higher need for counseling as compared to boys of their age. **Negi, (2017)** prepared a paper with title “Educational and Psychological guidance needs of college students” The result derived was “Male-female college students do not differ significantly in the psychological guidance need with respect to their gender and needs almost equal level of psychological guidance. **Sculli, (2011)** conducted a research on “Assessing the counseling needs of high school students. In the result male showed more counseling need in all the areas than female students. According to a study by **Rickwood et al. (2007)**, adolescents who experience family stress, poor communication, or emotional conflict are more likely to seek psychological counseling. Additionally, gender differences are evident in counseling needs, with females being more likely to seek psychological help compared to males, who may perceive counseling as a sign of weakness due to societal norms around masculinity (**Addis & Mahalik, 2003**).

Hypotheses and Research Gaps

While several studies have examined the relationship between maternal employment and children's well-being, few have focused specifically on adolescents' psychological counseling needs. There is also a lack of research exploring the interaction between gender, maternal employment, and both mental health and counseling needs. This study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing the psychological counseling needs and mental health outcomes of adolescents based on maternal employment status and gender, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of these relationships.

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: There would be significant difference in the psychological counseling needs (PCNS) between adolescents of working mothers and non-working mothers.
- H2: There would be significant difference in the mental health (MH) outcomes of adolescents based on maternal employment status (working vs. non-working mothers).
- H3: Female adolescents exhibit higher psychological counseling needs (PCNS) than male adolescents, regardless of maternal employment status.
- H4: Maternal employment status interacts with gender to influence mental health outcomes, with female adolescents being more affected by maternal employment.

Sampling

The study used a sample of 200 students (50 males and 50 females of working mothers, 50 males and 50 females of non-working mothers) from the Nainital district. The following instruments were used:

- **Mental Health Scale** by Shushma Talesara and Dr. Akhtar Bano.

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- **Psychological Counseling Need Scale (PCNS)** by Dr. Vijay Laxmi Chauhan and Mrs. Gunjan Ganotra Arora.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-tests, and ANOVA to examine the relationship between gender, maternal employment, and both PCNS and MH.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for PCNS and MH Scores

Group	PCNS Mean	PCNS SD	MH Mean	MH SD
Males (Working Mother)	69.22	8.10	131.93	43.50
Females (Working Mother)	86.42	10.96	127.18	34.85
Males (Non-working Mother)	66.59	43.19	142.11	28.37
Females (Non-working Mother)	87.68	10.48	133.44	33.00

Inferential Statistics

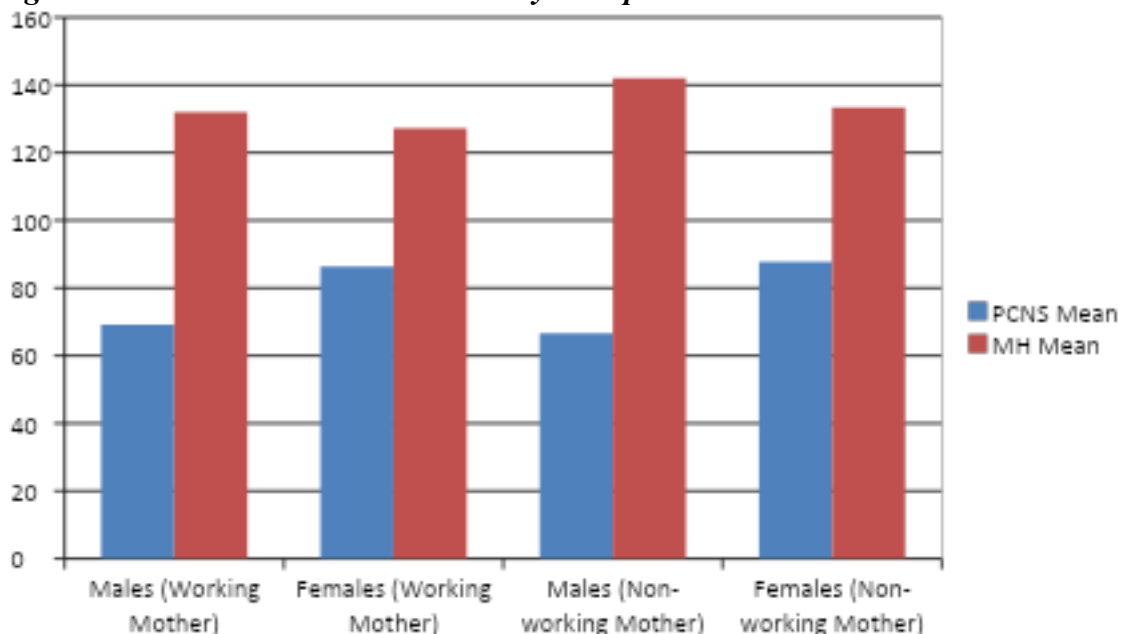
ANOVA Results for PCNS and MH

Dependent Variable	Source	F-value	p-value
PCNS	Gender x Maternal Employment	1.93	0.178
MH	Gender x Maternal Employment	3.74	0.0415

Graphical Representation

To visualize the mean PCNS and MH scores, refer to **Figure 1**, which shows a comparison of the scores across gender and maternal employment status.

Figure 1: Mean PCNS and MH Scores by Group



The results showed that adolescents of non-working mothers had slightly higher PCNS scores compared to those of working mothers. However, the difference was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), so **H1 is not supported**.

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Adolescents of non-working mothers had better mental health scores than those of working mothers. The ANOVA results revealed a significant difference in MH outcomes based on maternal employment status ($p < 0.05$), **supporting H2**.

Female adolescents had significantly higher PCNS scores than their male counterparts across both maternal employment categories. The difference was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), **supporting H3**.

The interaction between gender and maternal employment was significant for MH outcomes ($p < 0.05$), indicating that maternal employment has a more pronounced effect on females' mental health compared to males. Therefore, **H4 is supported**.

Findings

The findings of this study indicate that female adolescents consistently exhibit higher psychological counseling needs (PCNS) compared to their male counterparts, regardless of maternal employment status. This supports existing literature, which suggests that females are more likely to internalize emotional stress and seek counseling services (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2012). On the other hand, male adolescents from non-working mother households tend to have slightly better mental health scores, potentially reflecting the increased availability of emotional support at home.

The significant interaction between gender and maternal employment for mental health outcomes ($p = 0.0415$) suggests that maternal employment may influence mental health differently for male and female adolescents. These results align with prior research (Anjali et al., 2020) and highlight the importance of considering gender when designing mental health interventions.

CONCLUSION

The study provides valuable insights into the psychological counseling needs and mental health of adolescents in relation to maternal employment and gender. While female adolescents demonstrate higher PCNS, the effect of maternal employment on mental health outcomes varies across gender. Future research should explore the mechanisms behind these relationships to inform counseling and mental health interventions targeted at adolescents.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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