

Balancing Career and Roles: An Empirical Analysis of Career Orientation and Role Conflict among Women Employees in Selected Colleges

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Abstract

The participation of women in higher education institutions has increased significantly over the past few decades. However, women employees continue to face challenges in balancing professional responsibilities and multiple role expectations. This study examines the relationship between career orientation and role conflict among women employees working in selected colleges. Using a structured questionnaire, data were collected from 350 women employees, including teaching and non-teaching staff across government and private institutions. Statistical tools including descriptive analysis, correlation analysis, multiple regression analysis, and ANOVA were applied. The findings reveal that women employees exhibit moderate to high career orientation ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.62$) alongside significant levels of role conflict ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.58$), particularly work-family conflict ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.71$). A significant positive correlation was found between career orientation and role conflict ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$), and regression analysis confirmed that career orientation significantly predicts role conflict ($\beta = 0.52$, $R^2 = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$). The study provides evidence-based recommendations for institutional policy development and human resource practices to support women employees in achieving career growth while maintaining work-life balance.

Keywords: Career Orientation, Role Conflict, Women Employees, Higher Education, Work-Life Balance, Work-Family Conflict

1. Introduction

The role of women in the workforce has undergone substantial transformation, particularly in the higher education sector. According to UNESCO (2023), women now constitute approximately 47% of the global academic workforce, representing a significant increase from 38% in 2000. In India, the participation of women in higher education institutions has risen to 42% as of 2023 (MHRD, 2024). Women employees now contribute significantly as faculty members, administrators, and non-teaching staff in colleges and universities. Despite this progress, women continue to experience unique challenges arising from societal expectations, organizational demands, and personal responsibilities.

Career orientation refers to an individual's preferences, values, and commitment toward career advancement and professional identity (Schein, 1978; Hall, 2002). For women employees, career orientation is influenced by multiple factors including educational attainment, organizational culture, family responsibilities, and prevailing social norms (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). While many women demonstrate strong career aspirations, they frequently encounter role conflict due to the simultaneous demands of work and family roles.

Role conflict occurs when an individual faces incompatible pressures from different roles, making it difficult to fulfill expectations effectively (Kahn et al., 1964). In the context of women employees in higher education, role conflict often manifests as work–family conflict, family–work conflict, role overload, and time-based stress (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The higher education sector presents a particularly demanding work environment characterized by performance expectations, research requirements, and accreditation processes (Kinman & Jones, 2008). This study aims to empirically analyze career orientation and role conflict among women employees working in selected colleges.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Career Orientation

Career orientation has been extensively studied in organizational behavior literature. Schein (1978) pioneered the concept of career anchors, identifying eight distinct career orientations. Subsequent research by Hall (2002) and Ng et al. (2005) expanded on these dimensions. Studies show that women increasingly exhibit strong career orientation in professional fields (O'Neil et al., 2008), though progression is influenced by organizational support and family responsibilities (Guillaume & Pochic, 2009). Research by Ezzedeen and Ritchey (2009) indicates that women with high career orientation invest more time in work, potentially intensifying role conflict.

2.2 Role Conflict

Role conflict arises when expectations from different roles are incompatible (Kahn et al., 1964). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined work–family conflict as inter-role conflict where work and family pressures are mutually incompatible. Previous studies consistently report higher role conflict among women due to traditional gender expectations (Gutek et al., 1991; Frone et al., 1992). A comprehensive review by Eby et al. (2005) identified numerous antecedents including job demands, work hours, family demands, and organizational support.

2.3 Research Gap

While numerous studies have examined career orientation and role conflict separately, limited empirical research has focused on their combined impact among women employees in Indian higher education institutions. This study bridges this gap by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between these variables in the context of selected colleges.

3. Objectives and Hypotheses

3.1 Objectives

1. To examine the level of career orientation among women employees.
2. To assess the extent of role conflict experienced by women employees.
3. To analyze the relationship between career orientation and role conflict.
4. To study the predictive impact of career orientation on role conflict.
5. To examine differences based on demographic variables.

3.2 Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between career orientation and role conflict.

H2: Career orientation significantly predicts role conflict.

H3: There is a significant difference in role conflict across age groups.

H4: Teaching and non-teaching employees differ significantly in career orientation.

H5: Marital status significantly influences role conflict levels.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Sample

This study employs a descriptive and analytical research design using a quantitative approach. A sample of 350 women employees was selected from government and private colleges using stratified random sampling. The sample included both teaching (68%) and non-teaching staff (32%). Table 1 presents the demographic profile of respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 350)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	25-35 years	142	40.6
	36-45 years	126	36.0
	46-60 years	82	23.4
Marital Status	Married	245	70.0
	Unmarried	105	30.0
Job Type	Teaching	238	68.0
	Non-teaching	112	32.0
Institution Type	Government	189	54.0
	Private	161	46.0

Source: Primary Data

4.2 Data Collection and Measurement

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree). Career Orientation was measured using a 20-item scale adapted from Hall (2002) and Schein (1978), covering career ambition, job involvement, career planning, and professional commitment. Role Conflict was measured using a 24-item scale based on Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), assessing work–family conflict, family–work conflict, role overload, and time-based conflict.

Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha showed excellent internal consistency: Career Orientation ($\alpha = 0.87$), Role Conflict ($\alpha = 0.91$), Work-Family Conflict ($\alpha = 0.88$), and Family-Work Conflict ($\alpha = 0.84$). Content validity was established through expert review, and construct validity was confirmed through exploratory factor analysis.

4.3 Statistical Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 26.0. Statistical tools included descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation), Pearson correlation analysis, multiple regression analysis, independent samples t-test, and one-way ANOVA. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$.

5. Data Analysis and Findings

5.1 Descriptive Analysis

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for career orientation and role conflict. Women employees exhibit moderate to high career orientation ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.62$) and moderate role conflict ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.58$). Work–family conflict ($M = 3.62$) was more pronounced than family–work conflict ($M = 3.31$), indicating that work demands interfere more substantially with family responsibilities than vice versa.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 350)

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
Career Orientation (Overall)	3.78	0.62	High
Career Ambition	3.85	0.71	High
Job Involvement	3.92	0.68	High
Career Planning	3.64	0.75	Moderate
Professional Commitment	3.71	0.69	High
Role Conflict (Overall)	3.45	0.58	Moderate
Work-Family Conflict	3.62	0.71	Moderate
Family-Work Conflict	3.31	0.64	Moderate

Role Overload	3.51	0.78	Moderate
Time-Based Conflict	3.38	0.82	Moderate

Note: Scale interpretation: 1-2.33 = Low; 2.34-3.66 = Moderate; 3.67-5.00 = High

5.2 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis examined relationships among study variables. Table 3 presents the correlation matrix. A significant positive correlation was found between career orientation and role conflict ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H₁. Career orientation showed the strongest correlation with work-family conflict ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that career-oriented women experience greater difficulty balancing work and family demands.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix (N = 350)

Variable	CO	RC	WFC	FWC	RO
Career Orientation (CO)	1				
Role Conflict (RC)	0.48**	1			
Work-Family Conflict (WFC)	0.52**	0.89**	1		
Family-Work Conflict (FWC)	0.38**	0.82**	0.54**	1	
Role Overload (RO)	0.44**	0.85**	0.61**	0.58**	1

Note: ** Correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$ level (2-tailed)

5.3 Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis examined the predictive relationship between career orientation and role conflict. Table 4 shows that career orientation significantly predicts overall role conflict ($\beta = 0.52$, $t = 10.47$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.23$), supporting H₂. The model explains 23% of variance in role conflict. Career orientation demonstrated the strongest predictive power for work-family conflict ($\beta = 0.58$, $R^2 = 0.27$), confirming that increased career involvement intensifies work-family conflict.

Table 4: Regression Analysis Results

Predictive Model	β	t-value	p-value	R^2
CO → Role Conflict	0.52	10.47	< 0.001	0.23
CO → WFC	0.58	12.16	< 0.001	0.27
CO → FWC	0.42	8.24	< 0.001	0.14
CO → Role Overload	0.48	9.56	< 0.001	0.19

Note: CO = Career Orientation; WFC = Work-Family Conflict; FWC = Family-Work Conflict

5.4 Demographic Differences

ANOVA revealed significant differences in role conflict across age groups ($F = 12.34$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H_3 . Post-hoc analysis showed that employees aged 36-45 years experienced significantly higher role conflict compared to other age groups, likely due to peak career demands coinciding with family responsibilities. Independent t-test showed teaching staff had significantly higher career orientation than non-teaching staff ($t = 4.82$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H_4 . Married employees reported significantly higher role conflict than unmarried employees ($t = 6.15$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H_5 . Table 5 summarizes these findings.

Table 5: Group Differences in Career Orientation and Role Conflict

Variable	Group	Mean (SD)	Sig.
Career Orientation	Teaching	3.89 (0.58)	< 0.001
	Non-teaching	3.54 (0.69)	
Role Conflict by Age	25-35 years	3.28 (0.61)	< 0.001
	36-45 years	3.71 (0.52)	
	46-60 years	3.38 (0.57)	
Role Conflict by Marital Status	Married	3.62 (0.54)	< 0.001
	Unmarried	3.08 (0.59)	

Note: SD = Standard Deviation; Sig. = Significance level

6. Discussion

This study empirically examined the relationship between career orientation and role conflict among women employees in higher education. The findings confirm all five hypotheses and provide important insights into the challenges faced by career-oriented women in academic institutions.

The significant positive correlation ($r = 0.48$) between career orientation and role conflict supports previous research by Cinamon and Rich (2002) and Noor (2004), indicating that higher career involvement intensifies role pressures. This paradoxical relationship suggests that while women demonstrate strong career aspirations, their professional success may come at the cost of increased work-life conflict. The regression analysis reveals that career orientation accounts for 23% of variance in role conflict, with the strongest effect on work-family conflict (27% variance explained). This confirms that career-oriented women face particular difficulty in preventing work demands from interfering with family responsibilities.

The finding that employees aged 36-45 years experience the highest role conflict aligns with life-course theory, as this age group typically faces simultaneous pressures from career advancement, childcare

responsibilities, and eldercare obligations. Teaching staff demonstrated significantly higher career orientation than non-teaching staff, likely due to greater professional autonomy, research expectations, and advancement opportunities. The higher role conflict among married employees compared to unmarried ones reflects the additional demands of managing spousal and family relationships alongside career commitments.

These findings have important theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the study contributes to work-family conflict literature by demonstrating how career orientation serves as both a driver of professional success and a source of inter-role strain. Practically, the results highlight the need for organizational interventions to support career-oriented women in managing multiple roles effectively.

7. Implications and Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed for higher education institutions. First, institutions should implement flexible work arrangements including telecommuting options, flexible scheduling, and compressed work weeks to help women employees manage work-family demands. Second, on-campus childcare facilities or childcare subsidies would significantly reduce family-work conflict. Third, mentoring programs and career development support specifically designed for women employees could help them navigate career advancement while managing role expectations.

Fourth, workload management policies should be reviewed to prevent excessive role overload, particularly for women in mid-career stages. Fifth, awareness programs for supervisors and administrators about work-family issues can foster a more supportive organizational culture. Sixth, employee assistance programs offering counseling and stress management support would help women employees cope with role conflict. Finally, clear policies on work-life balance should be institutionalized and actively promoted.

8. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences about the relationship between career orientation and role conflict. Longitudinal studies tracking women employees over time would provide deeper insights into how this relationship evolves across career stages. Second, the study is limited to selected colleges in a specific geographic region, which may limit generalizability. Comparative studies across different regions, institutional types, and educational levels would enhance external validity.

Third, reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias. Future studies could incorporate multiple data sources including supervisor ratings, spouse reports, and objective performance measures. Fourth, the study did not examine potential moderating variables such as organizational support, spousal support, or personal coping strategies. Future research should investigate these factors to identify protective mechanisms that buffer the negative effects of career orientation on role conflict.

Additionally, qualitative research exploring women's lived experiences of balancing career and family roles would complement quantitative findings and provide richer contextual understanding. Intervention

studies evaluating the effectiveness of organizational policies and support programs would provide evidence-based guidance for institutional practice.

9. Conclusion

This study provides robust empirical evidence on the relationship between career orientation and role conflict among women employees in higher education. The findings demonstrate that while women exhibit strong career orientation and professional commitment, they simultaneously experience significant role conflict, particularly work-family conflict. The positive relationship between career orientation and role conflict highlights a critical challenge: career advancement aspirations can intensify role pressures without adequate organizational support.

The study's contribution lies in quantifying this relationship and identifying vulnerable groups, particularly women aged 36-45 years, married employees, and teaching staff. These insights provide actionable guidance for institutional policy development. Creating supportive work environments that enable women to pursue career goals without excessive role strain is not only an equity imperative but also essential for institutional effectiveness and employee well-being.

Ultimately, achieving gender equality in higher education requires systemic changes that acknowledge and address the unique challenges faced by women employees. By implementing evidence-based policies and fostering inclusive organizational cultures, higher education institutions can support women's career advancement while promoting work-life balance, thereby benefiting individuals, institutions, and society at large.

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