

Beyond the Silent Struggle: A Multilevel Resource Framework for Work-Life Integration and Psychological Well-Being Among Working Women in India

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Abstract

Working women in India increasingly occupy professional roles while continuing to carry substantial responsibility for household coordination, caregiving, and relational work. Existing research has documented work-family conflict, occupational strain, resilience, and organizational support, yet these streams are often examined separately or reduced to individual coping. This conceptual article develops a multilevel resource framework for understanding psychological well-being among working women through the integration of Conservation of Resources theory, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, Job Demands-Resources theory, resilience perspectives, and positive psychology. The framework proposes that work-life integration is best understood as an ongoing process of resource negotiation across professional and family domains. It identifies invisible coordination, boundary permeability, cumulative psychological strain, coping and micro-recovery, resilience and restored control, and relational and organizational buffering as interconnected processes shaping sustainable psychological well-being. The article further distinguishes available support from enacted support and task sharing from responsibility sharing, and introduces boundary agency as the practical capacity to set, negotiate, and maintain workable limits across roles. A multilevel intervention architecture is proposed across individual, family, managerial, and organizational levels. The framework contributes a context-sensitive account of work-life integration that moves beyond asking women to become more resilient and instead locates well-being within interacting systems of demands, resources, relationships, and institutional practices.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in paid employment has transformed professional, family, and social life in India. Employment can provide financial independence, professional identity, social participation, purpose, and opportunities for personal development. At the same time, participation in paid work does not necessarily produce an equivalent redistribution of domestic, caregiving, and relational responsibilities. Many working women therefore occupy several demanding roles at once: professional, spouse, caregiver, household coordinator, parent, daughter, and family member. The psychological implications arise not only from the number of roles performed but from the expectations, boundaries, and resource requirements attached to them.

This problem is often described through the language of work-family conflict. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined work-family conflict as a form of inter-role conflict in which pressures from work and family domains become mutually incompatible. Their distinction among time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based conflict remains influential because it demonstrates that role interference is not merely a scheduling problem. Hochschild's (1989) account of the "second shift" similarly highlighted the unpaid domestic work that follows formal employment and thereby exposed the asymmetry that can persist even when women enter paid work. These foundational perspectives remain highly relevant, but contemporary working arrangements add new forms of permeability. Hybrid work, digital connectivity, asynchronous communication, and expectations of continuous responsiveness can provide flexibility while simultaneously weakening the boundary that once separated work from home.

A narrow emphasis on conflict, however, risks presenting working women primarily through a deficit lens. Women also develop coping routines, derive meaning and self-efficacy from professional work, mobilize family and social support, adapt to recurring pressures, and establish boundaries that protect functioning. Psychological well-being therefore cannot be understood only through the presence or absence of stress. Ryff's (1989) multidimensional account of psychological well-being emphasized positive functioning, including autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose, personal growth, positive relationships, and self-acceptance. This broader perspective is especially useful for understanding women who may experience substantial role strain while still maintaining competence, commitment, relationships, and meaning.

The central argument of this article is that work-life integration should be conceptualized as a dynamic process of resource negotiation rather than as a stable balance between two separate domains. Professional and family responsibilities draw on finite resources such as time, attention, emotional energy, sleep, autonomy, and cognitive capacity. When boundaries are highly permeable, demands from one domain can continue to consume resources while an individual is operating in another. Coping and recovery may restore control, while resilience can support adaptation. Yet these processes are embedded within family arrangements, managerial practices, and organizational systems that can either replenish resources or accelerate their depletion. This perspective has three implications. First, visible workload is only part of the psychological burden. A substantial component may consist of invisible coordination: remembering, anticipating, planning, monitoring, and ensuring that responsibilities are completed. Second, the presence of support does not necessarily mean

that support is usable. Formal flexibility, leave policies, or nominal household assistance can coexist with social penalties, after-hours expectations, and continuing responsibility for coordination. Third, resilience should not be treated as an unlimited personal reserve that compensates for poorly designed work or unequal responsibility. Individual adaptation is important, but sustainable well-being requires resource-supportive environments.

To develop this argument, the article integrates Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2017), resilience perspectives (Masten, 2001), and positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). These perspectives are not treated as competing theories. Rather, each explains a different part of the same process: COR theory explains resource loss and protection; transactional theory explains appraisal and coping; JD-R theory explains the interaction of occupational demands and job resources; resilience explains adaptation following challenge; and positive psychology directs attention to meaning, strengths, and sustainable positive functioning.

The article makes four contributions. It develops a process model linking invisible coordination, boundary permeability, cumulative strain, coping, resilience, buffering resources, and sustainable psychological well-being. It differentiates task sharing from responsibility sharing and formal support from enacted support. It introduces boundary agency as an outcome and mechanism through which women negotiate workable limits across professional and family roles. Finally, it proposes a multilevel intervention architecture spanning individuals, families, managers, and organizations, thereby shifting responsibility for well-being away from exclusively individualized resilience narratives.

II. FROM WORK-LIFE BALANCE TO RESOURCE BASED WORK-LIFE INTEGRATION

The metaphor of work-life balance implies the possibility of achieving a relatively stable equilibrium between work and non-work domains. While useful as a normative aspiration, the metaphor can obscure the dynamic nature of everyday role management. For many working women, work and family are not separable containers into which time can be allocated evenly. Both domains can contain non-negotiable events, unpredictable demands, emotional responsibilities, and expectations that extend beyond formal time boundaries. A resource-based perspective therefore asks not whether time is divided equally, but whether a person retains sufficient resources to function sustainably across roles.

Work-family conflict research provides a foundation for this shift. Time-based conflict captures direct competition for hours. Strain-based conflict captures the way fatigue, tension, or preoccupation originating in one domain impairs functioning in another. Behavior-based conflict captures incompatibilities in expected role behaviors. These forms of conflict are important because they reveal that an apparently manageable schedule can still be psychologically unsustainable. A woman may leave work at a reasonable hour but continue to think about unfinished tasks, emotionally difficult interactions, or anticipated deadlines. Similarly, family concerns can occupy attention during work even when no visible family task is being performed.

This permeability has become more complex under flexible and hybrid work arrangements. Allen et al. (2013) showed that flexibility is not a unitary construct and that its relationship with work-family outcomes depends on the nature of the arrangement. Spatial flexibility can reduce commuting and allow greater control over location, but it may not produce temporal control. When employees remain digitally reachable, work may expand into time previously protected for recovery, family interaction, or sleep. Thus, the relevant issue is not simply access to flexible work

but the degree to which flexibility increases or decreases control over boundaries.

A second limitation of conventional work-life accounts is their tendency to focus on visible tasks. The psychological demands of family life often include anticipation and coordination. Someone must remember appointments, monitor supplies, plan meals, track school or caregiving requirements, organize transportation, anticipate family needs, and maintain relational continuity. These activities may be difficult to observe because they are cognitive rather than physical. Even when household tasks are shared, responsibility for noticing and organizing them may remain concentrated. This distinction can be expressed as the difference between task sharing and responsibility sharing.

Task sharing refers to the distribution of observable activities. Responsibility sharing refers to the distribution of the cognitive and emotional ownership required to anticipate, coordinate, and ensure completion. The two may diverge considerably. A partner may “help” with a task after being asked while the other partner continues to identify the need, plan the activity, provide reminders, and monitor completion. From a resource perspective, this means that assistance can reduce physical workload without proportionately reducing cognitive load.

A third limitation concerns the way psychological well-being is often treated as a downstream outcome rather than a dynamic capacity. Ryff’s (1989) work suggests that well-being encompasses autonomy, mastery, purpose, growth, and relationships. In work-life contexts, these dimensions translate into more than low stress. Sustainable functioning involves being able to remain engaged in valued roles while preserving enough control, recovery, and emotional capacity to prevent persistent depletion. This article uses the term sustainable psychological well-being to denote such functioning.

Sustainable well-being does not require the elimination of all strain. Demanding roles can be meaningful. Professional work can produce pressure while also providing identity, achievement, financial independence, and growth. Family responsibilities can consume resources while also providing purpose, connection, and motivation. The same domain can therefore be both demanding and resource-generating. This duality is difficult to accommodate in simple “more demands equals worse well-being” models. A process approach is needed to explain how women appraise demands, mobilize resources, recover, and renegotiate boundaries over time.

2.1 The Indian Context: Employment Expansion, Family Expectations, and Psychological Meaning

A context-sensitive account is necessary because work-life integration does not occur in a cultural vacuum. In India, professional participation can carry multiple meanings at once. Paid work may represent economic contribution, autonomy, social mobility, professional identity, and family security. For some women, employment is also linked to educational investment, aspirations for children, and the ability to contribute to extended-family obligations. These meanings can make professional participation highly valued even when it produces substantial strain. At the same time, cultural expectations concerning marriage, caregiving, household competence, family availability, and respectability can continue to shape the standards against which women evaluate themselves and are evaluated by others. This combination can produce a distinctive form of role accumulation. Entry into paid employment may add a professional role without fully reducing pre-existing expectations in the family domain. The resulting difficulty is not necessarily explicit conflict between employment and family. It may instead appear as a continuous requirement to demonstrate adequacy in both domains. When women internalize the idea that a committed employee should remain responsive and a responsible family member should remain continuously available, the psychological burden

can persist even when no one openly demands perfection.

The Indian context also complicates simplistic assumptions about family structure. Joint or extended-family arrangements can provide substantial practical support with childcare, elder care, household tasks, and emotional reassurance. Yet the presence of more adults does not automatically imply equal distribution of planning responsibility. Support and expectation can coexist. A woman may benefit from practical assistance while simultaneously experiencing greater relational obligations, coordination demands, or expectations of availability to multiple family members. Nuclear families may provide greater autonomy but fewer practical buffers. The resource value of family structure therefore depends less on category and more on how responsibility, autonomy, and support are enacted within it.

Urban professional life adds another layer. Long commutes, performance pressures, global time zones, customer expectations, and digital communication can make work temporally elastic. In sectors such as information technology, financial services, healthcare, education, e-commerce, and human resources, the workday may be defined as much by responsiveness as by scheduled hours. This matters because a nominally fixed workday can still generate high boundary permeability when unfinished tasks, emotional residue, or digital messages continue after formal working time.

Contemporary scholarship increasingly cautions against interpreting women's career and well-being challenges as deficits in confidence, ambition, or resilience. Ryan and Morgenroth (2024) argue that context shapes and constrains women's career trajectories and that attempts to "fix women" can distract attention from organizational and social structures. This argument is especially relevant to work-life research. If strain arises because professional systems assume unlimited availability while family systems assume continuing caregiving

responsibility, individual resilience training addresses only one part of the problem.

Recent Indian workplace mental-health scholarship likewise underscores the need for context-sensitive approaches rather than generic wellness models (Sohal & Sharma, 2025). The practical significance is that psychological interventions should be culturally and organizationally grounded. Advice to establish boundaries, for example, is only useful if the social consequences of boundary-setting are understood. A manager may interpret non-availability differently across workplaces; a family may interpret refusal of a caregiving request differently across households. Boundary agency therefore depends on both personal skill and the legitimacy granted by surrounding systems.

The framework developed in this article treats Indian working women not as a homogeneous category but as individuals situated within variable combinations of occupation, family structure, caregiving intensity, socioeconomic resources, organizational culture, and life stage. This avoids two opposite errors: assuming that traditional expectations determine every woman's experience, or assuming that professional employment automatically neutralizes those expectations. The relevant question is how social and organizational expectations are negotiated in specific lives and how that negotiation affects resources and well-being.

III. THEORETICAL ARCHITECTURE OF THE MULTILEVEL RESOURCE FRAMEWORK

3.1 Conservation of Resources Theory: Resource Loss, Protection, and Gain

COR theory proposes that people strive to obtain, retain, protect, and build valued resources and experience stress when resources are threatened, lost, or insufficiently replenished (Hobfoll, 1989). This logic is particularly useful for understanding work-life integration because many relevant resources are finite or conditionally renewable. Time cannot be simultaneously invested in two incompatible activities. Sleep lost to late work or caregiving cannot be fully recovered by intention

alone. Emotional energy depleted through interpersonal demands may reduce patience and responsiveness in subsequent interactions. Cognitive attention occupied by unresolved work or family issues is unavailable for other tasks.

COR theory also highlights loss spirals and gain processes. Resource loss can make further loss more likely because depleted individuals have fewer reserves with which to manage new demands. A demanding day may reduce energy available for family responsibilities; family stress may then interfere with sleep; poor sleep may impair work performance, increasing the effort needed to meet occupational expectations. By contrast, resource gains can facilitate additional gains. Supportive supervision may increase control, which improves recovery, which strengthens self-efficacy, which improves coping with future demands.

For working women, resource protection occurs at several levels. Individually, boundaries and coping routines can protect time and attention. Relationally, genuinely shared responsibility can reduce cognitive and practical load. Managerially, workload predictability and respectful communication can reduce avoidable uncertainty. Organizationally, usable flexibility and norms limiting after-hours communication can protect recovery. These mechanisms are important because they show that resource conservation is not merely an individual skill; it is shaped by institutional and relational arrangements.

COR theory also clarifies why resilience should not be romanticized. If an organization repeatedly exposes employees to high demands while providing insufficient resources, asking individuals to become more resilient effectively shifts the burden of resource replacement onto the employee. Resilience may delay loss, facilitate recovery, or enable adaptation, but it cannot create unlimited time or indefinitely compensate for chronic structural depletion. A resource-based model therefore treats resilience as one resource among many rather than as the primary solution.

3.2 Transactional Stress and Coping: Appraisal, Perceived Control, and Response

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping emphasizes that stress depends not only on objective demands but on how those demands are appraised and on the resources perceived to be available for responding (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This helps explain why two women with similar schedules may experience those schedules differently. A workload increase may be appraised as manageable if the employee has autonomy, supportive colleagues, and the ability to reschedule family obligations. The same workload may be appraised as overwhelming when family demands are simultaneously high and organizational flexibility is low.

Primary appraisal concerns the meaning of the situation: is it irrelevant, benign, challenging, threatening, or harmful? Secondary appraisal concerns perceived options and coping capacity. In work-life contexts, secondary appraisal is particularly important because perceived control may determine whether a difficult period is experienced as temporary and manageable or as an inescapable accumulation of demands.

Coping strategies can be problem-focused or emotion-focused, although in practice the distinction is often less rigid. Problem-focused coping may include planning, prioritization, negotiating responsibilities, seeking practical assistance, or changing work arrangements. Emotion-focused coping may include reflection, social support, relaxation, exercise, prayer, reframing, or temporary detachment. Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) emphasized that coping is dynamic and can include positive psychological processes as well as attempts to reduce distress.

The framework developed here extends coping by emphasizing micro-recovery. Micro-recovery refers to short, repeatable periods in which individuals interrupt ongoing demand exposure and partially restore cognitive or emotional resources. Examples may include a brief walk, a quiet transition period, breathing exercises, short reflective practices, or temporarily disabling work

notifications. Such practices are not substitutes for sufficient rest or structural change. Their significance lies in their feasibility within lives where long uninterrupted recovery periods are difficult to obtain.

Perceived control links coping to boundary agency. Planning can reduce helplessness even when the total number of demands remains unchanged because it converts diffuse pressure into actionable priorities. Similarly, boundary setting can increase the perceived legitimacy of not responding immediately to every request. The psychological function of these behaviors is therefore not limited to time management; they change the individual's appraisal of what can be controlled.

3.3 Job Demands-Resources Theory: Organizational Demands and Enacted Support

The JD-R model distinguishes job demands that require sustained effort from job resources that help achieve goals, reduce demands, or stimulate growth (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2017). Relevant demands for working women can include workload, deadlines, emotional labor, unpredictability, long hours, role conflict, and continuous digital accessibility. Relevant resources include autonomy, supervisor support, feedback, role clarity, manageable workload, flexibility, and supportive relationships.

The model is useful because it avoids locating employee well-being entirely within personal coping. High demands can produce exhaustion even among capable individuals, while resources can buffer strain and support engagement. Bakker et al. (2014) further emphasized the relationship between demands, resources, burnout, and work engagement, reinforcing the importance of examining positive and negative outcomes within the same system.

For work-life integration, job resources may also offset demands arising outside work. Flexible scheduling can allow caregiving responsibilities to be accommodated. Predictable workload can make family planning easier. A supportive manager can legitimize short-term adjustments

without stigmatizing the employee. Conversely, unpredictable work may amplify family conflict even when total hours are not exceptionally high because uncertainty prevents effective coordination.

This article distinguishes available support from enacted support. Available support refers to the formal existence of a policy or resource. Enacted support refers to whether employees can use that resource without penalty, stigma, excessive administrative burden, or contradictory managerial expectations. A flexible-work policy, for example, may have little psychological value if employees believe its use signals reduced commitment. Similarly, leave may technically exist but remain difficult to use during high-demand periods.

Family-supportive supervisor behavior is therefore particularly important because supervisors translate policy into lived experience. Recent meta-analytic work underscores the significance of family-supportive supervisory behavior for work-family outcomes (Guo et al., 2024). When managers communicate respectfully, plan workload realistically, accommodate genuine family needs, and protect employees from unnecessary after-hours demands, organizational support becomes tangible. In contrast, a formal policy environment combined with unsupportive supervision can create the appearance of support without its resource value.

3.4 Resilience as Adaptation, Not Invulnerability

Resilience is often discussed as the capacity to adapt successfully in the context of adversity. Masten (2001) described resilience as “ordinary magic,” emphasizing the importance of ordinary adaptive systems rather than exceptional toughness. This perspective is especially valuable because it avoids equating resilience with the absence of strain.

A resilient working woman may still experience fatigue, frustration, guilt, or moments of overwhelm. Resilience becomes visible in the capacity to reorganize, seek help, reappraise expectations, recover, and continue functioning

meaningfully. It may be supported by self-efficacy, adaptability, problem-solving, purpose, relationships, and previous experience managing difficulty.

Meaning is particularly important because the roles that generate demands may also generate resources. Employment may create pressure while also contributing to financial independence, identity, competence, and growth. Family responsibilities may require substantial energy while also providing belonging, motivation, and purpose. Resilience therefore involves more than recovering from negative states; it includes retaining access to the valued meanings that make effort worthwhile.

Acceptance of imperfection can also function as a resilience process. When women are expected to perform professional, caregiving, relational, and household roles to idealized standards simultaneously, perfectionistic expectations can magnify resource demands. Reappraising such expectations can reduce unnecessary expenditure and protect self-efficacy. This is not withdrawal from responsibility; it is recalibration of what can realistically be sustained.

3.5 Positive Psychology and Sustainable Functioning

Positive psychology broadened psychological inquiry beyond pathology toward strengths, meaning, and conditions that enable flourishing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Within work-life research, this perspective is useful because it allows strain and positive functioning to coexist conceptually. Women may report demanding circumstances while also describing competence, purpose, meaningful relationships, and growth.

Sustainable psychological well-being is therefore defined here as the capacity to remain engaged in valued professional and family roles without

persistent psychological depletion, while retaining adequate autonomy, recovery, relational connection, and perceived control. This definition is compatible with Ryff's (1989) multidimensional approach because it emphasizes mastery, purpose, positive relationships, and autonomy rather than simply low distress.

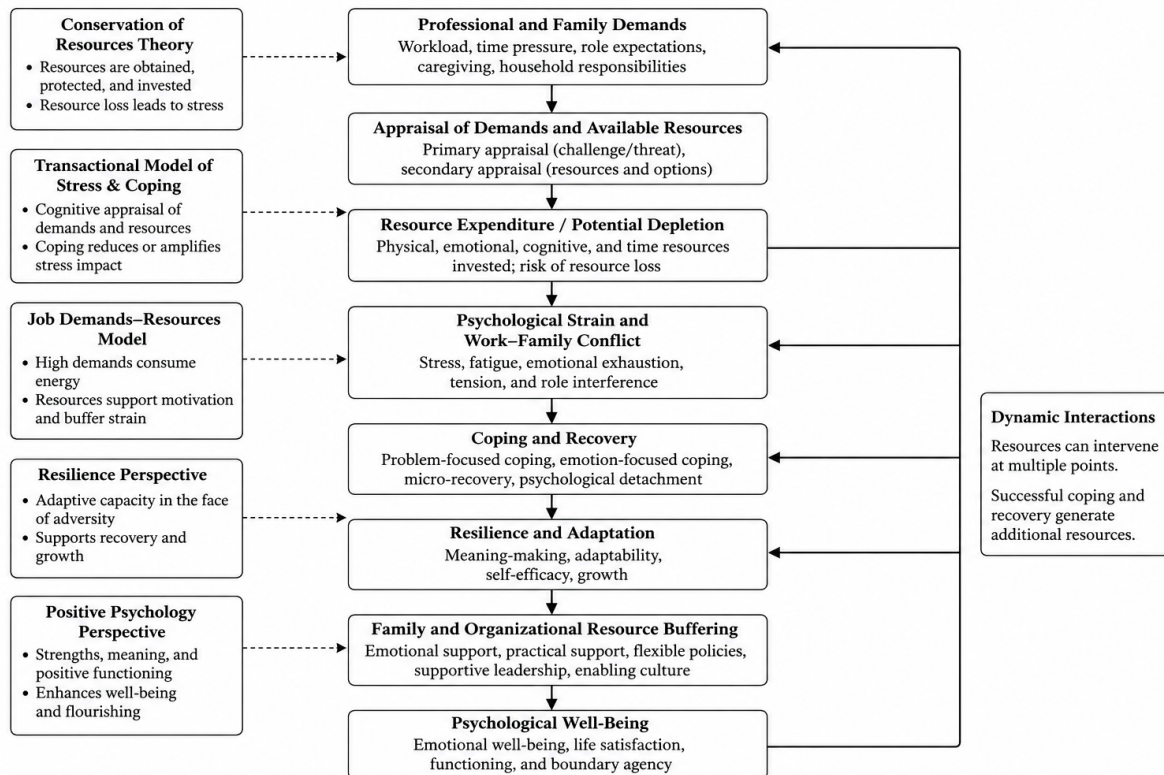
The concept also directs attention to boundary agency. Boundary agency is the perceived and practical capacity to set, negotiate, revise, and defend workable boundaries across roles. It includes the ability to say no to nonessential demands, seek assistance, negotiate household responsibilities, protect recovery time, and use organizational flexibility without unreasonable social cost. Boundary agency is partly personal but also structurally enabled. Employees cannot exercise meaningful boundary agency when organizational expectations punish non-availability or when family norms render responsibility non-negotiable.

IV. A MULTILEVEL RESOURCE FRAMEWORK FOR WORKING WOMEN'S PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

The theoretical perspectives above can be integrated into a process model in which professional and family demands initiate resource expenditure; appraisal determines how demands are interpreted; boundary permeability influences whether demands continue across domains; cumulative strain emerges when resource expenditure exceeds replenishment; coping and micro-recovery restore partial control; resilience supports adaptation; relational and organizational resources buffer loss; and sustainable well-being is supported when resources can be protected and renewed.

Figure 1

Integrated Multilevel Resource Framework for Work-Life Integration and Psychological Well-Being



Note. The framework integrates COR theory, transactional stress and coping, JD-R theory, resilience, and positive psychology. Arrows represent conceptual relationships rather than statistically tested causal effects.

4.1 Dual-Role Identity and Invisible Coordination

The process begins with dual-role identity rather than with conflict. Many working women value both professional and family roles. The psychological difficulty is therefore not necessarily that one role is unwanted but that both roles can demand simultaneous cognitive and emotional availability. This distinction matters because interventions that assume women simply need to “choose priorities” can misrecognize the problem. The challenge may be that multiple roles are genuinely valued and socially consequential.

Invisible coordination intensifies this challenge. Professional work often has explicit tasks, deadlines, and accountability systems, whereas family coordination may be diffuse and continuous. Remembering appointments, anticipating needs, planning logistics, monitoring household routines, and maintaining relational expectations may rarely appear as discrete tasks

even though they consume cognitive resources. When this responsibility remains concentrated, family support may reduce physical work without substantially reducing mental load.

This distinction suggests that equitable work-life integration requires more than task redistribution. Responsibility sharing involves transferring ownership of planning, remembering, and monitoring. A spouse who assumes responsibility for a domain should also assume the cognitive work of identifying what needs to happen and when. This reduces the need for one person to remain the default coordinator.

4.2 Boundary Permeability and Cumulative Psychological Strain

Boundary permeability refers to the extent to which demands, attention, emotions, and expectations cross between professional and family domains. High permeability is not always harmful. Some individuals prefer integrated roles, and flexibility can be beneficial. The problem arises when permeability is asymmetrical or involuntary—for example, when work can intrude into family time at any moment but family

responsibilities cannot be accommodated during work.

Digital accessibility makes this asymmetry especially salient. A hybrid employee may have more control over location but less control over availability if messages, calls, or task notifications persist into personal time. This creates a flexibility paradox: arrangements designed to support integration may increase boundary intrusion when norms of availability are not clearly defined.

Psychological strain becomes cumulative when boundary permeability reduces recovery. A difficult work interaction may carry emotional residue into family time. Family concerns may then occupy attention during work. If sleep or recovery is also compromised, each domain enters the next with fewer available resources. The resulting strain may present as fatigue, irritability, reduced patience, guilt, difficulty concentrating, or a sense of being continuously “on.”

Emotional labor can add another layer. Hochschild (1983) conceptualized emotional labor as the management of emotion as part of paid work, and Grandey (2000) further developed its relationship with emotion regulation. Women in healthcare, education, human resources, service, and managerial roles may regulate their own emotional responses while supporting others. If family roles also require emotional responsiveness, the cumulative burden involves emotional as well as temporal and cognitive resources.

4.3 Coping and Micro-Recovery

Coping interrupts the progression from demands to depletion by changing either the demand, the appraisal of the demand, or the individual's immediate state. Planning and prioritization can reduce cognitive overload by converting competing demands into an ordered sequence. Negotiating support can reduce the number of demands carried individually. Reflection and emotion regulation can prevent acute stress from dominating subsequent interactions.

Micro-recovery is especially relevant in dense work-family schedules. Short recovery periods can create transitions between roles, allowing individuals to reduce residual activation before entering the next domain. A brief walk after work, ten minutes of quiet before family interaction, breathing exercises, reading, or temporarily turning off notifications may appear minor, but their cumulative effect can be meaningful if they restore perceived control and interrupt continuous exposure.

The concept must be used carefully. Organizations should not use micro-recovery as a justification for excessive workload. Nor should family systems rely on women's recovery practices to compensate for unequal responsibility. Micro-recovery is a protective resource within a larger system, not a substitute for adequate workload, sleep, or support.

4.4 Resilience, Meaning, and Restored Control

Resilience operates after or during strain by enabling adaptation, reorganization, and continued engagement. Within this framework, its core mechanisms include meaning, self-efficacy, flexibility, and restored control. A woman may experience significant pressure but remain resilient if she can identify valued reasons for continuing, access support, adapt expectations, and regain a sense that demands can be managed. Perceived control is important because it changes the meaning of difficult periods. Unpredictable demands often feel more burdensome than equally intensive but predictable demands because they prevent planning. When individuals can reorganize tasks, renegotiate expectations, or obtain support, the same objective workload may become more psychologically manageable.

Meaning also protects motivation. Professional growth, financial independence, family contribution, identity, and mastery can make difficult roles worth sustaining. Positive psychology is useful here because it emphasizes that well-being is not achieved by removing all challenge. Rather, sustainable functioning requires that demands remain connected to

valued purposes and that adequate resources exist to pursue those purposes without chronic depletion.

4.5 Relational and Organizational Resource Buffering

Family and organizational resources can intervene at multiple points in the process. Emotional support can change appraisal by reducing isolation. Practical support can directly reduce workload. Shared coordination can reduce invisible cognitive demands. Managerial flexibility can prevent work demands from becoming unnecessarily rigid. Predictable scheduling can increase planning capacity. Organizational cultures that respect recovery can reduce boundary permeability.

The distinction between task sharing and responsibility sharing is critical at the relational level. Effective support does not merely involve “helping” the person who retains overall responsibility; it redistributes ownership. Similarly, the distinction between available and enacted support is critical at the organizational level. A policy that cannot be used without social cost does not provide its intended resource value. This is consistent with contemporary work emphasizing the importance of context in women’s career experiences. Ryan and Morgenroth (2024) argue that efforts to “fix women” can overlook the structural contexts that shape women’s trajectories. Applied to work-life integration, the implication is that resilience training, time-management workshops, or wellness applications cannot substitute for changes in workload, supervisory behavior, expectations of availability, or responsibility distribution.

Recent evidence on work-family supportive policies and supervisor behavior similarly reinforces the importance of organizational enactment (Kim et al., 2023; Guo et al., 2024). The resource value of flexibility depends on whether employees experience genuine discretion and whether managers treat caregiving needs as compatible with professional commitment.

Supportive contexts reduce the need for employees to spend additional resources proving legitimacy.

4.6 Sustainable Psychological Well-Being and Boundary Agency

The endpoint of the framework is not “perfect balance.” It is sustainable psychological well-being supported by boundary agency. Sustainable functioning means that individuals can remain engaged in valued roles while preserving enough emotional, cognitive, and physical resources for recovery and ongoing adaptation. Boundary agency means having both the internal capacity and external permission to negotiate how resources are allocated.

This conception avoids two unrealistic assumptions. The first is that stress can or should be eliminated. Demanding work and family roles can be meaningful and developmentally valuable. The second is that individuals can achieve well-being through self-management alone. Boundary agency is constrained by power, culture, financial necessity, job design, family expectations, and caregiving realities.

A resource-supportive environment therefore expands agency. When managers respect after-hours boundaries, employees can disengage without fear. When partners share responsibility rather than isolated tasks, women can stop monitoring everything. When organizations plan workload predictably, employees can coordinate family obligations more effectively. When individuals use coping and recovery strategies, they can preserve or rebuild the resources needed to engage in these negotiations.

4.7 Critical Distinctions and Potential Failure Modes

The framework is strengthened by clarifying several distinctions that are often collapsed in work-life discussions. The first is between flexibility and control. Flexibility describes the possibility of variation in where or when work is performed; control concerns who determines that

variation. Employer-controlled flexibility can require employees to adapt rapidly to changing demands and may therefore increase rather than reduce strain. Employee-controlled flexibility is more likely to function as a resource because it expands the ability to coordinate work and family responsibilities.

The second distinction is between support availability and support legitimacy. A resource can exist formally yet remain psychologically inaccessible. Employees may avoid leave, flexible schedules, or counselling when they believe use will signal weakness or lower commitment. Family members may offer help while still framing the woman as ultimately accountable for the outcome. In both cases, nominal support exists without full transfer of responsibility or reduction in vigilance.

The third distinction is between coping effectiveness and coping burden. Coping is typically treated as beneficial, but coping itself requires effort. Constant planning, emotional regulation, anticipatory problem solving, and self-monitoring can become another layer of labor when structural demands remain unchanged. An intervention that continually teaches employees to optimize their coping without reducing preventable demands may therefore increase the sense that well-being is another individual performance requirement.

The fourth distinction is between resilience and endurance. Endurance refers to continuing despite depletion; resilience implies adaptation that preserves or restores functioning. Organizations may mistakenly praise employees for tolerating chronically unsustainable conditions and label this resilience. A resource perspective asks whether functioning is being restored or whether costs are merely deferred. Persistent sleep loss, emotional exhaustion, and inability to disengage are indicators that endurance is being mistaken for resilience.

Finally, work-life integration can fail through resource mismatch. A person may have strong

family support but very low autonomy at work, or excellent organizational flexibility but intensive caregiving with little relational support. This suggests that interventions should diagnose the configuration of demands and resources rather than assume one universal solution. The same intervention can be highly valuable in one configuration and marginal in another.

V. CONCEPTUAL PROPOSITIONS

The framework generates a set of propositions that can guide future empirical research. These propositions are not statistical claims from the present article; they specify relationships that can be examined through qualitative, quantitative, longitudinal, or mixed-method designs.

Proposition 1: Invisible coordination will predict psychological strain beyond the contribution of visible household task load.

Conventional measures of domestic workload may underestimate the cognitive component of responsibility. The person who remembers, plans, monitors, and coordinates family activity continues to expend resources even when specific tasks are performed by others. Future studies should therefore distinguish task frequency from responsibility ownership. Measures of mental load, anticipatory responsibility, and coordination could be tested as predictors of fatigue, guilt, psychological detachment, and well-being.

Proposition 2: Boundary permeability will intensify the relationship between multiple role demands and cumulative psychological strain when permeability is involuntary or asymmetrical. Not all integration is harmful. Voluntary permeability may increase flexibility, while involuntary permeability can create continuous availability. The key moderator may therefore be boundary control rather than permeability itself. Research could examine whether employees who have similar levels of cross-domain contact experience different outcomes depending on their ability to control when that contact occurs.

Proposition 3: Micro-recovery will partially buffer the relationship between daily resource expenditure and psychological strain, but its protective effect will weaken under chronic structural overload.

Short recovery practices may be especially useful during temporary demand peaks, but they cannot indefinitely compensate for inadequate sleep, excessive workload, or persistent caregiving pressure. Daily diary designs could test when micro-recovery is protective and when structural demands overwhelm its effect.

Proposition 4: Resilience will operate primarily through restored control, adaptive reappraisal, and access to meaning rather than through reduced exposure to demands.

This proposition distinguishes resilience from demand reduction. Resilient individuals may face the same objective demands but interpret and manage them differently. Longitudinal research could test whether changes in self-efficacy, perceived control, and meaning explain recovery trajectories following periods of work-family strain.

Proposition 5: Enacted organizational support will predict work-life and well-being outcomes more strongly than the formal availability of supportive policies.

This proposition follows from the distinction between policies on paper and resources in practice. Organizations can provide flexible work arrangements, leave, or employee assistance programs that employees hesitate to use because of managerial signals or career penalties. Research should measure both availability and perceived usability and examine discrepancies between the two.

Proposition 6: Responsibility sharing within families and enacted support within organizations will jointly strengthen boundary agency.

Boundary agency depends on conditions across domains. A woman may have an understanding manager but little capacity to use flexibility if family responsibility remains highly concentrated. Conversely, family support may be insufficient if work expectations require continuous accessibility. Cross-domain models should therefore test interaction effects between family and organizational resources.

Proposition 7: Sustainable psychological well-being will be best explained by a resource configuration rather than any single protective factor.

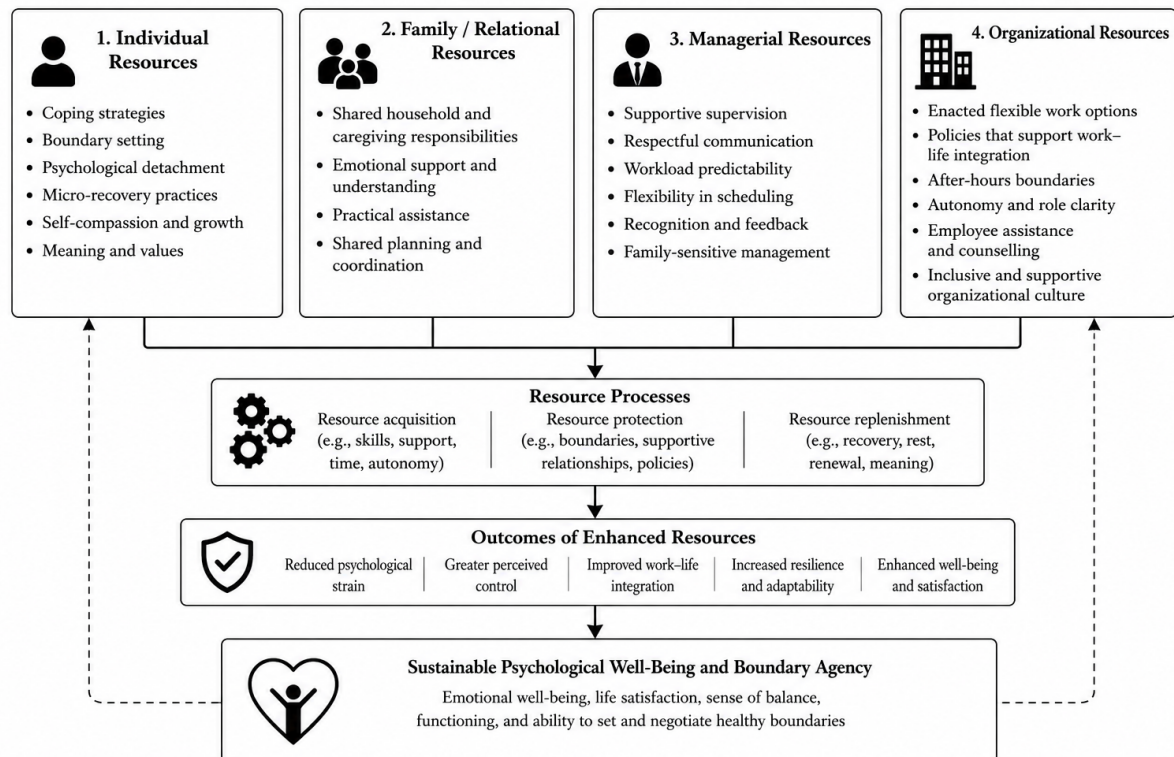
The framework predicts equifinality: different combinations of resources may support sustainable functioning. One woman may rely strongly on family support and predictable work; another may have high autonomy and strong coping skills; a third may benefit from shared caregiving and supportive supervision. Person-centered methods, configurational approaches, or qualitative comparative analysis may therefore be valuable complements to variable-centered models.

VI. MULTILEVEL IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The framework implies that work-life and psychological well-being interventions should be designed across multiple levels rather than concentrated on the individual. A woman's coping capacity matters, but so do family arrangements, supervisory behavior, and organizational systems. Sustainable change is most likely when these levels reinforce rather than contradict one another.

Figure 2

Multilevel Resource Pathways to Sustainable Psychological Well-Being and Boundary Agency



Note. The framework locates psychological well-being within coordinated individual, family/relational, managerial, and organizational resource systems.

6.1 Individual-Level Implications

Individual interventions can strengthen coping flexibility, psychological detachment, realistic prioritization, self-compassion, and boundary-setting skills. Counselling psychologists may help clients identify sources of resource depletion, distinguish controllable from uncontrollable demands, challenge perfectionistic role expectations, and develop communication strategies for negotiating responsibility.

Micro-recovery can be incorporated into intervention plans as a feasible daily practice. Rather than recommending vague “self-care,” practitioners can help clients identify specific transitions where brief recovery is possible, such as the period immediately after work, before caregiving tasks, or before sleep. The purpose is not to maximize productivity but to reduce continuous demand exposure.

Counselling should also attend to meaning. If professional and family roles are both deeply valued, advising a client simply to reduce commitment may be psychologically unrealistic. Therapeutic work can instead focus on values clarification, prioritization during peak periods, and distinguishing chosen commitment from socially imposed perfectionism.

6.2 Family and Relational Implications

Family interventions should move beyond requests for “help.” The more important question is who owns responsibility. Couples or family members can explicitly map domains such as school coordination, elder care, household supplies, appointments, finances, meal planning, or transport and assign not only task performance but planning responsibility.

Such discussions can reduce invisible coordination by transferring the cognitive burden associated with noticing and remembering. They can also surface assumptions about gender and responsibility that otherwise remain implicit. The aim is not mathematical equality in every task but a sustainable distribution of ownership that

reflects capacity, preference, and changing life demands.

Emotional support also matters. Family members who recognize occupational pressure can reduce the need for women to justify fatigue, delayed household tasks, or the need for recovery. Validation functions as a resource because it reduces interpersonal friction at the moment when other resources are already depleted.

6.3 Managerial Implications

Managers are critical translators of organizational policy. Family-supportive supervision includes respectful communication, realistic workload planning, advance notice of demands where possible, flexibility during genuine family needs, and avoidance of unnecessary after-hours contact. These practices signal that employees can use support without being judged as less committed.

Workload predictability deserves particular attention. Not all high-demand work can be reduced, but uncertainty can often be managed. Clear priorities, realistic deadlines, escalation rules, and communication norms allow employees to coordinate professional and family responsibilities more effectively. Predictability therefore functions as a resource even when workload remains substantial.

Managers should also differentiate urgency from habitual accessibility. If every message is treated as urgent, boundary agency becomes impossible. Teams can establish norms regarding response times, after-hours communication, and escalation. Such norms are especially important in hybrid environments where physical distance no longer marks the end of the workday.

6.4 Organizational Implications

At the organizational level, work-life initiatives should be evaluated by experienced usability rather than policy count. Organizations may have numerous programs yet provide little practical support if workloads, promotion norms, or supervisory behavior make those programs

difficult to use. Employee surveys should therefore assess whether workers feel psychologically safe using flexibility, leave, or counselling resources.

Organizational design can also protect recovery by limiting unnecessary after-hours communication, clarifying role expectations, managing staffing levels, and providing autonomy where feasible. Employee assistance programs should integrate work-family strain, caregiving pressures, and boundary issues rather than treating distress as an isolated individual problem.

A further implication concerns performance culture. Employees may avoid supportive policies if they believe visibility and constant availability are prerequisites for advancement. Organizations seeking to improve well-being must therefore examine the implicit signals embedded in promotion, recognition, and leadership behavior. Support is credible when successful employees can visibly use it without penalty.

Finally, organizations should avoid framing resilience as a substitute for job design. Resilience programs can be valuable when they expand coping repertoires and self-efficacy, but they become counterproductive when used to normalize excessive demands. The correct sequence is to remove avoidable structural strain, provide resources, and then strengthen individual capacity to manage unavoidable challenge.

6.5 Implications for Counselling Psychology and Clinical Practice

Counselling psychologists frequently encounter distress that is described as anxiety, exhaustion, guilt, irritability, or inability to “switch off,” yet the maintaining conditions may be distributed across work and family systems. A resource-based assessment can therefore complement symptom-focused assessment by mapping where demands originate, which resources are depleted, which resources remain available, and where the client has meaningful control. Such mapping can prevent over-pathologizing understandable responses to chronic role pressure.

Assessment can explore four domains. The first is demand density: how many professional, caregiving, domestic, and relational demands cluster within the same periods? The second is boundary permeability: when and how do work and family demands cross domains, and to what extent is this crossing voluntary? The third is resource access: what practical, emotional, managerial, financial, and temporal supports are genuinely usable? The fourth is boundary agency: where can the client negotiate change, and where are constraints largely structural?

Intervention can then be matched to the resource profile. When cognitive overload is prominent, planning, prioritization, and externalization of tasks may reduce working-memory demands. When emotional spillover is central, transition rituals, brief grounding, and psychological detachment may be more useful. When perfectionistic standards intensify depletion, cognitive reappraisal and self-compassion can help distinguish values from impossible role ideals. When the problem is unequal responsibility, communication and negotiation may be more relevant than individual relaxation techniques.

Importantly, clinicians should avoid implying that successful adaptation means tolerating all demands. Therapeutic work may include helping clients recognize when distress is signaling an unsustainable arrangement rather than insufficient coping. In such cases, intervention may involve problem-solving around workload, discussing accommodations, mobilizing social support, or clarifying what responsibilities can be renegotiated. This aligns clinical practice with the broader principle that well-being is jointly produced by individual and contextual resources.

The framework also supports a strengths-sensitive clinical stance. Women experiencing work-family strain may simultaneously demonstrate high competence, persistence, relational commitment, and adaptive capacity. Recognizing these strengths can reduce shame and support agency, but strengths should not be used to justify further

burden. The aim is to help clients deploy strengths strategically while protecting the resources that make continued functioning possible.

VII. RESEARCH AGENDA

The framework opens several directions for future research in India and comparable socio-cultural contexts. First, invisible coordination should be operationalized more precisely. Existing household-labor measures can be supplemented with indicators of remembering, anticipating, planning, monitoring, and emotional coordination. Researchers could examine whether these dimensions explain variance in well-being beyond time spent on domestic tasks.

Second, longitudinal designs are needed because work-life demands change across life stages. Marriage, childbirth, children's educational transitions, elder care, career advancement, relocation, and changes in work mode can alter both demands and available resources. Repeated-measures studies could identify when resource loss spirals are most likely and which buffers are most effective at different stages.

Third, hybrid work requires more nuanced analysis. Researchers should distinguish spatial flexibility from temporal autonomy, digital availability, schedule control, and perceived boundary legitimacy. The same "hybrid" category may contain very different resource profiles.

Fourth, multilevel research should examine the joint effects of family and organizational contexts. Many studies analyze work resources or family support separately even though employees experience both simultaneously. Cross-level models could test whether supervisor support is most protective when family responsibility is shared, or whether family support compensates for low organizational flexibility only up to a point. Fifth, intervention studies should compare individual-only programs with multilevel interventions. A counselling or resilience program may improve coping, but larger effects may emerge when paired with manager training, workload redesign, or family responsibility

interventions. Such studies would directly test the framework's central claim that sustainable well-being depends on coordinated resource systems. Finally, qualitative research remains important. Interpretative approaches can illuminate contradictions that standardized scales may miss: flexibility that feels invasive, support that still leaves one person responsible, valued roles that simultaneously exhaust and sustain, and resilience that coexists with periods of overwhelm. Such findings can improve measurement by ensuring that constructs reflect lived experience rather than only theoretical convenience.

7.1 Measurement and Design Priorities

Future empirical tests should also improve construct precision. Work-life integration should not be measured only through global satisfaction because global ratings can conceal the mechanisms identified here. Studies should separately assess time conflict, strain spillover, boundary control, digital accessibility, invisible coordination, perceived control, recovery opportunities, and the usability of organizational support. Distinguishing these dimensions would allow researchers to identify why two individuals with similar overall work-life satisfaction may arrive at that judgment through very different resource configurations.

Methodologically, daily diary and experience-sampling designs are particularly promising because many processes in the framework fluctuate within persons. Boundary intrusions, emotional residue, micro-recovery, and perceived control can vary from day to day even when employment and family structure remain constant. Repeated observations could therefore distinguish chronic resource deficits from temporary demand peaks. In parallel, qualitative interviews can clarify how participants interpret the same events, especially where support is experienced ambivalently or where culturally valued responsibilities are simultaneously meaningful and exhausting.

Mixed-method designs could combine these strengths. Quantitative data could identify

recurring relationships among demands, resources, and well-being, while qualitative accounts could explain the mechanisms and meanings underlying those patterns. Such designs would be especially useful for evaluating the proposed distinctions between task sharing and responsibility sharing, available and enacted support, and resilience and endurance across occupational sectors, family structures, and different stages of women's working lives.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Working women's psychological well-being cannot be adequately understood as a matter of personal coping alone. Work-life integration is an ongoing process in which professional and family demands compete for and sometimes generate time, attention, emotional energy, meaning, autonomy, and social support. When boundaries are involuntarily permeable and responsibility remains concentrated, resources can be depleted across domains. Coping and micro-recovery can interrupt this process, resilience can support adaptation, and family and organizational resources can buffer loss.

The multilevel resource framework developed here contributes by distinguishing task sharing from responsibility sharing, available support from enacted support, and resilience from structural compensation. It also introduces boundary agency as the capacity to negotiate sustainable limits across valued roles. These distinctions shift the practical question from "How can working women cope better?" to "How can individuals, families, managers, and organizations jointly create conditions in which valued work and family participation are psychologically sustainable?"

A resource-based answer does not deny individual agency; it locates agency within context. Sustainable psychological well-being is most likely when women can draw on personal strengths without being required to compensate for preventable resource loss, when families share responsibility rather than simply tasks, when managers translate policies into usable support, and when organizations protect recovery as a

legitimate condition of effective work. Such a perspective offers a more balanced foundation for research, counselling practice, and organizational policy in an increasingly integrated world of work and family life.

Table 1

Key Conceptual Distinctions in the Multilevel Resource Framework

Concept	Definition	Resource-Based Interpretation
Task sharing	Distribution of visible activities	May reduce physical load while cognitive ownership remains concentrated
Responsibility sharing	Distribution of anticipating, planning, remembering, monitoring, and ownership	Reduces invisible coordination and cognitive load
Available support	Formal existence of flexibility, leave, assistance, or other resources	May have limited value if use is stigmatized or impractical
Enacted support	Support that can be used without unreasonable social or career cost	Functions as an accessible resource in everyday life
Flexibility	Variation in where or when work is performed	Can help or harm depending on who controls the variation
Boundary agency	Practical and perceived capacity to negotiate workable limits across roles	Supports control, recovery, and sustainable functioning
Resilience	Adaptation that preserves or restores functioning	Can support recovery but cannot replace structural resources
Endurance	Continued performance despite ongoing depletion	May conceal delayed psychological or physical costs

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