Universe International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research
(International Peer Reviewed Refereed Journal)
DOI No. – 08.2020-25662434

© UIJIR | ISSN (O) – 2582-6417
AUG 2025 | Vol. 06 Issue 03
www.uijir.com

GUILT COMPLEX IN WORKING WOMAN

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ABSTRACT

When a person realizes that they have hurt someone—whether actually or just in perception—they often experience guilt, which is a negative and complex human emotion. Guilt arises from the belief that one has violated personal moral values or social norms. It is a self-conscious feeling marked by the unpleasant awareness of having done or thought something wrong, usually accompanied by regret and a sense of responsibility for the outcome. Merriam-Webster defines guilt as the feeling of deserving blame, whether for real or imagined offenses, or as the state of being aware of an offense or inadequacy. In general, guilt is understood as a form of self-evaluation that occurs when individuals feel responsible for actions that may have harmed others or gone against ethical standards. When these feelings become excessive and disproportionate to the situation, it is referred to as a guilt complex. This involves a persistent belief of having done something wrong, even when little or no evidence supports it, and may manifest as anxiety, self-blame, and difficulty in forgiving oneself.

Keywords: Guilt, moral values, self-evaluation, guilt complex, self-blame.

DOI Link :: https://doi-ds.org/doilink/08.2025-99792164/UIJIR

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AUG 2025 | Vol. 06 Issue 03
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INTRODUCTION

When someone realizes they have hurt someone else—actually or perceivably—they experience guilt, which is a negative emotion. A complex human feeling, guilt is brought on by a perceived infraction of one's own moral principles or of social conventions. It's a self-conscious emotion that includes an unpleasant assessment of having done or thought something incorrectly, frequently coupled with regret and a sense of accountability for a bad result.[1]

According to Merriam-Webster dictionary "It is feelings of deserving blame especially for imagined offenses or from a sense of inadequacy or we may say the state of one who has committed an offense especially conscious".[2]

Guilt is frequently described as a self-evaluation that occurs when people feel accountable for deeds that have harmed other people or transgressed moral principles.[3]

An overwhelming and ongoing sense of guilt that is frequently out of proportion to the circumstances or deeds involved is known as a guilt complex. It's characterized by an ongoing belief that one has done something wrong, even when there's little or no evidence to support it. This can evident as apprehension, self-blame, and complexity in pardoning oneself.[4]

DEFINITION

The syndrome known as "mom guilt" or "maternal guilt" is common among working women, especially when it comes to juggling work and family obligations. Social expectations, internalised gender norms, and the pressure to achieve perceived standards of parenting and professional success can all contribute to this guilt. Their professional advancement, job contentment, and general well-being may all suffer as a result of the guilt.[5,6]

Maternal guilt, often referred to as "mom guilt," is a pervasive and deeply ingrained emotion that many mothers experience during their parenting journey. It is characterized by feelings of self-doubt, anxiety, and a sense of failing as a mother.[7]

"Maternal guilt" could be described as a measurable and observable emotional state experienced by a mother, characterized by feelings of responsibility, remorse, or selfblame for perceived inadequacies in fulfilling her maternal roles and responsibilities.[8]

According to feminist/social constructivist theory, it is regarded as the maternal experience, contending that social constructs contribute to the induction of maternal guilt in women who do not conform to "traditional" responsibilities. Since this time, researchers using feminist framework and socio-cultural theories have created a narrative about the ways in which guilt and shame are disproportionately common in women.[9]

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www.uijir.com

PREVALENCE OF GUILT COMPLEX IN WORKING WOMAN

Majority of nurses fall into very High (7.62%), High (45.71%),and Moderate (13.33%) categories of maternal guilt level, indicating significant psychological pressure related to their dual roles as mothers and nurses.[10] A study conducted on child care related guilt complex perceived among employed mothers also found as moderate guilt was higher (50%) in mothers of children aged 3-5 years working in public sector.[11] An assessment of guilt complex of working women regarding child care also revealed that 12% of subjects had 'no guilt', 35% reported guilt and 53% were within the normal range of guilt complex.[12]

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO GUILT COMPLEX IN WORKING WOMEN:

1. **Societal Expectations:**
   Traditional gender roles often place a greater emphasis on women's roles as caregivers, leading to feelings of guilt when work interferes with family responsibilities.
2. **Internalized Gender Stereotypes:**
   Women may internalize societal expectations that link them more strongly to family and care giving, leading them to feel more guilty when their work interferes with these roles.
3. **Balancing Work and Family Demands:**
   Working women often face the challenge of juggling multiple roles, such as managing work responsibilities, caring for children, and maintaining household duties.
4. **Job-Related Pressures:**
   Long hours, demanding workloads, and travel requirements can exacerbate feelings of guilt when they interfere with family time.
5. **Lack of Support:**
   Inadequate support systems, including childcare and eldercare, can contribute to the burden and guilt experienced by working women.
6. **Ideal Worker and Ideal Mother Pressure**
   The pressure to be both a high-performing employee and a dedicated caregiver can lead to feelings of inadequacy and guilt.[11]

TYPES OF GUILT

Guilt can be classified in different ways, each with diverse effects on oneself.

Natural guilt arises when you've done something wrong and feel remorse—it can be constructive, prompting positive change or making amends. But if left untreated, it may result in ongoing distress.

Maladaptive guilt occurs when people blame themselves for events beyond their control, often feeling regret despite having no real responsibility.

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www.uijir.com

Guilty thoughts involve feeling guilt over negative or inappropriate thoughts, even if they are never acted upon, **leading to fear and shame.**

Existential guilt is more complex, tied to broader issues like failing to live by personal values or feeling undeserved good fortune—such as survivor's guilt after a tragedy.

CONSEQUENCES ON MOTHER AND CHILD REGARDING GUILT COMPLEX AMONG WORKING WOMAN

The consequences of guilt for working mothers can be categorized into three areas including (1) Consequences for childcare, (2) Consequences for work, and (3) Consequences for personal.

Consequences for childcare

- Permissive parenting patterns
- stimulate more positive parenting behavior such as spending quality time with children
- Social pressure related to the mother's role in providing perfect care. Mothers' feelings of shame over not living up to these standards might have a direct or indirect impact on their interactions and communication with their children.
- Mothers who feel guilty tend to place the children's needs above personal needs and often make ongoing sacrifices. This can influence daily interactions with children where mothers may feel the need to constantly compensate and provide extra attention to address evolving feelings of guilt.

Consequences on work

- Mothers take days off, reschedule the work hours, or even consider quitting the job. Additionally, when working mothers' feelings of guilt increase, the mothers are more inclined to consider reducing working hours to prioritize family care giving duties over the careers.
- Working and guilt-ridden mothers often have difficulty focusing fully on work tasks which can also have implications for the career development.
- Guilt is also known to impact job satisfaction, both directly and through other intermediary factors. When mothers continue to feel guilty and divided between the roles at home and at work, this creates chronic stress that can
- Reduce happiness with the job. Guilt can also influence the manner work is perceived which often feels similar to a burden than a source of professional accomplishment.

Consequences on personal

- Working mothers also make changes in spending time including sacrificing time for relaxing and "me-time". As the level of guilt increases, working mothers pay more attention to the children, reducing

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working hours, and trying to divide the time efficiently even at the expense of vacation. This behavior is part of the attempt to compensate or even eliminate the guilt

- Increased feelings of guilt can influence the well-being and happiness of working mothers. On the other hand, working mothers frequently describe encounters with hostility and rage in reaction.
- Strong feelings of guilt can even cause anxiety, feelings of emptiness, and difficulty breathing. Physical symptoms such as fever, chills, delayed thinking, fatigue, and need for sleep may also appear.
- According to a study, stress and feelings of failure might result from the pressure to be a "good mother" and from not always being able to be there as an ideal mother. Additionally, guilt eventually leads to a decrease in general well-being and a lack of satisfaction with the balance between work and family. Working mothers who often receive work-related disturbances outside normal job hours also feel significant psychological stress. [5,6,10,13,14,15]

WAY TO MANAGE GUILT COMPLEX AMONG WORKING WOMAN

1. Self-Compassion and Acceptance:

Self-compassion and acceptance involve challenging negative self-talk, particularly the tendency to criticize oneself for not being “perfect” in balancing work and home responsibilities. By recognizing and reframing these negative thoughts, individuals can begin to shift their mindset toward a more supportive inner dialogue. Treating yourself with the same consideration and empathy that you would give to a friend in a comparable circumstance is the key to practicing self-kindness. It’s also important to accept that perfection is an unrealistic goal and that making progress, rather than achieving flawlessness, is what truly matters.

2. Setting Boundaries and Prioritizing:

Setting boundaries and prioritizing are essential strategies for maintaining balance and well-being. Begin by establishing clear boundaries—define your work hours and adhere to them as consistently as possible, while also communicating your availability to both your employer and family. Prioritize tasks by identifying what is most important in both professional and personal spheres, allowing you to focus your energy effectively. It's equally important to learn to say no; avoid over committing by politely declining tasks or projects that could increase stress or guilt. Additionally, delegating responsibilities—both at work and at home—can significantly reduce your burden and help you manage your time more efficiently.

3. Effective Communication:

Open communication is vital for achieving work-life balance. Talk openly with your partner and

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children about your work schedule and how it affects family time, and involve them in creating practical solutions. Similarly, if you're finding it difficult to manage your responsibilities, share your concerns with your employer—they may be able to provide support, adjustments, or greater flexibility to help you cope more effectively.

4. Seeking Support:

Talking to friends and family can provide emotional relief and valuable perspective, helping you feel less isolated in your experiences. Sharing your feelings with trusted individuals often lightens the emotional load and opens the door to support and understanding. If guilt becomes overwhelming or starts to interfere with your daily life, consider seeking therapy or counseling. A mental health professional can help you explore the root of these feelings and offer effective strategies for managing guilt and improving your overall well-being..

5. Focusing on Quality Time:

Prioritizing quality over quantity can help ease feelings of guilt related to limited family time. Instead of dwelling on the hours you're apart, focus on making the most of the time you do have together. Engage in meaningful activities like playing games, reading books, or having heartfelt conversations—these shared moments create lasting connections and show your presence and care, even if time is limited.

6. Productivity and Self-Care:

Finding the underlying cause of guilt is the first step towards comprehending and controlling it. By exploring why you feel guilty, you can start to address the underlying issues more effectively. Practicing self-care is also essential—engage in activities that help you relax and recharge, such as exercising, enjoying hobbies, or spending time in nature. Avoid comparing yourself to others, as everyone's circumstances and challenges are different; instead, focus on your own journey and progress. Lastly, shift your attention to the positive—acknowledge your efforts, recognize your accomplishments, and take time to celebrate your successes.[16]

7. Distinguishing guilt and shame

It's important to assess the relative impact of guilt and shame on a patient's distress, recognizing that patients may label deep shame as mere embarrassment. When exploring guilt, consider whether it is proportionate to the patient's actions; if not, it may reflect deeper life factors that need unpacking over time to help the patient realistically assess their responsibility. Clinicians should also remain sensitive to cultural differences, as experiences of guilt and shame can vary widely across both broader cultural

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backgrounds and smaller social groups.[17]

Management of Guilt complex in working woman is simplified by[18]

Table 1: Consider the origin of the Guilt

Category	Strategy/Action
Consider the origin of the Guilt	Find the source: Determine whether guilt is a result of particular circumstances, personal standards, or cultural expectations.
	Combat negative self-talk by substituting more realistic ideas for pessimistic ones.
	Shame versus Guilt: Recognise that shame is about self-worth, but guilt is about deeds.
	Examine deeper emotional or contextual triggers of guilt in order to address the underlying issues.

Table 2 : Common approaches for guilt complex management

Category	Strategy/Action
Common approaches for guilt complex management	Cultivate self-compassion: Be kind to yourself as you would a friend
	Establish limits: Prioritise your tasks, communicate your needs, and learn to say no. Obviously
	Ask for help: Talk to a therapist, family member, or friend.
	Take care of yourself: Engage in relaxing and rejuvenating activities (e.g., hobbies, nature, exercise).
	Prioritise progress over perfection. Honour little accomplishments rather than aiming for perfection.
	Acquire knowledge from errors: Rather than focussing on errors, use them as teaching moments.
	Be mindful: Use mindfulness techniques to observe your thoughts and feelings without passing judgement.
	Think about therapy: Seek expert assistance if your guilt is severe or ongoing.

Table 3: Specific approach for guilt complex management in working woman

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AUG 2025 | Vol. 06 Issue 03
www.uijir.com

Category	Strategy/Action
Specific approach for guilt complex management in working woman	Recognise "mom guilt": Acknowledge that conflicting emotions are normal and legitimate.
	Make quality time a priority: Despite time constraints, give them your whole attention.
	Ask other working mothers for assistance: Make connections with people who have gone through similar hardships.
	Rethink what success means: Determine success based on your own principles rather than social comparisons.
	Allocate work: Allocate work related responsibilities to friends, relatives, or colleagues.

The first step in managing guilt in working women is recognizing its source, whether it be personal standards or social pressure, and differentiating guilt from shame. Setting boundaries, putting self-care first, practicing self-compassion, confronting negative self-talk, and getting help are all important tactics. By concentrating on spending quality time with their children, establishing connections with peers, redefining success on a personal level, and assigning chores to others to lighten the workload, working women can cope with “mom guilt.”

CONCLUSION

A typical emotional problem for working women, particularly moms, is guilt complex. It frequently results from work-family conflict, internalised gender roles, and societal expectations. This ongoing guilt can have a detrimental effect on personal wellbeing, work performance, and childcare. Mothers who work could feel stressed, anxious, and less satisfied with their lives. It is crucial to comprehend the underlying causes of guilt, whether they be internal or circumstantial. Effectively managing emotional reactions requires the ability to distinguish between guilt and shame. Self-compassion, boundary-setting, and self-care are important coping mechanisms. Psychological anguish can be reduced by seeking professional assistance and emotional support. It's critical to prioritise quality time, redefine success, and assign work to others. Working women can attain a better balance and manage their guilt if they have the appropriate resources.

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AUG 2025 | Vol. 06 Issue 03
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DOI Link :: https://doi-ds.org/doilink/08.2025-99792164/UIJIR

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AUG 2025 | Vol. 06 Issue 03
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