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The Big Picture: Challenges For Working Mothers

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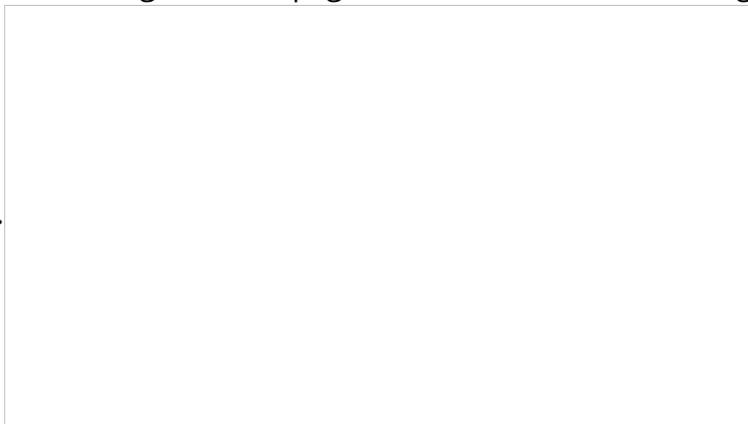
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The photograph on social media of a hard-working lady cop discharging her duties with her infant daughter not merely won her appreciation, but also made the police brass sit up and promptly transfer the woman to the district of her choice. Like any other day, Archana Jayant was present along with her six-month-old daughter, Anika, in the police station in Uttar Pradesh's Jhansi district, but was clicked by someone and her picture went viral on

social media last week. The Deputy Inspector General of Police applauded the dedication of Archana who also has a 10-year-old daughter. The plight of scores of other working mothers

is no different from Archana's.



The situation of working mothers is less than satisfactory. Because of the lack of proper infrastructure means, working mothers are suffering both as breadwinners and as caregivers in their respective families. Several women give up their careers and lifestyle due to lack of adequate facilities and stereotype. The plight of women working in the unorganized sector is even worse.

Challenges Faced by Working Mothers

- A working mother can be defined as a woman with the ability to combine a career with the added responsibility of raising a child.
- First and foremost, it is difficult to work even as a woman. Leave alone as a mother.
- Recovery of women from **childbirth stress** and their resumption of work and family responsibilities are mainly influenced by factors like work condition, e.g., the timing of return to work, work pressure, relations with her colleagues, etc.
- **Lack of social support** increases job stress, which in turn, affects the mental health of the employed mother.
- **Unequal Partnerships at home-** From past generations, it is upheld by the society that cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the needs of the family is the priority for any woman. In such an environment, people including the members of the family expect the working mother to play the role of homemaker once she comes back home after a long tiring day at work.
- **Lack of good Daycare Centres and Crèches-** Even though many daycare centers and crèches have mushroomed over the years in most metropolitan cities, finding one with certified professionals is really hard. Child abuse in such daycare centers has become another cause of concern for mothers.
- Most of these centers also don't follow the proper guidelines given by the concerned authorities regarding setting up and running such places. Security issues force many new mothers to leave their professional career to look after their newborn baby.

- There is a lack of strict implementation of The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act 2017.
- **Increasing number of Nuclear Families-** There was a time when joint families were the norm and the extended family as a whole used to take care of the children's welfare. Now the situation has changed and there is an increase in the number of nuclear families in the society. With elders missing in the present scenario, the entire responsibility falls upon the mother.
- The plight of working mothers in the informal sector is even more deplorable. Neither crèche facility nor maternal benefits are accorded to them and low income aggravates their condition.
- **Only 5-6% of the women in the workforce are in the organized sector.** The rest are in the unorganized sector. 42% of women are working in the agricultural sector without having the knowledge of basic laws to protect them.

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Provisions of Maternity Benefit Act, 2017

- **Increased Paid Maternity Leave:** The Maternity Benefit Amendment Act has increased the duration of paid maternity leave available for women employees from the existing 12 weeks to 26 weeks.
- **Maternity leave for adoptive and commissioning mothers:** Maternity leave of 12 weeks to be available to mothers adopting a child below the age of three months from the date of adoption as well as to the "commissioning mothers".
- **Work from Home option:** The Act has also introduced an enabling provision relating to "work from home" for women, which may be exercised after the expiry of the 26 weeks' leave period.
- **Crèche facility:** The Maternity Benefit Amendment Act makes crèche facility mandatory for every establishment employing 50 or more employees. Women employees would be permitted to visit the crèche 4 times during the day (including rest intervals).
- The Maternity Benefit Amendment Act makes it **mandatory for employers to educate women about the maternity benefits** available to them at the time of their appointment.

The Way Forward

- The government should frame a robust legal and policy framework. This framework should be dynamic in nature, that is, as time progress the law should evolve, incorporating the necessary changes.
- Most importantly, making women aware of the laws and policies, both in the informal and the formal sector can help the working mothers fight the odds.

- Empower the civil society to take up the responsibility in furtherance of women cause.
- The judiciary has to step in, for speedy discharge of cases on child abuse and child neglect cases. The pendency of cases too discourages women to move court. The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act 2017 which empowers working mother, should be properly implemented.
- Most of the establishments in the country do not provide a safe and adequate environment for the working of the mothers, including physical infrastructure. The government should include a crèche building mechanism in various schemes and should also subsidize the same.
- The last but not least, the sense of guilt that is forcibly thrust upon a working mother should be no more. Society has to refrain itself from defining the mother as “only” caregivers. A mother can be both, a care provider as well as a bread earner.