



**"IT'S HARD TO BE EVERYTHING AT ONCE":  
ISRAELI ARAB WOMEN BALANCING WORK,  
FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ROLES<sup>i</sup>**

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**Abstract:**

This research provides insight into the experiences of employed Arab women living in a traditional, Middle Eastern culture where most women (nearly 65%) are not employed outside the home. 287 Arab Israeli women reported on their personal experiences of balancing a career with family and community responsibilities from within a culture where women's employment is non-normative and subject to significant social disapproval. Quantitative analyses indicated that the women perceived more benefits (role expansion) than costs (role conflict) related to their employment even within the context of their parenting role. Qualitative data provided a more nuanced account as the women described both benefits and costs associated with possessing multiple roles, some they perceived as unique to their culture, others they perceived as being universal for all women. This work highlights the importance of understanding work-family balance and perceptions of maternal employment within non-Western, traditional cultures where women's entry into the workforce is more recent and non-normative. Our participants' voices add to the literature significantly by examining the real-time experiences of women who are actively breaking traditional gender norms from within a traditional society and who are on the front lines of societal change.

**Keywords:** gender roles, culture, working women, family-work relationship

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תקציר:

מחקר זה מספק תובנה מחווייתיהן של נשים ערביות בעלות קריירה, החיות בתרבות מזרח תיכונית מסורתית שבה רוב הנשים (כמעט 65%) אינן מועסקות מחוץ לבית. 287 נשים ערביות דיווחו על חווייתיהן האישיות שלהן בגישור בין קריירה, אחריות משפחתית ואחריות חברתית מתוך תרבות שבה קריירת נשים אינה נורמטיבית ונתונה לחוסר הסכמה חברתית משמעותית. ניתוחים כמותיים הצביעו על כך שהנשים תפסו יותר תועלת (הרחבת תפקיד) מאשר עלויות (קונפליקט תפקידי) הקשורות לעבודתן גם בהקשר של תפקידן ההורי. נתונים איכותיים סיפקו תיאור שונה במידה מה, שכן הנשים תיארו הן יתרונות והן עלויות הקשורות לבעלי תפקידים מרובים, חלקם נתפסו כייחודיים לתרבותם, אחרים נתפסו כאוניברסליים עבור כל הנשים. מחקר זה מדגיש את החשיבות של הבנת האיזון בין עבודה למשפחה ותפיסות של תעסוקת אימהות בתוך תרבויות מסורתיות לא מערביות שבהן כניסת נשים לשוק העבודה היא דבר חדש ולא נורמטיבי. הקולות של המשתתפים שלנו מוסיפים לספרות באופן משמעותי על ידי בחינת החוויית בזמן אמת של נשים ששוברות, באופן פעיל, נורמות מגדר מסורתיות מתוך חברה מסורתית ושנמצאות בחזית השינוי החברתי.

## 1. Introduction

This study examined the impact of holding multiple social roles for Arab minority women in Israel. Research on balancing work and family responsibilities has received significant attention in the psychological literature, but with a few exceptions (Akkas, Hossain & Rhaman, 2015) has largely been limited to Western cultures, primarily in the United States and Europe (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Brook, Garcia, & Fleming, 2008; Gaunt & Scott, 2014; Offer & Saba, 2011). Even within these countries, participants have been limited to predominately White, middle-class women, so the way in which past research on multiple roles generalizes to other populations remains unanswered. This study broadens this limited view by exploring the impact of combining work and family roles for women living in a non-Western, traditional culture in the Middle East. Specifically, we explored the importance of multiple roles and the degree of perceived role overload, role conflict, and role expansion among employed Arab women.

## 2. Literature Review

Historically, in the United States, women's entry into the workforce was considered a violation of women's biological gender orientation focused on care-giving and family relationships, and therefore, women's group-level transition to the workforce was predicted to lead to greater psychological distress and unhappiness for employed women and their families. Since the 1970s, however, the U.S. has transitioned into a country where most women are actively engaged in employment outside the home. Despite a drop in the number of working women during the Covid-19 pandemic, numbers are now returning to pre-pandemic levels, with almost 60% of women over the age of 20 employed (<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wb/data/widget>).

Contrary to early expectations, the existing body of research indicates that women's employment consistently predicts greater psychological and physical health for most women (Frech & Damaske, 2012). Societal concerns linger however regarding the impact of maternal employment on their children, particularly for mothers with

preschool age children (Gaunt & Scott, 2014; Goldberg & Lucas-Thompson, 2014; Milkie, Kendig, Nomaguchi, & Denny, 2010), and mothers continue to spend more time engaged in childcare than fathers regardless of their employment status (Pew Research Center, 2014).

In the current study, we surveyed Arab Israeli women who balance work and family roles from within a culture characterized as being significantly more traditional, collectivistic, and patriarchal than Western cultures. Each of these characteristics of Arab Israeli culture has interesting implications for the experience of working women. Of additional interest and in contrast to Western societies, Israeli Arab women's entry into the workforce is relatively recent and non-normative given that most married women are not engaged in work outside the home nor are they expected to contribute to the family's income following marriage (Offer & Sabah, 2011). The Central Bureau of Statistics in Israel reports that only 34% of Arab women aged 15 and over were employed outside the home in 2017 (Fuchs & Wilson, 2018).

Role expansion occurs when the benefits of one role spill over into another role. For example, a woman who finds that she has more in common to share with her husband because of her employment or who finds that she is better able to advise her children on career goals is experiencing role expansion; the benefits of being employed are also having a positive impact on her marriage and parenting roles. Working women may also benefit through their participation in the workforce through opportunities to broaden their worldview, develop larger social networks, and experience a greater sense of competency and success. Overall, working women are more satisfied with their lives than non-working women (Sinha, 2017). Additional benefits may be reduced financial strain and a correspondingly higher standard of living for the family due to the increase in family income achieved by women's employment (Feldman, Masalha, & Nadam, 2001), another source of potential pride and satisfaction.

On the other hand, research suggests these benefits may be moderated by the type of work, social economic status, gender ideology, and reasons for working. Women engaged in low-wage work, who have high demands for help from others in their social networks, or who feel their employment status violates their belief (or their husband's belief) in traditional gender roles within the family may not share the same benefits from being employed as other women do (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Brook et al. (2008) found that individuals who perceive multiple roles as important to them, but also conflicting, are less likely to experience benefits in comparison to those who perceive their social roles as facilitating one another. Based on limited personal resources, including time and energy, there are clearly outer limits on anyone's ability to meet multiple demands such that possessing too many roles (role overload) or when the ability to perform one role is hampered by the other (role conflict), the psychological and health benefits of employment for women may disappear (Simon, 1995). Among women, low-wage earners who feel overwhelmed by competing family demands and who would prefer to be a stay-at-home mother or homemaker may be least likely to benefit from employment outside the home.

## 2.1 Arab Culture in Israel and the Role of Women

The Arab community comprises a significant minority population in Israel (approximately 20% of the Israeli population). Among Arab Israelis, the population is further divided into Muslims (the Arab majority population), Christians, and Druze. Villages in Israel are largely segregated based on religion (Sharabi, 2010a); Arab communities in particular tend to be made up of a few extended families (Feldman et al, 2001). The community itself serves as a collectivistic unit where people's lives are deeply interconnected and supported by one another. Major life events such as marital engagements, weddings, births, and funerals are life events typically shared throughout the entire village.

Given the existing body of research on balancing work and family, it is interesting to explore the potential role of culture and community on women's experiences, particularly in a culture that varies considerably from the United States and other Western cultures in terms of gender role ideology and family expectations. Among women living in the United States, Goldberg and Lucas-Thompson (2014) found women with traditional gender ideologies tended to overestimate the negative consequences of maternal employment on children. Our study adds to this literature by going beyond perceptions and examining the actual experiences of employed women with children who are living in the midst of a traditional, non-Western society. For Arab women in the Middle East, women are expected to limit their interactions outside of their family and community; their primary focus is to be the home and family. Women are discouraged or even forbidden from seeking employment and education outside of their villages, and there are strong norms and prohibitions against spending time with any male who is not a family relative. These practical constraints and the strict gender segregation of Arab culture may add a significant psychological burden for women who choose to violate traditional cultural norms by engaging in outside employment, particularly when the job is beyond their family's village and in a mixed society (Abbas & Court, 2013; Offer & Sabah, 2011; Weiner-Levy, 2006, 2009).

Ongoing family obligations and responsibilities for Arab women also extend well beyond their nuclear family to parents, in-laws, and other extended family members including siblings, cousins, nieces, and nephews. Families live in close proximity and are expected to be highly interdependent and spend considerable time together. Care for elderly parents is seen as the responsibility of the family; most disabled parents live in multigenerational households where they are cared for by the extended family. Single or divorced women are expected to live with their parents and remain under the control of male relatives regardless of their age (Weiner-Levy, 2009). When a woman marries, she is expected to move to her husband's village where her family responsibilities expand to include his extended family as well. Married Arab couples tend to have many children. Although fertility rates have declined as education and employment have increased, roughly one-third of Arab Israeli women have four or more children, but women with more children are less likely to be employed (Offer & Sabah, 2011).

Close family proximity, large family size, and traditional gender roles may be particularly burdensome and lead to role overload for married Arab women who need to juggle many family responsibilities with employment outside the home. On the other hand, the larger family network and communal support provided within the family may help to mitigate some of the demands associated with balancing work and family, at least within families who largely support a woman's decision to work.

Taken together, these social norms and expectations related to Arab culture in Israel raise fascinating questions about women's experiences balancing work and family. Although the number of employed Arab women is rising, they are still a minority within their community and most are the first generation of working women within their families (Feldman et al., 2001). Between 2001 and 2018 the number of employed Arab women almost doubled, and today stand at close to 40% (Haj Yahya, Khalaily, Rudnisky & Fargeon, 2018). Whereas employed women in Western societies are conforming to normative behavior by having jobs and are likely to have grown up in families where mothers were employed, Arab Israeli women who work outside the home are more likely to be perceived as breaking cultural norms and as not fulfilling their expected role within their family (Haj-Yahya, Schnell & Khattab, 2018; Offer & Sabah, 2011).

Cultural disapproval of women's employment outside the home may increase the personal costs associated with employment and therefore lead to greater psychological distress for working women. In interviews with 34 Druze women who were among the first to seek higher education outside their village, Weiner-Levy (2009) found that women often described feeling marginalized and excluded in the community upon their return. In a sense, they described their new status as highly educated women as "being on the border" between their traditional culture and the modern world. On the other hand, educated and working women may gain additional status and prestige among some members of the community. They may also find significant personal fulfillment by perceiving themselves as groundbreakers and role models for other Arab women and their own daughters (Abbas & Court, 2013; Feldman et al., 2001; Offer & Sabah, 2011; Weiner-Levy, 2006, 2009). For example, Abbas and Court (2013) found that Druze women employed as school principals described the deep value, they attributed to being role models for other women seeking higher education and careers from within traditional communities.

Our predictions for this study were based on past research investigating employment among Arab Israeli women. Feldman, Masalha, and Nadem (2001) investigated the transition to parenthood among dual-wage earner Jewish and Arab families in Israel. Noting that the birth of the first child and a return to employment is a particularly stressful time for new mothers, they examined the impact of women's return to employment five months after giving birth to their first child. Among Arab Muslim and Christian families, Arab women reported better work adaptation and satisfaction with their childcare arrangements than Jewish parents (90% of the Arab women were Muslim, and 10% were Christian). As expected, these women were more likely to have family members caring for their children than the Jewish participants, and this may

account for their higher satisfaction with work and childcare. For these women, support from the extended family may have helped to mitigate some of the role conflict and overload typically associated with returning to work after the birth of a child.

Feldman et al. (2001) also examined reasons for working. In contrast to more individualistic societies where personal achievement and self-fulfillment are highly valued, Feldman et al. (2001) and Weiner-Levy (2006) note that in collectivistic societies, higher education and employment may be more likely to be valued by the contribution made to the collective group rather than to personal goals. In support of this, Feldman et al. found that significantly fewer Arab women reported that self-fulfillment (32%) or career advancement (17%) were reasons to return to work following the birth of their first child in comparison to Jewish respondents (74% and 38% respectively). On the other hand, Arab and Jewish women were equally likely to report that financial contributions to the family were a reason for returning to work (47% of Arab women and 62% of Jewish women). Interestingly, Sharabi (2010a, 2010b) found that Arab Israelis placed greater importance on their work role than Jewish Israelis, perhaps as a result of greater difficulty finding employment as a minority and the possibility for social mobility achieved through employment.

Other researches highlight the role expansion as well as role conflict among employed Arab Israeli women. A qualitative study comprised of interviews with five Druze women who are school principals in Israel supports the prediction that working Arab women perceive themselves as groundbreakers and role models for other Arab women (Abbas & Court, 2013). These women stressed the critical importance of familial support for enabling them to succeed professionally. On the other hand, they noted difficulties related to cultural disapproval and the ingenuity they needed to meet traditional expectations for women in their culture while also meeting the demands of their profession. For example, one principal described the internal window in her office that enabled her to meet the cultural prohibition against being alone with non-familial males while also meeting the need for confidential discussions with male colleagues or students behind closed doors. Druze women who choose to work may pay a particularly high price for their entry into the workforce; women who work outside their village face a religious ban for doing so and are prohibited from being members of the Druze religious community. Given this clear religious sanction and exclusion based on their employment, not surprisingly, these women reported experiencing disapproval and rejection from other members of their community who openly disapproved of their employment. For these women, support within the family may be particularly critical in giving them the strength needed to go against strong cultural prohibitions against women's employment. Other research suggests that Israeli Druze adolescents (Abbas & Pataki, 2014) and women pursuing higher education (Weiner-Levy, 2006, 2009) also rely heavily on family support to help navigate the competing demands of traditional Druze society and modern aspirations.

## 2.2 Contributions of the Current Study

Based on the limited body of research on working women in traditional cultures, we chose to examine the impact of juggling multiple roles on women in a non-Western, traditional culture. Whereas existing research in Western societies tends to focus on roles associated with marriage, parenthood, and employment, we included women's roles as a member of a distinct religious community and minority group within Israel. This community role was included in our study because of the interdependence and greater centrality of religion and community life within Arab villages (Sharabi, 2010a; Weiner-Levy, 2009).

Specifically, we measured the perceived importance of each role (parent, employee, and community member) as well as the extent to which each role was perceived to benefit or hurt the respondents' ability to perform the other three social roles. We also investigated the experience of both positive and negative affect (e.g. pride and satisfaction versus guilt and anger) that may be associated with possessing multiple roles (Abbas & Court, 2013; Weiner-Levy, 2009), as well as perceived control and feelings of stress that may be a consequence of role conflict (Brook et al., 2008).

## 2.3 Predictions

Overall, we expected to see greater evidence of role expansion than role conflict with the exception of two different areas in working women's lives. One area was women's ability to juggle the demands of a career and motherhood, a struggle that may be universally experienced by working mothers regardless of culture (Milkie & Peltola, 1999; Simon, 1995). The other area was women's ability to juggle the competing expectations of a traditional community with the professional demands of a career. This may be an area of role conflict that is unique to women living in traditional societies and one that may exacerbate feelings of stress and guilt associated with employment. Last, we predicted that a greater sense of role expansion would be related to stronger feelings of pride and satisfaction, whereas a greater sense of role conflict would be related to more guilt, anger, and stress, and less perceived control.

## 3. Materials and Method

### 3.1 Participants

A total of 287 Arab Israeli women participated in this study. Survey distribution and data collection were done by 16 undergraduate students recruited to conduct research about women living in traditional societies within the framework of a seminar course. Among those distributing the surveys, purposive sampling was used to identify employed women in Arab villages located in one of three areas of Arab settlement in northern Israel (in the upper Galilee, western Galilee, and Nazareth regions). The mean age of the participants was 39.10 years ( $SD = 8.86$ ). Nearly all were married and had children (90.8% and 89.5%, respectively). The average number of children was 2.48 ( $SD = 0.32$ ).

### **3.2 Procedure**

Researchers collected the data alone or in pairs at each participant's home. The researchers asked participants to complete an anonymous survey designed to examine the experiences of Arab women in their families, communities, and careers and explained that all participation was voluntary and participants could ask questions and/or decline to complete the survey at any time. All surveys were collected from the participants' homes within three days.

In addition to demographic questions, which were presented first, the questionnaires included the measures described below. We describe dependent variables, that is, affect, stress, and life satisfaction measures last; however, participants actually completed them prior to completing the measures of role importance, role expansion, and role conflict.

### **3.3 Measures**

#### **a. Role Importance**

Three items assessed how important participants felt each of the three roles was. The roles included being a mother, having a career, and being a part of the Arab community. Responses were provided on a scale of 1 (not at all important) to 10 (extremely important).

#### **b. Role Conflict and Role Expansion**

Six items assessed the extent to which each of the three roles (i.e., being a mother, having a career, and being part of the Arab community) hurt or had a negative impact on each of the other two roles. For example, participants indicated the extent to which having a career hurt or had a negative impact on being a mother and the extent to which having a career hurt or had a negative impact on being part of the Arab community. Participants indicated their responses to each item on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 10 (a lot). We analyzed responses to the individual items and also averaged them to form an indicator of overall role conflict; Cronbach's alpha for the overall index was .85. Six items similarly assessed the extent to which each of the three roles benefited or had a positive impact on each of the other two roles. Participants indicated their responses on the same 10-point scale. We again analyzed responses to the individual items and also averaged them to form an indicator of overall role expansion; Cronbach's alpha for the overall index was .81.

Perceived control (vs. stress), negative affect, and satisfaction. Participants completed 11 items intended to assess emotions, stress, and life satisfaction. They were asked to respond to each item based on their experiences during the last month and provide responses on a scale of 1 (Almost never) to 7 (Always).

Five items assessed how often during the last month participants felt proud, confident, pleased, guilty, and angry. Four items came from the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). Participants indicated the extent to which, during the last month, they: 1) were able to control important things in their life, 3) felt on top of things, 2) felt nervous and stressed, and 4) found that they could not cope with



all the things they had to do. Two items assessed how satisfied participants were with their families and their careers .

We conducted exploratory factor analyses, using maximum likelihood estimation and Promax rotations, of responses to the 11 items. Examination of the scree plots, eigenvalues greater than 1, and interpretability of the factors suggested three factors. Two items (i.e., nervous and stressed, not able to cope) were eliminated based on low communality estimates (.12 and .17, respectively). We averaged across responses to items within each factor to form indices of perceived control (proud, confident, control, and on top of things;  $\alpha = .70$ ), negative affect (guilty, angry;  $\alpha = .87$ ), and satisfaction (satisfaction with family, satisfaction with career, and pleased;  $\alpha = .77$ ).

Open-ended responses from participants regarding multiple roles. At the end of the survey, all participants were given the opportunity to respond to an open-ended question asking about their personal experience fulfilling multiple social roles such as being a mother, wife, daughter, and employee. A final open-ended question asked participants whether there was anything else they would like the researchers to know about their experiences or to consider for future research. After completing the survey, all participants were thanked for their participation.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Quantitative Analyses

We began by examining the relationships among measures. The simple correlations are reported in Table 1. Note that the measures of role expansion were generally more strongly correlated with each other than with measures of role conflict and vice versa, suggesting that role expansion and role conflict assess distinct constructs. In addition, participants who perceived a role to be more important experienced greater role expansion than role conflict. However, the reason appears to differ as a function of Role Type. That is, participants who perceived motherhood and Arab community roles as more important perceived those roles as providing greater expansion but not less conflict; this was less true for career roles. Indeed, participants who perceived the roles of their careers as more important tended to perceive their careers as providing less conflict, but not necessarily greater expansion.

Participants who judged motherhood as more important and those who judged being an Arab community member as more important reported greater control and greater satisfaction. Perhaps surprisingly, participants who judged their careers as more important reported less negative affect and greater control. Further, participants who experienced greater role expansion versus role conflict judged themselves as having more control and greater control was associated with less negative affect and greater satisfaction.

We also examined the correlations of our primary measures with participant age and number of children. Older participants and those who had more children experienced greater role expansion than role conflict. Not surprisingly, older participants

also had significantly more children. We therefore separately regressed perceived control, negative affect, and satisfaction on overall role expansion (i.e., averaged across role type) and overall role conflict (again, averaging across role type), controlling for age and number of children. These analyses indicated only that role expansion was associated with greater perceived control,  $F(1, 281) = 6.05, p = .015$ . All other  $p$  values were greater than .10. Consistent with the simple correlations, this effect appears to have been driven by the motherhood role expansion as separate analyses for each role type revealed only that role expansion for motherhood was associated with greater perceived control,  $F(1, 279) = 7.24, p = .008$ . We also conducted analyses of negative affect and satisfaction separately for each role type. These analyses revealed only that greater role conflict for Arab community roles was associated with greater negative affect,  $F(1, 282) = 3.84, p = .05$ . Again, this relationship is consistent with the simple correlations. All other  $p$ -values were greater than .10.

Mean differences in ratings of role importance, expansion, and conflict. Participants' ratings of role importance, role expansion, and role conflict were analyzed as a function of role type (motherhood vs. career vs. Arab community member)—all within participants' variables. Role importance was examined in one analysis; this analysis was thus a one-way repeated measures ANOVA. A second analysis tested differences in ratings of role expansion versus conflict by role type and was thus a  $2 \times 3$  repeated measures ANOVA. The means are reported in Table 2.

Role importance. The analysis yielded a main effect of role type,  $F(1, 568) = 65.18, p < .001$ . Focused tests indicated that participants rated their motherhood roles as more important than their career roles,  $F(1, 285) = 11.49, p = .001, \eta^2 = .04$ , and more important than their Arab community roles,  $F(1, 286) = 106.43, p < .001, \eta^2 = .27$ . Participants also rated their career roles as more important than their Arab community roles,  $F(1, 285) = 56.82, p < .001, \eta^2 = .17$ .

Role expansion versus role conflict. This analysis revealed a main effect of role expansion versus role conflict,  $F(1, 284) = 114.47, p < .001$ , and a marginal main effect of Role Type,  $F(2, 568) = 2.42, p = .09$ . The overall Role Expansion versus Role Conflict X Role Type interaction was not significant,  $F(2, 568) = 1.39, p = .25$ . Participants generally reported greater role expansion than role conflict. Further, and consistent with the tests of the main effects, focused tests revealed no evidence that role expansion versus conflict differed as a function of role type, all  $ps > .14$ .

We also examined whether the effects of Role Expansion versus Conflict and Role Type (both within participants factors) differed as a function of overall role importance (a continuous between-participants predictor). The analysis revealed an effect of role importance,  $F(1, 283) = 8.37, p = .004$ , indicating that ratings were generally higher for participants who perceived the roles as more important, a Role Expansion versus Conflict x Importance interaction,  $F(1, 283) = 25.48, p < .001$ , and a Role Expansion versus Conflict x Role Type x Importance interaction,  $F(2, 566) = 6.46, p = .002$ . Participants who perceived their roles as generally more (vs. less) important experienced greater role expansion versus conflict. Focused tests examining the latter interaction indicated that participants

who perceived the roles as more (vs. less) important experienced greater role expansion (vs. conflict) for careers than for motherhood,  $F(1, 283) = 13.81, p < .001$ , and for their careers than for their Arab community roles,  $F(1, 283) = 4.92, p = .027$ . Experiences of role expansion versus conflict for motherhood versus Arab community roles did not depend on overall role importance,  $p = .23$ .

Additional analyses examining each of the three types of role importance indicated that the above effects were driven by participants' ratings of motherhood and Arab community role importance rather than career importance; the effects of career importance were consistently non-significant. Interestingly, then, participants who rated motherhood as more important experienced greater role expansion versus conflict for careers than for motherhood,  $F(1, 283) = 14.30, p < .001$ . Similarly, those who rated Arab community roles as more important experienced greater role expansion versus conflict for careers than for Arab community roles,  $F(1, 283) = 3.82, p = .052$ .

#### 4.1.1 Summary

Participants rated motherhood as most important and Arab community roles as least important and they experienced greater role expansion than role conflict overall. The latter effect depended on both role type and role importance. That is, participants who perceived their motherhood and Arab community roles as more important experienced greater role expansion (vs. role conflict) for careers than for motherhood and Arab community roles.

#### 4.2 Qualitative Analysis of Participant Comments

At the end of the survey, 70 out of the 287 women (24.39%) responded to the open-ended questions asking about their personal experiences and for participant feedback. Not surprisingly, the themes that emerged in these comments reflected the focus of our survey and the theoretical constructs of role expansion and role conflict. All comments were easily categorized as reflecting benefits, costs, or a mixture of both benefits and costs associated with possessing multiple roles. Some women noted experiences that they perceived as being unique to their Arab community; others described their experiences as being universal to all working women. The comments highlighted below were selected as representative examples to provide an overall sense of the women's experiences in their own words.

Reflecting the benefits of role expansion, many women described feelings of personal fulfillment, pride, and satisfaction experienced by balancing multiple roles. One woman wrote: *"It is the best feeling ever to be a mother. I have a good husband and healthy children living in a warm atmosphere. At the same time, I work and contribute to the community. This makes me feel satisfied."* And another: *"I consider my career as a highly important part of my life, especially that I am a mother that supports her family...I'm accomplishing my goals while being a mother and a wife."* Also highlighting role expansion, several women described the positive effect their career has on their children. One wrote: *"Being a working mother has taught my children to be independent and it made me feel confident."* Others focused on what

they had learned personally: *"To have a career, to be a mother and a wife- it helped me to learn how to be in control even in times of stress. I learned how to organize my time and my priority toward my family and my career"* and *"This has helped me to depend on myself"*.

In contrast, other women described role conflict and difficulty in balancing multiple roles: *"It's hard to be everything at once... I find it hard to be a mother, wife, and employee all at the same time."* Another described: *"Working inside and outside (the) home is very difficult. In addition, the husband and the children's demands make me feel more stressed and takes all the time. I feel that I don't have time for myself."* Other women's comments described a mix of both positive and negative consequences such as: *"It was never easy playing the three parts all together, but it was also inspiring to see how I can succeed in what I want"*, and *"I love my job, and I'm proud of what I've accomplished in my career... however, there is a lot of stress that we have to deal with."*

Many women commented on the impact of being a part of the Arab community. For some, this impact was perceived as being either beneficial or as improving over time: *"Being an Arab woman supports me as a wife-mother-worker. I am glad to say that many Arab women are succeeding to manage their lives with different roles and lots of responsibility."* Another wrote: *"Being an Arab woman is not that easy, but it's easier than it was before. This generation is learning how to focus on the things they want, not what others want. I'm still attached to most of the society's commitments, but less than the older generations."*

In contrast, others described challenges: *"It requires us as Arab women to work so hard in order to succeed... Our society demands so many different responsibilities, and we care so much about how the society sees us", "being a mother, a wife and a working woman makes me feel exhausted. All the traditions increase these feelings... visiting people on holidays and such traditions makes me feel more stressed,"* and *"I wish I could achieve more in my career without getting married and having children but I doubt that I can achieve my goals as a single woman in our society."* For others, being an Arab woman was seen as having a mix of both positive and negative consequences: *"The fact that I am an Arab woman contributes to a huge determination. However, I feel that being an Arab woman is holding me back from developing in my career"* and *"it is not easy to work in Israel especially if we are Arabs. However, having a career makes Arab women feel satisfied since this motivates them to progress and develop."* Other women noted that the experience of balancing work and family is universal for women and/or unrelated to their Arab identity: *"I think that this research should not be connected to the Arab society. The fact that I'm an Arab woman does not affect the way I manage things in my life,"* and *"it doesn't matter if I am an Arab or not. I'm an Arab woman who is satisfied of what I have accomplished, and I know that whether I was an Arab or not, women will still face the difficulties of taking care of everything. It's a gender issue."*

#### **4.2.1 Summary**

Overall, these comments indicate that the Arab women who participated in this study shared similar experiences with working women in Western cultures. In contrast, the experiences of these women are largely inconsistent with the more negative stereotypes related to maternal employment found among women with traditional gender ideologies

in the United States (Goldberg & Lucas-Thompson, 2014). Their responses indicate that the theoretical constructs examined in this study were meaningful and made sense to the participants within their own cultural context; many of the comments seemed to convey strong emotional reactions and personal details. The insight provided by this personal feedback provides depth to the quantitative findings and supports the position that work-family balance is an important issue for working women regardless of country or culture.

## 5. Discussion

The overall results of this study support our prediction that women who balance multiple social roles within traditional cultures are likely to benefit through role expansion even amidst strong cultural prohibitions related to women's employment outside the home. Importantly, this study adds to the existing literature on the impact of women's employment by extending this literature to a non-Western, traditional society where women's transition into the workforce is relatively recent and non-normative. Consistent with other research on the transition to parenthood (Feldman et al., 2001), we found that Arab women with children placed the most importance on their role as mothers. On the other hand, we did not find support for our prediction that being a mother and having a career would be an area of greater role conflict due to competing demands and limited resources for juggling parenthood and careers. Consistent with their other social roles, Arab women reported experiencing more role expansion between their parenting and career roles than role conflict.

Second to motherhood, the women in this study indicated that their careers were more important to them than their role in the Arab community. Contrary to our predictions, they also reported that their careers benefited their role in the community more than their careers hurt their role in the community. We had predicted that employment would be seen as hurting women's engagement within the community due to strong cultural prohibitions against women's employment, including an explicit religious ban for Druze women; this was not the case, however. The finding that women reported their careers as benefitting both their parenting and community roles may reflect the heightened sense of importance they attribute to serving as a societal trailblazer and role models of achievement for working women in their communities and within their families. This pride is evidenced in many of their comments and is consistent with past research on the experience of women school principals in the Arab community (Abbas & Court, 2013). Interestingly, the women who perceived parenting and community roles as more important were those who also reported greater role expansion (versus role conflict) for their careers than for motherhood and their community roles.

While the quantitative results of this study provide strong evidence of role expansion, the comments participants wrote to provide a more nuanced account of their experiences as working mothers. As many of the women noted, balancing work, family, and community roles can be stressful and leave little time for anything else. Also,

important to note, even though these women reported experiencing more benefits than costs from juggling multiple roles, their responses also provided evidence that they do experience difficulty and stress. Interestingly, the importance women placed on their social roles seemed to mitigate this effect such that higher ratings of role importance were associated with a sense of greater control, lower stress, and more satisfaction.

The possibility of a positivity bias on the part of these women who are active participants in breaking down the traditional barriers for women in their culture is one limitation of the current study. Perhaps, these women are the ones who feel the need to justify their employment and personal decisions most strongly to prove that the costs of women's employment are limited and outweighed by the benefits. On the other hand, this bias in and of itself may speak to the importance these women place on transforming their society's view of women through their own actions and entry into the workplace. Ultimately, this sense of importance may be one of the most fulfilling aspects of their employment status, and a benefit that working women in non-traditional societies may be less likely to experience in countries where women's employment is the norm.

This research is interesting to consider in light of the recent study by Goldberg and Lucas-Thompson (2014) who found that although traditional gender ideologies in the United States predicted more negative beliefs related to the effects of maternal employment on children, women who immigrated to the United States had more positive views. Goldberg and Lucas-Thompson suggest that the high value placed on achievement among new American immigrants may be one reason why these women perceived the impact of maternal employment on children in a more positive light. Achievement, as well as social mobility, may be similarly valued among the women in our study given their non-traditional career aspirations and ongoing participation in societal change. Both studies suggest that predicting beliefs related to maternal employment requires more than simply measuring adherence to traditional versus egalitarian gender role ideologies. As found among our participants, the actual experience of working women in traditional societies may be significantly more positive than research conducted in Western societies would suggest and for reasons that are unique to the aspirations and goals of this population.

## 6. Recommendations and Conclusion

Future research would benefit by including a comparison group of Arab women who are fulfilling their traditional gender roles and not challenging the status-quo for women by seeking employment outside the home. Interestingly, these may be the women who are making other women's employment more accessible. By providing child care (Feldman, Masalha, & Nadem, 2001) and meeting the needs of the extended family, the women who stay at home may be the support system that enables other Arab women to pursue their education and careers. As one woman in our study wrote; *"Being an Arab woman and having such a good and warm relationship with the family-relatives- has helped me with my career."* Yet, ironically, as more women transition into the workforce over time, this

support system may become thin, and working women may begin to experience more stress related to juggling the multiple demands of a home and a career.

Cultures are time and place specific, and, though working women in traditional societies may share parallel challenges, the rules and nuances of cultural context are significant in how women achieve work-life balance (Noorani & Shakir, 2021). Thus, future research into working women in Israeli Arab society should take careful note of the details of family life, community norms, and workplace realities.

Additional research is also needed to determine whether there is a corresponding shift in men's gender roles within the Arab family such that husbands take on more parenting and housekeeping responsibilities when their wives transition into breadwinners. This may be another area of tension and potential realignment of gender roles as women's participation in the workforce grows. As recently investigated by Hochschild and Machung (2012) among families in the United States, the way in which husbands perceive the benefits and costs of their wives' employment is another interesting aspect to consider in light of its impact on the experience of married, working women everywhere. Women in this study reported mixed experiences regarding support from their husbands. As one wrote: *"Being married has actually helped me in achieving what I want. My husband has been there for me, and he has always supported me. He believed in my ability to develop in my career"* whereas another commented: *"Being a mother, a wife, and a worker is not easy at all. You have to keep working all the time and do everything by yourself especially when you do not get any help from your partner."* Future research in traditional, Middle Eastern cultures should examine the impact of husbands' gender ideologies and beliefs regarding maternal employment as well as the relative support they provide for working wives and their children.

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Appendix

Table 1

*Correlations among Measures*

	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
															Role importance
															Mother .1
															Career .2
														.13	Arab community .3
															Role expansion
															Mother .4
															Career .5
														.49	Arab community .6
															Role conflict
															Mother .7
															Career .8
															Arab community .9
															Role expansion vs. role conflict
															Expansion–conflict difference .10
															Dependent measures
															Negative affect .11
															Perceived control .12
															Satisfaction .13
															Demographic measures
															Age .14
															Number of children .15

Table 2

*Mean Ratings of Role Importance, Role Expansion, and Role Conflict*

Conflict	Expansion	Importance	Role type
4.95	6.53	9.18	Mother
(2.51)	(1.90)	(1.81)	
4.82	6.56	8.75	Career
(2.79)	(2.36)	(1.77)	
4.54	6.49	7.51	Arab community
(2.67)	(2.51)	(2.41)	
4.77	6.53	8.48	Total

*Note.* Standard deviations are in parentheses.

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