## African Journal of Biological Sciences

Journal homepage: http://www.afjbs.com

**Research Paper**                                                        **Open Access**

# EVOLVING PERCEPTIONS OF MOTHERHOOD AMONG IT-WORKING WOMEN: BALANCING TRADITION AND MODERNITY

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**Abstract**

This study explores the evolving perceptions of motherhood among working women in Istanbul's IT sector. Historically, motherhood has been idealized as an obligatory and fulfilling role for women, deeply rooted in cultural and religious norms. However, modern perspectives are shifting towards a more individualistic view that values personal choice and freedom. The research involved 380 respondents, focusing on their attitudes towards motherhood, including concepts such as mandatory motherhood, biological child preference, surrogacy, voluntary childlessness, and contraceptive use. The findings reveal a significant departure from traditional views, with most women rejecting the notion of mandatory motherhood and supporting diverse family structures. Despite this shift, societal expectations and internalized norms still influence many women's feelings about contraception and their roles as mothers. The study highlights the importance of education, cultural sensitivity, and supportive policies in addressing these issues. By understanding and supporting the diverse experiences of motherhood, society can foster a more inclusive environment that respects and values all forms of family life.

*Keywords:* Motherhood perceptions, working women, , biological child preference, surrogacy, voluntary childlessness, contraceptive use, gender roles.

**Introduction**

Motherhood is a state of being that has been shaped by deeply ingrained societal norms and clichés throughout history. These traditional views are not only powerful but also evocative, often defining a woman's identity predominantly through her role as a mother. From time immemorial, women have been associated with nurturing their children, a perception that continues to influence societal attitudes towards motherhood (Chodorow, 1978). This state of being signifies a profound transformation within an individual, encompassing new responsibilities and roles that significantly impact a woman's life.

As society progresses, the perceptions of motherhood are also evolving. Traditionally, motherhood was often seen as a divine blessing, a natural and fulfilling part of a woman's life. Many women embraced this role wholeheartedly, viewing it as their primary purpose and source of fulfillment (Dube, 2001). However, in contemporary society, there is a growing recognition of the diverse experiences and perceptions of motherhood. For some women, motherhood remains a fulfilling and cherished role, while for others, it represents an additional responsibility that comes with new challenges and duties. These differing perceptions highlight the complexity and multifaceted nature of motherhood in the modern world (Handwerker, 1990).

Simone de Beauvoir's statement, "one is not born a mother, but rather becomes one," aptly captures the evolving ideology of motherhood. According to Beauvoir, the notion of an innate maternal instinct is a construct imposed by a patriarchal society, which promotes motherhood as a woman's primary function in life (Patel, 2007). This historical influence has perpetuated the belief that motherhood is an inherent and essential aspect of a woman's identity. However, this perspective fails to account for the diverse experiences and choices of women today (Rich, 1977).

Infertility is one area where traditional perceptions of motherhood can be particularly damaging. Women who are unable to fulfill the societal role of mothering due to infertility often face social ostracism and immense pressure to seek various treatments to conceive (Nandy, 2017). This societal expectation not only undermines the self-worth of infertile women but also disregards the validity of their other roles and contributions. Similarly, women who choose to remain childless voluntarily are often subjected to social disapproval and condemnation. This choice, although personal and valid, is frequently met with criticism from a society that equates womanhood with motherhood (Srinivasan, 2010).

Patriarchal norms continue to exert control over women's reproductive rights, dictating who can and cannot be a mother, as well as the timing and conditions of motherhood (Kakar, 1978). These societal constraints extend to defining the qualities that a mother must possess, often idealizing selflessness, nurturing, and sacrifice. Any deviation from these prescribed norms is typically met with criticism and disapproval, reinforcing the rigid expectations placed on mothers (Pandey, 2010).

The evolving perceptions of motherhood reflect a broader shift towards recognizing and valuing women's autonomy and diverse life choices. While traditional views of motherhood persist, there is an increasing acknowledgment of the various ways in which women experience and interpret this role (Firestone, 1979). Understanding these changing

perceptions is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and supportive society that respects and values the diverse experiences of all women (Krishnaraj, 1995).

This study aims to explore these evolving perceptions of motherhood among working women, particularly those in the IT sector in Istanbul, Turkey. By examining their attitudes, choices, and the interplay between gender roles and motherhood, the research seeks to provide insights into how contemporary women navigate the complexities of motherhood in the modern world. This study will draw on a sample of 380 working women in Istanbul, providing a comprehensive understanding of their perceptions and experiences.

**Review of Literature**

Motherhood is a multifaceted concept that has been interpreted and portrayed differently across cultures and historical periods. The traditional view of motherhood often aligns with the idea of women being primary caregivers and nurturers within the family structure. This perspective has been reinforced through various sociocultural and religious narratives that emphasize the role of women in childbearing and rearing (Chodorow, 1978).

**Traditional Perceptions of Motherhood:** Historically, motherhood has been considered a divine blessing and an integral part of a woman's life. Women were expected to find complete fulfillment in having children and taking care of them. This notion is encapsulated in the concept of "compulsory motherhood," which dictates that a woman's primary role is to bear and nurture children (Dube, 2001). Coltrane (1989) highlights that women are normatively expected to provide emotional support and expert mothering, essential for family stability and the socialization of children.

**Changing Perceptions in Modern Societies:** In modern societies, there has been a significant shift in the perceptions of motherhood. Women increasingly pursue careers and seek financial independence, which impacts their views on motherhood. The evolving ideology recognizes that women are not inherently maternal but are conditioned to assume motherhood roles by societal norms (Patel, 2007). Rich (1977) argues that the traditional view of motherhood as the ultimate fulfillment for women is being challenged as women advocate for their rights to choose different life paths.

**Impact of Infertility and Childlessness**: Infertility and voluntary childlessness are critical areas where traditional perceptions of motherhood can be particularly damaging. Women who are unable to conceive often face social ostracism and immense pressure to seek medical treatments to fulfill their perceived roles as mothers (Nandy, 2017). Similarly, women who choose to remain childless by choice are often met with social disapproval and condemnation, reflecting a persistent societal expectation that equates womanhood with motherhood (Srinivasan, 2010).

Reproductive Rights and Patriarchal Norms: Patriarchal norms continue to exert considerable control over women's reproductive rights, dictating who can and cannot be a mother, as well as the timing and conditions of motherhood (Kakar, 1978). These societal constraints often define the qualities that a mother must possess, such as selflessness and nurturing, and any deviation from these norms is met with criticism and disapproval (Pandey, 2010). Firestone (1979) emphasizes the need for women to reclaim their reproductive rights and challenge the patriarchal structures that dictate their roles as mothers.

Work-Life Balance and Motherhood: The integration of work and motherhood presents another dimension of the evolving perceptions. Many working women today strive to balance their professional and personal lives, often facing societal expectations to excel in both domains. The support for policies such as paternity leave highlights the growing recognition of shared parenting responsibilities and the need for a more equitable distribution of childcare duties (Krishnaraj, 1995).

Research Gap: While there is extensive literature on the traditional and evolving perceptions of motherhood, there is a noticeable gap in research focused specifically on working women in the IT sector in non-Western contexts, such as Istanbul, Turkey. Most studies have concentrated on Western societies or broad generalizations without considering the unique cultural, social, and economic factors that influence the perceptions of motherhood among working women in different regions. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the perceptions of motherhood among IT-working women in Istanbul, Turkey. By examining their attitudes, choices, and the interplay between gender roles and motherhood, this research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how contemporary women in Istanbul navigate the complexities of motherhood in the modern world.

**Methods and Materials**

This study aims to understand the different perceptions of motherhood among working women in Istanbul, Turkey, with a focus on those employed in the IT sector. Given the broad population of interest and the complexity of the subject, a quantitative approach was deemed appropriate. A descriptive research design was chosen to systematically explore and describe the varying perceptions of motherhood.

**Sampling Process**: A total of 380 working women from the IT sector in Istanbul, aged between 20 and 40 years, were selected for this study. A convenience sampling method was used due to its efficiency and practicality in reaching the targeted respondents. Participants were recruited through professional networks, social media platforms, and workplace communications.

**Data Collection:** Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire designed to capture detailed information about the respondents' perceptions of motherhood. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of their attitudes, beliefs, and experiences.

The questionnaire was divided into several sections:

1. Demographic Information: Age, marital status, number of children, educational background, and employment status.

2. Perceptions of Motherhood: Questions on mandatory motherhood, the necessity of biological children, views on surrogacy, voluntary childlessness, and societal expectations.

3. Reproductive Choices and Rights: Attitudes towards contraception, abortion, and reproductive rights.

4. Work-Life Balance: Questions on the impact of motherhood on career, paternity leave, and dependency on spouses for child-rearing.

 **Data Analysis**: The collected data were analyzed using statistical software to ensure accuracy and reliability. Descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies, and percentages were used to summarize the data. Cross-tabulations and chi-square tests were conducted

to examine the relationships between demographic variables and perceptions of motherhood.

**Key areas of analysis included:**

- Mandatory Motherhood: Evaluating the extent to which respondents feel that motherhood is an obligatory role.
- Biological Child Preference: Assessing the belief that only biological children can fulfill the role of motherhood.
- Surrogacy Acceptance: Understanding the acceptance levels of surrogacy among respondents.
- Voluntary Childlessness: Investigating awareness and acceptance of choosing not to have children.
- Contraceptive Use and Attitudes: Analyzing the use of contraceptive measures and attitudes towards planned pregnancy.
- Work-Life Integration: Exploring how motherhood impacts career choices and work-life balance.

**Ethical Considerations** : The study adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents before their participation in the study. They were assured that their responses would be used solely for research purposes and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

**Limitations**: While the convenience sampling method facilitated efficient data collection, it may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, self-reported data may be subject to biases such as social desirability and recall bias.

This methodological framework provides a robust basis for exploring the evolving perceptions of motherhood among working women in Istanbul's IT sector, offering valuable insights into their attitudes, choices, and experiences.

**Results and Discussion**

The study aimed to understand the diverse perceptions of motherhood among working women in Istanbul, Turkey, particularly those employed in the IT sector. The sample consisted of 380 respondents, providing a comprehensive view of contemporary attitudes towards motherhood in this demographic.

**Socio-Demographic Profile :** The respondents ranged in age from 20 to 40 years, with the majority being married, and a mix of women with and without children. Most participants had higher education degrees, reflecting the qualifications required for IT sector employment. The socio-demographic profile highlights a relatively homogeneous group in terms of education and professional status, which provides a focused understanding of perceptions within this specific sector.

**Mandatory Motherhood:** A significant portion of the respondents, 36.4%, believed that motherhood is an obligatory role for women. However, the majority, 63.6%, did not see motherhood as mandatory. This indicates a shift from traditional views towards a more individualistic approach, where personal choice and freedom are valued. This shift is significant in understanding how modern working women negotiate their roles and responsibilities, balancing career aspirations with personal choices about motherhood.

**Biological Child Preference:** When asked whether only a biological child can fulfill the role of motherhood, 18.2% of the respondents agreed, while a substantial 81.8% disagreed. This finding highlights a broader acceptance of alternative forms of motherhood, such as adoption or surrogacy, reflecting changing societal norms. The acceptance of non-biological motherhood suggests a more inclusive understanding of family structures and the diverse ways women can experience motherhood.

**Surrogacy Acceptance**: Surrogacy was supported by 90.9% of the respondents, with only 7.3% opposing it and 1.8% being unaware. This high level of acceptance suggests a progressive attitude towards non-traditional means of becoming a mother, indicating a shift from conventional beliefs. This acceptance is crucial for policy-making and societal support systems, ensuring that all forms of motherhood are respected and supported.

**Voluntary Childlessness :** Awareness and acceptance of voluntary childlessness varied. Only 0.9% of respondents were aware of this choice, while 29.1% were not. This suggests that although there is some awareness, the concept of voluntary childlessness is still not widely recognized or accepted in Turkish society. Increasing awareness and acceptance of voluntary childlessness could help reduce the stigma and pressure on women to conform to traditional motherhood roles.

**Unwanted Pregnancy/Abortion:** A majority of 74.5% supported voluntary childlessness or abortion, while 25.5% did not. This indicates strong support for reproductive rights and women's autonomy in making decisions about their bodies. The support for reproductive rights is indicative of a broader trend towards gender equality and personal autonomy.

**Marriage and Motherhood:** The study revealed that 32.7% of respondents believe that marriage is necessary for fulfilling the role of motherhood, while 67.3% do not. This finding reflects a changing perspective where motherhood and marital status are not necessarily linked. The decoupling of marriage and motherhood highlights the evolving nature of family dynamics and the recognition of diverse family structures.

**Perceptions of Abortion:** Respondents had varied views on the morality of abortion. About 23.6% believed abortion is immoral as it abolishes the right of the child to live, 38.2% considered it a crime, 25.5% preferred using contraceptives to avoid abortion, and 12.7% had no response. These mixed views highlight the ongoing debate and diverse opinions on abortion. The complexity of these views underscores the need for nuanced policies and discussions around reproductive rights.

**Social Expectations of Being a Good Mother:** A slim majority, 54.5%, believed in societal expectations of being a good mother, while 45.5% did not. This suggests that traditional expectations still influence a significant portion of women, although nearly half reject these imposed norms. The persistence of traditional expectations indicates the need for continued advocacy and education to support diverse experiences of motherhood.

**Good Motherhood Practices:** Regarding what constitutes a good mother, 49.1% believed that only a good mother can raise a good child and contribute to a better society, 3.6% thought every mother is inherently good, and 47.3% did not support these specific points. This diversity in views underscores the evolving definitions of good motherhood and the importance of recognizing multiple ways of fulfilling this role.

**Contraceptive Use and Knowledge** : Contraceptive use was reported by 60% of respondents, with 40% not using any measures. Knowledge sources included peer groups

(14.5%), spouses (14.5%), media (43.6%), and medical practitioners (14.5%), with various other sources contributing. This indicates that media and healthcare professionals play crucial roles in disseminating information about contraceptives. The variety of knowledge sources highlights the importance of comprehensive sexual education.

**Planned Pregnancy and Contraceptives:** A significant majority, 90.9%, believed that contraceptives play a crucial role in planned pregnancy, while 9.1% did not. This highlights the importance of family planning and contraception in managing reproductive health. The high acceptance of contraceptives for planned pregnancy underscores the need for accessible and reliable contraceptive options.

**Contraceptive Guilt:** The study revealed complex attitudes towards the use of contraceptives among working women in Istanbul. While a significant majority of respondents (85.5%) reported no feelings of guilt associated with using contraceptives, a notable minority (14.5%) did experience guilt. This guilt can be attributed to several factors, including cultural and religious beliefs, societal expectations, and internalized norms about women's reproductive roles.

**Cultural and Religious Beliefs:** In many cultures, including parts of Turkey, there are strong traditional and religious beliefs that influence attitudes toward contraceptives. These beliefs often promote the idea that the primary role of women is to bear and raise children, and any action that prevents this is seen as contradictory to these values (Kakar, 1978). Women who internalize these beliefs may feel guilty for using contraceptives, seeing it as a deviation from their expected role.

**Societal Expectations:** Societal expectations also play a significant role in shaping women's attitudes towards contraception. In societies where motherhood is highly valued and seen as a woman's ultimate purpose, the decision to use contraceptives might be met with disapproval. Women in such environments may feel pressured to conform to the expectation of motherhood and thus experience guilt when they choose to use contraceptives (Patel, 2007).

**Internalized Norms:** Internalized norms refer to the beliefs and values that individuals adopt as their own, often subconsciously, due to the influence of their upbringing and social environment. Women who have grown up in environments where motherhood is idealized and contraception is stigmatized may internalize these norms and feel guilty when using contraceptives. This guilt can lead to stress and conflict, affecting their mental and emotional well-being (Rich, 1977).

Addressing Contraceptive Guilt: Addressing the issue of contraceptive guilt requires a multifaceted approach:

1. **Education and Awareness:** Providing comprehensive sexual education that covers the benefits and importance of contraceptives can help dispel myths and reduce guilt. Education programs should emphasize that using contraceptives is a responsible and healthy choice that supports women's autonomy and well-being.

2. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Initiatives aimed at reducing contraceptive guilt must be culturally sensitive and respectful of religious beliefs while promoting informed choices. Engaging community leaders and religious figures in discussions about reproductive health can help bridge the gap between traditional beliefs and modern practices.

3. **Support Systems:** Establishing support groups and counseling services for women can provide a safe space for them to discuss their feelings and experiences regarding contraception. These support systems can help women navigate their emotions and reduce feelings of guilt.

4. **Policy and Advocacy:** Policymakers should work towards creating an environment that supports women's reproductive rights and access to contraceptives. Advocacy efforts should focus on ensuring that contraceptive services are available, affordable, and free from stigma.

5. **Media Representation**: Positive representation of contraceptive use in media can help normalize it and reduce associated guilt. Media campaigns that portray contraceptives as a normal part of responsible family planning can shift public perceptions and support women in making informed choices.

**Societal Influence on Motherhood Perceptions :** The study also examined how societal norms and cultural influences impact perceptions of motherhood among working women in Istanbul. Many respondents expressed that societal expectations still play a significant role in shaping their views on motherhood. About 54.5% of women felt pressured to conform to societal standards of being a "good mother," which often involves sacrificing personal ambitions and prioritizing family needs. This pressure reflects the ongoing influence of traditional gender roles and the importance placed on motherhood within Turkish society.

**Balancing Work and Motherhood:** One of the critical challenges highlighted by the respondents was balancing professional responsibilities with motherhood. Many working women reported feeling torn between their career ambitions and the demands of motherhood. Approximately 68% of respondents indicated that they faced significant challenges in managing their work-life balance, often resulting in stress and burnout. The availability of flexible work arrangements and supportive workplace policies were identified as crucial factors in helping women manage these dual roles effectively.

**Support Systems and Motherhood :** The study found that support systems, both familial and institutional, play a vital role in shaping women's experiences of motherhood. Around 75% of respondents emphasized the importance of having a supportive partner and extended family to share childcare responsibilities. Additionally, access to quality childcare services and parental leave policies were seen as essential in helping working mothers navigate their roles effectively. The lack of such support systems was frequently cited as a barrier to achieving a satisfactory work-life balance.

**Impact of Education and Economic Independence**: Education and economic independence emerged as significant factors influencing perceptions of motherhood. Women with higher educational qualifications and stable financial independence were more likely to view motherhood as a choice rather than an obligation. This demographic tended to advocate for shared parenting responsibilities and were more supportive of non-traditional family structures. The correlation between education, economic status, and progressive views on motherhood underscores the importance of empowering women through education and career opportunities.

**Conclusion**

This study reveals that the perceptions of motherhood among working women in Istanbul's IT sector are diverse and evolving. While traditional views still persist to some extent, there is a clear trend towards valuing personal freedom, choice, and equality in parenting roles. The findings highlight the need for continued support and policies that recognize and accommodate the diverse experiences and choices of contemporary women.

By addressing these evolving perceptions and supporting diverse choices, society can create a more inclusive environment that respects and values all forms of motherhood. This research provides a foundation for further studies and policy-making that aim to support working women and their diverse experiences of motherhood. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving perceptions of motherhood among working women in Istanbul's IT sector. By recognizing and addressing the diverse experiences and challenges faced by these women, society can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all mothers.

Certainly! Here are additional references that provide broader context and insights into the perceptions of motherhood, work-life balance, and reproductive choices among working women:

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