

Female Breadwinners: Resultant Feelings of Guilt and Shame

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This paper explores the constructs of shame and guilt, the role of these constructs in women fulfilling the role of breadwinners within their marital or family units, and the impact it had on the unit. The paper also explores the challenges that these women faced within the society, the workplace, their family unit and in their marriages. A phenomenological approach was adopted for this paper and was based on semi-structured interviews (n = 20) with South African women who were the main/sole breadwinners within their marital family unit. Two key findings emerged from this study, the first being the existence of ongoing guilt and shame in the lives of women fulfilling breadwinning roles, and the second being the direct link between the areas of a respondent's upbringing, respondent's personal beliefs, the acceptance of roles within a marriage, the joint collaboration of responsibilities between spouses, the level of open communication within the unit, and the resulting emotions such as guilt, shame, resentment, anger, frustration, stress and regret.

Historically, women have always been assigned the traditional role of the family caretaker (Marecek and Ballou, 1981); however, the new-norm of traditional family has both spouses working outside the home and a decrease in the wage gap between spouses (Crompton and Geran, 1995). Additionally, there is a growing proportion of working couples in which the wife earns more than the husband—

the female breadwinner. In a research on the female breadwinner, Meisenbach (2010) found that many of these women felt enormous guilt and resentment. Hofstede and Bond (1984) asserted that shame and guilt are related to cultural dimensions such as “masculinity vs. femininity”.

Gender socialization and stereotypes seem to play a role in expectations as to how women should behave (Barrett, 1995; and Cassidy and

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Davies, 2003). It would also appear that the gender socialization of women as nurturers and primary caregivers is enduring and instilling an embedded standard that women themselves want to uphold (April and Mooketsi, 2010). Consequently, women are under significant pressure when they attempt to put their emotional needs and personal fulfillment (joy and subjective wellbeing—instinctually individual) above their idealistic responsibilities and beliefs thereof as either a mother, wife or a caregiver (which are socially constructed) (Guendouzi, 2006). These sometimes unreasonable, stressful and fear-driven societal and cultural expectations induce differential self-views and can be fertile grounds for reoccurring guilt and shame (Thomson and Walker, 1989; and Lewis, 1992), exacerbated by feelings of inferiority, exhaustion, confusion, fearfulness and anger (Douglas and Michaels, 2004).

As the model of the female breadwinner grew, so the growth of the 'house husband' arose—husbands who are actively engaged in a role-reversal with their wives (Wentworth and Chell, 2001). It has been argued that the breadwinner role validates a man's masculinity (Lewis and Cooper, 1987) and that men who cannot fulfill the breadwinner role are not fully adult or not fully masculine (Meisenbach, 2010)—thus, seen as having their sexuality questioned. An essential part of a female breadwinner's experience is skillfully managing the male's identity by valuing his household contribution (if such contribution manifests), as they jointly experience the traditional emphasis of breadwinning as being a standard for male identity (Meisenbach, 2010).

Baumeister et al. (1994) explain that despite guilt's unsavory reputation and aversiveness, it may be valuable in helping people live together and maintain a successful interpersonal relationship. Guilt appears to serve multiple relationship enhancing factors, including

motivating people to treat their partners well and avoid transgressions, rectifying inequities and allowing less powerful partners to exert influence, and possibly redistributing emotional distress so as to bring the relationship partners into harmony (Baumeister et al., 1994). However, excessive guilt robs life of its joys and leads to social paralysis by damaging one's relationships, weakening bonds and alienating one from society (Katchadourian, 2010). Similarly, unrecognized and unmanaged shame has the potential to have a dehumanizing effect on the individual, leading to a toxic or debilitating outcome (Bradshaw, 2005).

The present study explores whether any constructs of guilt and shame exist within each individual of a marital unit, where the female is the higher earner and the main breadwinner within the unit. Furthermore, this study analyzes how this has impacted the individual and the marital unit as one.

A secondary purpose of the study is to sensitize individuals in a marital unit, or ones that are about to embark on forming a unit, of the existence of guilt and shame within a unit, should they be following a model that is not aligned with the traditional gender ideologies such as dual-earner, dual-career or egalitarian models.

Ultimately, this study aims to add more theory to the constructs of guilt and shame by using an inductive approach. The aim is "to draw generalizable inferences" from the observations made during the interview process and to describe how female breadwinners experience guilt and shame (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p. 14). Rather than assuming that all women fulfilling breadwinning roles experience guilt and shame, an inductive process using semi-structured interviews was chosen so that unknown groupings and new theory could emerge (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

In the first section, the paper highlights the key themes in the literature. The second section draws inductively on interviews with female breadwinners to show how, and why, guilt and shame exist. The third section examines the impact that these emotions have on a marital and/or family unit.

Guilt

Guilt is an important psychological mechanism through which an individual becomes socialized in the ways of her/his culture (Ausubel, 1955). Kubany and Watson (2003) define guilt as an unpleasant emotion accompanied by beliefs (and sometimes anger) that one should have thought, felt, or acted differently. Guilt, often borne out of personal values—incongruity—is a form of (aroused) emotional distress, common in behavioral decisions, but distinct from fear (Baumeister et al., 1994).

Kohlberg (1984) describes guilt in psychoanalytical terms of self-punishment and self-judgement. Guilt is one subcategory of distress over inequity; specifically, it is the distress suffered by people who are over-rewarded (Baumeister et al., 1994). Receiving less than one deserves may cause resentment, anger, envy and feelings of having been cheated. Receiving more than one deserves may cause guilt, especially in relation to other people who failed to be similarly over-rewarded (Hasselbrauck, 1986). Another source of guilt is survivor guilt. This concept makes it clear that people can feel guilty without having done anything wrong or, indeed, having not done much of anything at all (Baumeister et al., 1994).

Shame

Lewis (1992) simply defines shame as encompassing our whole self, the painful negative scrutiny of the self, particularly in the estimation of others (social emotion), causing embarrassment and exposure (Katchadourian, 2010). It occurs

either when others are present or when the presence of others is in the forefront of one's mind, even when reflecting alone on something one has done (Dryden, 1994); it generates a wish to hide, to disappear and even die—healthy shame, therefore, lets us know that we are limited (social sanction) (Bradshaw, 2005).

Smedes (1993), however, separates shame from embarrassment by claiming that embarrassment is felt when we are caught doing that which makes a person look bad, but we feel shame because “we think we are bad”. Potter-Efron and Potter-Efron (1989) found that there are five main sources of shame which explain how we view and experience it. These are: “our genetic and biological composition, our families of origin, society's expectations and demands, current relationships and ourselves” (p. 124).

Shame can also stem from the grandiose self's demands for perfection, which results in a devastating critique of one's own shortcomings. A further source of shame is association shame, which can be described as the shame related to letting down one's own reference group, and having brought them into disrepute through one's behavior (April and Mooketsi, 2010).

Gender Differences

Socially-constructed gender roles have gained recognition as important factors affecting the developmental, psychological, and relational wellbeing of men and women (Efthim et al., 2001). Women tend to score higher in private self-consciousness and can show greater increases in self-reflective concerns than men—and therefore women tend to experience greater levels of shame than men (Arndt and Goldenburg, 2004). Some authors have suggested that the experience of shame itself violates masculine norms, which relate to prohibitions regarding feeling exposed, vulnerable, and out of control. As a result, it is

possible that men, who are most committed to traditional male schemas, experience more discomfort with shame and turn to defensive maneuvers such as externalization to manage the painful effect (Efthim et al., 2001). Some of the common defenses of shame are denial, withdrawal, rage, perfectionism, arrogance, and exhibitionism (Potter-Efron and Potter-Efron, 1989).

Morrison (1989) found that shame in women tends to revolve around relational failures, whereas men are likely to be linked to failures in instrumental achievement. Lewis (1992) concurred that men are more apt to feel shame in situations involving task failure and sexual potency, whereas women are more likely to experience shame about physical attractiveness and failure in relationships. Connor (2001) puts it simply by stating that women are ashamed for breaking out, and men are ashamed for falling short.

Within Relationship

Guilt results when we neglect our partners, fail to fulfill our obligations to them, or act selfishly (Katchadourian, 2010). There are two emotional sources for feeling guilty within relationships, namely, emotional distress, where we share another person's pain, and exclusion anxiety, which results from the sense of alienation from the relationship partner we have hurt (Katchadourian, 2010). During a study conducted by Baumeister et al. (1994), the two most cited reasons for recent guilt within the respondents relationships were neglecting a partner, and failing to live up to a personal obligation. Hoffman (2000) asserted that this could be due to the fact that close relationships provide endless opportunities for hurting one's partner, which results in guilt.

Shame too can wreak havoc in intimate relationships by setting in motion a cycle of

escalating anger, externalization of blame, recurring shame and communication difficulty (Tangney and Dearing, 2002). Lansky (1987) suggested that when two shame-prone individuals become romantically involved, the result is often disastrous with partners interpreting each other's needs differently (Tangney and Dearing, 2002), often characterized by repeated rejection and frequent messages of overt humiliation (Fossum and Mason, 1986) as well as blame assignment (Tangney and Dearing, 2002).

Traditional Societal Roles

According to Williams and Ness (1998), the predominant 'ideal worker' is someone who enters a career immediately upon attaining the appropriate credentials, and then works his/her way up the corporate ladder, with no career interruptions and making substantial time commitments to the organization—leaving their familial contributions to be primarily financial. When this becomes the 'accepted norm/ideal' in the organization, it has important implications for women who aspire for executive roles (April and Dreyer, 2007).

Prentice and Carranza (2002) found that as a result of gender stereotypes, women in the paid workforce face competing role demands and conflicts that men do not. They found that society expects women to have certain personal qualities (e.g., cheerfulness, spousal care, child interest, compassion) that often are not the same ones that they need to perform work roles (aggression, competitiveness, and work commitment). According to Coltrane (2000), male tasks have more structure in terms of how they are to be completed and when they can be performed. In contrast, female tasks are ongoing, ill-defined, and must occur at certain times.

In contrast, for men the personal role quality expectations align with the work role quality

expectations (Prentice and Carranza, 2002) and rarely bare role conflicts. Additionally, employed mothers report a virtual absence of time for themselves or for recreation—a situation hardly conducive to mental health (Maracek and Ballou, 1981).

April and Dreyer (2007) explain that as women are starting to exceed their spouses career advancement, women are finding resistance at home. Therefore, issues of women workplace empowerment cannot be adequately addressed without considering the holistic empowerment of men, specifically within traditional family scenarios, i.e., share equally in child rearing, housework and home responsibilities (Hirschmann, 2008).

The Female Breadwinner

The traditional family with a breadwinning husband and stay-at-home wife has been transformed into a new norm, in which both spouses work outside the home (Crompton and Geran, 1995). At the same time, the gap between the employment incomes of spouses has narrowed. One effect of these two phenomena has been the growing proportion of working couples in which the wife earns more than the husband—the growth of the female breadwinner (Crompton and Geran, 1995).

Although many wives and mothers today enact the role of breadwinner for the family by earning an income more than the husband (Crompton and Geran, 1995), they do not necessarily define themselves as providers or breadwinners for their families, nor do their husbands relinquish the breadwinning roles and the psychological responsibility to provide (Helms et al., 2010). Many of these wives think of themselves as the secondary breadwinner, someone who contributes to the family's economic wellbeing but who is not centrally responsible for the

breadwinning. This is partly due to women trying to protect their spouses' masculinity (Medved, 2009). Potuchek (1992) claims that the breadwinner role is a family role, and not necessarily an occupational role. What makes a worker a breadwinner is the fact that the person is responsible for the financial support of the family. Thus, although in earning income wives may behave as breadwinners, it is the felt obligation to earn money for the financial support of the family that actually defines the employed wife and mother as a breadwinner or provider (Helms et al., 2010).

Bulanda (2011) reports that wives who work, and whose husbands are not in the labor force, have significantly higher marital conflict and lower levels of marital quality. This is due to women not having greater power in their marriages and instead actively downplaying their greater economic resources, and maintaining more traditional roles (Tichenor, 1999). Wives' personal wellbeing and family dynamics vary as a function of their provider-role attitudes (Helms et al., 2010).

Methodology

This research was modeled on a phenomenological study as it attempted to understand people's perceptions and perspectives of a particular situation (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005), and therefore employed an inductive and qualitative approach. Since there was limited subject matter relating to the relationship between female breadwinners and resultant guilt and shame, this study intended to contribute to theory rather than disprove theory. The researchers gathered data through semi-structured interviews, using open-ended questions, with 20 females fulfilling the breadwinner role within their marital/family unit.

A tested and approved interview questionnaire was setup and used to guide the

semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews were based on interview themes relevant to the case, derived from the literature review.

An interview practice session took place prior to the planned interviews. The pilot study was useful for highlighting potential problems with the methodology early on in the research, and enabled the researchers to check the feasibility of the chosen method for answering the research question (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005).

The interviews were conducted between July and September 2012. Ninety percent of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, while the rest were done by phone. Interviews ranged in duration from one to two hours, and were recorded and transcribed.

As advised by Giorgi and Giorgi (2003), a four-step process was followed to analyze the data: firstly, thorough reading and review of the manuscripts; secondly, categorization of the 'meaning units'; thirdly, analysis of the 'meaning units'; and fourthly, synthesis of insights into a coherent statement. The researchers fully anticipated that the process of analysis would not be a simple one, given the amount of data which would be available. Therefore, Strauss and Corbin's (1990) advice was taken, which was to use a coding system to bring order, structure and meaning to the raw data, followed by mapping out relationships between emerging categories of data in a systematic fashion.

Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) was used for data analysis, particularly Atlas/ti. Cambra-Fierro and Wilson (2010) indicate that there are a number of advantages to using data analysis software, which far outweigh the disadvantages. These include data storage, indexing and retrieval; graphical display of empirical data; and coding and recoding of data (Cambra-Fierro and Wilson, 2010, p. 18). Through the use of this software, the "computer

takes over the manual tasks associated with the coding process", that is, "the physical task of writing marginal codes, making photocopies of transcripts or field notes, cutting out chunks of text relating to a code, and pasting them together" (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p. 603). However, the researcher still had a role in this process, as the researcher had to still interpret the data, code and retrieve the data (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

Findings

A majority of participants were in the '25 to 35 years' age bracket. The industries that the participants came from varied across oil and gas, financial services, FMCG, retail, public and private health, management consulting, advisory, and media with the majority of them being in specialist or middle management roles. Forty-five percent of the participants had been married for five years or less, and 35% were married for 10 years or more.

Twenty-five percent of the participants' spouses were unemployed, of which three were by choice and the other two due to market circumstances. Fifty percent of the participants' spouses were self-employed, with the remainder 25% being employed by companies and organizations.

Seventy-five percent of the participants had children, with 30% of them having just one child, 30% of them with two children, and 15% of them having three or more children.

Fifty percent of the participants entered into their marriage knowing they were, and would be, the higher earner, and have continued to be the female breadwinner. The other 50% of the participants have been in the reverse situation, with their spouses being the breadwinner sometime during their marriage and then changing due to circumstances.

Seventy percent of the participants brought home 70% or more of the household income,

with 65% of them paying for the majority of the expenses in the family, and one of them splitting the expenses equally between herself and her spouse. The other 30% of the participants generated 55-65% of the household income and covered the majority of the expenses. There was one exception in this study, where the spouse covered the majority of the expenses despite the female earning 65% of the household income.

Seventy codes emerged from the interviews, which were grouped into eight family codes during the grouping process: Being a Female Breadwinner, Sacrifices of a Female Breadwinner, Influence and Pressure, Functioning as a Unit, Support, Manifestations of Guilt and Shame, Other Resulting Emotions, and Dealing with Guilt and Shame.

Being a Female Breadwinner

A majority of the respondents were comfortable being female breadwinners; however, they expressed factors of stress. As one interviewee said:

Ultimately, it's not to say that I have an issue with the fact that he earns less. That's not an issue. It's just that, are you making an effort to do more, because I'm making the effort, I'm growing all the time.

Those women, who entered their marriage with full understanding of the setup and the associated sacrifices, were able to manage their expectations much better. As one woman shared:

I knew what I was getting myself into when I married him. Obviously, there are certain things I can't have, but those are nice-to-haves. I don't have to have it. I could have been driving a Merc[edes Benz]...or living in Plattekleo of [upscale suburb], but ... those are just material things, versus the love, respect and trust I'm getting. You can't have it all.

Many of the women felt that they would not be able to be a stay-at-home mother or wife. One of the interviewees stated:

I think that my husband did a far better job with the kids when they were little. I think he's got a lot more patience and he's a lot stricter. So I think, regarding the kids, [that] our kids were better off having him at their small stage.

Some of the women expressed that their spouses did not have a problem with them being the main breadwinners, but they felt as though they had let their spouse down. Two of the respondents shared that their spouses actually preferred them to work instead of staying at home, as they had happier wives. All of the women and their spouses were actively taking steps to change the setup to have the male spouse contribute more, but not necessarily take over the breadwinner role.

Despite the stated pressures of being a female breadwinner, these women continued to fulfill this role. The majority of participants continued as they were forced to (as a result of responsibility and dependents); however, some of the participants fulfilled this role by choice.

Sacrifices of a Female Breadwinner

The two biggest sacrifices noted by the respondents were: having to own the responsibility and manage the risks; and taking time or focus away from their kids. The responsibility they talked about was related to managing the household and children, but more importantly, managing the responsibility and risks of ensuring financial stability within their unit. This responsibility resulted in participants prioritizing continual planning for their future. Two of the women shared:

I always have to be providing. I always have to make sure there's a plan. That if I'm not going to provide, what other

alternatives, what other sources ... so there's always planning.

Sometimes, I just want some freedom in my life...that you can actually just go to your kid's rugby match, and not plan everything far ahead to ensure that you've got time to be there.

The fear of losing their jobs was very prevalent among these female breadwinners, as they carried the financial responsibility. One of the respondents shared her limitations:

I have to be very conscious that I can't do things to jeopardize my career ... which I may ordinarily not have done if I had a husband that was [earning well]. I might have taken more risks with my career if I wasn't the main breadwinner.

Even though not all the participants had children, time and focus away from the kids were mentioned by 50% of the participants as the sacrifices that they made as a result of their fulfilling the breadwinner role. Some of the women claimed that even though they could do better as mothers, they did not necessarily feel guilty about it as the sacrifice and benefits for their children were worth it:

No, I don't feel guilty in the sense that it's benefitted my children. I'm able to give them a lot more than if I hadn't, because being a parent is twofold. You have to look after your kids on an emotional level, and you have to look after their physical needs too. You need to try and balance that. It is pointless if you can only focus on the emotional, but financially you can't provide them with a good education and they can't do sport, you can't give them fringe benefits. Kids are different today. They're not like us when we grew up. We could live on love and fresh air. Peer pressure is greater, so I think that I was given this opportunity

and I think they kind of understand that being in a job in a corporate company is very demanding ... I think they're not in a space where they feel mom doesn't have time for us. I think they do know that if they need me for anything, I am there ... I don't feel any guilt about that. I think that's what I needed in my life to make it better.

Some of the other sacrifices listed by these women were: being spoilt, lack of 'me' time, giving up personal passions, financial freedom, not being true to oneself, pursuing further studies, working long hours or having to travel, having to fulfill multiple roles, health, having a clean and neat house, and unable to spend time with friends. Many of the respondents were not resentful about these sacrifices as they felt it was ultimately worth it; however, many of them still wished for it.

Influence and Pressure

Three of the most frequent sub-codes in this study featured under influence and pressure. The first being "Beliefs and Trends – Role of Men and Women", which was overall the most frequent sub-code within this research with the remainder two, "Influence from Upbringing and Parent Setup" and "Influence from Society" featuring in the top six most frequent sub-codes.

This highlights the importance of the female breadwinners' belief about the role of a man and woman within a unit, which has an impact on the way they function as a unit, as well as the manifestations of various emotions such as guilt and shame. The majority of the respondents felt that society had shifted in its beliefs about men/women roles within marital units. Some noted that the makeup of a family unit had even changed, with same sex marriages being accepted into society. However, a few of the respondents noted that while attempts have been made to change societal roles, the traditional roles were still playing

out, especially in boardrooms, making it difficult for women to hold senior roles and be taken seriously at executive levels. There were quite a few examples shared where the majority of dual-income households still required the female to contribute income, as well as still being responsible for managing the house and rearing the children. One woman shared:

I think they still very much believe that the man is the breadwinner. He's the one in control. He's the one that rules, runs the household ... especially in the colored [mixed race] community. I think it's even worse in the black community.

Eighty percent of the women felt that a marital unit should function with both men and women playing equal roles, with both managing the finances and household responsibilities. The other 20% felt that regardless of whether the male spouses earned higher or not, he should be seen and respected as the head of the household. These respondents also felt that women were better suited to nurturing and child rearing, regardless their income levels.

There was a definite correlation between the females' upbringing and their independent will and nature, and the males' upbringing and their openness to being the lesser earner. A few of the respondents came from a family unit where the father was very controlling and disempowering the mother, which left them determined to never land up in similar situations. Some females unconsciously sought men who would not be able to hold this power over them. One interviewee said:

I hated the power my dad had, and still has over my mom. I definitely chose a husband that's not like that. Not on a conscious level, but on an unconscious level I think I definitely went for a different sort of man...controlling, power...I wouldn't do well with that.

Many of the respondents felt very strongly about not being overly influenced by the society. They understood that their setups were not very non-traditional, and not favored in the eyes of the older generations. However, four of the respondents felt that they were unduly influenced by the society, which has impacted their behavior and actions.

Functioning as a Unit

Seventy-five percent of the respondents provided insights as to how they communicated with their spouses regarding the breadwinner situation. Thirty-five percent of these respondents shared that they were not able to talk to their spouses regarding the situation, as it either turned into fights, or because their spouses were not willing to face the situation and talk openly about it. The other eight respondents had discussions with their spouses regarding this setup. Some of them pre-planned their conversations to ensure calm during the conversation, while others stated that, over time, the level of openness and calmness improved and they were then able to have frequent constructive discussions with their spouses. One woman shared:

We can generally talk about it calmly. At the moment, it does come up in an unpleasant way, because we feel a lot of financial burden. But when we are calm, like recently ... we realize that we know where we're at, and we know what we have to do to get out of what we're in at the moment. So now we're learning to talk better about it.

Thirty percent of the respondents shared that they were unable to discuss finances with their spouses, as their spouses refused to do so. The majority of them then landed up handling the finances on their own, along with the pressures and risks associated with it.

Fifty percent of the respondents entered into their marriage as the higher earner and fulfilled the breadwinner role from day one; however, a couple of them claimed that finances were not discussed between them prior to tying the knot. Respondent 6 verbalized the fact that her spouse had openly stated that he did not like talking about it, and she therefore consciously tried not to bring it up that often. Only four of the respondents had joint accounts with their spouses, and had an understanding between themselves of how much came in every month and how much was available for spending.

Fifty percent of the respondents indicated that their spouses contributed in other ways to make up their lower income, or lack of income. The majority of the respondents stated that they would have to ask their spouses to assist with tasks and duties, while a few of the respondents' spouses did such tasks without being asked.

Fifty percent of the females made household decisions on their own, while the other 50% made it jointly with their spouses. The majority of the respondents who made it jointly consulted their spouses to make them feel included; however, many of them stated that they still had a bigger influence. A few of the respondents who had sole decision-making rights did not actually want that responsibility. Many of them shared that they wished their spouses could make more decisions.

Forty-five percent of the respondents claimed that this setup had impacted their marriage. Five of these respondents entered into their marriage knowing that they were the higher earner and assumed the breadwinner role immediately. Of these five respondents, two of them had reached a state where the responsibility was just too much for them to handle, and they had lost respect for their spouses; another two of them felt that they were not being an ideal wife due to their

controlling nature, and one of them felt that their spouse's ego was dented and he used other methods to claim his power—which she did not appreciate. Four of the respondents assumed the breadwinner role during their marriage; two of the respondents shared that they did not feel like coming home and being a wife most days; one of the respondents believed that this situation had impacted her spouse so much that she did not relate to him anymore, while the other respondent stated that, at that time, she was just trying to keep things stable at home as her daughter was in her final school year.

Forty percent of the respondents claimed that this setup had affected their marriage intimacy levels. Five of them attributed it to their being tired and not in the mood due to their careers/other responsibilities; two of them attributed it to the fact that they were less attracted to their spouse over time, with one of them attributing it to the fact that their relationship had changed as they had become better 'friends' as opposed to 'spouses'.

Support

A majority of the respondents did not seek support from family or friends related to them, as many of their families and friends were unaware of the situation or they did not feel comfortable enough discussing it with them. Thirty percent of the respondents had specific family members which they depended on to provide perspective and support to them in times of need. The majority of the respondents who sought support from friends, sought it from friends who were in similar situations. One interviewee shared:

My best friend definitely knows, because we bitch to each other about our spouses all the time.

Manifestations of Guilt and Shame

Financial or social status emerged as a source of guilt or shame for the women who were either

sole earners in their marital units or brought home 80% or more of the income. A majority of these women felt guilty for not being able to give their children more of their time. One of the women felt guilty for not seeing her mother (who stayed in a different city) more frequently. Another woman felt guilty for not being able to contribute more towards her parents' wellbeing. One interviewee revealed:

I just feel like I'm not there enough for them. I don't know if it's linked to the relationship with my husband, or maybe it's linked to every single thing in my life...I mean, often I wish that I could be like some of my friends who are okay to not see their kids for extended periods of time. I wish I was wired like that, but the guilt, oh it's exhausting. It kills me. It just absolutely brings me down. I can't stay focused.

Forty-five percent of the respondents mentioned "inability to be the main provider" as a key source of guilt or shame for their spouse. The fact that the spouses earned less than their wives was not their main source of frustration, but rather the fact that they were unable to cover all of the family expenses and be the ultimate provider (i.e., earn bigger incomes). One woman shared:

I think he has struggled with himself, yes ... because I think every man wants to be the breadwinner and look after, and provide for, his family.

Thirty percent of the respondents shared insight into their spouses' feeling guilty or shameful for not meeting spousal and family expectations. Other sources of guilt and shame for these women and their spouses were: self-disappointment, work commitments and travel impact on children, higher earning capacity, inauthenticity, masculinity, taking time out for themselves, too focused on work, saying 'no' to

people, control over finances, feeling tired and frustrated, and settling for current situations.

Other Resulting Emotions

'Resentment and anger' featured among 70% of the interviewees. Eleven of the respondents verbalized internal resentment, while three claimed that their spouses were resentful of the situation. The majority of the respondents' resentment originated from the financial responsibility they shouldered, while other reasons cited included spouses not meeting the expectations that they had agreed upon when getting married, spouses spending money on unnecessary items and not contributing enough to the unit, and having to cover expenses for stepchildren that were not even their responsibility. One woman shared:

There was actually a very clear period in my mind when I felt very resentful about being the main breadwinner. I don't think he felt the shame or guilt, but I definitely was angry about being made to be responsible for shouldering the financial weight of the family.

Fifty-five percent of the women shared feelings of 'frustration or stress' as a result of their setup (the next highest felt emotion). These feelings resulted from having worked harder to ensure career growth and greater financial gain, having an unappreciative spouse, being financially constrained, having a spouse who was not taking initiative to balance things, silence during arguments, spouses spending money on unnecessary luxuries, managing the responsibilities alone, dependency on others, and dealing with in-laws who did not come to terms with the setup. One of the interviewees said:

You know what frustrates me...I always say that he has a worker mentality. He will do what is asked of him, but nothing more.

Other resulting emotions included negative impact on self-esteem, unhappiness and depression, under-appreciation and being undervalued, and regret.

Dealing with Guilt and Shame

Many of the interviewees managed their spouses' egos in an attempt to lessen, or prevent, feelings of guilt or shame within their spouses. One woman shared:

I personally have to motivate him and talk him into it; to make him realize that it's not that bad. It will get better. We will get out of it. For him, it's really hard. He gets stuck in a very dark place, and he can't move forward.

Thirty percent of the women claimed that they had been to, or were currently in, therapy or counseling to help them deal with the issues. All six women initiated going for therapy or counseling. One interviewee said:

I think that during that year when he earned no money, he was so traumatized that he went into an ice block state ... couldn't face up to it, because he was a rabbit in the headlights. It was a really tough year, and then we went into therapy together. It's taken like two years for our relationship to thaw from that stressful year.

Some of the other ways that these women dealt with their levels of guilt and shame were: making time for their spouse, children, family or friends, being more authentic, being kinder to themselves, steering away from negative influences, asking for help, trying to help others financially, ignoring their feelings, or simply just allowing themselves to experience feelings of shame or guilt (without fighting it).

Discussion

The 20 participants that were interviewed provided rich insight and experience into their

roles as female breadwinners. They shared the reasons and actions which led them to fulfill these roles, their thoughts about being female breadwinners, how they functioned as a unit, as well as the accompanying emotions, including guilt and shame. In addition, they also shared perceptions of their spouses' feelings and experiences. All the participants experienced different levels of guilt and shame for various reasons related to being the female breadwinner. However, many of them also felt a sense of resentment—similar finding to Meisenbach's (2010) study. Other emotions expressed were frustration, stress, depression, under-appreciation and regret. Even though 50% of the participants entered into their marriages as the main breadwinner, many of them stated that their spouses were not living up to the initial agreements and, as a result, the responsibility and financial burden on their part had increased.

As highlighted by literature, gender socialization and stereotypes seem to play roles in expectations of how women should behave (Barrett, 1995). It was therefore no surprise that the levels of guilt, shame, resentment, and other emotions were directly related to their beliefs regarding gender roles within marital units.

Many of the female participants found that their biggest challenges were role conflict and owning all the responsibility. Hecht (2001) explains that conflict between roles can emerge when the requirements of one life domain (e.g., work) directly interferes with the burdens of another life domain (e.g., family). As a result of these participants having to manage multiple roles and owning the financial responsibility, they ended up making many sacrifices. These sacrifices primarily included being away from their children, giving up on luxury items or being spoiled, and not having enough personal time. Many of the participants stated, however, that they did not

mind making sacrifices since the benefits outweighed the sacrifices in most instances.

One of the biggest insights gained through the interviews was the level of influence the participants' upbringing had on their current state. Quite a few of the participants came from homes where their fathers were controlling, or had let them down in some way. As a result, these participants developed a very independent nature, and steered away from ever having to depend on a man for anything.

One of the areas explored within this research was how the participants' marital or family unit functioned. There was a clear link between the state of happiness in the marriage, the level of open communication between spouses, and the split of responsibility or contribution within the household. This state of happiness directly impacted the decision making, negotiation of power, relationships with children, and intimacy levels within the unit. Participants whose spouses contributed more in other ways, such as cooking, cleaning, household management and tending the children, were more accepting and willing to take on the financial responsibility of the unit. Even though they would also experience stress and frustration, they did not exhibit anger or resentment to their spouses.

When exploring the various drivers of guilt and shame, the participants listed "not being available to family and friends" as the most common cause of their guilt or shame. A majority of participants who derived guilt or shame from this, were mothers and felt that they were unable to give enough time to their children. While they believed that their children were benefitting in the current setup, from a financial perspective, they still felt that their children deserved more of their time and focus. The participants reported "inability to be the main provider" as the biggest driver of their spouses' guilt or shame. While

many of these spouses allegedly did not mind that their wives were higher earners, they would have preferred being the main providers (covering the majority of the expenses).

Overall, the research has highlighted the presence of guilt and shame in the lives of women fulfilling breadwinning roles, among other key discussion points. It also showed a direct link between the areas of one's upbringing, one's personal beliefs, the acceptance of roles within a marriage, the joint collaboration of responsibilities between spouses, the level of open communication within the unit, and the resulting emotions such as guilt, shame, resentment, anger, frustration, stress and regret. This research study is by no means conclusive, and there remains scope for further examination of the topic.

Future Research

Since this research study did not include interviews with the male spouses, there would be value in researching the resultant guilt and shame existent in men who are married to female breadwinners, and comparing it to the perceptions of these female breadwinners.

Resentment was a frequent emotion expressed by the participants of this research. The participants, in addition, perceive their spouses to harbor a lot of resentment too. It would be valuable to explore the levels and drivers of resentment within both spouses, and methods of overcoming this resentment, e.g., sustainable forgiveness.

The impact and functioning of a marital or family unit was explored very lightly in this research. Further, in depth research on this would add great insight, and provides awareness to women and men who are embarking on such a setup.

One of the greatest influences listed in this research was that of upbringing and parental setup. Exploring this further would provide

understanding as to how this impacts our beliefs and actions within this context.

Finally, one of the most significant findings of this research was the link between communication between spouses, and the state of the marital unit. Further research could be done to explore which methods of communication seem to be working best, and ways to foster better communication within such units. ☺

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