

# Can "Educational Mothers" Maintain Their Career Aspirations? A Qualitative Study on Middle-Class Singaporean Mothers

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The purpose of this paper is to examine how mother's educational role for their children and their career aspirations can be balanced by middle-class Singaporean women.

Although there have been numerous studies on the integration of work and childcare, there are three problems related to the career aspirations of women after having children. First, while parental occupations and educational expectations have been evaluated as variables that contribute to children's educational aspirations or achievements, there has been little research specifically concerned with the career aspirations of mothers. Second, there have been studies which focus on female workforce rates after giving birth but little attention to the diverse career aspirations of mothers with school-aged children. Third, although the phenomenon of "intensive mothering" or "educating family" has been observed and studied in various countries, the question of whether there must be trade-offs between a woman's career and being an educational mother remains unresolved.

Thus, this study considers whether mothers can successfully pursue their career aspirations whilst also educating their children. This study addresses this question through interviews with 29 middle-class mothers in Singapore, a country with competitive educational and social systems.

Through the interviews, two educational value orientations toward child-rearing were identified: "status attainment" and "self-fulfillment". "Status attainment" mothers valued getting their children into brand-name schools while "self-fulfillment" mothers put importance on character building and independence of their children. Distinguished by this tendency and occupational status, the mothers diverged into four groups. These were group A, who worked part-time or were stay-at-home moms and had "status attainment" values; group B, who worked full-time and had "status attainment" values; group C, who worked full-time and had "self-fulfillment" values; and group D, who worked part-time or were stay-at-home moms and had "self-fulfillment" values. The modified grounded theory approach (M-GTA) was used in this analysis.

From the analysis, while cooling-out of mothers' career aspirations can be observed in some way in group A, B, and D, only mothers in group C can balance their roles as mothers and their career aspirations. Mothers in group A and B have internalized the meritocratic values and competitive mindset. These mothers' aspirations of promoting or gaining higher statuses have been cooled down for the remaining gender role of educating their children. The mothers in group D valued staying at home with their children for their mental well-being of their children. These mothers remembered their own childhoods as lonely because their parents had little time to spend with them. However, the mothers in group C pursue their career, sometimes through adult education, were able to successfully balance with being "educational mothers."

In conclusion, by shedding light on diverse aspects of aspirations, the way to balance the educational role of children as mothers and their career aspirations can be found. The results of this investigation suggest that, despite individual efforts to resist competitive meritocratic competition can be observed, to have welfare measures of reskilling and socialization of childcare is important.

Keywords: Meritocracy, Women workforce, educational role, aspiration, reskilling

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