# Multiple Role Stress, Burnout, and Purpose in Life Among Female Counselors

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Eighty counselors participated in a study which sought to determine the difference between single and married female counselors in terms of multiple role stress, burnout, and purpose in life, and the relationship between burnout and purpose in life. Measures used were Maslach Burnout Inventory, Purpose in Life, and a questionnaire on priority roles, hours per week devoted to work and family roles, subjective estimate of multiple role stress, and nature of concerns and coping with multiple roles. Results revealed that married female counselors experienced multiple role stress more often than their single counterparts. Married counselors placed higher priority on family roles than work role, spent more time performing family roles, and had more home-related concerns as compared to single counselors. Both groups coped with multiple role stress through social and religious activities. Both groups reported low emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, high personal accomplishment, and definite purpose in life. The findings also showed that purpose in life correlates negatively with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and correlates positively with personal accomplishment. Exploring multiple role stress from the perspectives of full-time homemakers and career women, women in professional/managerial and clerical positions, and men and women among dual-earner couples are potentially fruitful avenues for future research.

Multiple role stress is a phenomenon that merits special attention in the career psychology of women (Rollins, 1996). Traditionally, women are socialized to value household and childcare responsibilities as their primary roles. However, forces such as globalization, downsizing, deregulation, and technology trigger the continuous reshaping of the workplace that consequently creates opportunities for women to perform vital roles in the world of work (Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 1998).
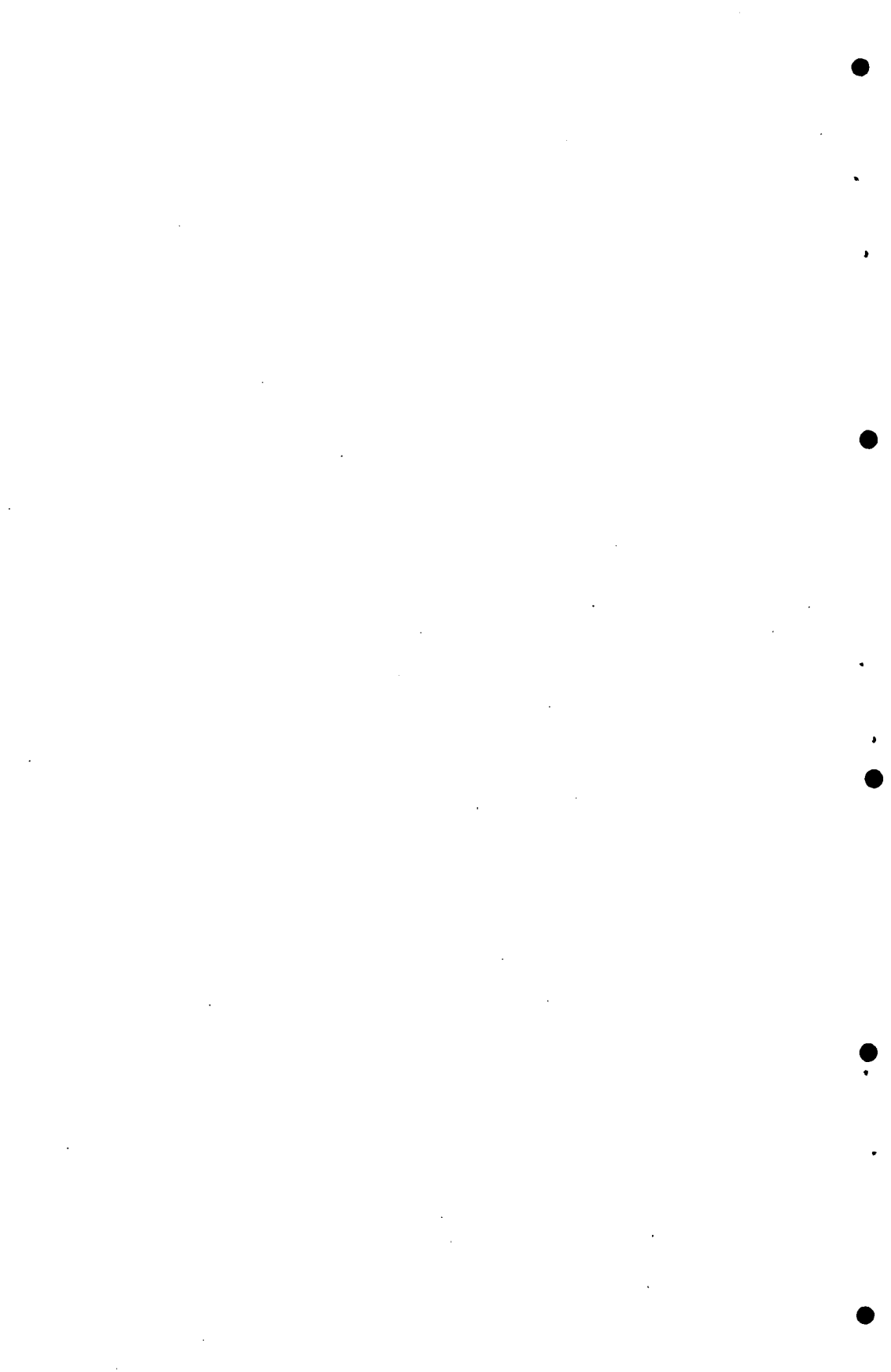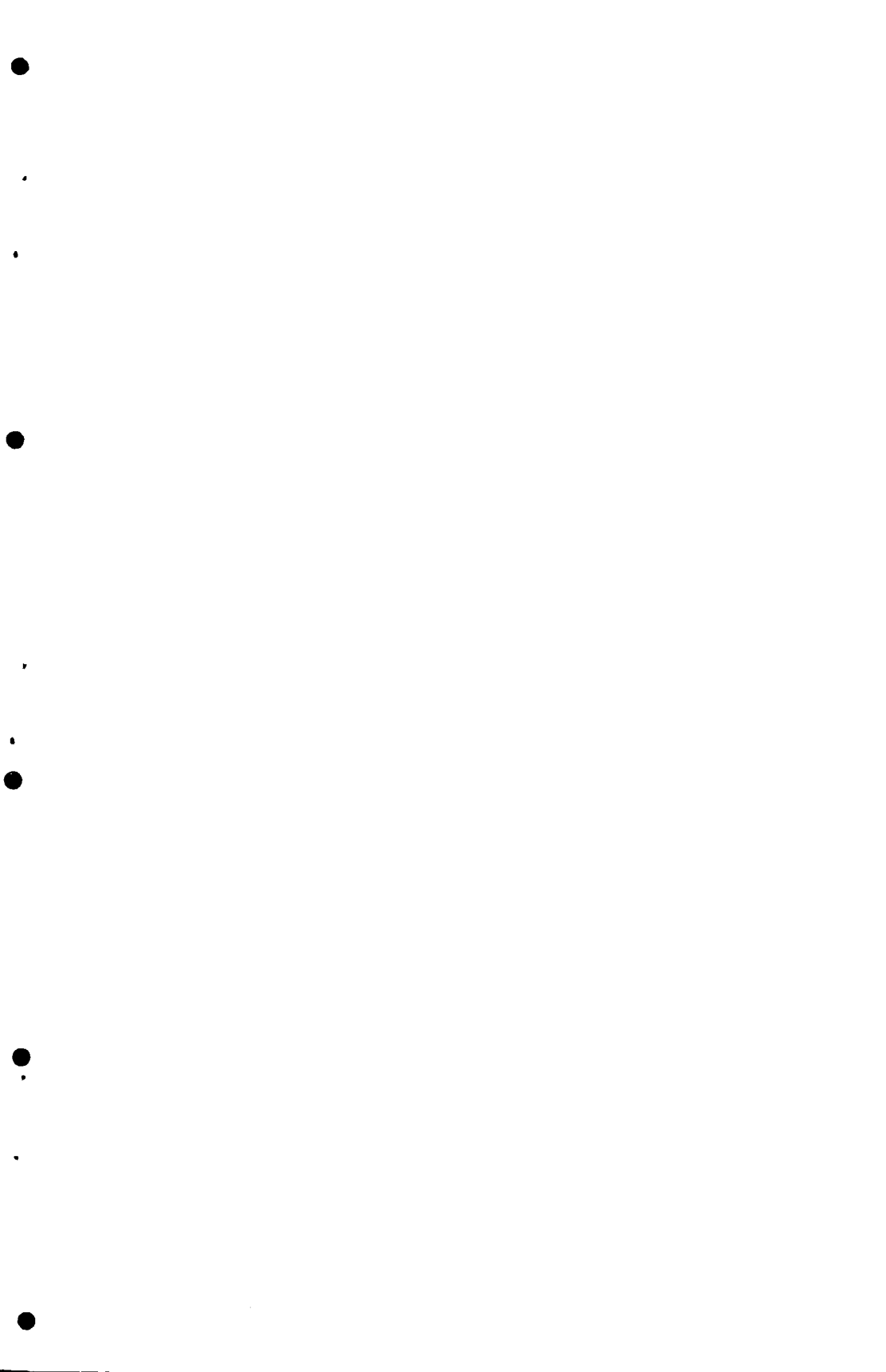
& Robinson, 1995), self-esteem, marital adjustment, and life satisfaction (Nathawat & Mathur, 1993) are the advantages identified by working mothers over full-time homemakers. Work satisfaction is equated with emotional well being by married women in professional and managerial careers (Burke & McKeen, 1995; Moen & Robinson, 1995).

However, some studies show no difference in the job satisfaction and psychological well-being of working women with career-primary or career-family orientation (Burke, Todorova, Kotzeva, & McKeen, 1994).

Working women manage multiple role stress through a variety of coping strategies. High occupational status has been found to temper the negative effects of multiple role stress on the psychological well being of professional women (Tharakan, 1992). On the other hand, greater availability of part-time work and lesser negative effects of job interruptions on salaries enable women to balance the demands of work and family (Olson, Frieze, & Detlefesen, 1990).

Perception of self-efficacy, which is the capacity to strike a balance between work and family, has been found to reduce strain, anxiety, and work impairment among working women in professional or clerical jobs (Bharat, 1994). Rejection of the superwoman mentality, which is the belief that women's employment should not diminish their homemaker responsibilities, is an indispensable coping among women in dual-earner families (Herrera & Delcampo, 1995). Working women in dual-earner families endorse expansion of husband's roles to include housework and childcare. They value their roles as wife, mother, and worker, and perceive themselves as co-providers who are equal in decision-making and authority as their husbands.

Perception of job as important, challenging, and rewarding (Barnett, Marshall, Raudenbush, & Brennan, 1991) and perception of work environment as favorable in terms of team organizational structure, transformation, and transactional leadership (Schulz, Greenley, & Brown, 1995) are helpful in addressing the role conflict. Furthermore, personal characteristics such as high educational qualification (Guerrero, 1991), sociability (Rojas, 1997), motivation (Mendoza, 1991), and job satisfaction (Schultz, Greenley, & Brown 1995) help alleviate multiple role stress. The sense of personal control over work and family situations empower working women to keep multiple role stress at bay (Ahad & Kapoor, 1995; Amatea & Fong, 1991; Lewis & Borders, 1995; Tingey,

Kiger, & Riley, 1996). Social support has a stress-buffering effect among women in various occupations (Amatea & Fong, 1991; Caltabiano & Caltabiano, 1994) but this positive effect is not experienced by working mothers (Reifman, Biernat, & Lang, 1991). Balance between work and leisure is associated with life satisfaction among single professional women (Lewis & Borders, 1995). Self-care methods such as praying, exercise, and recreation are effective in reducing corporate stress among Filipino women executives (Estalilla, 1989).

Women in professional and managerial occupations use more problem-focused and preventive coping as compared to those in clerical positions (Rollins & Lederberg, 1989). Married working women use more active, behavioral coping strategies than single women (Fong & Amatea, 1992). Behavioral solutions effectively address areas of multiple role conflict such as domestic chores, maintaining social relationships, role cycling, job relocations, sex-role socialization, social pressure, and direct competition between spouses (Wiersma & Van den Berg, 1991).

The findings on multiple role stress have shed light on the valuable aspects of this phenomenon. Higher stress due to domestic and childcare responsibilities is reported by women in professional and managerial occupations as compared to men among dual-earner couples (e.g., Higgins & Duxbury, 1994), full-time homemakers (e.g., Lennon, 1994), and women in clerical and secretarial occupations (e.g., Rollins & Lederberg, 1989). Burnout is a function of the demands and resources in the workplace and at home (e.g., Leiter & Durup, 1996). It is associated with sociability (e.g., Rojas, 1997), educational level (e.g., Mendoza, 1991), work environment (e.g, Dy, 1988; Estalilla, 1989; Sears & Galambos, 1992), and job satisfaction (e.g., Guerrero, 1991; Schulz, Greenley, & Brown, 1995).

Strategies for coping with multiple role stress and burnout among career women include: (a) debunking the superwoman mentality which is the belief that women's employment should not diminish their home-maker responsibilities (e.g., Herrera & Delcampo, 1995); (b) endorsing the expansion of husband's roles to include housework and childcare (Herrera & Delcampo, 1995); (c) applying problem-focused, preventive (e.g., Rollins & Lederberg, 1989), or emotion-focused (e.g., Sahu & Misra, 1995) coping; and (d) using self-care methods such as praying, exercise, and recreation (e.g., Estalilla, 1989).
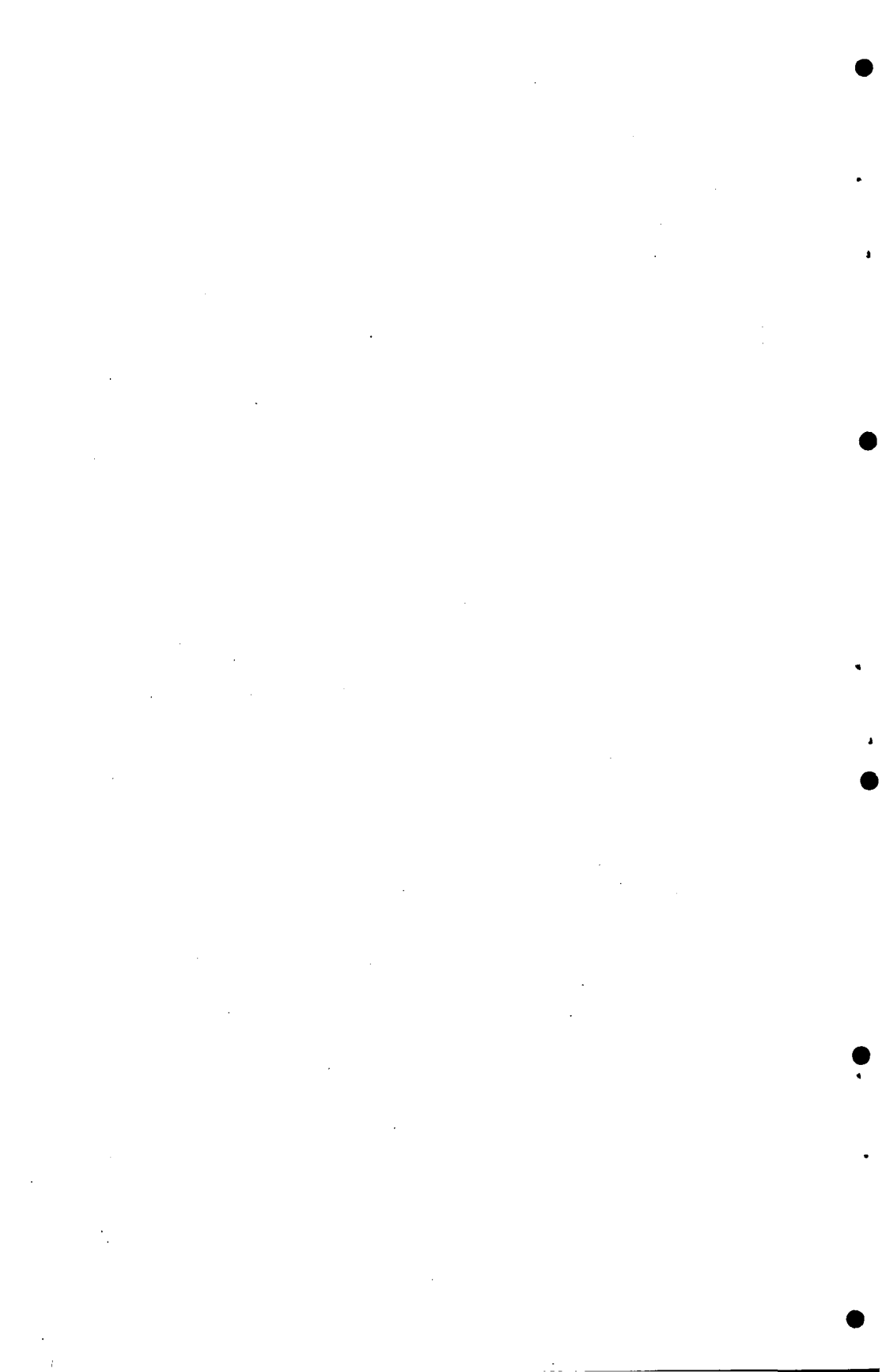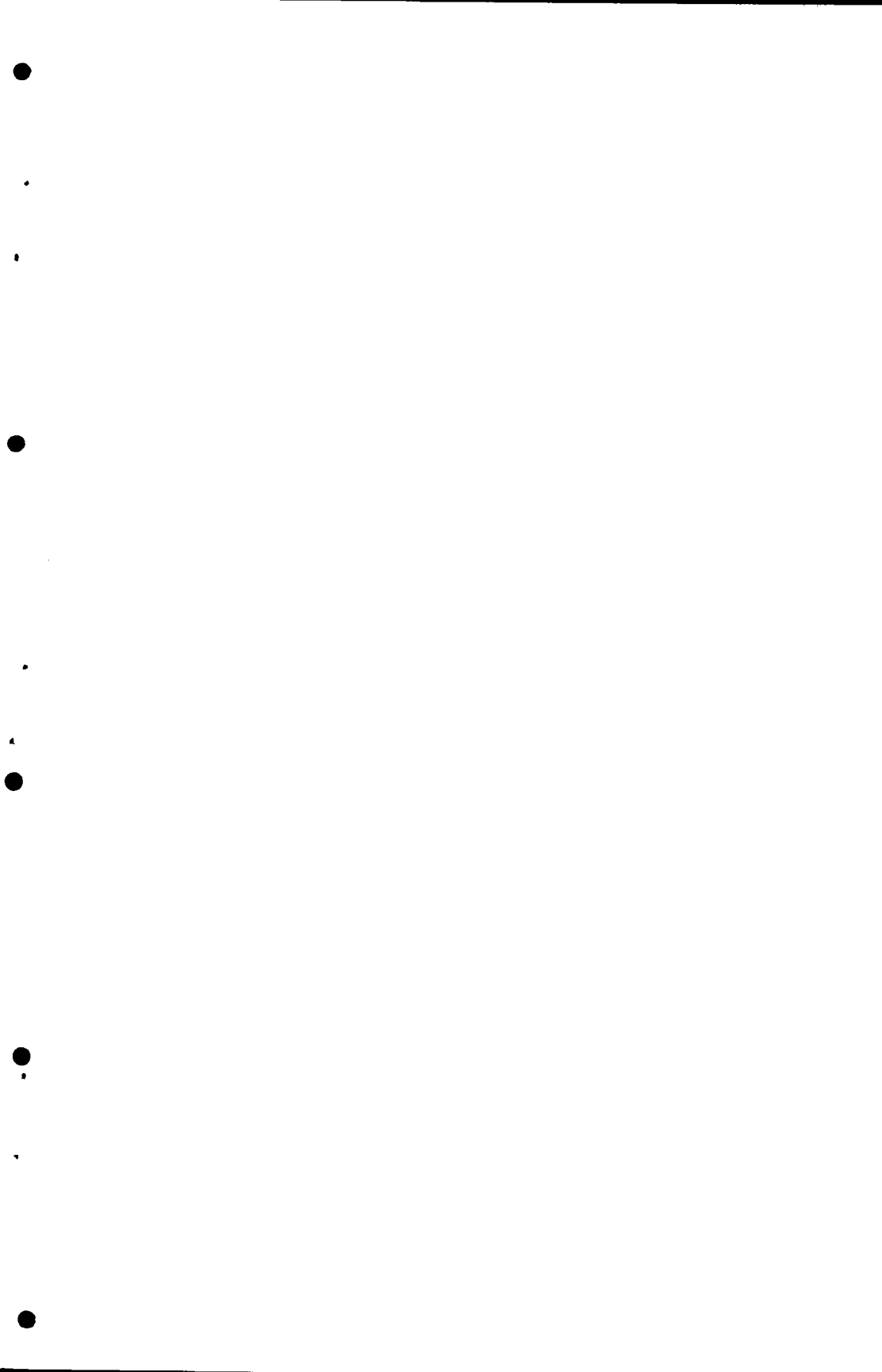
empowers the persons encountered to become aware of and to realize their potentials. Having facilitated the blossoming (growth) of human beings, counselors are inspired to see and actualize their own growth potentials.

Creative values are fulfilled through multiple roles whenever women see them as occasions for creative accomplishments that add to the welfare, knowledge, and beauty of the world. As counselors, women value their contributions to the theory, research, and practice of counseling to advance the frontiers of the mental health profession, and more importantly, to discover ways of helping human beings live a happy life. As caregivers, wives, and mothers, women treasure their investment of self in the lives of the people they love.

Fulfillment of attitudinal values occurs when women acknowledge their multiple roles as their unique and special mission in life. They accept that their roles do not always allow them to do creative work or to enjoy life because sacrifices are inevitable. The sacrifices demanded of multiple roles become meaningful because they are viewed as challenging situations to which women can respond by being responsible. Responsibility is demonstrated by the act of suffering bravely when women take on the challenge of changing themselves in the face of a situation that cannot be changed. It is also evident in women's ingenious ways of transforming a predicament into a human achievement. Sacrifices also become meaningful when women identify clearly and accept wholeheartedly the roles on which they place premium value.

Therefore, women whose multiple roles provide them with a definite purpose in life are likely to experience low level of burnout. There is very little room for depersonalization because their interactions with people are moments of growth for others and for themselves. Emotional exhaustion hardly ever takes place because they view difficult situations as challenging moments to which they respond in responsible and creative ways. Finally, personal accomplishment is seen in the satisfaction and happiness that come from their achievements in work and home domains.

On the other hand, there are instances where fulfilling multiple roles becomes an impossible feat because women's resources are stretched to breaking point. When this happens, women see indefinite meanings in

the multiple roles they perform which makes them susceptible to high level of burnout. Women often find themselves giving emotional support for too long so that in time their emotional resources are depleted and they develop negative attitude toward people. Moreover, they are filled with a deep sense of discontent that comes from their view of personal accomplishments as insignificant.

Thus, purpose in life is conceptualized as having the potential to mitigate burnout that is caused by the conflicting demands of multiple roles.

**Method**

*Research design.* The descriptive-comparative, correlational design was used to investigate the relationship between burnout and purpose in life among single and married female counselors.

*Participants.* Female counselors were identified as participants of the study because the intense involvement with maladaptive clients, which characterizes their work, may compound the difficulty of balancing work and family roles. Thus, female counselors qualify as a special population of career women because their work in the human services may predispose them to multiple role stress and burnout.

A total of 80 female counselors (40 single, 40 married) from 19 elementary and high schools, colleges, and universities in Metro Manila participated in the study. They were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (a) single, without adoptive children; or (b) married and living with spouse and children.

Among single counselors, 67.5% worked in colleges/universities, 20% in high schools, and 12.5% in elementary schools. The average age was 30 (sd = 9.47). They had been in the counseling profession for an average of 5 years (sd=3.94) and held their present positions for about 8 years (sd=7.26). They were assigned an average of 607 students (sd=420.69).

On the other hand, 37.5% of married participants were employed in colleges/universities, 32.5% in high schools, and 30% in elementary schools. The average age was 38 (sd= 7.45). They had been counselors for an average of 11 years (sd=7.32) and worked in their present capacity for 5 years (sd=7.44). They were responsible for 690 students

(sd=937). In addition, they had been married for 13 years (sd=8.81) and had 2 children (sd=1.05) who were living with them. The age of the oldest child was 12 years (sd 8.87) whereas the youngest child was 6 years (sd=6.06).

*Instruments*. Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) by Maslach and Jackson (1986) was used to assess the three aspects of the burnout syndrome: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment. It is a 22-item measure of burnout level of educators, health professionals, and other occupational fields. A high degree of burnout is reflected in high scores in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and in low scores in personal accomplishment. Low scores in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and high scores in personal accomplishment indicate a low degree of burnout. Average degree of burnout is shown in average scores on the three subscales.

The test-retest reliability coefficients for the subscales were .82 for emotional exhaustion, .60 for depersonalization, and .80 for personal accomplishment. Discriminant validity was evidenced by significant correlations of job satisfaction with emotional exhaustion ($r = -.23$, $p< .05$), depersonalization ($r = -.22, p< .05$), and personal accomplishment ($r = .17, p< .06$). Validity of MBI for western and non-western population was demonstrated by Abu-Hilal (1995).

Purpose in Life (PIL) by Crumbaugh and Maholick (1981) was used. It is an attitude scale that aims to determine the degree of meaning or purpose in life and is based on Logotherapy of Frankl. Part A consists of 20 items that is objectively scored. Parts B and C reveal qualitative information, which are interpreted clinically by psychologists. Interpretation ranges from definite purpose to lack of clear meaning and purpose. The split-half reliability of PIL is $r = .81$ (n=225; 105 normals, 120 patients) whereas the validity in terms of correlation with therapists' ratings is .38 (n=50).

A questionnaire was constructed to elicit information as follows: (a) priority roles (work vs. family); (b) number of hours per week devoted to work and family roles; (c) subjective estimate of the frequency of stress experienced in relation to balancing the demands of work and family roles based on a 5-point scale (i.e., 0=not at all, 1=rarely, 2= sometimes, 3=often, and 4=always); and (d) nature of concerns and coping with multiple roles.

*Data-gathering.* One hundred and twenty questionnaires and tests were sent to counselors in educational institutions in Metro Manila through persons who were employed in these institutions and were known to the researcher. Of the 120, 66.67% (80) were returned with usable data.

*Data-analysis.* Chi-square test of homogeneity, *t*-test for independent samples, and Pearson *r* were utilized to test hypotheses at alpha .05.

## Results

When confronted with conflicting demands of work and family, career women are compelled to make a decision about the roles that are most important and the roles that must be sacrificed to fulfill those that demand immediate attention. A requirement in the decision-making process is the perception and valuing of which roles are most significant in one's life. Working women who consider work as most important have a career-primary orientation (Burke et al., 1994). They are likely to sacrifice family roles to fulfill work roles. On the other hand, career women who see family and relationships as most valued roles have a career-family orientation (Burke & Yuet, 1996). Their family roles are given immediate attention at the expense of work roles. Those who consider both family and work roles as important see these roles are having equal priority.

The findings of the study revealed that single and married female counselors differ significantly $\chi^2$ (df=2)= 28.75, p < .05, in terms of priority of roles (see Table 1). Single counselors placed higher priority on work roles whereas married counselors gave greater importance to home or family roles.

Table 1. Priority Roles of Single and Married Female Counselors

| Status | Priority | | | | | |
| | Work | % | Home | % | Equal | % |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Single (n = 40) | 17 | 42.5 | 13 | 32.5 | 10 | 25.0 |
| Married (n = 40) | 0 | 0.0 | 35 | 87.5 | 5 | 12.5 |

Multiple role stress is associated with the sense of being pressured and distressed because there is insufficient time, effort, and finances to satisfactorily meet the demands of work and family roles. It was shown

in the findings that single and married counselors are significantly different, $\chi^2$ (df=2)=22.76, p < .05, in the frequency of experience of multiple role stress (see Table 2). Married counselors experienced multiple role stress more often than single counselors did. In addition to work role, married counselors manage more family roles (i.e., wife, mother, caregiver) as compared to single counselors who perform the family role of caregiver.

Table 2. Multiple Role Stress of Single and Married Female Counselors

| Status | 0 | % | 1 | Stress* % | 2 | % | 3 | % | 4 | % |
|--------|---|-----|----|------|----|------|----|------|---|------|
| Single | 3 | 7.5 | 12 | 30.0 | 18 | 45.0 | 5 | 12.5 | 2 | 5.0 |
| Married | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 18 | 45.0 | 16 | 40.0 | 6 | 15.0 |

*0=Not at all; 1=Rarely; 2=Sometimes; 3=Often; 4=Always.

The number of hours per week spent on attending to work and family roles may be helpful in defining the extent of multiple role stress. Single and married counselors do not differ significantly on the number of hours per week spent performing work roles (see Table 3). However, they differ significantly, $t$ (df=78)=8.09, p < .05, in terms of hours per week spent on family roles. Married counselors devoted more hours (mean=52.2) for home roles than their single counterparts (mean=19.4). Domestic and childcare responsibilities account for the greater amount of time spent on family roles by married counselors.

Table 3. Hours per Week Spent for Work and Family Roles of Single and Married Female Counselors

| | Single | | Married | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | SD | M | SD |
| Work Hours | 52.2 | 17.1 | 47.8 | 8.1 |
| Home Hours | 19.4 | 14.5 | 52.2 | 21.2 |

The nature of concerns associated with multiple role demands is likewise an area in which single and married counselors differ

significantly, $\chi^2$ (df=2)=8.79, p < .05. Married counselors have more family-related concerns such as spending less time at home and pressures from duties as wife and mother (see Table 4). Single counselors, on the other hand, reported more work-related concerns such as spending more time at work and pressures from work duties. In addition, single counselors were more concerned with the need to spend time for recreational activities than married counselors were.

Table 4. Domain-Related Concerns of Single and Married Female Counselors

| Status | Domain of Concern | | | | | |
| | Work | % | Home | % | Others | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Single | 36 | 44.4 | 22 | 27.2 | 23 | 28.4 |
| Married | 33 | 31.4 | 51 | 48.6 | 21 | 20.0 |

The distress brought about by multiple role stress necessitates the use of coping strategies to enable counselors to jugggle the demands of work and family. In terms of strategies for dealing with multiple role stress, single and married counselors differ significantly, $\chi^2$ (df=2)= 36.09, p < .05. Single counselors relied on work-centered coping strategies such as working overtime and bringing some work to do at home (see Table 5). On the other hand, married counselors depended on home-centered strategies such as leaving children with relatives or hired help and spending weekend with the family. Interestingly, both single and married counselors obtained relief from multiple role stress through social and spiritual activities, and hobbies.

Table 5. Strategies for Coping with Multiple Roles of Single and Married Female Counselors

| Status | Work-Centered | % | Home-Centered | % | Others | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Single | 41 | 57.8 | 11 | 15.4 | 19 | 26.8 |
| Married | 25 | 25.3 | 61 | 61.6 | 13 | 13.1 |

Burnout results when the pressures of work and family duties have become overwhelming for female counselors such that they fail to see

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meaning in the roles they perform. The results of this study reveal that there is no significant difference between single and married counselors in terms of dimensions of burnout. Both groups have low level of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and high level of personal accomplishment. Both single and married counselors are able to respond creatively to challenging moments in counseling and consider interactions with clients as growth-promoting experiences for themselves as well as their clients. They likewise derive satisfaction and happiness from their roles. On the other hand, although both groups exhibited definite purpose in life, married counselors were significantly higher, t (df=78)= -1.90, p < .05, in this variable. Work and family roles serve as sources of meaning in the lives of counselors. Through these roles, they are able to respond creatively to challenging situations and enjoy life despite the sacrifices they need to do to fulfill these roles.

Table 6. Dimensions of Burnout and Purpose in Life of Single and Married Counselors

| Dimension | Married | | Single | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | SD | M | SD |
| Exhaustion | 15.0 | 7.9 | 16.7 | 8.2 |
| Depersonalization | 2.4 | 2.6 | 2.4 | 3.0 |
| Accomplishment | 37.9 | 7.2 | 36.4 | 7.5 |
| Purpose in Life | 115.7 | 14.7 | 120.9 | 8.9 |

The meaning which counselors attach to multiple roles can reduce the distress caused by role conflict. Counselors who see their multiple roles as meaningful have the resources to sustain a healthy emotional life, positive attitude toward people, and sense of accomplishment from their life roles. This is pinpointed in the results (see Table 7) that describe purpose in life as negatively related to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and positively related to personal accomplishment.

## Discussion

Multiple role stress is a phenomenon that exists among single and married female counselors. This finding lends support to previous studies (e.g., Caltabiano & Caltabiano, 1994; Fong & Amatea, 1992) on multiple role stress among career women in professional occupations.

Table 7. Correlations Between Dimensions of Burnout and Purpose in Life Among
All Counselors

| Dimensions of Burnout | Purpose in Life |
|---|---|
| Emotional Exhaustion | -.41* |
| Depersonalization | -.29* |
| Personal Accomplishment | .19* |

*p < .05.

Multiple role stress stems from the conflicting demands of work roles and family roles (e.g.,Parasuraman, Purohit, & Godshalk, 1996; Rollins, 1996). Basically, there are three sources of conflicts that could account for multiple role stress, namely, time-based conflict (time commitment), strain-based conflict (work stressors), and behavior-based (role expectations; Rollins, 1996)). Single and married female counselors encounter pressures due to time and effort requirements of work role (i.e., career woman) and family roles (i.e., caregiver, mother, wife). The work role in a mental health profession such as counseling requires involvement in planning and reaching work targets, caseload, and supervision. On the other hand, family roles entail intense physical and emotional involvement in caring for husband, children, and other family members. The conflicting demands of work and family roles are clearly shown by married counselors who experience the difficulty of balancing these roles more often than single counselors do. The difficulty may be attributed to the increased time commitment to domestic and childcare obligations that are expected of career women who are married with children. As demonstrated in previous studies (e.g., Burke & McKeen, 1995), married career women's time is affected by home-related duties.

Single and married female counselors successfully contend with multiple role stress through creative and responsible ways such as prioritizing roles, allocating time and effort according to priority, coping strategies, and finding a sense of meaning in work and family roles.

Female counselors acknowledge the necessity of setting role priorities as a way to exercise control over these roles. Prioritizing allows them to

be constantly aware of the roles that they consider most important in their lives. It also enables them to accept happily the sacrifices they need to do in relation to the roles they have chosen to situate in the lower rung of the priority ladder. Thus, being in tune with their priority permits female counselors to keep themselves from overstraining as they fulfill their multiple roles.

Clearly, single and married female counselors know their priorities, and invest time and effort commensurate to the level of priority of their multiple roles. Work roles are the top priority for single counselors. Their primary concerns are focused on work, which they address by dedicating more time accomplishing work responsibilities (e.g., working overtime, bringing some work to do at home). However, single counselors reported a strong need for leisure time, which is consonant with the finding of Lewis and Borders (1995) that the ability to balance work and recreational activities influences the life satisfaction of unmarried career women.

On the other hand, married counselors consider family roles most important. Their concerns are centered on the home domain, which they handle by accepting help with domestic and childcare duties, and spending weekend with family.

In general, female counselors cope with multiple role stress through a variety of solitary (e.g., cross stitching, reading pocketbooks, gardening) and interpersonal (e.g., socializing with friends, ballroom dancing, prayer meeting) recreational activities. This result reinforces studies (e.g., Ahad & Kapoor, 1995; Mendoza, 1991; Rojas, 1997) on the stress-buffering effect of social support obtained from family, friends, and community.

Moreover, the years of academic training and experience in the mental health profession which female counselors possess may have equipped them with a repertoire of skills essential for satisfactory life adjustments. Counselors' awareness of their high level of self-efficacy (i.e., perception of own ability to successfully bring about change) may have given them the firm resolve to move toward effective resolution of conflicting role demands. This result echoes the findings of some researches (e.g., Rollins, 1996) that self-efficacy is instrumental in enhancing a person's capacity to cope with stress.

Multiple role stress does not reach burnout proportions because single and married female counselors find a strong sense of purpose in their multiple roles. Purpose in life corresponds negatively with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and positively with personal accomplishment. Single counselors derive meaning in life from their work role as career woman. On the other hand, the purpose in life of married counselors is anchored on their family roles of caregiver, wife, and mother.

The role of career woman in the field of counseling affords female counselors the opportunity to make worthwhile contributions to the welfare of humanity by helping people to have satisfactory life adjustment. In their interactions with clients, female counselors demonstrate genuine concern and healthy emotional support to enable clients to recognize their own capacity to resolve successfully their problematic situations. The career woman role is a source of personal accomplishment for female counselors. This echoes earlier findings concerning work as an avenue for self-expression (Nieva, 1985) and self-fulfillment (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Although both groups have definite meaning in life, married counselors gather higher purpose from their multiple roles. Aside from the fulfillment that married women derive from work, they find happiness from their roles as caregiver, wife, and mother through which they experience love from significant others. This result hints that family climate (i.e., quality of marital and parent-child relationships) may be a determinant of satisfaction in home roles.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The study furnished evidence that although single and married female counselors experience multiple role stress, they are able to balance successfully the demands of work and family roles. Moreover, female counselors derive a sense of personal accomplishment and purpose from their multiple roles.

Exploring multiple role stress from the perspectives of full-time homemakers, working women in professional/managerial and clerical positions, dual-earner couples, and adults who carried work and family responsibilities while pursuing graduate studies are potentially fruitful

avenues for future research. Enhancing awareness of priorities and values in life as well as expanding the range of coping strategies through career counseling can strengthen working women's adjustment to multiple roles.

On the whole, the study paints a positive image of career women as gracefully juggling their work and family roles. Although the task of juggling roles is admittedly enveloped in hardships and sacrifices, working women in the counseling profession live multiple roles as occasions for creative accomplishments that add meaning and beauty to their lives and to those whose lives they touch.

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