

Supporting women middle managers in the Health and Social Service System by fostering their psychological well-being : A qualitative inquiry into lived experiences

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1. Abstract:

This research captures the lived experiences of women middle managers in Québec's Health and Social Service System (HSSS) and makes recommendations for changes that will support them in their multiple roles, while fostering their psychological well-being. It explores the opportunities and barriers that these women face in a context where family-friendly policies such as parental leave, affordable daycare, and pay equity have existed for over two decades. The research revealed that they felt overextended, and that the superwoman syndrome is still alive and well, reinforced by unrealistic organizational and societal expectations grounded in the gendered segregation of both paid and unpaid work. Although these women were highly educated, they still followed the societal norms concerning their domestic, caregiver, and emotional roles, trying to adapt and “do it all” at the expense of their own health and psychological well-being. The implications of this study show that persistent gender segregation in paid and unpaid work spheres leaves women and mothers squeezed for time which negatively impacts their well being. This study calls for changes in the organizational culture and a move away from a work- iv centric focus to a focus on human capital.

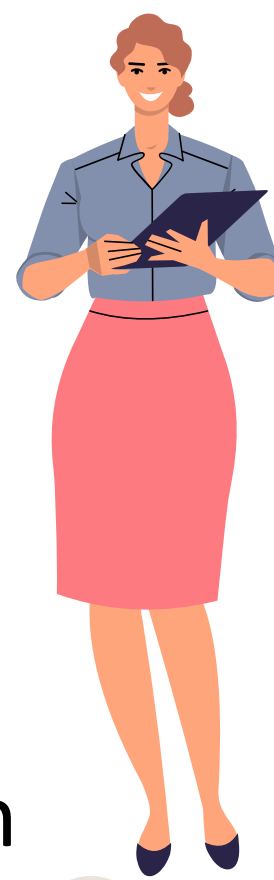
3. Methodology:

A qualitative inquiry research approach was used to study how women middle managers navigate their professional and private roles, in a public organization where women comprise the majority of the employees and middle managers. A feminist lens related to childcare, housework, caregiving and motherhood was used along with Relational Cultural theory and one of the central tenets of RCT is that the ability to make and maintain relationships is central to woman's sense of self and well-being (Miller, 1988).

5. How they identified their role as middle managers:



I am responsible for the team. I have to make sure that in these teams, the service is given, and it is given adequately, and that I don't find myself with a gap in services.



We are change agents, communication agents, human resources, strategist and political strategist.

6. Results:

The research revealed that they felt overextended, and that the superwoman syndrome is still alive and well, reinforced by unrealistic organizational and societal expectations grounded in the gendered segregation of both paid and unpaid work. Although these women were highly educated, they still followed the societal norms concerning their domestic, caregiver, and emotional roles, trying to adapt and “do it all” at the expense of their own health and psychological well-being.

What fostered and challenged their psychological well-being?

Positive relationships – connections	Control
Valorization- recognition	Flexibility
Confidence	Support (work and home)

What challenged their psychological well being?

Societal norms, clash of values, organizational culture, leadership styles, unrealistic mandates and expectations, lack of resources, lack of onboarding, unresolved conflict, perfectionism, emotional labour, lack of time to recover, tearing (to be stuck in the middle), being over extended.

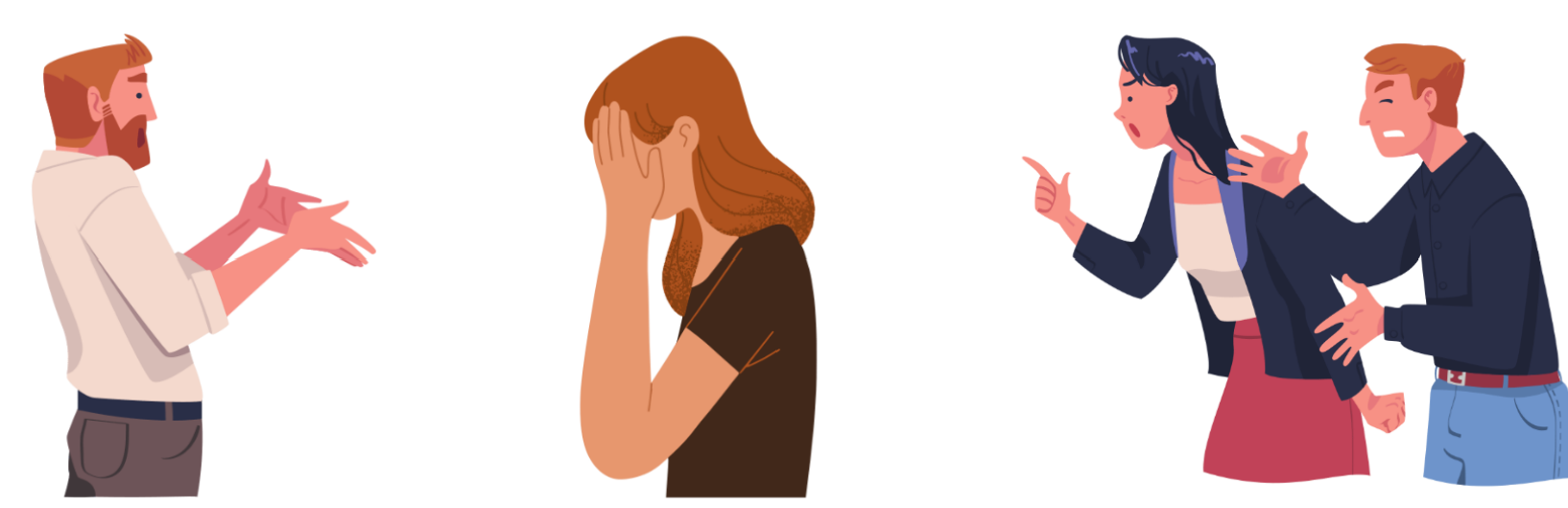
8. Recommendation:

This study calls for changes in the organizational culture and a move away from a work-centric focus to a focus on human capital. It also has important implications for governments as their policies and practices contribute to work environments which are maladapted to women's and especially mothers' realities. If true progress is to be made, society must value caregiving and develop policies and practices which allow people to thrive in all spheres of their lives: self, family, and work. We have to stop trying to fix women and rather focus on system change and transformation.

8. Conclusion:

This study shows that persistent gender segregation in paid and unpaid work spheres leaves women and mothers squeezed for time which negatively impacts their well being.

In a health and social services system which has values of compassion, respect, collaboration, accountability, and innovation, be sensitive to women's psychological well-being?



These women (mothers) did not fare better!



2. Introduction:

- Study wanted to understand the realities of women middle managers in a system where women make up 82% of the workforce.
- Would a health and social services system which has values of compassion, respect, collaboration, accountability, and innovation, be sensitive to women's psychological well-being?

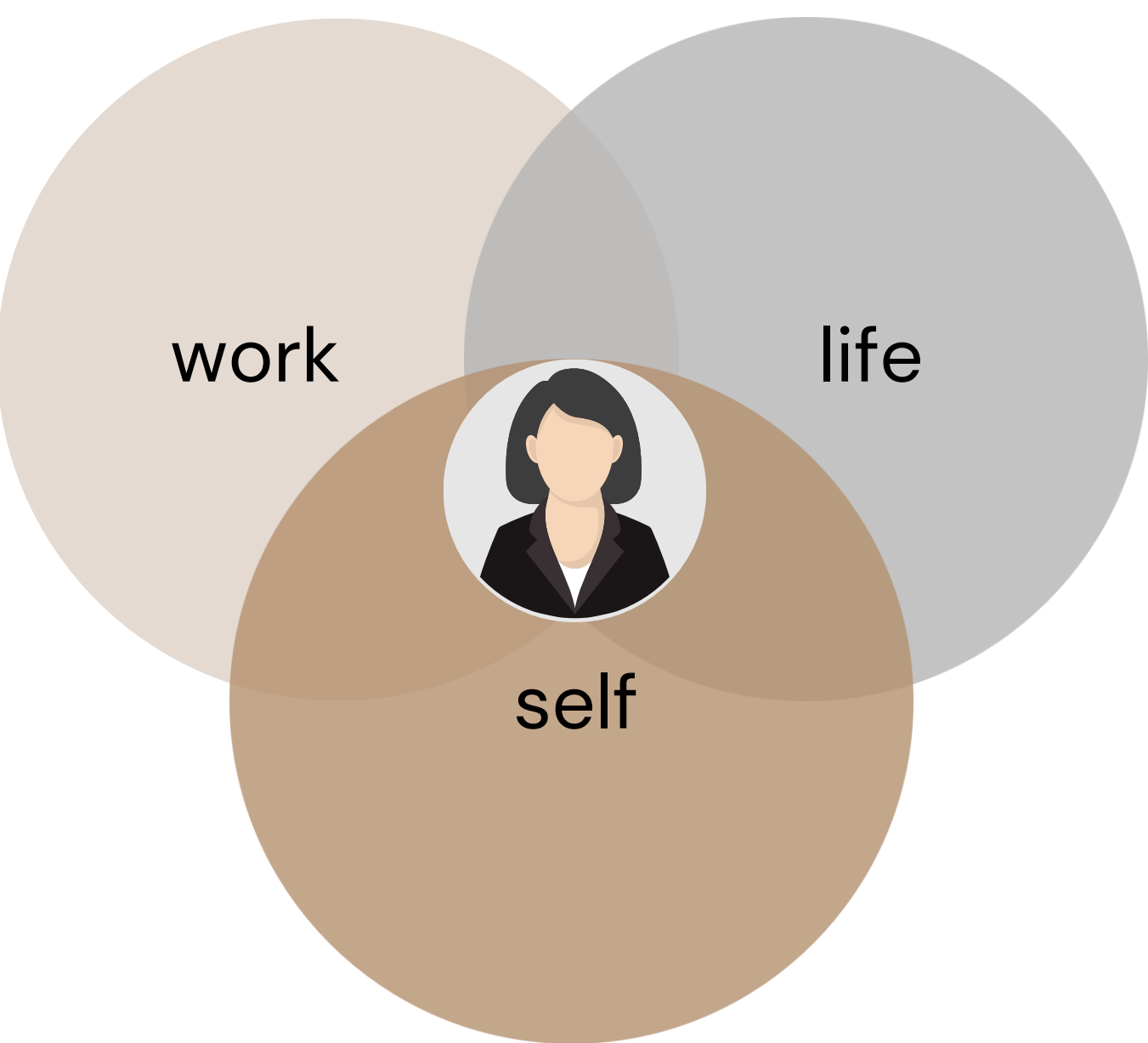
Wanted to comprehend

- How they identified their role as women middle manager
- What fostered and challenged their psychological well being?
- How they managed their multiple roles
- The strategies they use to help them
- Their recommendations to the CIUSSS-CN

4. Participants:



7. Implications:



work life self

- A societal paradigm shift is needed, **caring** should not be gendered and **must be valued** in our society and organizations.
- The organizational culture should not rely on the **exploitation of middle managers** to meet its objectives.
- Recognize the importance of taking care of the self.



We need to fix the systems not the women!

