

WISDOMTOOTH

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Mumpreneurs: Taking away the stigma

All mums are working mothers, only some are salaried...and I want to add about those who are not only not salaried, but create and sustain their own ventures, and generate jobs for others too!

From being a badge that was often worn with pride, and justly so, when the term mumpreneur was first coined, to becoming stigmatised over time, it has had a variety of connotations. Recently, it has sometimes been used to stigmatise and look down upon women entrepreneurs' hard work as mere hobbies along with their main 'job' of raising children.

Essentially, the term mumpreneur refers to female entrepreneurs who juggle a business while being the primary caregivers of their brood, in effect, nurturing babies of two kinds, tiny humans and a business venture, both with varying demands of their own!

To me, the very fact that someone is a full-time mum and working, be it for a salaried position or as a business owner, is amazing in itself. The same applies to dads too, if they happen to be the primary caregivers to their children, although the concept and practice remain very uncommon in our part of the world.

Each human being has various identities in the different roles they play in the variety



of relationships that form families and societies. Each role is important, and fulfilling in different ways. In the modern world, the emphasis is on men and women to receive equal opportunity and rights, but equal opportunity is often misinterpreted as extra privilege. For example, nature has devised that women bear the brunt of creating life and bringing it into the world, and for a certain period of time, it is necessary that mother and baby get quality time together to rest and bond, for the betterment of both, but especially the child, in the long run. Yet, in many offices even today, maternity leave is considered a special privilege despite laws stating otherwise, are granted only reluctantly, and often held against employees who do take it.

One such lady working in the media industry, on condition of anonymity, said that her last performance review held her back and denied a promotion simply

because she had just returned from her maternity leave. This in effect negated all her work prior to and since her leave, and was morale breaking.

It is no wonder then, that after having children, many mums try to launch their own ventures. This gives them a certain level of flexibility, to juggle their creative and entrepreneurial needs, with the demands of child care.

Sabrina Islam Shurovi, is one such mum with multi-dimensional roles. She is at once a mother, a homemaker, an author, as well as module coordinator at SPEED. In her words, she joined a school as it would allow the most time with her toddler, but later moved to the corporate side of things, and now creates modules for teacher training, while working on her own books for toddlers.

"My current employers have been very accommodating, as corporate timings are longer, I start my day earlier than others, and finish by 3:30 PM. This allows me adequate time with my child, who is now a teenager, and also have my own time, all in the day. I also must mention that my daughter and husband have both been very supportive," Sabrina said.

"I am enjoying my different identities," she added.

Being a mumpreneur also allows many women to adjust the workload as per the changing demands on their time, such as with Fatema Sarwar Rashid. She and her partners, all women, have their own jute bag factory called Ananna Enterprise.

This is not her first venture, as Fatema is sort of a serial entrepreneur, having launched her first project while still a student at intermediate level, with boutique work. Later, in 2003, she began to supply woven bags to the likes of Meena Bazar and Agora, but their business policy changes meant that the

type of bags changed and the amount of investment required was a big barrier. Thus, she adapted again, changed her business model, and with her partners, shifted to special promotional products of jute, and now supplies those to various companies. As her children were nearing the milestones in their education careers, she decided to cut back a little from her business work, only to share it more with her partner, in a great example of mumpreneurs helping each other.

"There are certain adjustments all business owners need to make to create a successful enterprise, and I am not any different. I avoid social events if there is an important order going on at the factory, prioritising work and family," Fatema said.

The motivation for mumpreneurs to launch their own businesses can be as different as each mum's personality and personal creed. For Nabila Ameen Bidhu, launching Paatvanga was about promoting what she, and her partners, love — all of 'deshi' handloom's beautiful variety.

"I prefer to buy as much of deshi stuff as I can find, for all types of products. When it came to the handloom of Bangladesh, I myself was surprised to find the beautiful variations available, and the lack of promotions thereof. That is when we decided to start Paatvanga. Capital constraints meant we had to rely on existing product varieties and buy from dealers, but now we are working on creating and launching our own designs," Bidhu said. She also said that all of this was possible because her family had been supportive of her work, and still encourage her to go on.

For Farhana Alam Neela, a teacher at Junior Laboratory School, and a mother to two, a chance idea led her back to her childhood passion of painting, which she now also sells under the Legerity brand.

Neela and her sister used to paint for fun a lot, especially during the long break after their HSC exams. The hobby was then ignored after she got married, but recently, her sister suggested she make one more for their parent's wedding anniversary. That picture, once posted online, got her so many positive reviews and encouragement that Legerity was born.

"I get a lot of support from my parents and husband. Typically, I paint on the weekends or at night, after putting the children to bed," she said.

Reading played a great role in my growing up, and while we all share and face the inherent barriers to movement as women in a largely male-dominated world, there are great examples of those who break through, some with, and more often without the support of their families or the society at large.

The first mumpreneur I learnt about was the trailblazing Khadija (RA), wife of Muhammad (SAW). She was already a widow with children, and 15 years senior to her husband, to whom she proposed marriage. But this happened only after he took one of her trade caravans for business, and impressed all those he worked with. If she could do it then, we can do it now.

There is no stigma in being a mumpreneur, unless it is intentionally inserted by those who use the term. It does not denote a small hobby that also generates income, although there is nothing wrong with that, rather it is a badge to sport with pride, for not many entrepreneurs can claim to successfully run a business while also bringing up children, both gargantuan feats, at a time!

Photo: Paatvanga, Legerity by Farhana Alam Neela