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Working Mothers: Good mothering, Parental Guilt and Work Volition

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Abstract: ***Working mothers experience marked work-family conflict which negatively affects their career progression and mental well-being. This study aimed to determine the interrelationship between good mothering expectations, parental guilt and work volition in working mothers. The participants included a total of 150 working mothers between the ages of 21 and 59. The inclusion criterion was working mothers with children of ages 21 or below. The study included participants primarily from India (90.8%), with a smaller representation from Australia (0.7%), the UK (2%), the US (0.7%), Egypt (0.7%), Turkey (0.7%) and Romania (5.4%). Three scales were utilized: the Good mothering Expectations Scale, the Guilt about Parenting Scale, and Work Volition. The results indicate a weak significant correlation between traditional roles and parental guilt (Rho = .345). The significant F-statistic (14.137) with a very low p-value (000) suggests that there are statistically significant differences in parental guilt scores among the traditional roles. No statistically significant relationships were found between guilt about parenting and work volition. The results of the study indicate that working mothers who subscribe to traditional mothering roles face increased amounts of guilt.***

Keywords: Parental Guilt, Working mothers, Work volition, Motherhood, Good mothering, Traditional roles

I. INTRODUCTION

Working mothers face the dual responsibility of managing family chores and fulfilling their professional obligations. Working mothers face bias and subtle discrimination at the workplace which decreases their chances of hiring, promotions and equal pay[1]. There is a prevailing expectation that women should accord primary importance to tending to familial responsibilities, including the management of domestic affairs and the upbringing of children, while their professional pursuits are relegated to a secondary position. In certain instances, they are even expected to resign from their employment in order to assume responsibility for their familial obligations. Mothers who choose to maintain employment following childbirth may encounter significant feelings of guilt associated with their decision to separate from their children. Parental guilt refers to the emotional distress experienced by those who believe that they should possess alternative beliefs, thoughts, or behaviors in their role as parents[2].

According to Guendouzi[1], the traditional role of motherhood imposes restrictive guidelines that result in feelings of guilt among employed women. It arises from the internalization of societal expectations surrounding the idealized image of a competent mother. A working mother's self-identity changes drastically, as they internalize the cultural stereotypes[3]. Working women have to work twice as hard as working men because of the stereotypes they face as working mothers[4]. Their competence and commitment both at the workplace and home is constantly under scrutiny [5]. Parental guilt exerts influence on working mothers' perceptions of their careers, thereby impacting their work volition. Work volition is the ability to make occupational choices despite constraints [6]. If the concept of being a good mother is closely linked to the notion of prioritizing domestic responsibilities and child rearing, it prompts an inquiry into whether working mothers possess agency in their decision to work.

A. Motherhood

Motherhood has been a topic of debate in feminist discourses since 2017. Some view motherhood as a blessing and thread that unites women, whereas others believe that motherhood binds women to domesticity and restricts their autonomy. Researchers argue that motherhood becomes a fixed status that implicitly reinforces women's economic and social "inferiority"[7]. A qualitative study by Laney et al., showed that mothers felt like they had lost their identities in the beginning stages of motherhood [8]. They had to expand their boundaries and reform their identities to incorporate children and child rearing. The close relationships mothers share with their children also intensify their personalities[8].

Motherhood is a social construct, who is an ideal mother cannot be described objectively. The status of motherhood is complex and dynamic. In some cultures motherhood does not restrict women from occupation, whereas in some other cultures motherhood restricts the women in different ways.

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It is the cultural norms that determine the policies related to paid leave, maternal leave, childcare etc[9]. Study on work-family conflict in mothers showed that if the culture supports higher earning for women then maternal employment and job satisfaction is high whereas if the culture caters to males and follow the male as a breadwinner and female as a caregiver model it becomes difficult for mothers to continue working[9].

B. Good Mothering Stereotypes

Mothers internalize the idea that a good mother is someone who willingly gives up personal desires and needs for the sake of her family and children. Okimoto and Heilman[10] conducted four experimental studies that indicated that working mothers are seen as less competent in both their professional and domestic roles. According to Okimoto and Heilman[10], the impression of women as "bad mothers" increases when they assume roles that are traditionally dominated by men. Additionally, it was discovered that when mothers choose to engage in employment, they are seen as inadequate parents in comparison to mothers who work out of obligation. One's endorsement or rejection of stereotypes also affects how individuals perceive the significance of their roles in both their professional and personal lives, such as being handed significant assignments at work[11]. Sonnenburg and Miller conducted a cross-sectional study in 2021, in which 230 mothers participated. The study revealed that there is a direct correlation between the level of incongruence between the societal expectation of a "good mother" and a woman's personal perception of her maternal identity. The greater the incongruence is, the greater the likelihood of experiencing feelings of guilt, maternal shame, and postnatal depression[12].

C. Gender Roles

Heilman[13] in his study of gender stereotypes and workplace bias discussed the concepts of descriptive gender stereotypes and prescriptive gender stereotypes. Whereas descriptive states how men and women are, prescriptive stereotypes describe how men and women *should be*. Descriptive gender stereotypes result in a negative bias toward women, who are expected to be less competent than men, especially in typically male-dominated roles and positions[13]. Prescriptive stereotypes dictate and control a woman's behavior. When women do not conform to these stereotypes they face social penalties[13]. For instance, a successful and career oriented woman does not evoke positive affect from others, on the contrary, successful men are admired and respected.

A thorough review of the literature revealed that only a limited number of studies have specifically targeted work volition in working mothers. Work-family conflict and experience of guilt are highly researched topics however, the intersection of the pressure to be a "good mother," the parental guilt that comes with it and how it affects work volition needs to be researched further to empower working mothers.

II. METHOD

This study was carried out on working mothers with children aged 21 years or younger (n=150). The majority of the participants resided in India. Convenience sampling was performed to collect responses by circulating Google forms through various online media. The Google Form consisted of an informed consent form and three different scales that measured the three variables of the study i.e good mothering expectations, parental guilt and work volition. Descriptive statistics were used to show the frequency, variance and mean of the scores obtained for each of the scales separately. Spearman's correlation coefficient (rho) with a confidence level of 0.05 was used to find the linear correlation between good mothering and between parental guilt and work volition. One way ANOVA was used to study the difference in means of the three variables to study the variance in parental guilt by differences in good mothering expectations and variance in work volition by differences in parental guilt in working mothers.

A. Hypotheses

H0: There are no significant differences between the means of Good Mothering Expectations and Parental Guilt or between the means of Parental Guilt and Work Volition in working mothers

H1: There is a significant difference between the means of Good Mothering Expectations and Parental Guilt in working mothers

H2: There is a significant difference between the means of Parental guilt and Work Volition in working mothers

B. Participants

A total of 150 working mothers with children aged 21 years and younger participated in the study. The age of the participants ranged from 21 to 59 years. The participants ranged from high school graduates to doctorate holders. The occupations included teaching, government services, software developers, doctors, chefs, marketing managers, consultants, mental health professionals, nurses, freelancers, economists, managers, engineers, bank employees, private employees and clerks.

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The participants had been working for 1 year to 41 years. A total of 50.7% of the participants had one child, 44% had two children, 4.7% had three children and 0.7% had more than three children aged 21 years or younger. The majority of the respondents were married, three were single and one woman was divorced. The study included participants primarily from India (90.8%), with a smaller percentage from Australia (0.7%), the UK (2%), the US (0.7%), Egypt (0.7%), Turkey (0.7%) and Romania (5.4%).

C. *Tools for data collection*

1) *Good Mothering Expectations Scale:* The scale was developed to study cross-cultural and culturally specific expectations of a "good mother." It was developed by Karen O'Brian[14] and colleagues. The scale has a total of 30 items. The scale is reliable and the three scales have a moderately strong correlation (.33-.5)
2) *The Guilt about Parenting scale (GAPS):* The GAPS was developed by Haslam[2] and colleagues (2020) to study the phenomenon of parental guilt. The statistical analyses revealed that there was good concurrent, construct and convergent validity and strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.89$, $H = 0.89$). The 10-item scale, which focuses on a single factor related to parenting guilt, demonstrated a strong fit based on the statistical analysis, with $\chi^2 (35) = 65.59$ and $p < 0.001$ (Haslam et al., 2020).
3) *Work Volition Scale:* The WVS was developed by Duffy[6] and colleagues (2012) to study work volition . It consists of 13 items that were chosen after conducting a thorough factor analysis. There are three subscales: the general volition subscale, the financial constraints subscale, and the structural constraints subscale. The overall internal consistency of the WVS-SV scale was excellent, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .88. Similarly, the constraints subscale exhibited a high level of internal consistency, registering an alpha coefficient of .87. The general volition subscale, it demonstrated acceptable reliability, with an alpha coefficient of .70 (Duffy et al., 2012).

D. *Statistical Analysis*

Descriptive statistics was used to show the frequency, variance and mean of the scores obtained in each of the scales separately. Spearman's correlation coefficient (rho) with confidence level of 0.05 was used to find the linear correlation between good mothering and parental guilt, and parental guilt and work volition. It indicated the strength of the correlation between the variables and the direction of the relationship between the variables. One way ANOVA was used to study the difference in means of the three variables to study the variance in parental guilt by differences in good mothering expectations and variance in work volition by differences in parental guilt in working mothers.

E. *Ethics Followed*

1) Informed Consent: A google form was circulated to collect responses from the participants. The google form contained all the required details of the study. The rights and role of the participants and limitations of confidentiality were mentioned. The objective of the study and its relevance was also mentioned. For any further queries the researcher's contact details were provided.
2) *Privacy:* The participants' data was collected anonymously, participants were given the choice of using their initials instead of their name to record the responses. It was ensured that the details provided by the participants cannot be traced back to them.
3) *Confidentiality:* The confidentiality of the participants was maintained by keeping their identity anonymous, and by storing the data safely and securely on the researcher's laptop. The data was only accessed by the researcher.
4) *Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:* The consent form also explained that the participation in the study is completely voluntary and the participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any penalty.
5) *Integrity:* The data was recorded accurately without any manipulation. All the work has been cited and due credit has been given to all researchers if any idea was borrowed.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between traditional roles and parental guilt. A Spearman's correlation test and a One-way ANOVA were performed to determine the statistical significance of the results. It is notable that there is a significant positive correlation between Parental Guilt and traditional roles. Parental guilt is positively correlated with praise and protection. The one-way ANOVA test indicated that the variance in parental guilt is due to variations in traditional roles.
The Spearman's correlation coefficient indicated that there is no significant relationship between parental guilt and possession of capital and connecting and teaching.

There is no substantial correlation between parental guilt, volition (work), structural restrictions, and financial constraints. The one-way ANOVA results indicated that there is a lack of significance in variances among the variables mentioned. The results indicate a strong and statistically significant correlation between Traditional roles and parental guilt.

A. Results

TABLE 1
Showing descriptive Statistics of Work Volition, Structural Constraints, Financial Constraints and volition

	Work Volition	Structural Constraints	Financial Constraints	Volition
Mean	46.93	12.29	11.36	20.39
Median	45	12	10	21
Mode	43	4	4	22
SD	12. 153	6.129	6.423	5.009

Table 1 shows the mean, median, mode and standard deviation of work volition, structural constraints, financial constraints and general volition. The means are 46.93, 12.29, 11.36, and 20.39 for work volition, structural constraints, financial constraints and volition respectively. The medians are 45, 12, 10, and 20 for work volition, structural constraints, financial constraints and volition respectively. The modes are 43, 4, 4, 22 for work volition, structural constraints, financial constraints and volition respectively. The standard deviation for each work volition, structural constraints, financial constraints and volition are 12.153, 6.129, 6.423, and 5.009 respectively.

TABLE 2
Showing descriptive statistics of Good mothering Expectations, Traditional Roles, Connection and Teaching, Possession of Capital and Praise and Protection

	Good Mothering Expectations	Traditional Roles	Connection and Teaching	Possession of Capital	Praise and Protection
Mean	150.97	22.63	30.77	28.24	29.05
Median	153.50	23	31	29	30
Mode	155	22	31	30	31
SD	20.743	4.425	4.495	5.174	4.771

Table 2 shows the mean, median, mode and standard deviation of work volition, structural constraints, financial constraints and general volition. The means are 150.97, 22.63, 30.77, 28.24, and 29.05 for good mothering expectations, traditional roles, connecting and teaching, possession of capital, and praise and protection respectively. The medians are 153.50, 23, 31, 29, and 30 for good mothering expectations, traditional roles, connecting and teaching, possession of capital, and praise and protection respectively. The modes are 155, 22, 31, 30 and 31 good mothering expectations, traditional roles, connecting and teaching, possession of capital, and praise and protection respectively. The standard deviation for good mothering expectations, traditional roles, connecting and teaching, possession of capital, and praise and protection are 20.743, 4.425, 4.495, 5.174 and 4.771 respectively.

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TABLE 3
Showing descriptive statistics of Parental Guilt

	Parental Guilt
Mean	41.10
Median	39
Mode	46
Standard Deviation	17.002

Table 3 shows the mean, median, mode and standard deviation of parental guilt which are 41.10, 39, 46 and 17.002 respectively.

TABLE 4
Showing the Spearman's correlation between Parental Guilt and Traditional roles, Connecting and Teaching, Possession of Capital and Praise and Protection

			Traditional Roles	Connecting and Teaching	Possession of Capital	Praise and Protection
Spearman's Rho	Parental guilt	Correlation Coefficient	.345**	.079	.076	.262**
		Sig (2-tailed)	000	334	354	.001
		N	150	150	150	150

**Correlation is significant at 0.05 level

Spearman's correlation was conducted to find the correlation coefficients between the variables mentioned in table 4. There is a significant positive weak correlation between traditional roles and parental guilt (Rho = .345) and praise and protection and parental guilt (Rho= .262). There is no significant correlation between parental guilt, connecting and teaching and possession of capital.

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TABLE 5
Showing Spearman's correlation between Traditional Roles, Possession of Capital, Praise and Protection, Connecting and Teaching and Volition, Structural and Financial Constraint

			Structural	Financial	Volition
Spearman's Rho	Traditional roles	Correlation Coefficient	.145	.140	-.061
		Sig (2-tailed)	.076	.087	.460
		N	150	150	150
	Possession of Capital	Correlation Coefficient	.004	-.082	.110
		Sig (2-tailed)	.964	.320	.180
		N	150	150	150
	Praise and protection	Correlation Coefficient	.034	.107	.029
		Sig (2-tailed)	.675	.194	.725
		N	150	150	150
	Connecting and Teaching	Correlation Coefficient	-.072	-.188	.032
		Sig (2-tailed)	.378	.021	.695
		N	150	150	150

Table 5 shows that there are no statistically significant correlations between the above mentioned variables.

TABLE 6
Showing One Way ANOVA of Parental Guilt by Traditional roles

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
Between Groups	29577.166	20	1478.858	14.137	000
Within Groups	13494.334	129	104.607		
Total	43701.500	149			

The significant F-statistic (14.137) with a very low p-value (000) suggests that there are statistically significant differences in Parental Guilt scores among the Traditional roles.The Between Groups analysis suggests that the variance in Parental guilt can be attributed to differences between Traditional roles rather than random variation within groups.

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TABLE 7
Showing one way ANOVA of Parental Guilt by Possession of Capital

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
Between Groups	9109.568	22	414.071	1.548	.070
Within Groups	33961.932	127	267.417		
Total	43071.500	149			

The F-statistic (1.548) suggests that there is some difference in the means of the groups, but the associated p-value (0.070) indicates that this difference is not statistically significant at the significance level of 0.05. The Between Groups analysis suggests that the variance in Parental guilt cannot be attributed to differences in Possession of Capital.

TABLE 8
Showing One way ANOVA of Parental Guilt by Connecting and Teaching

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
Between Groups	2548.153	17	149.891	.488	.955
Within Groups	40523.347	132	306.995		
Total	43071.500	149			

The F-statistic (0.488) suggests that there is very little evidence of differences in Parental Guilt scores between groups based on Connecting and Teaching. The associated p-value (0.955) is much higher than the significance level of 0.05. The Between Groups analysis suggests that the variance in Parental guilt scores is not significantly explained by differences between groups based on Connecting and Teaching.

TABLE 9
Showing One Way ANOVA of Parental guilt by Praise and Protection

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
Between Groups	3861.460	22	175.521	.569	.937
Within Groups	39210.040	127	308.740		
Total	43701.500	149			

The F-statistic (0.569) suggests that there is little evidence of differences in Parental guilt scores between groups based on Praise and Protection. The associated p-value (0.937) is much higher than the significance level of 0.05, indicating that any observed differences are likely due to random chance. The Between Groups analysis suggests that the variance in Parental guilt scores is not significantly explained by differences between groups based on Praise and Protection.

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TABLE 10
Showing one way ANOVA of Parental guilt by Structural Constraint, Financial Constraint and Volition

		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
Structural Constraint	Between Groups	2219.524	43	51.617	1.620	.024
	Within Groups	3377.569	106	31.864		
	Total	5597.093	149			
Financial Constraint	Between Groups	1925.645	43	44.782	1.223	.203
	Within Groups	3880.915	106	36.612		
	Total	5806.560	149			
Volition	Between Groups	1354.786	43	31.507	1.401	.084
	Within Groups	2383.007	106	22.481		
	Total	3737.793	149			

The F-statistic (1.620) for Structural Constraint suggests that there is little evidence of differences in parental guilt scores between groups based on praise and protection. The associated p-value (0.024) is lower than the significance level of 0.05, indicated that the differences are significant. The F-statistic (1.233) for Financial Constraint suggests that there is little evidence of differences in parental guilt scores between groups based on Financial Constraints. The associated p-value (0.203) is higher than the significance level of 0.05, indicating that any observed differences are likely due to random chance. The F-statistic (1.401) for Volition suggests that there is little evidence of differences in parental guilt scores between groups based on Volition. The associated p-value (0.84) is higher than the significance level of 0.05, indicating that any observed differences are likely due to random chance. The Between Groups analysis suggests that the variance in parental guilt scores is not significantly explained by differences between groups based on Volition

B. Discussion

The results show that there is a positive significant weak correlation between Parental Guilt and Traditional roles (Rho = .345) and there is a positive significant weak correlation between Parental Guilt and Praise and Protection (Rho = .262). It was also found that the F-statistic (14.137) with a very low p-value (000) shows that results are highly significant. It suggests that the variance in Parental guilt can be attributed to differences between Traditional roles rather than random variation within groups.

Traditional roles impact how parents view themselves, when it comes to working mothers traditional roles enforced by the society creates feelings of guilt. The gender stereotypes prescribed by society are internalized by women, thus, working mothers face greater amounts of guilt than working fathers[15]. Working mothers feel guilt mainly due to the amount of time and energy they have to invest in their occupations instead of family, this leads to mothers from opting out of jobs and some mothers on the other hand follow the “mommy track”[15] The guilt limits their family and work satisfaction, and they end up complying to the gender norms[13].

Studies show that working mothers are seen as less competent in both domestic and occupational spheres. Women who do not follow the traditional roles of being a caregiver and subservient to their spouses face extreme stress[13]. The internalization of sexist norms puts serious pressure on working mothers[16]. In accordance with the existing literature, this study shows that working mothers who prescribe to the traditional roles of a "good mother" experience a large amount of parental guilt.

The traditional role of a mother mandates that she should invest in her children and be constantly involved in different parts of their life. According to the Good Mothering Expectations Scale that was used in this study there are 4 factors that determine how mothers view themselves, namely traditional roles, praise and protecting, connecting and teaching and possession of capital. The weak positive correlation between Parental guilt and Praise and Protection shows that working mothers experience guilt when they are not able to be present in parts of their children's lives which requires appreciation and safety. Good mothering entails that mothers put their children over everything, when they feel that they cannot always be there when their child needs them and they may suffer in the absence of the mother [16].

Contrary to the evidence from the existing literature, the findings of the study do not show a statistically significant relationship between parental guilt and teaching and connecting and possession of capital. According to this study working mothers do not experience parental guilt if they are unable to form strong bonds with their children and play an active role in imparting wisdom. Moreover, possession of capital does not equate with good mothering as evidenced by the study. According to traditional roles and gender stereotypes, an ideal mother is expected to be solely responsible for the domestic sphere and whether they have a good source of income is considered to be redundant in accordance with the traditional norms[16].

The study revealed that there is no significant relationship between parental guilt and work volition. The findings of the study contradict the literature that was reviewed. The literature shows that women face high levels of work-family conflict. According to Stuart et al.,[17] women are straightjacketed into the "mommy track," wherein they are forced to pick or adjust their careers to accommodate their domestic roles. However, the participants of this study reported that their work volition is not affected by financial constraints, structural constraints or volition.

A significant proportion of the participants in this study had graduate or postgraduate qualifications. Additionally, a considerable number of them are employed in educational institutions, healthcare, and government agencies. Some women self-identified as freelance workers. The sample of this study consists of women who were able to pursue occupations that aligned with their educational background. Given the participants' backgrounds, it is likely that a significant portion of them were able to actively select careers in their respective fields of interest and expertise. Moreover, a significant proportion of participants were over the age of 30 and had only one child under the age of 21. This circumstance may have had a positive impact on their career choices, allowing them the opportunity to pursue jobs despite the challenges of being a mother, as their children are capable of taking care of themselves. Several participants had long-term jobs, whereas two participants had to suspend their careers due to child-rearing responsibilities. The literature study indicates that mothers who have younger children have higher levels of parental guilt and work-family conflict[18].

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The study showed that there is a statistically significant relationship between traditional roles and parental guilt. Working mothers who subscribe to traditional norms that describe good mothering are more likely to experience substantial amounts of parental guilt. Working mothers also fear whether they are able to provide safety and protection to their children. According to the sample of this study good mothering does not cover other elements such as connecting with the child, forming close bonds, possessing financial resources for the child, and teaching. Working or having financial resources is not prioritized by mothers, due to the gendered nature of households and working conditions. Working mothers' primary focus is not on earnings but rather they prioritize the family. Furthermore, in regard to work volition, experiencing parental guilt does not affect their career related choices.

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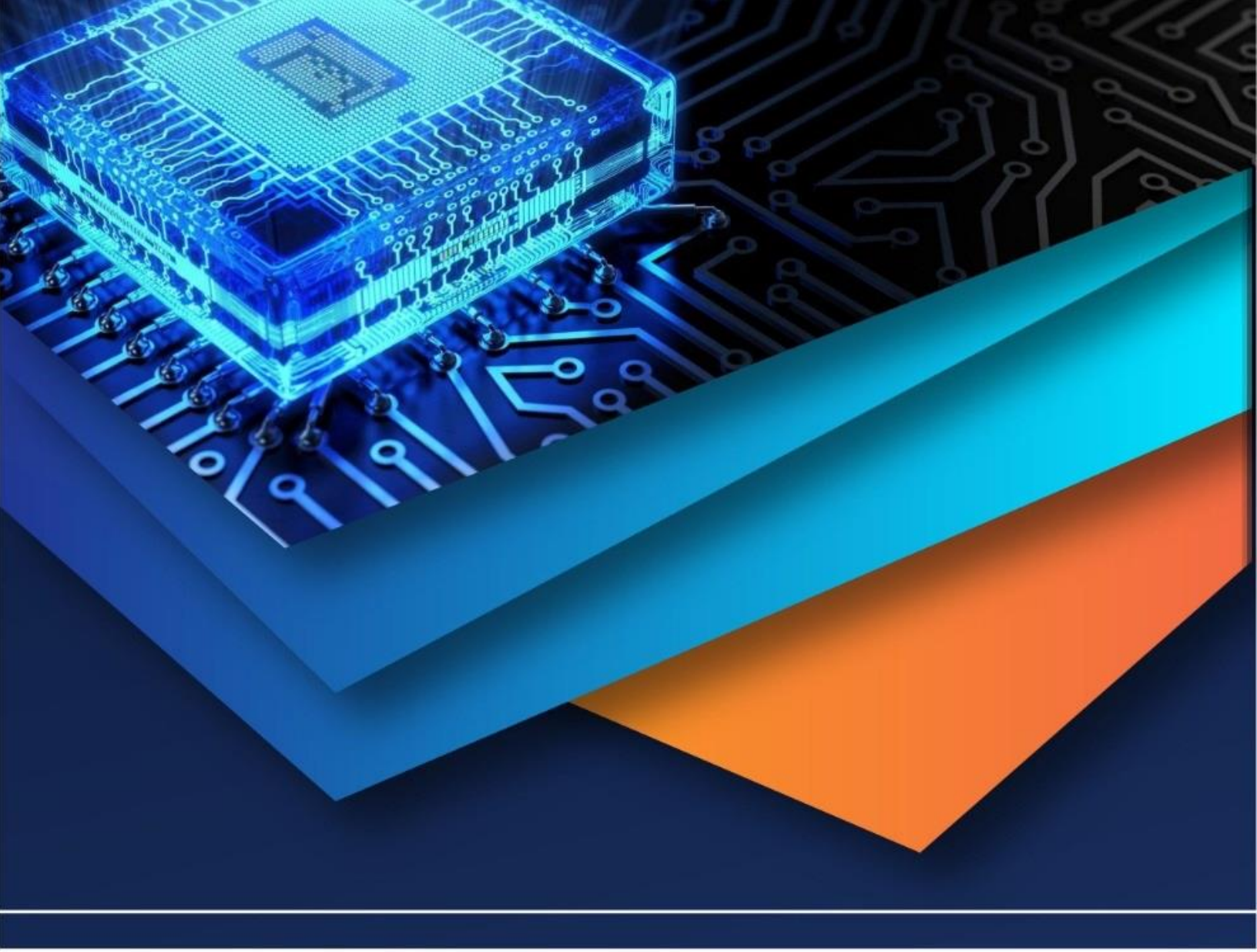
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