# Geography · GS - IV

At 9 pm on Saturday evening, Rashika, a Joint Secretary, was still engrossed in her work in her office. Her husband, Vikram, is an executive in an MNC and frequently out of town in connection with his work. Their two children aged 5 and 3 are looked after by their domestic helper. At 9:30 pm her superior, Mr. Suresh calls her and asks her to prepare a detailed note on an important matter to be discussed in a meeting in the Ministry. She realises that she will have to work on Sunday to finish the additional task given by her superior.

She reflects on how she had looked forward to this posting and had worked long hours for months to achieve it. She had kept the welfare of people uppermost in discharging her duties. She feels that she has not done enough justice to her family and she has not fulfilled her duties in discharging essential social obligations. Even as recently as last month she had to leave her sick child in the nanny's care as she had to work in the office. Now, she feels that she must draw a line, beyond which her personal life should take precedence over her professional responsibilities. She thinks that there should be reasonable limits to the work ethics such as punctuality, hard work, dedication to duty and selfless service.

**(a) Discuss the ethical issues involved in this case.**

**(b) Briefly describe at least four laws that have been enacted by the Government with respect to providing a healthy, safe and equitable working environment for women.**

**(c) Imagine you are in a similar situation. What suggestions would you make to mitigate such working conditions?**

| EXAM YEAR | PAPER | SUBJECT |
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| MARKS | WORD LIMIT |
|---|---|
| 20 | ~250 words |

## Answer Hint

**The case involves the ethical tension between professional duty and family responsibilities, especially the question of whether dedication requires unlimited sacrifice. It demands a balance between commitment to public service, work-life balance, gender equity, family obligations, institutional efficiency and humane working conditions.**

## Model Answer

**Introduction:**

The case highlights the ethical dilemma between **professional commitment and personal responsibilities**. Public service demands dedication, but dedication should not be interpreted as unlimited availability that undermines family welfare, health or human dignity.

**(a) Ethical issues involved:**

**Professional duty versus family obligations:** Rashika has a responsibility towards citizens and the Ministry, but also towards her young and dependent children.

**Work ethic versus work-life balance:** Punctuality, hard work and dedication are virtues, but their excessive interpretation can lead to burnout and neglect of legitimate personal responsibilities.

**Gender dimension:** Women often face disproportionate expectations of managing both professional and domestic responsibilities. An equitable workplace must not make career advancement dependent upon sacrificing family life.

**Individual responsibility versus institutional responsibility:** The issue is not merely Rashika's ability to manage time; the organisation must also ensure reasonable workloads, delegation and predictable working hours.

**Public interest versus employee well-being:** Excessive working hours may initially increase output but can eventually reduce efficiency, creativity, mental well-being and quality of decision-making.

**(b) Laws providing a healthy, safe and equitable working environment for women:**

**1. Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013:** Provides a framework for preventing sexual harassment and establishes mechanisms such as Internal Complaints Committees for redressal.

**2. Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, as amended in 2017:** Provides maternity benefits and safeguards relating to maternity, including enhanced paid maternity leave and provisions concerning nursing breaks and crèche facilities in applicable establishments.

**3. Equal Remuneration Act, 1976:** Sought to ensure equal remuneration for men and women for the same or similar work and prevent discrimination in employment on grounds of sex. Its substantive provisions have subsequently been incorporated into the **Code on Wages, 2019**.

**4. Factories Act, 1948:** Contained provisions relating to the health, safety and welfare of workers, including specific provisions concerning women workers. Its occupational safety framework has subsequently been consolidated under the **Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020**.

**(c) Suggestions to mitigate such working conditions:**

First, I would establish **clear work priorities** and distinguish genuinely urgent tasks from those that can be completed during normal working hours.

Second, I would discuss the workload with the superior respectfully and seek **reasonable timelines, delegation or redistribution of work** where possible.

Third, the organisation should adopt **flexible working arrangements**, predictable working hours, compensatory mechanisms for exceptional overtime and effective leave policies.

Fourth, ministries should strengthen **delegation and team-based work** so that important tasks do not depend excessively on one officer.

Fifth, institutional support such as **crèche facilities, childcare support and family-friendly policies** should be strengthened.

Finally, officers should maintain boundaries without compromising essential public duties. If an emergency genuinely requires extended work, I would accept the additional responsibility while ensuring that such exceptional demands do not become a permanent work culture.

**Conclusion:**

True work ethics should combine **dedication with sustainability, responsibility with empathy, and professional excellence with human dignity**. A healthy institution is one where employees serve society effectively without being forced to choose permanently between their profession and their family.

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