

Exploring the unrealistic expectations placed on women around the world

In every society around the world, women* bear a multitude of responsibilities. Women have to deal with difficult expectations from society that can feel overwhelming at every stage of their lives. From when to have a baby, fertility, pregnancy, how to deliver the baby, postpartum, parenting, and through menopause (anyone else exhausted yet?), society often demands an ever-changing vision of perfection from women, making them try to fit an ideal that is both unattainable and detrimental to their well-being.

Read on to learn about the common demands placed on women around the world throughout critical life stages, illustrating the need for a more compassionate and equitable world for all women.

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*When we say “women,” we are talking about anyone on the *gender spectrum* who identifies as a woman



Fertility

Expectation:

“You should conceive naturally on your first try.”

Reality:

We have this idea that getting pregnant is easy and happens quickly for everyone, but one in five couples around the world struggle with infertility.



India

Women in India are often blamed if they are unable to get pregnant—and failure to get pregnant in India sometimes leads to loss of social status and support.

U.K.

Fertility in the U.K. continues to be a major source of shame. One in five employees would rather call in sick than inform their employer that they have a fertility appointment.

Canada

Canada is considered to be a “late” childbearing nation—the average age of mothers at the time of delivery is 31.4. The most reported symptom of infertility-related distress is anxiety, which includes anxious rumination, avoidance of events that reminded them of infertility, and excessive information seeking.

United States

In the U.S., an estimated one in five women experience infertility. More and more, women in the U.S. are waiting until they are more financially secure to have children. But people affected by infertility in the U.S. may feel anxious or depressed because of societal pressure to achieve the “American dream” of a successful career and family with kids.

Japan

Japan has the highest number of cases of fertility treatment in the world—18.2% of Japanese couples have undergone or are undergoing fertility treatment or testing. Even though it’s common, it’s still very mentally and socially challenging for people. Half of women going through IVF or ICSI in Japan showed more than mild depressive symptoms.

Pregnancy and postpartum

Expectation:

“You should always feel overwhelming joy and gratitude as a pregnant woman and a mother.”

Reality:

We may picture pregnancy as a flawless and happy experience. Women who have undergone fertility treatments often feel added pressure to cherish and enjoy every second of their pregnancy journey. However, pregnancy can bring various physical discomforts, complications, and mental challenges that are all completely normal.



India

Many Indian women believe they have little to no control over their pregnancy and will only seek medical advice in the event of a problem. Research suggests that women in India experience shame in asking about reproductive and gynecological health.

U.K.

In the U.K., the COVID-19 pandemic increased pregnant women's risk for anxiety, depression, and attachment to their newborn babies. However, the more social support a woman had, the less anxiety she was likely to experience.

Canada

Like new moms around the world, new moms in Canada often feel an intense pressure to “bounce back” to their pre-baby bodies. It's very normal to struggle with body image during and after having a baby—when a new mom is expected to care for their child while adhering to strict beauty standards.

United States

Despite having one of the most advanced healthcare systems in the world, America has the highest maternal mortality rate among developed nations. Black women, who experience medical racism and inattentive care at higher rates, are more than three times more likely to die in pregnancy and postpartum than white women in the U.S.

Japan

Most women who give birth in Japan will not have access to pain medication during labor—only 6.1% of women are given pain relief during labor.

Parenthood

Expectation:

“You should be able to do it all as a mom” and “Enjoy every second!”

Reality:

Parenthood is sometimes depicted as a state of bliss and harmony, but the reality is that it comes with a range of emotions, including stress, frustration, and exhaustion. Women may feel guilty for not living up to the idealized image of the perfect, always happy supermom. But with all of the expectations of modern day mothers, levels of burnout have skyrocketed.



India

Mothers in India are susceptible to “mom guilt,” the feeling of guilt or shame when someone feels they’re not living up to their role as a parent. 73% of Indian women leave their jobs after giving birth. Many want to re-enter the workforce, but fear pay cuts after maternity leave and worry about the shame of not being there for their families.

U.K.

A recent study found that 70% of parents with babies and young children feel it is getting harder every year to be a parent in Britain, with 70% feeling that being a parent today is harder than it was for their parent’s generation.

Canada

Two-thirds of working Canadian moms are struggling with work-life balance, feeling like they’re never really off work even when they’re with their families.

United States

Anxiety is rising among parents in the U.S.—and mothers are disproportionately worrying about their kids more than fathers. Recent research found that mothers are more likely than fathers to say being a parent is stressful all or more of the time and are more likely to feel judged for the way they parent their children.

Japan

78% of Japanese women work, but they also shoulder an enormous responsibility at home. Japan ranks as one of the countries in which men do the fewest hours of household chores and child care, leaving women to manage close to 25 hours of housework a week.

Menopause

Expectation:

“You should hide or deny the signs of aging and menopause”

Reality:

As women approach menopause, society often encourages them to hide or reverse the signs of aging. Because they have for such a long time, women are expected to suffer in silence through the physical and emotional challenges of menopause—and if they do speak up, they aren’t always taken seriously.



India

In India, menopause is often thought of as something to be feared or dreaded as women equate menopause with old age—even though the average age of menopause, 46.2, is younger than the global menopause average. Talking about menopause is taboo, leaving women to deal with symptoms on their own.

U.K.

Menopause is starting to become a larger part of the conversation in the U.K. In 2015, the government published the first national guidelines on menopause, and since then, there have been several resources published to support women going through menopause.

Canada

Menopause in Canada remains a taboo subject that is shrouded in secrecy, leaving women unprepared for this phase of life. Nearly 50% of women in Canada feel unprepared for menopause, and more than half were unaware of common menopausal symptoms.

United States

Most American medical schools only teach about an hour of menopause education over the course of the four year training. About 20% of U.S. doctors have no menopause training, and only 7% feel prepared to treat menopausal patients.

Japan

Menopause in Japan is called “konenki,” which translates to “the years of transition” and has connotations of renewal and energy. Menopause is viewed positively as a natural life stage, because in Japan, age is revered and respected (cheers to this!).

Maven is there for you through every stage of life

There is a troubling pattern of unrealistic expectations that impacts women throughout their lives. Women are shouldering a disproportionate burden—but if you're feeling the weight of this, you're not alone. Maven strives for a world where women are celebrated for their individuality, their choices are respected, and they are supported at every age.

Maven can help you:

- Manage the emotional and mental stress of fertility
- Navigate the pressures of pregnancy and postpartum
- Handle the ups and downs of parenthood
- Treat menopause symptoms, big and small

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