Reclaiming the Self: Individuation and Midlife Crisis among Working-Mothers

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study is to explore the construct of individuation and midlife crisis within analytical psychology perspective among working mothers. It examines the psychological and social aspects of Jungian Individuation and midlife changes in working mothers to gain insight into the concept of Individuation in an indigenous context. Individuation in midlife is an important period of psychological development and reorientation of identity, but it can also coincide with distinct social and familial demands of working mothers. The goal of the study is to discover the lived reality and negotiated experience of individuation and possible midlife crises of midlife working mothers in both their personal and professional settings. The qualitative exploratory research design was used. Study sample comprised of (N = 10) middle-aged working mothers, age range; 40-60 years and education; 16-18 years. Using a self-developed semi-structured interview protocol. The Hybrid inductive-deductive thematic analysis was used to draw themes from data. Results indicate that the process of individuation in working mothers is influenced by role conflict experiences and changes in self-perceptual identity and family system. Resilience, self-realization, connection to the Divine, existential awareness, Spiritual awakening and relational transformation were derived as key themes in their midlife experience. The study also points towards the importance of the gendered work-family context in the understanding of individuation and midlife crisis, as well as the understanding of the simultaneous development of professional and personal identity within the Self of working mothers.

KEYWORDS: Individuation, Midlife Crisis, Working Mothers, Self-awareness, Hybrid Thematic Analysis, Spirituality, Psychological Growth

Pages: 295 – 312
Volume: 5
Issue: 9 (September 2026)

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Cite this Article: Khan, M., & Tarar, A. H. (2026). Reclaiming the Self: Individuation and Midlife Crisis among Working-Mothers. *The Regional Tribune, 5*(9), 295-312. https://doi.org/10.55737/trt/v-ix.449

Introduction

The process of becoming oneself is a lifelong one, starting with a person's recollection of what has happened in earlier years of life, which influences their sense of Self, others, and the world. It is a progression of internalizing what one has learnt into one's worldview and evolving a unified Self that reflects upon life's ups and downs and links with the transcendent. It's Individuation, becoming a whole person. The paper explores how the individuation process through Jungian psychology can be a catalyst for the redefinition of identity, assuming that the midlife transition is a critical period for psychological growth. This developmental period requires an internal rebalancing for working moms to meet the dual demands of work and family. This liminal period, where women must deal with the nature of the conflicts between their roles and responsibilities as mother and employee, can also lead to deep

reflection on themselves (Ladge et al., 2012; Grady & McCarthy, 2008), as the strains of work and family life may have a damaging consequence on personal wellbeing and increase conflict (Zagefka et al., 2021, p. 2452). Therefore, this developmental transition requires an approach that goes beyond undesirable role experiences and the co-construction of multiple identities, instead of the separation of work and home life (Kroger, 2015). Adopting this archetypal maturation experience could help women break away from the rigid social conversation and find greater resonance between their lived experience and a more convincing sense of Self.

In this kind of identity work, mothers engage in a process of seeking intersubjective recognition of their shifting priorities that is no longer merely about coping with the external expectations of society but about establishing a stable sense of subjectivity in post-midlife life (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2023, p. 2483). It is well agreed, within this landscape, that the midlife period acts as a critical juncture where women must navigate the pressure to "balance" competing spheres while simultaneously addressing the psychic need to move beyond traditional role-based definitions (O'Brien et al., 2025).

Literature Review

This lack of empirical research The current study highlights that while the midlife transition often activates identity crisis due to challenging resource needs, a prominent gap remains in how working mothers navigate the subsequent midlife phase as a distinct period of psychological synthesis while biological changes also take places in women body along with work/family demands simultaneously.

Although research recognizes that work and family identities co-evolve through ongoing identity work, it has rarely considered how recent Jungian accounts of midlife as an individualized process of transformation, moving through separation, liminality, and reintegration, might unsettle the neo-liberal ideal of successful work family balance and reframe identity tensions as potential catalysts for psychological growth (O'Brien et al., 2025; Matić, 2020). According to the Jungian perspective, the crisis can spark individuation and open the door to psychological integration and redefining the meaning of life after the age of 40 (Matić, 2020). The social structures and constraints, however, are often under-theorized in contemporary literature and have a constraining influence on these interior psychological processes (Binyamin & Peretz, 2026, p. 5). Jungian theory points out that juggling work-life balance by mothers could mask the experience of individuation, a midlife process where working mothers are in the process of introspection and integration, might rethink socially assigned roles and achieve a more meaningful sense of Self (O'Brien et al., 2025; Matić, 2020). Although there is increasing recognition of gender in work- life balance as a domain for identity formation, the link between identity transformation at midlife and systemic inequities that impact the ability of working mothers to pursue individuation and self-actualization is underdeveloped (O'Brien et al., 2025; Matić, 2020). Moreover, existing studies focus mainly on the conflict that arises from dual role performance (Adekoya et al., 2024, p. 845), while not considering the symbolic nature of midlife as a subjectively restructured time of crisis within the broader context of systemic professional limitations. In particular, there is no exploration of how these archetypal transitions intersect with the strategic labor of "mother workers" (Henry, 2025, p. 53) who have to negotiate professional reconfiguration, while also dealing with the social expectations that shape caregiving as a set of obstacles to Self-achievement.

also makes it difficult to understand how a mom might contribute to the process of individuation in personal, relational, and vocational contexts as working mother engage in re-negotiation of their gendered identity and structures limit possibilities for exploration and development of possible selves (Kroger, 2015; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010; O'Brien et al., 2025). Furthermore, though identity play is suggested as a way to negotiate role shifts, it is under-investigated how working mothers engage in it when trying to balance and negotiate long-term career goals with family responsibilities.

The Jungian archetypes: Shadow, Persona, Anima/Animus, motherhood, and finally Self simultaneously work within females; however, they are on a road to achieve individuation. Self-growth is an integral part of it. Let's examine how individuation evolves within the mother.

Self

Individuation is not a checklist. It is not about fully meeting or mastering *every* archetype. It is about becoming aware of key unconscious contents that interfere with wholeness. Integrating what is personally necessary, not everything possible. It is near to "*Nasf ey Mutmaena,"* a concept given by Muslim psychology. It's a road of enlightenment and self-awareness, and an ordinary man may try to be on it for the rest of his life. Sufis and saints are exceptions to the Self as a dominant archetype in them. It is easy for them to be on the path of God's command; offering religious rituals is not a burden for them. Once we are not offering prayers wholeheartedly, it's not the dominant Self archetype, but a persona only. The self-archetype is rarely dominant in most of us. The ideal and real Self must be in congruence for balance and harmony.

Many people individuate meaningfully while barely touching the Wise Old Man/Woman archetype. Never clearly encounter the Hero or Trickster. Experiencing Anima/Animus only indirectly (through projections). A few middle-aged people may be juggling the wise old man/women archetype, unable to stay away from the tricks of evil energies. E.g., a middle-aged religious man lusting over a young girl who came to ask for help from him is an example of a trickster archetype dominant in the Self. Corrupt politicians who pretend to be helpful to the public as justification are another example of it.

The central theme in Jung's individuation concept is that we must bring each aspect of the personality into harmony with all other aspects and achieve the state of wholeness in personality (Jung, 1933).

The symbolism of the "Lotus flower" is a strong representation of the Self archetype and how individuation occurs, especially during midlife. The lotus praises the experience of moving through the murky waters of life; moving from the unconscious into the conscious by blooming into a beautiful flower. Jungian Psychology refers to the self archetype as representing the wholeness/totality of one's personality, in which all the aspects of oneself are at peace with one another, meaning one is fully integrated, or in balance. Mid-life is an important stage of development for individuating individuals, because they begin to look at who they are, what their values are, and what direction their life will take. This is why lotus flower manifests a sense of purity, renewal, and spiritual awakening to those who do inner work and reflect on themselves, just as the lotus flower grows and blooms above the water, while at the same time continuing to be rooted in the same water; so too does the process of individuating involve incorporating all of one's experiences (the light side and dark side of our life) into our true self/wholeness.

Rationale of the Study

As the literature suggests that measurement of Jungian individuation can be possible in terms of the presence and absence of positive and negative traits of personality, this doctoral study will investigate individuation and relevant personality characteristics in a cultural context with three phases. The reason for a triangulation around Individuation in terms of contexts (qualitative exploration of life experiences), constituents (building a measure of the construct), and correlates (investigating its relationship with mid-life crisis and other related/unrelated factors) is the broad scope of the study. Moreover, it is the first attempt to locate this concept in an empirical paradigm.
The current study is about a qualitative exploration of the individuation context in working mothers.

Research Questions

1. What are the constituents of the process of individuation amongst middle-aged working mothers?
2. How does a mother's reliance on spirituality, sense of self-reflection, attempt to create harmony & balance in life, resilience, generativity, and integration of various life aspects play a role in the process of individuation?
3. What are the expressions and outcomes of a mother's individuation in the Jungian archetypal model under the local paradigm?
4. What traits and qualities does motherhood foster and inculcate that lead to becoming a whole and integrated person with a sense of achievement?

Method

Research Design

An exploratory qualitative research design was used in the current study. This research design was used to study individuation and midlife crisis in working mothers.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Working Mothers (N=50)

Sample Characteristics	*f*	%
Education		
Masters	4	40
Post-graduation	6	60
Age		
Middle age 40-60 years	10	
Marital Status		
Intact Marriage	9	90
Widow	1	10
Profession		
College Teachers	4	40
University Chairperson	1	10
Medical Doctor	3	30
Religious scholar	1	10
Corporate professional	1	10

Sample

A purposive sample of N= 10 working mothers, age 40 to 60 years, with at least 16 years

Note: f= frequency, % = percentage or more of education (masters, post-graduation), preferably working in public/private organization. Working mothers were interviewed via Zoom using a semi-structured interview protocol.

Inclusion Criteria

- Mother (intact marriage, divorced/separated, widow)
- Within the age range of 40-60 years of age
- Master's or post- graduation (16 or 18 years of formal education)
- Working (doing a job)in the public/ private sector in an organization

Exclusion Criteria:

- Less than16 years of education,
- Less than 40 years of age and greater than 60 years

Assessment Measures

Qualitative Pilot Study

The Creative-led personal interviews were conducted with psychologists adept in analytical psychology (N=3). The pilot study sample comprised 2 = male and 1= female respondents, highly experienced professors in the field of psychology with more than 30 years of teaching and research and practicing experience in the field of psychology across the world. The Jungian paradigm of individuation served as a reference for developing an indigenous framework of individuation in Pakistan, which usually occurs in midlife. All three were interviewed with a semi-structured interview protocol, later transcribed, and themes were generated using Clark & Brown, (2006) inductive thematic analysis.

The indigenous findings of the pilot study serve as an aid to develop a semi-structured interview protocol for the study, containing native domains of Jungian individuation and a novel perspective. This interview consisted of 22 open-ended questions related to different components of individuation in midlife mothers' personal, social, and interpersonal experiences, thereby becoming a complete and unified Self.

Procedure

The semi-structured interviews, on average 60min, were conducted using Zoom meetings for every ten interviews. (N=10). All interviews were recorded and transcribed in Urdu, English, and Punjabi as needed, using Notta and TurboScribe software and personal understanding for voice-to-text conversion. The hybrid deductive-Inductive themes of the study were derived using Naeem et al. (2023) hybrid inductive-deductive thematic analysis to develop a conceptual model for the study.

Results

Table 1

Hybrid Inductive and Deductive Thematic Analysis: Individuation and Midlife Crisis in Working Mothers

Deductive Themes	Inductive Themes
Relational Transformation	**Psychological & Spiritual Resource for Others**
"I become more myself, but I do not necessarily become separate from my relationships."P8	*"I am blessed with the knowledge from my spiritual guide i.e., bestowed from the Prophet (PBUH). I spread awareness in people to connect with their true values". P8*
"I have worked a lot on my temperament over the years, much learnt with my mistakes; I accept others the way they are, and one must have courage to ignore & not argue with others." P2	*"One must have a generous and big heart for others, especially on mistakes of junior fellows, those are less experienced." P5*
"درد آشنائی نے مجھے خود آشنائی سے روشناس کرایا اور یہ بہت ہی پر لطف ہے۔ آپ جتنی چیزیں اپنے اندر جذب کرتے جاتے ہیں آپ کی شخصیت میں اتنا ہی نکھار آتا چلا جاتا ہے۔" P6	*"I encourage people to begin the journey of self-awareness, to work hard, move forward, and become strong not only professionally in the world but also in terms of their inner selves and personal development." P6*
	"I try to help others; if I can, I do provide all kinds of help if someone asks for." P2
	"کسی کے کان سے اچھی بات گزار دینا یہ بھی نیکی ہے اور لوگوں کو مخلص مشورہ دینا چاہئے اور میں ہمیشہ یہی کرتی ہوں جب بھی کوئی مشورہ مانگے تو میں اسے مخلص مشورہ دیتی ہوں یہ بھی ایک نیکی ہے۔" P7

Self-Realization/Reflection	Forgiveness for Self & Others
"*Well…one has to work very hard to earn "Irfaan ay Nafas"(self realization). I do practice "Meditation" that directly connects us with our soul. It tells us, who we really are? & once we get familiar with our soul, it is an infinite destination.*"P8 *"When a person comes to know themselves and attains a certain light, that light does not let them remain still. It inspires them to spread that light throughout the world. They remain constantly active, and their purpose in life becomes to spread the light that Allah Almighty has bestowed upon them throughout the world. This is the work for which they have been chosen. Furthermore,* *There are various ways to spread this light in the world. This journey of light helps dispel the darkness in people's hearts, giving them hope, certainty, and a sense of direction. And this is the greatest achievement of a human being: to spread that light to others."*P8	*"We all have to return to God; nothing lasts, I believe on Quran, and I practice it , I really don't remember now, the pain people have given me. P8* *"Without forgiveness, we cannot take even a single step toward the evolution of our own being. And if we cannot forgive ourselves, our personal and spiritual Self, both don't progress anymore . P9* *"It's not easy to forgive others; those who intentionally hurt you, but it's an exercise; a test by nature for us to live with others and not clash"* P3 *"Revenge is fire, affects the nervous system, promotes negativity, and causes a person to harm others. Allah Almighty does not approve of any kind of harm for humankind. Allah says that "those who exercise patience and forgive others are rewarded, and Allah bestows His grace upon them. "This act of forgiveness develops love within a person. Whether someone is younger or older than you, they should be forgiven. This is what gives us dignity and honor; otherwise, we cannot be free."*p8
"I regularly reflect on myself, sometimes monthly, sometimes weekly, and sometimes randomly. It is not that I have no shortcomings; every human being has flaws and weaknesses."P6	*" I believe that a person who remains trapped in regret cannot move forward. It is important to correct one's own behaviors; a person needs to work on it and improve their own behaviors. If you make a mistake somewhere, you should apologize, make amends for it, and try to ensure that such behavior is not repeated."p6*
Sense making through Experience	**Wisdom**
"I think I had felt a few ordinary things with such high intensity that I must not do; that's emotionality, but it has to be like that as eternally planned. "(p8). *"I have learnt that people will keep on nagging you, but I had to keep moving forward with right motives. "p5* دشمن کی بڑائی کا اعتراف کر لینا، سچ "کو تسلیم کر لینا، اس میں کیا دقت ہے؟ اگر کوئی آپ کا دشمن بھی ہے تو وہ بھی آپ کی عزت کرنے لگے گا، اگر آپ اسے عزت دیں گے"۔ اگر کوئی غلطی سرزد ہو جائے اور اس کے بعد تمہارے دل میں اس بات کی کھٹک پیدا' ہو جائے، تو پھر اس شخص کے پاس جا کر معافی مانگ لینی چاہیے۔ انسان سے غلطی ہو جانا فطری ہے، لیکن اپنی غلطی کا احساس ہونا اور اسے تسلیم کر کے معافی مانگ لینا ہی اصل بڑائی ہے۔" p7	*" Quran says; wisdom is to think about. He who is given wisdom is indeed given abundant good."* *"Wisdom is understanding of what ever happens in life is a test/trail from Allah."p8* *"Wisdom is whenever one faces a challenging situation, hold on and think about the unexpected outcome; what blessing in disguise is there in it for us, that will strain/ pressure your brain a lot" (p4).* *" Wisdom is power to take decisions according to situation, which do not harm the people around you. It is emotional intelligence. P4"*

"wisdom is when you are good at interpersonal interactions; at personal relations, at work, with everyone, this is high intelligence I must say."P10

Persona/ Social Role Balance

"My social Self and personal self are never likely to clash. We must avoid hypocrisy in the fulfillment of social roles; if we are pure and honest, we rise and flourish as a person in any role." P7.

"As a mother, for success in the journey of life, you need a great deal of courage. If you face failure with a strong heart and determination, you will ultimately achieve success." P8

"It becomes very difficult, and sometimes I become ill. I once read that a candle burns from one end, but a working woman burns from both ends and therefore burns out faster. I feel that women like me burn from three sides; we burn and break from within, and also from the outside. I always try to fulfill all my social, administrative, educational, and domestic responsibilities, give time to my relationships and family, and ensure that nothing is neglected. But in fulfilling all these responsibilities, I end up neglecting myself. I have left myself far behind."

Illumination of the Heart

"The light within a human being resides in the heart, not in the brain. When people of a pure and purified soul dream, they perceive through the vision of the heart. The heart guides them and gradually makes the mind clearer and more transparent. Their attention and devotion toward Allah continue to increase, and the heart is used in the sense of the conscience". P8

"Religion is fundamentally something that refines you from within; one's heart purifies, it makes you acquainted with your own self, and shapes how you deal with worldly matters, your social interactions, and your social living."P6

" Worship is simply an expression of gratitude; other people have nothing to do with it." P5

" Religion gives you a direction. But your self-learning, or what you learn after learning religion, becomes your social self, and that radiates the core; heart."P6

Balance & Harmony

"*We must not have high expectations from others. I have learned with time that anger is not good & the best we learn with experiences and move towards growth and development of Self. (p1)"*

"I have trained my children to adapt to a working mother's role, and I succeed gracefully as mother and in work-life."p8

"میری مزاج میں ٹھہراو ہے، یہ "ٹھہراو ایسے نہیں ہے۔ اس کے پیچھے بہت دفعہ ٹوٹنا ، بکھرنا، رونا اپنے حالات پر، نوحہ کرنا ہونا، بہت کچھ شامل ہے۔ لیکن اس کے بعد یہ سب چیزیں انسان کو ٹرانسفارم کر دیتی ہیں۔"p6

Role of Mentor in Enlightenment

"Spiritual growth and enlightenment is not possible without a spiritual guide."P8

"My mentor has given me spiritual lessons that I practice with high punctuality, & reached to initial stages of spirituality, but it is such a destiny that is boundless; one always feels on the first step where ever reach." P5

"پیر و مرشد سے حقیقی عقیدت وہ ہے جو آپ کو بیداری عطا کرے، آپ کی آنکھیں کھول دے اور آپ پر باطن کے راز بھی آشکار کر دے۔ ایسی رہنمائی ہر کسی کے نصیب میں نہیں ہوتی؛ یہ کسی کسی کو نصیب ہوتی ہے۔ لیکن اگر آپ سچے دل سے اللہ سے مانگیں تو اللہ آپ کے لیے ایسی رہنمائی کا وسیلہ ضرور پیدا کرتا ہے۔"

"*Flowers and plants need to be nurtured; otherwise, it is simply a jungle where there is no need for a gardener. The flowers and plants may still be there, but they need to be cultivated and cared for. Having a guide is necessary, but it is a matter of fortune to find a spiritual teacher who can refine and develop you."P6*

Emotional Reorientation

"I don't argue with others; my spiritual mentor advised me to do so, I gives you a headache. I keep saying to myself that nature has given me a task to play and I have to come out of it myself. "(p8).

"My mentor says, listen, this concept of honor and disgrace does not really exist, "And You honor whom You will" or "And He honors whom He wills". [1, 2]." I have written it and keep practicing by saying it to myself.

Continually tolerating others is a big struggle of the self. P8

Connection with Divine/Existential Awareness

"It is such a supernatural experience that nature guides you in a manner that is unexplainable in words no one can understand." P8

"I met with a spiritual mentor and then things became clear; my dream interpretation has become so relevant and clear that it was never before." P7

"I progressed with my spiritual mentors, and all of this progression leads you to the footsteps of the Prophet (pbuh)."p3

"میرے مرشد نے فرمایا:

تیرا نچ ویلے، تے میرا ہر ویلے۔ تیرا اک وار ٹُٹیا وضو فیر ہو سکدا اے، پر صوفی دا وضو جے اک وار ٹُٹ جائے، تے فیر نہیں ہو سکدا۔" p6

Spiritual Awakening Evolution

"پہلے میرے بہت سارے، بہت سے "مسائل تھے۔ تو میرے پیر و مرشد نے فرمایا:

"بھائی، یہ عزت، ذلت کچھ نہیں ہوتی۔"

وَتُعِزُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُذِلُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ

اللہ جسے چاہتا ہے عزت دیتا ہے اور جسے چاہتا ہے ذلت دیتا ہے۔

میں نے یہ بات لکھ لی اور اس کی بڑی تکرار کی۔ نہ لوگ مجھے عزت دے سکتے ہیں اور نہ ذلت۔ وہ بھی اپنا کام کر رہے ہیں اور میں بھی اپنا کام کر رہی ہوں۔

P8تو قدرت آپ کو عزت دیتی ہے، اور میرا اللہ پر ایمان ہے۔

میں نے ان دو دہائیوں میں یہ دیکھا ہے، اور میں ہمیشہ "لوگوں سے کہتی ہوں کہ اپنا معاملہ اللہ کے ساتھ درست رکھیں۔ پھر اللہ آپ کو خود اس کا نظارہ دکھاتا ہے"۔

P6

Surrender/Submission to Divine

"Whatever the circumstances may be, a person should accept them, because there is wisdom and goodness in the circumstances ordained by Allah. The difficulties we face come by Allah's command. We should certainly try to find a way out of our suffering and seek relief from it, but when no way seems available, we should surrender ourselves to the circumstances." P2

"When we surrender, we become complete within ourselves, because we have placed ourselves at the feet of our Creator, trusting that Allah knows what is best and what He is doing. We are His obedient servants. And it is from this point that the process of becoming coal to diamond begins & then nature surely helps them to shine like a diamond." P3

Hybrid Thematic Analysis

The participant expresses a psycho-spiritual model of 'self' that enlarges and deepens the relationship without breaking them off. She grows as an individual without necessarily distancing herself from others. It is pursued through disciplined spiritual practice, meditation and the quest for '*Irfaan ay Nafas*' *(Discovery of the self),* but not as a private introspection, rather as a technology of the soul that, once they have achieved it, impels them to 'spread light' and inspire others; self-knowledge then becomes a purpose and a service rather than a solitary peace.

Psychologically, she frames her life as a story of redemption: she makes her lessons learned (to lower her expectations of others, to control her anger, to accept failure as the first step towards eventual success) signposts to a growth and development of herself.

The stories shared by the participants offer a glimpse into how the experiences of forgiveness and self-realization are intertwined in the journey of personal and spiritual change. Self-realization is defined as a conscious quest to explore oneself through meditation and Irfan-e-Nafs, uncovering the reality of the individual and sharpening one's purpose. The image of receiving "light" also implies that self-knowledge is transformative and brings with it a sense of responsibility to bring hope, certainty and guidance to others. So, self-realization transcends an individual sense of self into meaningful giving and sacred service.

The need for forgiveness is also illustrated as a key to ongoing growth and development. Participants believe that self-forgiveness is essential for maintaining both the personal and spiritual self, and forgiving others is essential for emotional freedom, patience and living in harmony with others. Describing forgiveness as an 'exercise' or test implies that it involves constant self-control and emotional control. Revenge is rejected once again, highlighting the movement away from negativity and towards love and inner freedom. The stories imply that psychological and spiritual progress towards knowing the self, releasing resentment and cultivating compassion are steps in the right direction. The theme illustrates forgiveness on many levels: self-forgiveness, interpersonal forgiveness, emotional management, and spiritual surrender. These processes seem to be interwoven and lead to the participants' growing sense of authenticity and psychological integration. In the realm of Jungian individuation, forgiveness can be seen as a process of integration that involves the assimilation of painful memories and self-forgiveness of suppressed emotions, thereby moving past the self-perceptions of unresolved resentment and self-condemnation to a more unified, compassionate, and spiritually evolved sense of self. The act is seen as helpful in maintaining the emotional well-being of the Self.

The participants appear to reinterpret emotionally charged experiences within a broader framework of acceptance, recognizing that experiences may have a purpose or meaning beyond their immediate emotional impact. Similarly, there is a shift from being preoccupied with others' criticism toward maintaining personal values and intentions. This reflects meaning-making through persistence, self-reflection, and value-based action, in which external difficulties become experiences from which the participant learns and obstacles determine her direction.

The participants' understanding of wisdom further reinforces this process. Wisdom is described as the ability to think deeply about experiences and to recognize that life events may function as tests or trials from "Allah almighty". The emphasis on asking what "blessing in disguise" may exist within a challenging situation indicates an active cognitive process of reappraisal, whereby adversity is transformed into an opportunity for learning, growth, and spiritual understanding. Thus, wisdom is not presented simply as possessing knowledge; rather, it involves the ability to pause, reflect, tolerate uncertainty, search for meaning, and derive constructive insight from difficult circumstances.

The radiation of the heart is a more spiritual view of inner awareness. Participants consider the heart to be the seat of conscience, intuition, and spiritual perception, and the mind develops into a "clearer and more transparent" faculty. The more one turns to Allah, the deeper the spiritually awakened experience of this inner clarity. Taken together, these articulations suggest a trend toward authenticity, psychological wholeness, resilience, and spiritually infused self-awareness, with personal values, social roles, emotional reactions, and spiritual awareness becoming more intertwined.

The participants' narratives illustrate psychological integration as an ongoing process of self-development, emotional regulation, and adaptation to multiple life roles, with spiritual mentorship serving as an important source of guidance for this development. The statement, "*We must not have high expectations from others. I have learned with time that anger is not good & the best we learn with experiences and move towards growth and development of Self*," reflects increasing emotional awareness and regulation. Through experience, the participant has recognized the limitations of relying on others to meet personal expectations and has developed a more accepting and reflective approach to interpersonal relationships. The movement away from anger toward learning and self-development suggests an integration of previously reactive emotional responses into a more mature psychological stance. This indicates that difficult relational experiences are being transformed into opportunities for self-reflection, emotional regulation, and personal growth rather than remaining sources of ongoing conflict.

Religion is portrayed by the individual to be an internal and transformative experience of life instead of just performing religious rituals externally. "*Religion has a religious aspect for me; worship is important to me but not really what religion is all about.*" Religion is meaningful if it leads to consciousness, morality, responsibility for oneself, and spiritual improvement.

"Religion is an inner refinement" implies that this person views spirituality as a process of self-improvement. Religion helps a person to know about themselves; it develops their ethics and moral values. Therefore, it's more about change within as a person and not so much with regard to their religious practices externally.

Also, the individual makes a distinction between religion as an individual relationship with God and religion as a social identity. Religion can be defined as a form of worship, which means that it is mostly an individual's spiritual life with regard to their relationship with God. Thus, she resists the amalgamation of religion and "social self".However, at this middle age, religion does guide thoughts and behaviors. After acquiring knowledge of religion, it becomes a part of one's personality that affects interpersonal relations and social behavior. Thus, social Self isn't created by ritual performance alone; it's more about internalizing religion and then applying it to everyday life.

Participants narratives are an example of process of individuation and it shows a shift from external religiosity to an integrated spirituality. Personal reflection, self-knowledge, independence and morality are valued by this person more than religious conformity. Thus religion is an instrument by which a person develops an authentic identity and carries this self-development to society.

Accordingly, participants view spirituality as a continuum. It is believed that the achievement of one level does not equal an end but instead serves as a beginning of further development. After an individual reaches a certain height in their spiritual growth, they begin to grow in another direction. However, finding a genuine spiritual guide is seen as a matter of fate. In the same way, people believe that true guidance may come from heaven. It means that it can open up their world and change their lives.

These verbatims indicate that the participant perceives religion as something internal and intrinsic to him/her rather than an external and objective orientation. Worship is a feeling of being thankful to Allah, and it is not dependent on the acknowledgment or judgment of others. Religion guides him/her in being morally correct and makes him/her develop as a personality, whereas the knowledge and wisdom that she gains through his/her faith influences her social self. In other words, spirituality takes place inside the core of the participant's personality, or the heart, and then it expands to his/her social life manifested through behavior.

Spiritual mentoring was associated with a holistic religious and prophetic perspective. It seems that spiritual development is not seen as something that is happening in a person's personal life, but is seen as a movement toward a set standard of religion, the footsteps of the Prophet (Pbuh). So the mentor offers the road, and the Divine and prophetic model offers the ultimate life purpose and meaning of spiritual growth. In general, the theme shows a movement from concept to practice, from practice to spiritual awareness, and toward a deeper relationship with the Divine. It may be a key step in the individuation process, where the spiritual aspect leads participants to form a more meaningful and integrated self; the mentor may play a crucial role in helping the participants discover inner transformation, while the Divine may act as an ultimate source of orientation and meaning.Participants view having a spiritual guide/wizard as being able to help them take part in developing their spirituality. They mean that they need mentoring or assistance from the outside world to obtain enlightenment, become more open-minded, and tap into the deepest parts of themselves. The participant uses the comparison of plants and gardeners, claiming that just like plants need to be tended and nurtured to grow strong, people need guidance to bring out the best in them. The spiritual teacher is seen as someone who helps you develop and polish your being. By saying that "*one has to choose their spiritual teacher wisely, the participant states that it is a matter of luck or fate to pick the right one and to benefit from their teachings."*

One participant mentioned that before meeting a spiritual guide, her dreams were probably confusing and meaningless. Her mentor's advice seems to have given her an understanding and interpretation of these events. Thus, they were also relevant and meaningful for her as it was no longer just about having a dream but assigning it a spiritual value.

Psychologically speaking, this statement is about creating meaning and better awareness of oneself. A spiritual counselor seems like an advisor who helps a person to explore some aspects of his/her psyche that were previously not understood by him/her. It might have strengthened her spiritual awareness as she started to see her dreams and other subjective experiences as possibly significant forms of spiritual guidance.

The theme of Surrender/Submission to the Divine is about accepting life circumstances through faith in Allah's wisdom and providence. People seemed to see hard and unmanageable events not only as sources of pain but also as opportunities with an underlying significance. Therefore, surrender was not passive nor a surrender of one's will. Instead, this was more about trying hard to overcome problems and accepting results beyond one's control.

It seems this acceptance facilitates a change within oneself from resistance to trust. Relinquishing too much authority by letting go of it to God's will gave people their psychological completeness and tranquility. "*Becoming coal to diamond"* is an idiom that conveys transformation and growth through hardship; adversity is seen as a means by which one becomes stronger, wiser, and more spiritual. Therefore, surrender is a part and parcel to individuality as it involves a gradual transition from being solely self-reliant to accepting something greater.

Negative life experiences or set backs can turn into a growth opportunity if an individual takes the experience to better oneself. Hard times in life can be an eye-opener and lead to personal development and transformation.

Individuals who are positive and focused on improving every area can turn adverse events into lessons that make them wiser and more conscientious of their actions. Having a positive attitude and outlook on life enables an individual not to be defeated by circumstances and to improve continually. Therefore, negative life experiences can be a growth generator for a positive self, awareness, and improvement.

Participants verbatim on, "Wuzu" (ablution) is being used in a deeper spiritual/metaphorical sense, suggesting that the Sufi's state of spiritual connection or purity, once lost, is not easily regained. A Sufi's spiritual connection is beyond religious rituals. Every Muslim must perform, but a person who rises higher in spiritual level thinks & perform acts beyond sacraments.

The participants' narratives demonstrate emotional regulation, distancing from others' evaluation, and spiritual adaptation. No arguing, a decrease in the fear of shame, implies that there is a change from the reactive interpersonal style to inner control and acceptance. Tolerating people is a 'struggle of the self '; it is an ongoing action of self-management and patience. Likewise, changing from constant grumbling to reliance upon Allah is a shift in attitude and mindset that fosters a spirit of endurance and patience when faced with hardship, making it easier for people to overcome challenges without becoming resentful. The belief that events that have happened may have consequences, and they can become "chains", again implies one's awareness of personal responsibility and the need to change patterns that block psychological and spiritual development.

It is about dependence upon Allah, perseverance, morality, and responsibility for what happens to us. "Setting your affairs right with Allah" is what the person says to mean that mental and spiritual health are related to having an honest relationship with God.

If one believes, then one will be able to endure hardships without losing hope. Patience isn't about enduring pain; it's more like an attitude to endure hardships with faith that these problems have purpose and that perseverance will lead to success.

Also, the person understands it's "not easy" to practice that thing, which means it's hard emotionally and psychologically for them when they have to endure hardship. Nevertheless, witnessing other individuals' experiences with consequences for past deeds seems to reinforce a person's faith in justice and morality. Being "caged" by these chains and prisons is a metaphor that shows how unresolved issues from previous decisions limit one's mental and spiritual liberty for a long time.In terms of individuation, this story might be an indication that one is moving towards introspection and accountability. Personal experiences give awareness of how the past affects current life; change is not about avoiding it but confronting it directly. Faith and perseverance offer an approach to endure, comprehend, and possibly change through hardship.

The verbatims on the institution of marriage reflect a developmental and transformative experience**,** through which the individual gradually acquires greater self-awareness, maturity, and capacity to manage complex interpersonal and relational demands. The participant appears to view marriage not merely as a social or relational role but as a learning process that contributes to personal growth**.** Navigating the challenges and responsibilities of married life seems to facilitate the development of emotional maturity, adaptability, problem-solving, and a more integrated sense of self. The statement reflects the participant's perception that marriage and its associated responsibilities can constrain women's opportunities for personal growth and self-development**.** The phrase "*get stuck*" suggests a sense of restriction, stagnation, or loss of personal autonomy**,** where domestic, marital, and family responsibilities may take precedence over individual aspirations, interests, and self-exploration that may resolve in later years of life.

In the Jungian individuation framework, this can be interpreted as marriage serving as a relational context for individuation, in which encounters with the demands, challenges, and dynamics of marital life encourage the person to recognize, adapt to, and develop different aspects of the self.

Discussion

The present study 1 explored contextual manifestations of individuation and midlife crisis among working mothers. The qualitative component of the study was conducted through semi-structured interviews with 10 working mothers, and the data were analyzed primarily using thematic analysis by Clark & Brown, (2006). Further hybrid thematic analysis was carried out following Naeem et al., (2023). The deductive analysis generated six interconnected themes: Relational transformation, Self-realization/reflection, Sense-making through experience, Persona/Social role Balance, Balance & harmony, and Emotional Reorientation. Inductive themes in the context of individuation among working mothers include: Psychological & Spiritual resource for others, Forgiveness for Self & others, Wisdom, Illumination of the heart, Role of mentor in enlightenment, Connection with Divine/existential awareness, Spiritual awakening evolution, and finally Surrender/submission to Divine.

The findings indicate that there is no one linear path to individuation for working mothers. Actually, it is a multidimensional and dynamic psychological process through which women question their self-identities, interpret their past experiences, grow in emotional maturity, deal with evolving relationships, face existential issues, and have a deeper connection with the Divine. In this context, this is why midlife not only appears as a time of psychological decline and crisis- the worry of old age or anxiety of ageing- but also as a major developmental transition that can offer greater opportunities for learning and growth as an individual. Self-awareness, meaning, emotional regulation, spiritual development, and authenticity. The results are especially consistent with the Jungian notion of individuation. As a process of lifelong journey towards psychological wholeness and development of a more authentic self. Jungian individuation is the integration of previously unrecognized or developing aspects of personality and the progressive drift away from living. Exclusively, as per the roles prescribed by society. From the experiences of the participants, it is inferred that working mothers often have to play several roles, such as mother, wife, and professional, daughter, and family member. Midlife seems to provide a compelling moment for these women to think about how they have been influenced by others' expectations and how they might re-examine their own needs, values, beliefs, aspirations, and purpose.

The seven deductive themes identified in the present study: Resilience, Self-realization, Emotional reorientation, Connection with the Divine, Existential awareness, Spiritual awakening, and Relational transformation offer a multi-layered view of individuation within working mothers. The results of this research are in line with Jung's understanding of individuation as a lifelong process of increasing consciousness, differentiation, authenticity and psychological wholeness (Jung, 1953, 1968). Jung argued that the process of individuation is the progressive development of Self into a more conscious relationship with the psyche and the unification of less conscious parts of Self. The results of the present study indicate that this process is manifested in the areas of identity development, emotional change, spirituality, existential reflection, and transformation of relationships.

The deductive theme of self-realization is the most evident of the Jungian meaning of individuation. From the earlier experiences of life before entering into midlife, a working mother remains busy fulfilling assigned gender role obligations. By reaching midlife, she reassesses her experiences and tries to find her true Self within these social transactions. Individuation is defined by Jung as the differentiation of the individual from the collective. This was to be accompanied by the rise of expectations and the development of a more authentic personality (Jung, 1953). The participants' midlife narratives indicate that midlife was a time to reflect on identities that were traditionally

adopted and incorporated. Social and familial roles have been largely responsible for shaping them. This process is a reference to Jung's separation of the socially adapted mask and larger psychological personality. Individuation is not related to denying social roles; instead, it's about growing awareness of the ignored parts of the Self, outward expectations have influenced one's identity (Jung, 1953, 1968).

Similarly, Emotional reorientation in turn involved participants' emotional reactions, priorities, and understanding of life experiences. The participants seemed to come from an immediate and emotional response to a relatively reflective and emotionally mature person. This is in keeping with the Jungian spirit of raising awareness of the psychic experience of the inner world. Individuation, as defined by Jung (1953; 1968), is a process of understanding and conscious awareness of the individual's emotions, motivations, conflicts, and psychological patterns within the context of his or her experience, so that he or she can respond to this experience rather than be acted upon by it. The present results thus indicate that emotional development is a significant factor in the individuation of working mothers.

The present findings thus suggest that emotional development is one of the important factors in the individuation process in working mothers. The deductive themes of connection with the Divine and spiritual awakening are an integral part of the findings. The participants attributed Allah as a source of support during hardship and attributed the recitations of the Quran and religious beliefs as a source of emotional regulation and meaning. These results are in line with the spiritual aspect of Jungian psychology. Jung regarded psychological growth as an approach to the Self, a greater psychological wholeness than anything offered by the conscious ego (Jung, 1968). His writings also acknowledged the importance of a religious and symbolic experience in psychological development (Jung, 1953; 1968). The present results further build on this view by showing how the phenomenon of individuation can be experienced in an explicitly Islamic spiritual context. For these participants, psychological growth did not require movement away from religious faith; rather, closer in-depth bonding has been observed in participants.

The formation of a more genuine "self" seemed to take place in parallel with an increasing intimacy with Allah. Existence consciousness also speaks to significant areas of Jungian psychological evolution. Participants mentioned a growing sense of impermanence in world life, acknowledging real life purpose and renovation of life. Jung maintained that the second half of life has a psychological approach and dimension which is not the same as the first half. While early adulthood is more likely to be a period of adaptation to external life, later life may be marked by increased reflection, inwardness, processes of meaning making and psychological integration (Jung, 1933). In line with this view, the present results can be summarized as follows.

Therefore, existential awareness could not only be a fear of growing old, but a significant developmental stage that fosters reflection and psychological reorientation. Aging is embraced as a natural welcoming process in participants, rather a fear of losing beauty in working mothers.

The theme of relational transformation further supports the understanding of individuation as a process that occurs within, rather than outside, relationships. Participants described changing expectations of others, greater awareness of interpersonal dynamics, and changes in their relationships. Jungian individuation does not imply social isolation or complete independence. Rather, the individual develops a distinct identity while maintaining a relationship with the social world (Jung, 1953). The present findings suggest that participants increasingly sought a balance between individuality and connectedness. This is particularly important for working mothers, whose identities are embedded in family, professional, and social relationships. Thus, the findings suggest that individuation among working mothers involves the development of a more authentic self while continuing to participate

meaningfully in relationships. Participants practice "let go" in interpersonal transactions of life and experience greater peace.

The themes can be read as a unified manifestation of the individuation process, in total. Sense making through Experience; past actions are put together to form a coherent understanding; self-realization brings the awareness of one's personal identity; emotional reorientation is the emerging sense of psychological consciousness; connection with the Divine and spiritual awakening is a sense of transcendence and meaning; existential awareness is a reflection on purpose and impermanence; and relational transformation is an emerging sense of the relationship between the developing self and others. The results of the research suggest that individuation is a multi-dimensional process of psychological development and completion (Jung, 1953, 1968).

The present research encapsulates indigenous theory development since it takes the concept of Jung's individuation and applies it to the context of working mothers going through midlife in the context of Pakistani and Islamic culture. First, the results indicate that individuation is more than an intrapsychic phenomenon. While Jung placed emphasis on the process of individuation of a person's psyche, the experiences of the study participants reveal that social roles, family life, work commitments, faith, and cultural norms play a significant role in structuring individuation. This result thus verifies a contextual approach to individuation. Second, the study helps to develop the concept of individuation as responsibilities or religious faith. The present results indicate that midlife might be a key opportunity for this negotiation. As the group grew older and more experienced in life, they seemed to have made a fresh appraisal of their priorities and their needs and values. Working mothers' responsibilities can then serve as a stress as well as a setting for the growth of resilience, self-awareness, emotional maturity, and individuation. The key point of the present study is that the process of individuation of working mothers is a multidimensional process and not a single psychological trait. The participants spoke about changes in their identity, emotions, spirituality, existential perspective, and interpersonal relationships. This discovery is in line with Jung's concept of individuation, which is the sum of the personality.

Individuation means becoming more conscious of psychological experiences in the self and gradually moving towards a more integrated and authentic sense of self. This process was often experienced by the participants as a result of transition in life, challenging events, role shifts, interpersonal encounters, and reflection on past life decisions. The results also reveal the strong contextuality of the process of individuation. Identities were not formed apart. Mothers' experiences were influenced by family obligations, career status, cultural norms, social networks, religious beliefs, and midlife issues. Thus, the process of individuation for working mothers was constantly negotiated between the negotiation of individuality and connectedness. Specifically, in cultures where the family is the main source of identity for women, they can develop their identity in a relational context. There has to be a gradation of psychological progress that does not necessarily involve a separation from the family and society. However, it can be about making new life choices and finding a more compelling way to be oneself while simultaneously keeping up with relationships and obligations. The present results thus indicate an individuation which can be seen more as a process of self-development rather than as a process of breaking away from relations.

There are some practical implications of the findings. Mental health professionals who work with midlife women can learn to shift their focus to a developmental, rather than a solely deficit-based, approach. However, the concerns in midlife should not be taken as a sign of psychological dysfunction. Rather, therapy can offer space to explore, make meaning of, process, and develop one's identity.

There are several strengths in the present study. First, it adds to an under-studied field by exploring Jungian individuation in particular amongst working mothers of mid-life. Jungian paradigm remains neglected by and large

in modern psychology. Most psychology, from textbooks to public discourse is dominated by Freudian terms. Secondly, the qualitative design allowed participants to share their experiences in their own words, which helped to gain deeper insight into identity, spirituality, emotional development, adversity, and relationships. Third, the hybrid inductive/deductive thematic analysis process enabled themes to emerge from the participants' accounts, rather than being imposed upon by theory alone. Fourth, the study adds to the cultural knowledge of the process of individuation by studying it in a Pakistani and Islamic context. Lastly, the study gives a multidimensional insight into individuation covering psychological, emotional, spiritual, existential, and relational dimensions of the process. Although the study has made some contributions, it is still quite limited.

Conclusions

The results indicate the need for culturally responsive interventions to foster self-awareness, autonomy, identity development, and emotional health for middle-aged working mothers. Women may receive counselling and/or psychoeducational training to cope more effectively with demands at work, in their relationships, and in their lives. The identified themes can also be used to develop a culturally relevant scale for the assessment of individuation. Further studies are needed with larger, more diverse samples to explore the constituents of individuation.

Suggestions and Implications

The study was theory-based in Jungian individuation, but there was no single standardized scale of individuation to assess the experiences of the participants. The incorporation of qualitative interviews with quantitative measures may thus be valuable for future research

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