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Q9

Case study. 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.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · GS IV · 20 marks · Ethics Case Studies

Case Studies on above issues.

Core demand of the question

- Rashika, a Joint Secretary, faces a Sunday note, a sick child and social obligations
- Discuss reasonable limits of work ethics; her options; and what the organisation should do, with real rules such as the Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964 and flexible hours - no invented statutes

Revision summary

Rashika's clash is a real file, a sick child and social duty on one Sunday.

Work ethic is devotion to genuine public urgency, not unlimited availability.

The Conduct Rules require duty and integrity; they do not require a false excuse or the erasure of a child.

Her sound option is triage, shared drafting, honest timing and cancelling only what can wait.

The organisation must roster Sunday work, build deputies, and use flexible hours already known to service practice, not invent a statute.

Introduction

Rashika is a **Joint Secretary** whose Sunday is claimed by an urgent note, a sick child and social duties she cannot simply cancel. The case is about the limit of work ethic, not about a saint who never goes home.

Body

Stakeholders

- Rashika, her sick child, and the family members who share care.
- The minister or secretary who wants the Sunday note.
- Colleagues who will inherit the file if she steps back, and those who already work unsocial hours.
- Citizens waiting on the policy in that note.
- The organisation, whose culture either burns people or plans depth.

Ethical issues

- **Work ethic in public service is real:** the Union's files do not follow a private calendar when a disaster or a Cabinet deadline is live.
- Unlimited work ethic is not a virtue. It treats the officer as a tool, neglects a sick child, and in time produces errors and quiet resentment.
- **Gendered expectation is an issue:** **Joint Secretary** mothers are still more often asked to prove commitment by disappearing from the home.
- Honesty toward the minister matters; so does honesty toward the child who needs a parent, not a video call from a corridor.
- The **Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964** require **devotion to duty** and do not require the erasure of family life. They also do not create a right to ignore a genuine emergency file.

Reasonable limits of work ethics

- A genuine, time-bound public interest - a disaster, a court deadline, a Cabinet note that cannot slip - can claim a Sunday.
- A habit of Sunday notes because the office cannot plan, or because a superior enjoys late control, is not public interest.
- **Reasonable limit means:** the officer remains contactable; a deputy is trained; rest and care duties are scheduled; and "urgent" is a scarce word.
- Work ethic includes saying in time that the note needs two more hands, not performing martyrdom and then missing a fact.

Options for Rashika

- **Option 1:** Ignore the child and the social duty, finish the note alone all Sunday.
- **Merit:** the file moves.
- **Demerit:** the child is left, error risk rises, and the organisation learns that it can always dump on her.
- **Option 2:** Ignore the note without information, citing family.
- **Merit:** the child is seen.

- **Demerit:** if the deadline is real, citizens and the minister are failed, and she looks unavailable without a plan.
- **Option 3:** Send a false medical excuse for herself.
- **Merit:** none that ethics can use.
- **Demerit:** a lie, which the Conduct Rules treat as unbecoming, and it solves nothing for the next Sunday.
- **Option 4:** Triage. Confirm whether the note is truly Sunday-critical. If it is, share the draft with a trusted colleague, attend the child's acute need in blocks, cancel only the social event that can be cancelled, and tell the superior the honest time of delivery.
- **Merit:** duty and care both appear in the day.
- **Demerit:** she will still be tired; that is the honest cost of a real emergency, not of a fake one.

What the organisation should do

- **Define genuine after-hours work in writing:** disaster, court, Cabinet, not every "please see".
- Build bench strength so a **Joint Secretary** is not the only person who can write the note.
- Use flexible hours and staggered presence where the Department of Personnel and Training instructions and the organisation's own orders already allow, rather than inventing a new "work-life Act".
- Supervisors should not treat a sick child as a loyalty test. The Conduct Rules ask for integrity and courtesy, not for a parent to hide an ill child.
- Provide a known roster for Sunday duty and compensatory rest, as many organised services already do in principle.
- Do not issue a fake rule or a poster that promises balance while the minister still rings only one name at 6 a.m.

Flow diagram

Sunday note -> Is it genuine urgency
 Is it genuine urgency -> Share draft and roster
 Sick child -> Blocks of care
 Share draft and roster -> Honest delivery time
 Blocks of care -> Honest delivery time
 False excuse -> Conduct failure

Conclusion

- **Work ethic has a limit:** real public urgency, not a culture of Sunday theatre. Rashika should triage, share the file, tell the truth about time, and not lie. The organisation should roster, deepen the bench, and use flexible hours that already exist in service practice.

Facts & figures

Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964

Require integrity, devotion to duty and conduct becoming a government servant; they do not command a lie about health or a total surrender of family care.

Joint Secretary

A senior policy manager in the Government of India whose notes often feed ministers and Cabinet; the post is demanding and is still a human post.

Flexible working hours

Several Union offices already use staggered or flexible hours by administrative order; this is practice, not a separate invented Act.

Devotion to duty

A service value that means the work is done to a professional standard, including asking for help, not that one officer absorbs every weekend.

Gendered unpaid care

Women officers still carry a larger share of child-sickness duty; organisations that ignore that fact call the overload 'commitment'.

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