

## STRESS AND WORKING WOMEN : A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS



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### ABSTRACT

*Traditionally, women in Indian society suffer from various social and cultural handicaps and it is felt that unless the women are sufficiently empowered, the socio-economic development may be difficult to achieve; centuries old social practices, beliefs, attitudes and biases – against the women may be difficult to overcome in a short period of time. Education is a milestone for women empowerment as it will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. It was said that education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary and to ensure equal participation in the development process for economic independence. Educating women benefits the whole society women are almost half the working force and therefore must be tapped as a human resource. Women are the backbone of a society but unlike men they have a continuous proving to do – both at home and office. Women have always worked but in modern society they have the right to obtain jobs and promotions without the help or permission of men. In today's world of increased competition and over busy schedule, women are marching of equal pace with men. There is no field untouched by women. They work hard and try to maintain balance between their personal and professional life. But various factors make them lead a stressful life. These and other qualitative changes have given rise to a host of speculations about consequences on position of women both within the family and outside of it.*

*If the wife works, does marital happiness increase or decrease, what is then her relationship with her husband? Does the working women lose the authority within the area of household? There are some of the questions that are likely to arise at the family level of the working women. A serious hassle that a working woman faces is to bring about a balance in her home life and her (working) office life. At both the places she has constantly proved, herself as exemplary housewife, a good mother, a committed employee. The present study is the initial part of the research work in which the researcher is trying to find out the reasons of stress in women. As a consequence we have seen the proliferation of dual income families where role expectations towards men and women, both in their work activities and their domestic responsibilities, have radically changed. Due to this new mix of gender equity, shifting role expectations, and family time scarcity, many women are required to find new ways to balance their professional and personal lives and also managing the increasing level of stress.*

### **Introduction :**

The role of women worldwide is undergoing a dramatic change. Women today share the podium with men in almost all fields, be it kitchen or in defense working women are no longer a rarity and are now accepted as an integral part of the working force. Women are over the world are the concerned with the issue of gender equality women all rights are geared towards the elimination of discrimination – gender discrimination and are in tune with the human rights ideology. For women to gain control of their lives, to achieve equality in society, they need to be empowered. Empowerment literally means making someone powerful, facilitating the weak to attain strength, to increase one's self-esteem, to help someone to be assertive / self confident, to enable someone to confront justice and oppression and to support someone to fight for rights. Empowering women actually means strengthening them to confront family, community, caste, religion and traditional forces, patriarchal forces and biases working within government departments. Women empowerment is interpreted in development agenda as participation in decision making increased access to productive resources, expanded choices, rights and control over body and life.

Indian organization has experienced a steady increase in the number of women employees and this pattern is bound to continue in the future as well. Women recently began to join the ranks of managers in large numbers. But the women at the top management positions are still a rare species. Globally, they comprise one 10 percent of senior managers in Fortune, 500 companies less than 4% are in the uppermost ranks of CEO, president, executive, vice-president and COO and less than 3% of them are top corporate earners. The percentage of women in the active work population has increased rapidly in many countries around the world, including ours.

Working women today form a crucial segment of the society. As a whole in the country, although the status of the working women is improving still in a majority of lower or middle class families, which yet uphold the age old inferior status of the women, the working women's importance is not allowed to improve. They are still expected and in some cases compelled to do the whole household works in addition to her working full time of the work place. Though she is contributing significantly to the family, yet she is kept under the grip of her spouse and is made to surrender herself to the decisions of her husband or in-laws are regards to the whole matters of the household. Thus in a lower, middle class or upper middle class joint family set up

in which in-laws stay, working women's role seldom change. There she used to work similar to the non-working women, though in the process, she becomes more tired than the latter due to the dual role she is compelled extent upon the liberal outlook and endorsement for improving the socio-economic role of the women, by all members at family and community level. To add to that, if the household workloads is rationally shared by all the members of the family relieving her from excess workload, that will also pave the way for improvement in her health, relief in stress and consequently the socio-economic role. The problems confronted by the working women are enormous as well as varied and that also differs under different regions and different professions. And moreover as these problems have a strong bearing on their different aspects of life, i.e., health, socio-economic conditions etc. To examine the same a lot of studies have been undertaken. To make a brief analysis of the studies on the problems we need to review some relevant studies on this issue.

### **Review of Literature**

Mathur (1992) in her study 'Women, Family and Work' shows that among various problems confronted by working women, the most commonly faced on is work overload leading to their physical or emotional exhaustion. The second problem faced by these women is the burden of performing crucial domestic chores under traditional expectations. The third problem encountered by these women, is keeping a smooth relationship with the members of her family. And the fourth problem often encountered by the working women, is the lack of favourable working conditions, risk and insecurity at work place.

Kala (1976) in her work deals exclusively with dual roles, i.e., home role (as wife as mother) and job role (occupational role). She examines dual role performance and consequent dilemmas faced by the working women. She finds that role-conflict is mainly a psychological phenomena. Since women are traditional in perception roles, therefore, they do not mind putting in long hours of works to satisfy household needs. Besides, individual expectations are also found to be related to the role conflict.

Gullensten and Palmer (2005) viewed in their study that women reported higher levels of stress compared to men. This is so because the stressors included, multiple roles, lack of career progress and discrimination and stereotyping. In considering the development of future conflict – management training programs, recent developments are done in the field of cognitive and social psychology which suggest that self control demands have an effect as a source of stress at work.

Kapur (1970) in her work has cited that generally a working women happily accept and manage dual roles, but conflict is felt by those who feel torn between the loyalty towards her job and loyalty towards her husband and children. She mentions that "intense conflict is possible where there is clash between two equally important roles with corresponding aspirations because of workload in both cases."

Souja (1963) reveals that the young working women's status is exposed to various psychological, social and household problems as they work under varied working conditions.

### **Objectives**

1. To locate the different causes relating to stress.
2. To find out the outcomes of stress.
3. To give suggestions to the corporate and women on stress management.

## Methodology

The present study is confined to Rohtak city which is just 70 kms from National Capital, Delhi, located on National Highway No. 10, with a population of about 37 lakh as per 2011 census. The city is considered as educational hub because it has two universities, almost twenty two degree colleges, four engineering colleges, two polytechnics and other several educational institutions such as schools and coaching centres both for boys and girls. These educational facilities also play an important role in attracting more people from rural areas.

The present study is initial part of the research work for which a sample of 30 working women has been taken. In the sample 30 respondents (10 from banks, 10 from universities and colleges, 10 from corporate sector) has been selected to analyse their opinion about stress and coping practices in this study. We have used interview schedule and observation techniques for collecting maximum information from respondents. The researcher personally visited every family and tried to collect information keeping in view the objective of the present study.

**Table 1**      **Reasons of Stress**

Reasons of stress	Total no. of cases who reported this reason	% of the cases to the sample	Problem due to this reason (No. of reported cases)	% of the problems to the number of cases reported	% of the problems to total sample size
Gender inequalities	28	93.33	25	89.8	83.33
Decision Making	25	83.33	23	92	76.66
A new job or responsibility	2	6.66	---	---	---
Family conflict	25	83.33	23	92	76.66
Financial problems	8	26.66	3	37.5	10.00
Comfort level with colleagues	24	80	23	95.83	76.66
Divorce or Marriage	7	23.3	5	71.4	16.66
Work pressure	21	70	18	85.7	60

## Results

It was analysed from the above table that there are various reasons which contribute to the increased level of stress in women. The women are mostly treated as slaves to society and its tradition. Born as a woman, she has no freedom in social / economic / political and cultural arena of life. The women in India have always been relegated to a secondary status vis-à-vis men. The research was supervised to see a percentage of women faced inequalities. They were of the view that in this male dominated society due to a "glass ceiling" women were departed of top positions despite being capable 86.66 percent of the sample size reported problems arising out of this reason.

In today's world decision making is the process to exercise power to plan and allocate the available resources as per ones priorities and requirements in the family so the person who performs the decision making has more power over the control and disbursement of the household resources in comparison to other members. Decision making is an important aspect because of the power attached to it saving is one indicator explain the economic soundness of a family. In general, women shall possess a characteristics feature of saving tendency with or without the notice of the head of household due to their insecure nature. 25 out of 30 respondents felt stressed about their savings which is 83.33 percent of the sample size faced different stress related problems because in family she has no right to think about savings and investments. In this matter, only man has right to decide.

Another concern for stress in working women's was found to be a new job switch or increased responsibility. Only 2 respondents reported this reason as a cause of their stress. One of the major causes of stress was family conflict. It was found that more than 80 percent of the women were under high levels of stress due to the family matters. Further it was seen that 25 out of 30 working women faced problems due to their disturbed family life. The percentage of women who faced problems due to this reason was 76.66 of the total sample size which is large in number.

It has also found that financial problem was also a reason which faced women to work to providing a helping hand to their families but still 8 respondents reported stress due to this reason which is 26.66 percent of the sample size. Though the percentage is so small but no small enough to be ignored. It was also seen that 5 out of 8 respondents faced due to this reason. The percentage of the female who face problem due to financial crisis was 10.00.

Another reason of women stress was unhealthy work environment. Unfair discrimination exists in the work place, partly because women themselves are unaware of their potentialities and shy away from certain work imagining themselves incapable. Another difficulty faced by women in the work place is resistance from men to accept them as colleagues and more so as seniors in responsible position. More than 80 percent of the women respondents were found in stress due to the above stated reason. It was also seen that out of 80 percent around 96 percent women's dealt with different problems on day to day basis.

7 out of 30 women stated that the period of marriage/divorce involves a lot of activities which occupied a large position of their attention. This resulted in the lack of concentration towards work and led to stress. The study reveals that 23.3 percent working women's reported stress during the above stated period. However 71.4 percent of the respondents who reported this reason as a cause of stress faced problems in their personal life. In today's world of liberalised society more and more women are stepping out their house and are giving tough competition to this male dominated society. This requires spending a considerable amount of time in work. In today's world of increasing competition, the working hours – prolonged which requires sitting late in the office. This is creating a misbalance in the personal and professional life of women. 21 out of 30 respondents felt stressed due to increase in the work pressure which is very significant percentage of 70%. It was further sent hat 18 out of the above reported 21 which is 85.7 percent of the sample size faced different stress related problems.

### **Findings and Suggestions**

Women have constituted a growing portion of the workforce for several decades. Initially women used to take up employment activity until their marriage. But at present they are continuing employment even after their marriage and even after they become mothers. Today unmarried female employees, married female employees and working mothers are steadily increasing. Women employees presently limited their careers to selected jobs and organizations. But, they will be ready to take up all types of jobs in different types by organizations. As a part of the research work, an initial survey was done with a sample of 30 women to have their views on the stress in working women, during the study there was many findings. Some of which were surprising in nature. It was observed that women going through personal or family problems tend to carry their worries and anxieties to their workplace. Both wife and husband will be loaded with grievances and problems as both of them share their problems and grievances both at work and off the work. In other's words, husband's problems would be his own problems and the problems of his wife are her own both at work and at home. Similarly, wife's problems in dual career couples will be her domestic problems, job problems and work-related and non work problems of her husband.

A majority of respondents started different reasons by which they are experiencing stress. Out of the many few of the largely reported causes are discussed, the major cause of stress in working women was found to be family disturbance. Women work at their work places and after returning home do the household chores. Their social or family life is reduced to zero level. They just lead a mechanical life. They have no time for recreation, extra burden because of household work is primary, comments and criticism from family members, undue expectations from others, husband getting irritated, more demand for money by in-law's family members and greater expectations from own parents/brothers/sisters.

During the study some of the women repeated that switching job or increase in the responsibility of the work place also caused the stress in their minds as their workload is increased, due to fatigue and mental pressure they experience stress and of last result in loss of health. Due to the overloaded work schedule, their health suffers and a tensed or unhappy, disturbed environment craps up in the home. Many women were also of the view that living in joint families and keeping at pace with today's competitive world proved to be a big tension and they felt stressed out by the feeling that their identify will be lost in doing only the household chores. The daily conflict between the daughter-in-laws and mother-in-laws forced them to adopt the nuclear family approach and divorce. The women who lived with their in-laws were more stressed than those living in nuclear families. The reason they gave was lack of support from the in-laws as well as from the spouse. The expectations are more and nobody is ready to adjust with them. Lack of proper rest due to increased business and responsibilities created many health related problems leading to depression, hormonal imbalance, loss of sleep and many more. Some of the women also said that due to financial problems they are forced to work so that they can provide a helping hand to support their family. Almost all of the working women were of the view point that the gender biases also added to them stress. They said that despite of performing well they are banned from the hikes or promotions and no reason is given to them but the actual reason that was found in this male dominated society and in survey the most men are not ready to work under women. It is their psychology that women are made to work and receive orders and not giving orders to them. Unhealthy work



environment also contributed to a great extent in adding to the women's stress. The world has accepted them to step out and work but still the different treatment is given to them. Passing on nasty remarks, abuses and unhygienic language and body movements make them feel very uncomfortable. Even at the, they are not supported. Instead they are told to leave the job and better to stay at home. Their plight goes into the trash box and they silently bear all the sufferings.

All this create a mental pressure in the minds of women which contributes to a great amount in increasing the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, strokes. It is suggested to the working women to avoid taking too much stress. To take proper sleep and rest so that the mind and body is relaxed and the symptoms of stress are vanished. The family members of the respondents to be supportive and encouraging. Their motivation and support may work leaps and bounds in encouraging them organizations are also suggested to take care of the work culture that no abusive language or any unhealthy activities is incorporated while dealing with ladies strict action should be taken against them who do so.

Women's equality in power sharing and active participation in decision making in family matters. Systems lead the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation. As of view, the Indian Government has taken several steps towards empowering women, yet it requires some more effective policy measures for the participation and co-operation of men as they benefit by having educated mothers, wives, daughters and sisters. Undoubtedly, the economic empowerment will allow raising women's self awareness, skill development, creative decision making and may lead to produce better citizens and modern India.

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