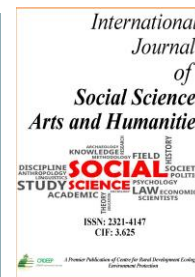


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Research Paper

Stress Management: Key Challenges and Tasks for Working Women

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ABSTRACT

Social attitude to the role of women lags much behind. This attitude which considers women fit for certain jobs and not others colors those who recruit employees. A woman's work is not merely confined to paid employment. She has to almost always shoulder the burden of household chores as well. A gender bias creates an obstacle at the recruitment stage itself. When it comes to remuneration the law proclaims equality but it is seldom put into practice. The inbuilt conviction that women are capable of less work than men or less efficient than men governs this injustice of unequal salaries and wages for the same job. The age old belief of male superiority over women creates several hurdles for women at their place of work. Women on the way up the corporate ladder discover that they must be much better than their male colleagues to reach the top. Once at the top male colleagues and subordinates often expect much greater expertise and efficiency from a woman boss than from a male boss. Working in such conditions inevitably put much greater strain on women than what men experience. These problems tend to make women less eager to progress in their careers.

1. Introduction

The Indian women had been homemakers but the ever-increasing cost of living has made them to go out and opt for careers. In a patriarchal society like India, it is still believed that a man is the primary breadwinner of his family. Although Indian women have started working outside their homes but they have a long way to go both culturally and socially before they are actually treated equal to their male counterparts in their workplaces. Majority of the Indian women live in rural areas and these women generally work as unskilled laborers. In urban areas, although Indian women are a part of the corporate world but these women are facing a number of challenges in their day-to-day life. Recent studies indicate that despite progress, women continue to experience unequal access to opportunities and resources, especially in male-dominated sectors (Kabeer, 2016). Further, gendered expectations regarding household responsibilities still place an additional burden on working women, influencing their career advancement (Budhwar & Bhatnagar, 2022).

While most of the women still face discrimination, a number of Indian women have been able to cross barriers and are successful in politics, technology and business. The Indian society has started seeing women with a different perspective. Some men have started realizing that women are competent in most of the fields. They are now being recognized and honored for their work. The female professionals are steadily increasing in number and this in turn is opening new paths other women. Majority of the Indian women live in rural areas and these women generally work as unskilled laborers. In urban areas, although Indian women are a part of the corporate world but these women are facing a number of challenges in their day-to-day life. The causes of stress are known as stressors and there are exactly hundreds of different types of stressors. Women's life finds that threatening, difficult to cope with or causes excess pressure can be potential cause of stress and work over-lap

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and facilitate stress. A problem reduces stress related productivity and morale. The other hand if there is no job satisfaction for women employees it causes heavy stress and work life imbalance. Studies have also shown that women experience higher work-family conflict than men, which significantly increases their stress levels (Barnett & Hyde, 2001).

To mark her identity, to be independent, to earn a living, to run her family or to support her husband run the family...; there are numerous reasons today women step out of their home, to work and to earn. Breaking off her traditional image of home maker, women today are taking up new roles and challenges of work and career. A woman plays so many roles (of daughter, sister, wife, daughter-in-law, mother...) and for ages has been a multi-tasker; one who cook food, does the domestic works, raises kids, and cares for everyone. She works 24X7, never complains and asks no remuneration. Work life balance of women employees and stress met with the job performance then job dissatisfaction comes as an outcome. Different stages of life and career have different stress, work life balances and satisfaction needs. Richard Welford (2008) in his survey results on work life balance in Hong Kong quotes that there is an alarmingly high percentage of respondents who feel that work is the cause of health problems, stress and lack of exercise. Health problem are likely led to lower productivity and effectiveness of workers.

2. Challenges For The Working Women

Her tasks and challenges have increased and hardened multifold now when she is super multi-tasking; juggling between career, travelling, kitchen, kids, husband, house, society, personal health, passion and desires. Balancing between so many duties and obligations, a woman faces numerous challenges and problems every day, every time, and may be every second minute or second. Here a simplistic summary of what all a working woman has to face in her daily life, the challenges and the problems:

Acceptance as Working Professionals

Most Indian men are yet to come to terms with the fact that women are also capable of working with them, shoulder to shoulder, in any field or professional sphere. They still visualize women as individuals who should be in charge of the kitchen and other domestic affairs. As a result, Indian working women do not get the respect they require from their male colleagues in the workplace. Research also shows that deep-rooted gender stereotypes in India continue to shape workplace attitudes and limit women's acceptance as professionals (Chaudhary & Verick, 2022).

Balancing Work-Family Life

No matter how high their position or designation is in the office, women in India are still viewed as the family manager back home. They are expected to return home at a certain time, cook, clean and take care of family affairs. In fact, men who help out around their house are often the butt of jokes by their male friends. This makes life extremely stressful for women who have little help around the house and have to do it all. Studies confirm that Indian women experience significantly higher work-family conflict due to unequal household responsibilities (Subramaniam & Selvaratnam, 2020).

Travelling For Work Is Not Acceptable

One of the problems faced by married working women is that they cannot travel or go on tours without having to answer uncomfortable questions by most of their friends and family. This is especially true for married women, who also have a flourishing career. Their professional obligations often depend on the support and understanding of family members. A married man can go on long official tours outside his home city, without raising eyebrows and questions from his family members and peers, but his equally-successful wife would face disapproval. As a result, women often have to opt out of jobs than involve travel or settle for not being promoted as a result.

Typically, the orthodox mindset in the Indian society makes it difficult for a working woman to balance her domestic environment with the professional life. In some families, it may not be acceptable to work after six o'clock. Those families that do accept these working hours may experience considerable anxiety every day about a woman's safety while traveling. So many issues affect a working woman because she is closely protected or watched by her family and the society. According to survey conducted by ASSOCHAM, on 1000 women professionals, around 80 per cent of the households expect their daughters-in-law to prioritize household requirements over the official work. Further, many of them are physically and psychologically abused, by their in-laws and husband but they do not complain or let others know about it, particularly if they have children. Scholars note that restrictive mobility norms remain one of the strongest barriers to women's career progression in India (Kapur, 2021).

Safety of Working Women While Traveling

The "nosey questions factor" aside, there is still the concern for safety of working women who need to travel on official business. Women travelling out of their home city for work trips are considered vulnerable and an easy target to fulfill the lewd intentions of their chauvinist male colleagues. Checking into a hotel alone is one of the problems faced by working women, even if the trip is purely official. Many hotels refuse to allot a room to a single woman (under strange pretexts) because of their own safety concerns or if a woman decides to stay alone, she is viewed with suspicion. National Crime Records

Bureau data also highlights that safety concerns significantly impact women's workforce participation and independent travel in India (NCRB, 2021).

Sexual Harassment

Every single day a woman when steps out, stays out whole day working while travelling, in office, in field, in canteen, in outdoor meetings...; directly/indirectly she is subjected to a lot of sexual abuses and harassment. It's not always with hands she is hurt, but she is attacked and hurt with eyes, with tongue, with gestures and of course unfortunately physically. A few women wave off, ignore and move on; some disgust them to the very soul, out there is no way out so with tears or suppressed anger they move on; while some root off their dignity and even existence. To some women have to compromise, to some escape routes, while some compel them to revolt or break down. And it's no less than a part of the working women, directly or indirectly, to a small and ignorant to large scale. A survey by the Indian National Bar Association (INBA, 2017) revealed that nearly 70% of working women reported experiencing workplace sexual harassment at some point in their careers.

Unequal Pay

One of the raging topics of discussion in the context of problems faced by working women (not only in India, but also in any other nations) is that of equal pay. Legally, a woman is entitled to get the same salary as their male colleagues for the same kind of work done by them. However, gender discrimination is rampant as many companies still do not adhere to these guidelines and pay women less than their male colleagues. The family becomes an organizational stakeholder and this powerful social trend marked the beginning of the work/life balance paradigm shift. (Denise Horner Mitnick, 2007). The Global Gender Gap Report also consistently shows that India has one of the widest genders pay gaps in Asia (World Economic Forum, 2023).

Discrimination at Work

Discrimination at Workplace: However, Indian women still face blatant discrimination at their workplaces. A major problem faced by the working women is sexual harassment at the work place. Further, women employees working in night shift are more vulnerable to such incidents. Nurses, for example, face this problem nearly every day. There is nothing that is done in hospitals to tackle and address the danger they face. Such blatant disregard of current Indian laws is one reason why sexual harassment at the workplace continues to increase. Discrimination starts at the very level of recruitment and interview, where recruiters/interviewers see women incompetent for challenging roles and ask questions like whether you would be able to continue after marriage? Studies highlight that gender bias during recruitment is widespread in India, especially for leadership and technical roles (Bhandari & Seshadri, 2019).

Challenges to Safety, Life and Dignity

Sexual harassment, theft, molestation, eve-teasing, etc. are some of the forms of challenges working women face to their safety, life and dignity. UN Women (2020) reports that public harassment and unsafe workplaces significantly restrict Indian women's participation in economic activities.

Non-acceptance of Talent, Offered Disrespect

A woman going out to work in many societies is seen very lowly and questioned about her character/moral. A working woman who is beautiful or well-maintained or presentable or is friendly with everyone and is progressing in her career instead of being complimented is disrespected and disgusted; is questioned/remarked on her dignity and morals.

Family Duties

In today's modern era, even after working in the corporate world and after taking up challenging roles of executives/directors/marketing professional/IT professionals, etc.; the age-old image of a woman of being a home-maker is not much changed. Even if she works, comes home tired/has to leave early for office; she is expected to cook food, take care of kids and all other household duties and the male counterparts may volunteer but they hold no responsibilities. OECD (2021) data shows that Indian women perform almost 5 times more unpaid domestic work than men, contributing heavily to work-life imbalance.

Juggling Between Work, Home, Relationships and Personal Life.

Amid all the dilemma and stretch of balancing the job responsibilities, following her passion, going ahead with her aspirations and looking after her family-kids-husband; a woman handles and balances a big lot of stress, which deprives her of peace, rest, sleep, independent though and luxury to be herself.

Ego of Male Counterpart.

One of the most tough to handle challenges is to manage and cope with the ego of your male counterpart as wife/partner. Males do support women to go out and work, but somewhere they find it hard to accept the progress and achievement of women whether she is his colleague or life partner. Studies on gender dynamics show that male ego and fear of role reversal often create emotional stress for working women (Singh & Sharma, 2018).

Inequality as in Provision of Opportunities in Terms of Job Responsibilities, Projects and Organizational Advancement.

One of the most unfortunate challenges for women that they are subject to undergo at work despite all their qualifications, skills, talent, hard work and performance; is to be overlooked and low rated in comparison to their male colleagues. This is one reason, why many women have to settle down at less challenging jobs than their capabilities/talent, or get stuck at an irrelevant job/field or get stuck at one point of career with no opportunities for further growth, etc. According to Catalyst (2020), women in India face a “broken rung” where they are less likely to be promoted to first-level management, limiting their career progression.

Low Dignity and No Ownership of Her Own Earning.

Mostly women are not seen as independent earners, who command respect and dignity. Instead, is seen as a small back-wheel of a heavy vehicle and thus, her role and contribution are mostly over looked. In most of the families, especially middle class, upper middle class and lower middle class; it's seen that the income of the woman either goes in the hands of her father or husband, rather than in her hands. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2021) reports that only 18% of Indian women have full control over their own earnings, indicating limited economic autonomy.

3. Conclusion

Technological advancement results in retrenchment of women employees. No one thinks of upgrading their skills. Women going to work are often subject to sexual harassment. If a woman is praised for her work or promoted on merit. The psychological pressure of all this can easily lead to a woman quitting her job. Most of the problems that beset working women are in reality rooted in the social perspective of the position of women. Traditionally men are seen as the bread winner and women as the house-keepers, child bearers and rearers. This typecast role model continues to put obstacles and challenges before the working women. A fundamental change is required in the attitudes of the employers, policy makers, family members and other relatives and the public at large.\

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