

## Occupational Role Stress and Working Women – Research Findings

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### ABSTRACT

*For today's women working is means to growth and self worth. Working women lives in two different worlds of work and Home. Our society expects women to act like a lady, think like a man and work like a dog. She is struggling continuously in fulfilling contradicting expectations from work place and home, thus is a serious phenomena to study. Continuous struggle to prove her at two different places makes her more stressful. Changes in life stages from unmarried to married to having children add on her struggle in managing her occupational role stress.*

**Keywords:** Occupational Role Stress, Role, Men, Women, Conflict

### Methodology:

Research Papers were systematically reviewed and analyzed on Women at Workplace, Conflicting world of working women; occupational role stress and working women.

### Women at Workplace

In India Women's and Men's roles exists in context of a society and Culture. Our society and culture has myths and historic stories about man, a hero, who unfolds his life to seek answer to the question of who am I and what is the purpose of his life. But in our culture we never find stories about adventures of women's journey towards knowing why she exists. Their lives and stories are always around family and relationships. Women have lived within frozen initiative and shrunken roles in India. The women of the agrarian society have restricted themselves within their homes and community. They have lived alone and isolated path of their inner being. After centuries of agrarian living the technological and industrial Revolution happened and the education institution has emerged. This has helped women to discover that they are intelligent, competent, capable and creative. From the first footsteps into the educational institutions, to becoming teachers, nurses and doctors women went on to become engineers, scientists, pilots, astronauts and telecommunication experts. One by one they entered the portals of bank, insurance companies, automobiles plants, oil and gas industry and politics to name a few. Not only entred into this field, they stayed in the fore front at significant managerial and leadership positions. They broke out of the prisons made by themselves, others, systems and traditions. (Indira J Parikh, 2001)

There are changes in large part due to a significant cultural shift in parental perspective that is, an increased acceptance of giving education to girls that allows for the possibility of women working outside the home, contributing economically to the family and even pursuing a career. With more Indian women in the workforce, a number of rates of female workers in rural areas are 31 percent and 11.6 percent in urban areas. Employment numbers for women, further detailed in women workers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century- Unemployment and Underemployment, indicate that of India's 397 million workers, 123.9 million are women: 106 million women are in the rural areas and 18 million in the urban areas. However, only 7 percent of India's labor force is in the organized sector (including workers on regular salaries in registered companies), with the remaining workers (93 percent) in the unorganized or informal sectors.

### Conflicting world of working women:

Working women lives in two different worlds: home and Workplace. There are different expectations from women when they are at work and at home. She continuous struggles between home and workplace. She suffered from two contradictory expectations from two different worlds. On professional front she is expected to be committed, dynamic, competitive, straight forward, non sentimental and act in a "business like manner" and at home she is expected to be sweet, soft, sensitive, adaptable and, gentle, unassertative and domesticated. (Misra, 1998).

The word Stress is derived from English. Originally it was used in physics and it meant an external pressure, tension, load of an object (Newhouse and Treven, 2005). Term stress was introduced in medicine in 1949 by Canadian endocrinologist Hans Selye. In Psycho-physiology, stress referred to some stimulus resulting in a

detectable strain that cannot be accommodated by the organism and which ultimately results into impaired health or behaviour.

Stress has been conceptualized in following ways: 1) as an external force which is perceived as threatening 2) as response to a situation demanding an individual to adapt changes, physically or psychologically 3) as an interactional outcome of the external demand and internal resources and 4) as a personal response to a certain variation in the environment.

According to Selye (1956), any external event or internal drive which threatens to upset the organismic equilibrium is stress. He has defined stress as non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it. According to McGarh (1976) there is a potential for stress when an environmental situation is perceived as presenting a demand which threatens to exceed the person's capacities and resources for meeting it, under condition where he has expected a substantial differential in reward and cost from meeting the demand versus not meeting it.

As a comprehensive definition stress is a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraint or demand related to what he or she desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important.

D.M. Pestonjee (1992) has identified following three important sections of life, in which stress originates:

- 1) Job and Organizational Sector: Work environment and policies, task, responsibility, power and accountability, working hours and atmosphere, compensation and reward, subordinates, colleagues and superiors
- 2) Social Sector: Political and cultural factors; religion and cast; region and language; civic amenities and recreational avenues; health services and educational facilities.
- 3) Intrapsychic Sector: Temperament, attitudes, values and beliefs; aspirations and desires; health, problems and abilities.
- 4) Stress in workplace can cause huge financial losses and reduce profitability. Stress is therefore a problem of the organization as a whole and not just of an individual (Ivanko and Stare, 2007)

### **Occupational Role Stress**

Role is the position one occupies in social system, and is defined by the functions one performs in response to the expectations of the significant members of a social system, and one's own expectations from that position or office. (Pareek, 1983). Modern life is full of stress. As organizations become more complex, the potential for stress in the organization increases. According to Udai Pareek (1983) there are ten role stressors 1) Self Role Distance 2) Inter -role distance 3) Role stagnation 4) Role isolation 5) Role Ambiguity 6) Role expectation Conflicts 7) Role overload 8) Role Erosion 9) Resource inadequacy and 10) Personal Inadequacy

Stress is an inevitable in everybody's life in such a demanding market. Along with expectations from self, others, from society, and rising uncertainties, the level of stress has increased a lot. Modern age is called as age of "Anxiety and Stress". (Coleman, 1936). According to World Health Organization, it is the "Twentieth Century Disease", prevailing in almost all occupations. Stress is an unavoidable characteristic of life and work. In any job, there are wide variety of potential causes of stress, some of which are common to both men and women. Occupational stress describes physical, mental and emotional wear and tear brought about by incongruence between the requirement of the job and capabilities, resources and needs of the employee to cope with job demands. (Akinboye et al, 2002)

The greatest source of stress for modern women appears to be the increasing tendency toward development among women of Type A behavior pattern in male dominated professions. (Paul J. Rosch, 1984)

### **Women and occupational role stress**

Gender is an important determinant of human health, and there is a clear pattern for sex-specific prevalence rates of various mental and physical disorder. Susceptibility of infectious diseases, hypertension, aggressive behavior and drug abuse is generally observed to be higher in men. Conditions such as autoimmune diseases, chronic pain, depression, and anxiety disorders are relatively more prevalent among women. The observed gender specific disease pattern may be partly attributed to effects of sex hormones as one of these gender differences emerge during reproductive years. Individual differences in stress reactivity have been proposed as a potentially important risk factor for gender specific health problems. Men and women tend to react differently to stress—both psychologically and biologically. (Rohit Verma, Yatan Pal Singh Balhara, Chandra Shekhar Gupta, 2011) Men respond to the stressful situations by attack or flee (Flight or fight) and women respond by protecting self and other (Tend and befriend).

Vijit Chaturvedi (2011) has investigated the difference in occupational role stress among male and female employees working in private and government institutes in academic industry. It was found that female employees were more stressed than counterparts.

Women IT professionals experience considerable level of stress and depression in Chennai. Safeguarding the mental health of employees is the basis for peaceful nation. A women's peace paves peacefulness in the family, than the whole community and ultimately the whole nation.(Balasubramanian Vimala, Chokalingam Madhavi, 2009)

According to study done by Nagina Parveen (2009), the overall work related stress was greater in married working women as compared to the unmarried working women because of traditional trends, demands of society and more roles and responsibilities assigned to them as a mother, wife, homemaker as compared to unmarried women.

P Aujla, Hapinder, R. Gill and P. Sandhu (2004) has studied sociological and environmental factors causing stress among Women and fighting techniques used. According to their studies working women were more stressed compare to nonworking women. According to both the categories of respondents highest ranking social pressure was 'unexpected guests' followed by compulsory socialization. They were suffering because of children future and husband related stress. Extremely hot weather and natural calamities were also identified as main environmental factors causing stress. Proper Planning and relaxation were found most preferred techniques to cope up with stress compared to medical and other natural therapies.

Achla Pareek and Manju Mehta have investigated three groups of working women i.e gazette officer, bank employees and school teachers on type of role stress they experience. Findings shows that role stress was experienced most by gazetted officers, followed by bank employees and least by school teachers. Women gazetted officers and bank employees have to compete with male and show their capability. They have to exert more to prove themselves efficient as compared to males. Their bosses are likely to comment on their work which gets delayed because they have a women as subordinate, and therefore they can give the work to someone also, or avoid giving her important task.

Anja Huzjak, Maja Hajdinijak, Sabina Habjan and Sabina Bernjak (2009) analyzed that Constant pressure on healthcare sector, lack of staff and waiting queues are factors that especially affect medical sector, which additionally makes achieving the quality of work more difficult. It has been found that doctors and technicians are pretty much under stress. Stress varies from dental technicians and dentist. While dental technicians are more concern with relations between employees, doctors are more disturbed with work flow.

Leslie A. MacDonald, James A. Deddens, Barbara Grajewski, Elizabeth Whelan & Joseph Hurrell (2003) have studied Job stress among female flight attendants. The result of the study suggest that certain chronic job stressors such as high mental and/or psychological job demands, imbalance between job demands and outside obligations, low supervisor support, and emotional load have a substantial effect on psychological distress, perceived stress and job satisfaction among flight attendants.

According to Usha Ram, though culture differs in several aspects, urban working mothers with dependent children, the number of hassles experienced and the intensity of stress arising from the hassles are quite similar across the New Zealand and Indian Groups of working mothers.

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