

Psycho social work environment and health of women

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ABSTRACT

Working women compose a large proportion of the workforce today and for them to be working as a manager is really a challenge which leads to stress in their life. Job stress arises from the interaction of people and their jobs. Role stress is the stress experienced by the persons because of their role (job) in the organization. The women professionals were of the view that now days, it was difficult to survive on single income, so their going to the workplace is very much accepted by family members. The family members try to adjust their roles within the family and a change is being felt in their attitudes also. The reasons for such a change are: increase in women's education, changing socio-cultural values, increasing awareness and consciousness in women and the rise in economic independence. Besides this, due to better working conditions, better transportation facilities and improved technology, the stress on women professionals is reduced and their efficiency has increased. They have the support of their family and friends and are able to cope better with stress. Women are becoming more and more career conscious. They want to take up challenging roles for growth and development, so wherever they are performing stereotyped roles, they face stress. Although women have joined almost every profession in our country and most of them are doing excellent work, the working women have to put in a great deal of hard work to reach the top. But everything does not stop there. She has to fight hard to retain her position and make people realise the worth of her skills. Economic independence is essential for the personality development of woman and for providing economic support to her family. It gives her confidence, liberty, identity, security, a status and a feeling of sharing the economic needs of the household.

Key Words : Stress, Coping, Job stress, Social support, Diseases, Social environment

INTRODUCTION

The psychosocial work environment—particularly exposure to job stress—has been linked to the onset of several conditions, including cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, and mental illness. Social variables potentially affect health outcomes throughout the entire spectrum of etiology: from disease onset (beginning prenatally and accumulating in their effects throughout the life course) to disease progression and survival. During each stage of the disease continuum, social-environmental variables can influence outcomes in a variety of different ways. Prior to the onset of disease, social variables might influence the risk of prenatal infections, the adoption of risky or health-promoting behaviors, or the ability to cope with adverse circumstances. Subsequent to the development of illness,

social variables may determine the rate of progression of disease (or recovery) through differential rates of access to treatment, treatment adherence, coping behaviors, or “direct” effects on immune surveillance and tissue repair. It is important to note, however, that the relevance and magnitude of the associations between social-environmental variables and health outcomes can vary at different points of the disease process. For example, the incidence of some cancers, notably breast cancer and melanoma, is higher among more advantaged groups, reflecting in part the underlying socioeconomic distribution of their risk factors. For breast cancer, the increased incidence among higher SES women is in part explained by reproductive factors, including earlier age at menarche, later age at first birth, and lower fertility (Baylor College of Medicine, 2003). On the other hand, survival following the diagnosis of breast cancer

consistently favors higher status women, due, among other things, to earlier detection and better access to effective treatment. Likewise, observational evidence suggests the strong role of social support in improving survival and functional recovery following major diseases (such as stroke or heart attack), but the evidence is less consistent for preventing the incidence of disease (where social networks appear to have a stronger role).

There also may be critical stages in the life course during which the social environment has a stronger impact on later life health outcomes. In addition, social-environmental conditions often cumulate over the life course, so that for example, persistent poverty may be more detrimental to health than transient poverty, and studying the dynamic trajectories of social variables is likely to be of additional interest in explaining patterns of health. Finally, social-environmental conditions may be reproduced across generations, because parents “pass on” their disadvantage to their children. For example, poor households are more likely to have sick children. Childhood illness can in turn truncate the educational and occupational mobility of the affected individuals. This constitutes a social mechanism—separate from a genetic mechanism—for the inheritance or transmission of disease risk. There may, of course, be gene-environment interactions involved in the ways in which these two separate influences shape the patterns of health across the life

Balancing work and family frequently means irregular work hours for women professionals leading to stress and various problems related to it. An increasing number of women are becoming career conscious and professional in their outlook. Earlier women preferred jobs like nursing, medicine, clerical but now the number of women executives is on the increase. The reasons for such a change are: increase in women’s education, changing socio-cultural values, increasing awareness and consciousness in women and the rise in economic independence.

Women are in a dilemma facing queries regarding self and her rights. Her inner conflict keeps on puzzling her regarding existence in reality and what people talk about. Dr. Hans Selye described stress as a “state manifested by a specific syndrome which consists of all the non-specifically induced changes within a biological system”. Women performing dual role are under stress and several factors at home and at the work place cause it. Conditions that cause stress are called stressors. The

stressors combine to produce stress. The stressors may be overload of work, responsibility, inadequate authority, non-cooperation from subordinates, hostile boss, poor working conditions and conflicts in the organization. Job stress arises from the interaction of people and their jobs. If working mothers do not focus on what is best for them and their families, they will be only adding stress to already difficult job-versus home-life balance. Role stress is the stress experienced by the persons because of their role (job) in the organization. They assume a role based on the expectation of the self and others at work place. Working women compose a large proportion of the workforce today and for them to be working as a manager is really a challenge which leads to stress in their life.

METHODOLOGY

One hundred and fifty women managers in the age group 25-35 years were selected from various organisations. They were from different income groups. Their marital status could be single/married/divorced/widows. The places selected for conducting the present study were cities of Yamunanagar, Jagadhri, Kurukshetra, Chandigarh and Panchkula. Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents. In some cases, the respondents had to be convinced to actively participate in the research work. A meeting was arranged with the selected respondents to confirm their participation in the study. The survey method was used to gather information for the study. Based on the objectives of the study, the Standardized Questionnaire was distributed. The present study was an attempt to provide a practical and positive approach to women managers experiencing stress at work and at home.

Research instrument :

To find out the level of role stress and to identify key role stressors, the OSI inventory by A.K Srivastava and A.P. Singh (1984) was used. The scale consists of 46 items, each to be rated on the five-point scale. The items relate to almost all relevant components of the job life which causes stress. It has questions related to twelve types of role stressors. The score of the inventory varies from 0-230. The scores were divided into following levels—Very High, Moderately High, Moderately Low and Very Low. The statistical analysis was carried out using tools like percentages; mean score, variance and standard deviation.

Below P²⁵ – Very Low Stress

Between P²⁶and P⁷⁵—Moderate Stress
 Above P⁷⁶—Very High Stress

Any score of greater than or equal to mean plus standard deviation means very high level of role stress. Any score less than mean minus standard deviation means very low level of low stress. Intermediate ranges from mean to mean plus standard deviation and from mean to mean minus standard deviation implies moderately high and moderately low level of stress, respectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The overall level of role stress on women managers was analysed. It was found that majority of women (40%) were under moderately low level of stress followed by 36% women who reported moderately high level of stress (Table 1). Women managers experiencing very high or low stress are 12 % in each case. The analysis proves that women managers were under moderate stress.

The data was further analysed to find difference between the stress levels of women managers belonging to different organisations. There was no significant difference between role stress being experienced by women managers belonging to different organisations. As each respondent varies in response to different type

of role stress, it was assumed that a role stress will assume a key role only if it effects more than 40% of the women managers.

Conclusion :

Women managers have to perform dual role of a maid and a manager so they feel rushed but are under moderate level of stress. The key stressors which affect maximum number of women managers are Poor Peer Relations, Intrinsic Impoverishment, and Under-participation. This is because women are becoming more and more career conscious, they want to accept challenges, improve performance and want to become socially and economically independent. They were of the view that now days, it was difficult to survive on single income, so their going to the workplace is very much accepted by family members. The family members try to adjust their roles within the family and a change is being felt in their attitudes also. Besides this, due to better working conditions, better transportation facilities and improved technology, the stress on women professionals is reduced and their efficiency has increased. They have the support of their family and friends and are able to cope better with stress. Bradley *et al.* (2005) reported

Table 1 : Level of role stress in women professionals

Level of role stress	N =150	%
Very High	18	(12)
Moderately High	54	(36)
Moderately Low	60	(40)
Very Low	18	(12)

Table 2 : Role stressors in women managers

Role Stressors	Very High	Moderately High	Moderately Low	Very Low	Total
Role Overload	20(13.3%)	25(16.6%)	50(33.3%)	55(36.6)	150
Role Ambiguity	35(23.3%)	50(33.3%)	35(23.3%)	30(20%)	150
Role Conflict	20(13.3%)	20(13.3%)	55(36.6)	55(36.6)	150
Unreasonable Group and Political Pressure	25(16.6%)	45(30%)	40(26.6%)	40(26.6%)	150
Responsibility For Persons	35(23.3%)	45(30%)	30(33.3%)	40(26.6%)	150
Under- participation	40(26.6%)	50(33.3%)	30(20%)	30(20%)	150
Powerlessness	35(23.3%)	45(30%)	40(26.6%)	30(20%)	150
Poor Peer Relations	45(30%)	45(30%)	30(20%)	30(20%)	150
Intrinsic Impoverishment	45(30%)	45(30%)	40(26.6%)	20(13.3%)	150
Low Status	20(13.3%)	25(16.6%)	50(33.3%)	55(36.6)	150
Strenuous Working Conditions	40(26.6%)	35(23.3%)	35(23.3%)	40(26.6%)	150
Un-profitability	45(30%)	40(26.6%)	35(23.3%)	30(20%)	150

*Figures inside the parenthesis indicates percentages

that self-esteem, social support and religious coping acted as protective factors for post-traumatic stress disorders. If the women managers want to be accepted as efficient homemakers as well as employees, they have to make use of effective stress management techniques, appropriate coping patterns and have internal locus of control. Much stress occurs through emotions such as aggression, impatience, anger, anxiety and fear, all of which kindle the body's stress responses. For maintaining both physical and mental health, women managers must be optimistic and have a positive attitude in life. With new awareness on account of education, economic development, social awareness, social organisations, industrialisation, urbanisation, disintegration of joint families, economic and technical developments, pressures of consumer society, more opportunities for work, development of means of communication and transportation and social mobility, a great change has occurred in the attitude towards women. Subsequently, the position of women has certainly been enhanced. Women have now certainly got a status in society. Although women have joined almost every profession in our country and most of them are doing excellent work, the working women have to put in a great deal of hard work to reach the top. But everything does not stop there. She has to fight hard to retain her position and make people realise the worth of her skills. Economic independence is essential for the personality development of woman and for providing economic support to her family. It gives her confidence, liberty, identity, security, a status and a feeling of sharing the economic needs of the household.

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