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## **A STUDY ON PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS OF WORKING WOMEN**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Women in India have proved their mettle in the work domain. Behind such success lies a big story of struggle and freedom in the traditional social arena. Besides, changing roles of working women, they have maintained the traditional work ethos of household. This research is devoted towards finding the root causes of the existing problems faced by the working women. It also aims at finding feasible solutions that have been practiced elsewhere and needs to be adopted at other social fronts.

**KEYWORDS:** Working Women, Stress, Workplace, Social Status, Working mothers.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

#### **I.1 WORKING WOMEN**

The Industrial Revolution in part was fuelled by the economic necessity of many women, single and married, to find waged work outside their home. Women mostly found jobs in domestic service, textile factories, and piece workshops. They also worked in the coal mines. For some, the Industrial Revolution provided independent wages, mobility and a better standard of living. For the majority, however, factory work in the early years of the 19th century resulted in a life of hardship.[1]

Women in India have come a long way after independence. From just a skilled homemaker, women today have acquired skills and capabilities of not just being a homemaker but being at par with their male counterparts. This is the new generation of women, who want to pursue their dream career. But this life is not a bed of roses for all.

More conflict arises with the working mother. One has to fulfil the demand at work followed by various demands at home. In today's scenario the husband and wife both work towards creating a balance with their work life as well as at home with their children. But it is still difficult for women as she has to play multiple roles of a cook, a family maid, a tutor, a nurse as well as cater to the demands of office work. This can leave a working woman stressed and anxious; more so if the family is not supportive. "My office is quite far from my home. By the time I get home my

husband takes care of my children's studies and sometimes also prepares food. He gets time as his office is nearby and he reaches home early. If it was not for his support I would have left my job long time back", says a working professional.[2]

## **I.2 WHAT IS STRESS**

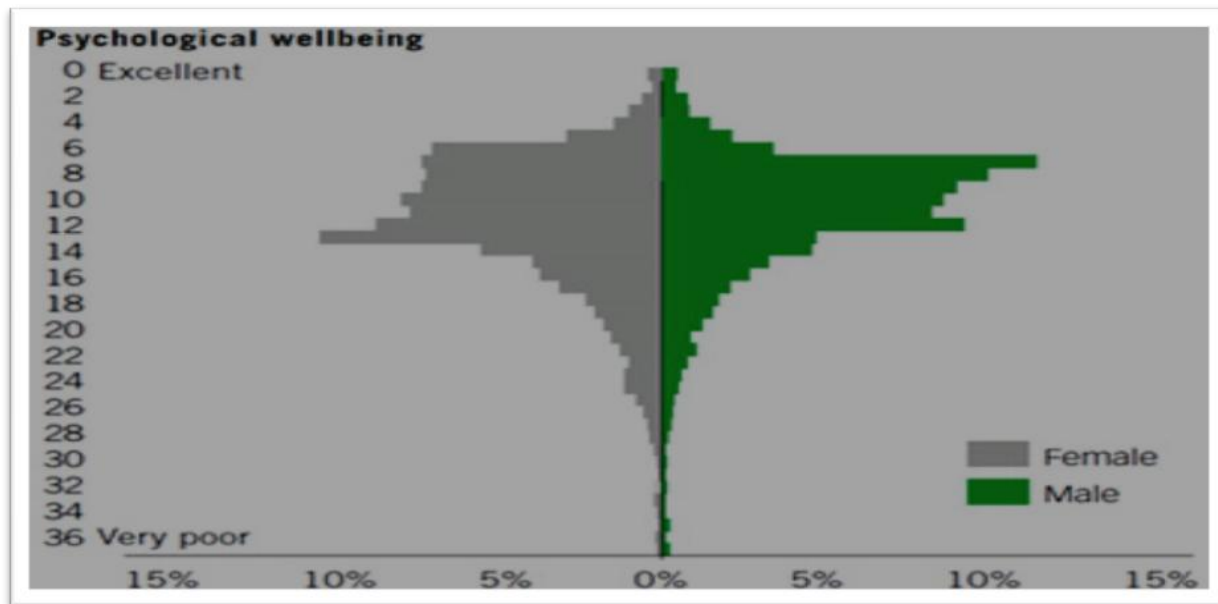
We live in stressful times. We are holding down two or more jobs. We are putting up with heavy job loads and unreasonable demands. We are swallowing outrage and frustration with unfair situations and irrational superiors because we cannot afford to be laid off or fired. Or we have already been laid off and we are struggling to find another job. Or we have given up and are coping with unemployment. Outside strains like these are called **stressors**. Stressors are the barely-tolerable pressures that bring us unhappiness and, eventually, disease.

Some people hardly seem to be affected by stressors. They maintain a sense of perspective and a sense of humour. They remain calm in the midst of adversity and catastrophe. Other people are overwhelmed by a lesser number and intensity of stressors and slide downhill, losing relationships, jobs, and eventually their mental and physical health. The physiological and psychological responses to situations or events that disturb the equilibrium of an organism constitute stress.

While there is little consensus among psychologists about the exact definition of stress, it is agreed that stress results when demands placed on an organism cause unusual physical, psychological, or emotional responses. In humans, stress originates from a multitude of sources and causes a wide variety of responses, both positive and negative. Despite its negative connotation, many experts believe some level of stress is essential for well-being and mental health.

## **I.3 PRESENT STATUS**

The present status of women in the current working environment can be illustrated using some recent data on the working women culture.



**FIG 1.PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL BEING**

( Source : [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk))

#### **I.4 RELATIVE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN STRESS**

It seems to be common knowledge that women are generally busier and more stressed than men, and that they juggle more roles and are constantly rushing towards goal fulfilment.

Researchers from The University of Arizona's School of Family and Consumer Resources decided to find out. They took a sample of 166 married couples and had each participant maintain a daily diary over the course of 42 days, where they recorded their daily stressors. The results indeed showed that women reported a greater amount of "high distress" days and fewer distress-free days than men. Interestingly, the differences in levels of stressful days were due to women experiencing more onsets of "distress episodes" (having stress response triggered), rather than being more likely to continue in a distressed state from one day to the next. In other words, women didn't hold onto their stress more; they just experienced more episodes of being stressed.[3]

## **II . HYPOTHESIS**

H<sub>0</sub>: Working Women feel more stress than working men. (Null Hypothesis)

H<sub>2</sub>: Working Women do not feel more stress than working men ( Alternate Hypothesis)

### **III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Our study includes exploratory research on the concerned areas relating to working women and the stress levels that are constantly being felt by them. We have tried to use the latest concepts in management to highlight the situation in context of such problem and tried to suggest some of them for correcting the situation.

### **IV. DATA COLLECTION**

Data was collected mainly using secondary sources such as newspapers, magazines and online sources such as websites and blogs. Some analytical graphs were also collected to support the research objectives and the hypothesis.

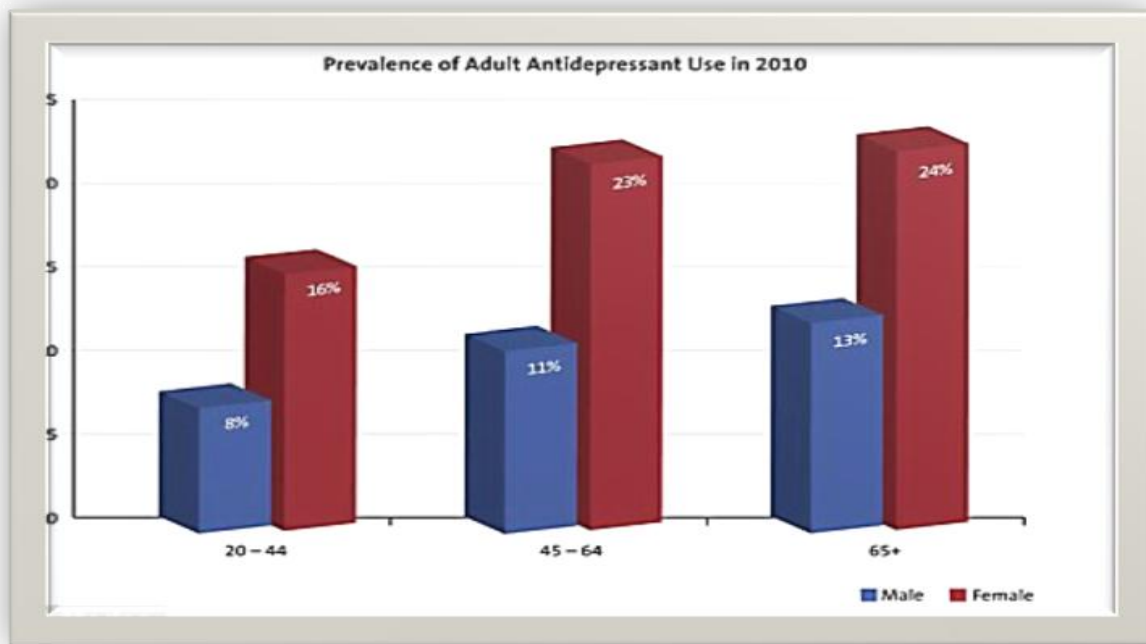
### **V. RESEARCH ANALYSIS**

#### **V.1 SURVEYS**

##### **CASE 1**

In a survey conducted by Kenexa Research Institute, an HR advisory firm based in the US, 56% of the women surveyed said their stress level was reasonable, while 26% felt they were under unreasonable stress. Across roles, more women experienced unreasonable amount of stress than men did. While doing front-line supervisory jobs, women experienced 10% more stress than their male counterparts who carried out the same kind of functions. In service and production jobs, women felt 8% additional stress while at middle and upper manager level, the stress levels were up by 6% for them, compared to men.[4]

Factors including work-life balance, doing exciting work, having a respectful manager, being paid fairly, having a clear career path etc had a direct impact on the work stress among women, said the study. Looking at the difference between genders, results show that women work stress is more related to managerial support and equal opportunity, whereas men's stress drivers focus more on product quality and trust in senior leadership. It included some 29,338 men and women from India, China, Brazil, Russia, America, Britain, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.



**FIG.2 AGE WISE STRESS LEVELS**

(Source: [www.ibankcoin.com](http://www.ibankcoin.com))

## CASE 2

In another study conducted in Bangalore, It was seen that while women at work deliver the same results as men, across occupations, women experience "unreasonable" stress than men do, says a global survey. Payment parity, equal opportunities, career growth, fair performance assessment etc are some of the key concerns that kept working women under unreasonable stress.

|    | Job                            | Median Salary | % Women in Industry | % of Men's Earnings |
|----|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1  | Physicians & Surgeons          | \$84,000      | 31%                 | 71%                 |
| 2  | Pharmacists                    | \$83,500      | 48%                 | 83%                 |
| 3  | Chief Executives               | \$83,000      | 26%                 | 72%                 |
| 4  | Lawyers                        | \$76,000      | 35%                 | 77%                 |
| 5  | Computer Software Engineers    | \$75,000      | 21%                 | 91%                 |
| 6  | Computer and Info Sys Managers | \$73,500      | 30%                 | 82%                 |
| 7  | Physical Therapists            | \$63,000      | 62%                 | unknown             |
| 8  | Speech Language Pathologist    | \$61,500      | 97%                 | unknown             |
| 9  | Computer Programmers           | \$61,000      | 22%                 | 95%                 |
| 10 | HR Managers                    | \$60,500      | 71%                 | 80%                 |

**FIG. 3 JOB WISE INVOLVEMENT OF WOMEN IN VARIOUS INDIAN INDUSTRIES.**

( Source:www.frautech.blogspot.com)

This research may partially explain why there are fewer women in the management roles. The media and academia have substantiated the existence of the glass ceiling. "Women fight the commonly held perception that they may lack the motivation to climb the corporate ladder, and our data indicate that fewer women feel that achieving career goals are likely while maintaining a balance between personal and professional lives. All these factors increase stress levels for women workers. Again, women are more open to report their stress conditions, compared to men," said Brenda Kowske, research consultant, Kenexa Research Institute.

## V.2 CHILD'S PROSPECTS

Some researchers have revealed that mothers who return to work after their baby is born risk causing serious damage to the child's prospects in later life. Such children are more likely to do worse at school, become unemployed and to suffer mental stress than youngsters whose mothers stay at home to bring them up. The findings from the Institute for Social and Economic Research are a severe blow to the Government, which has used the tax and benefit system to encourage mothers to work while stripping away tax breaks such as the Married Couple's Allowance. They are an endorsement of the instincts of thousands of women who either give up work or drastically cut down their job commitments to devote most of their time to raising a young child.

According to the study, the impact of having a full-time working mother on a child's education is similar to growing up in a single-parent family. If a mother returns to work, say the researchers, the child is 20 per-cent less likely to get an A-level. They also reject the idea that a child is helped if the father stays at home, showing that his absence has little effect on the child's educational success. The research, published yesterday by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, followed the lives of 1,263 young people across all social groups who were born in the 1970s.[5]

Researchers attempted to allow for other factors such as income, the parents' education and family break-up, and made comparisons of the performance of brothers and sisters. It found that the children between one and five whose mothers worked for the longest periods tended to have lower educational attainment, greater risk of unemployment as a young adult, and a greater risk of psychological distress. In only one field were the children better off than most others: Daughters of working mothers were less likely to become teenage mothers themselves. The findings showed that the average mother during the 1970s and early 1980s worked for 18 months full-time before her child was five. Nearly two thirds of their children, 64 per cent, achieved at least one A-level or equivalent qualification. However, among mothers who worked for a longer period - 30 months and over before their child was five - only 52 per cent of the children achieved one A-level pass. The likelihood of unemployment rose from seven to nine per cent for those whose mothers had worked full-time, and the chance of psychological stress went up from 23 per cent to 28 per cent.

Part-time work had much less damaging effects on children. The child's chance of passing an A-level fell by six per cent, but there was no evidence of other harm. Fathers who worked full-time had a similar impact on their children's development to mothers who worked part-time. But their children were less likely than others to be unemployed later in life and less likely to show signs of mental distress. Study author Professor John Ermisch said increases in family income were positive for children and could offset the damage of a full-time working mother. 'The large proportion of employed mothers with young children who are in part-time jobs is evidence that many mothers already prefer this option. 'But the Department for Education and Employment dismissed the findings, claiming that the development of childcare improves the educational chances of children of working mothers.

It said a study of more than 2,000 children had 'shown that quality pre-school and child-care has a positive impact on children's education'. This report is based on children born 30 years ago when there was little quality child-care and nursery education. The Government has changed that by creating the largest ever expansion of childcare. Meanwhile, a U.S. study has found that growing up in a clean home can boost youngsters' exam grades and even the salaries they earn as adults. The study of 3,400 volunteers over 25 years found that the length of time a child stayed in education and their future earnings was directly linked to the hygiene in their homes. [5]

### **V.3 OTHER COMMON ISSUES**

Working mothers still perform most of the household chores, while childcare costs can eat up much of their wages. Even when both parents are working, the responsibility of care for sick children usually falls on the mother. Stress loads are high for working mothers. Women's access to jobs may once have been a political issue, but in today's tough economic climate, working is



now a necessity for most mothers. The bulk of families can no longer afford to live on one wage. Despite women's greater participation in the workforce, most men have yet to increase their share of domestic duties. This means that the majority of working mothers are also responsible for housework and looking after their children.

➤ **INCOME DIFFICULTIES IN SOCIAL CONTEXT**

If a mother works, then childcare has to be arranged. In some cases, childcare costs can eat up much of the mother's wage. For low-income families, a second wage may actually leave the family in the same or worse financial position than a single wage, simply because the Parenting Allowance is income-tested.

➤ **STRESS LOADS ARE HIGH FOR WORKING MOTHERS**

Recent survey in a health magazine reported that managing the dual roles of mother and worker is extremely hard. Findings include:

- Over 60 per cent of working mothers feel they take out their stress on their families.
- Close to half of all working mothers would prefer to be full-time mothers, while around one fifth would like to work from home.
- Just four per cent of working mothers would elect to work full-time if they had the choice.
- Nearly eight out of 10 working mothers would quit their jobs if they could.

➤ **HOUSEWORK IS STILL CONSIDERED AS 'WOMAN'S WORK'**

Various Researches indicates that married women with children are worse off than ever before, which is why they are initiating divorce in higher numbers and having fewer children. Some of the findings include:

- Working mothers still perform most of the household chores.
- Full-time mothers and women who work full-time have similar working hours.
- Working mothers work more hours (paid and unpaid) than working fathers.
- Mothers who work part-time have the longest working hours of all.
- Most divorces are initiated by women.

➤ **SICK CHILDREN OF WORKING WOMEN**

Many working mothers dread the possibility of their child getting sick and needing care during usual business hours. Most employers only provide paid sick leave for unwell employees. This means that many working mothers have to take annual leave or unpaid leave in order to stay home and care for their sick children. Key findings of a study published in Family Matters in 1991 include:

- Even when both parents are working, the responsibility of care for sick children usually falls on the mother.
- Some of the reasons for this include that the father earns a higher wage, his job responsibilities are deemed more important, and employers are more likely to accept a mother staying home to care for sick children than a father.
- Around one in 10 working mothers feel guilty about their childcare arrangements - whatever those arrangements may be - when their child is sick.
- Other common carers of sick children - apart from the mother - include grandmothers, other relatives, the usual child care (such as babysitter or crèche) and, lastly, fathers.
- Working mothers want more flexible working hours, parental leave, workplace facilities for unwell children, and more understanding from employers.

➤ **SEX LIVES**

The Centre for Labour Research at Adelaide University conducted a study of 150 working women and discovered, through interviews, that lack of sexual intimacy was a major complaint. Some of the findings of the study include:

- Most working women are too fatigued or stressed to feel like having sex..
- Some working women resent their spouses for not doing their share of housework and other domestic duties (such as looking after children), and this anger spills over into the bedroom.
- Most working women feel guilty and sad about their lost sex lives.
- One solution to the problem is for men to do their fair share around the home.
- More flexible working hours for working mothers would also alleviate the burden.

## **VI. MAJOR FINDINGS**

### **VI.1 AT PERSONAL LEVEL**

This brings up some important issues regarding women and stress, that women need to be aware of:

#### **✓ UNDERSTAND GENDER DIFFERENCES IN STRESS**

If as a woman is feeling more stressed than their male counterparts, then they shouldn't take it as a sign that they are not handling stress as well; it might be because they are experiencing more stress. They should uplift themselves for handling what they already are, and should move confidently to next step.

#### **✓ PRIORITIZE & ELIMINATE WHAT YOU CAN**

Women are associated with organising events in home and office. They may fall in situations where saying 'no' becomes difficult for them especially when the work may seem to be easy and happy mood persists around the environment. They need to encourage themselves to be politely responding negatively to reduce the already existing stress. They must prioritize what's necessary and what can be avoided.

#### **✓ ALTER OR CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE**

Much of the experience with stress can be eliminated with a change in the way we look at things. This may sound too good to be true, but it isn't! Altering the way to conceptualize the events like finding or viewing them as a "challenge" instead of a "threat," or an "opportunity" instead of a "crisis,". The point is to make them feel less threatening and stressful. When people don't perceive a situation as a threat, then the body's stress response is deactivated more quickly (or doesn't get triggered in the first place), and individual's may be more capable of avoiding the effects of chronic stress.

#### **✓ HAVE SOME QUICK STRESS RELIEVERS**

Fast stress relievers may be adopted by working women to avoid the monotony of stress. Such may include reading a book of jokes, listening to songs or discussion on general topics with colleagues.

#### **✓ MAINTAIN REGULAR STRESS-RELIEVING HABITS**

One can avoid stress from occurring in the first place by maintaining or practicing regular stress relieving activities. It may include Exercises, Yoga, meditation etc. This can be inducted in either morning or evening schedule for regular days. It can be stretched further during holidays or weekends.

## **VI.2 AT WORK LEVEL**

There are a variety of ways that both working individuals particularly women and organizations can deal with stress related burnout. In general, simply resting can be very effective. This may include a temporary reduction of regular working hours, slowly rebuilding the endurance of the individual. In his book, *Managing stress: Emotion and power at work* (1995), Newton argues that many of the remedies related to burnout are motivated not from an employee's perspective, but from the organization's perspective. Despite that, if there are benefits to coping strategies, then it would follow that both organizations and individuals should attempt to adopt some burnout coping strategies. Below are some of the more common strategies for dealing with burnout.

### **1 ) EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS (EAP)**

Stemming from Mayo's Hawthorne Studies, Employee Assistance Programs were designed to assist employees in dealing with the basic causes of stress. Some programs included were counselling and psychological services for employees and workers. There are organizations that uses EAPs today, but the popularity has diminished substantially because of the advent of stress management training (SMT).[6]

### **2 ) STRESS MANAGEMENT TRAINING**

Stress Management Training (SMT) is employed by many organizations today as a method to get employees to either work through regular stress or to control their stress levels. The idea is to maintain stress levels below instances of burnout.[7]

### **3) STRESS INTERVENTIONS**

Several Researches has been conducted that links certain interventions, such as narrative writing or topic-specific training to reductions in physiological and psychological stress.[8]

### **4.) PROBLEM-BASED COPING**

On an individual basis, employees can cope with the problems related to burnout and stress by focusing on the causes of their stress. Various therapies, such as Neurofeedback therapy, claim to assist in cases of burnout. This type of coping has successfully been linked to reductions in individual stress.[9]

### **5.) APPRAISAL-BASED COPING**

Appraisal-based coping strategies deal with individual interpretations of what is and is not a stress inducing activity. There have been mixed findings related to the effectiveness of appraisal-based coping strategies.

## **6.) SOCIAL SUPPORT**

Social support has been seen as one of the largest predictors toward a reduction in burnout and stress for workers. It require creating an organizationally-supportive environment as well as ensuring that all the employees have supportive work environments .This may negate some of the severe affects of stress and burnouts.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

Our findings reveal that our null hypothesis of Working Women feel more stress than working men stands true due to the highlighted facts from different sources. Also, alternate hypothesis H1, Working Women do not feel more stress than working men stands as false.

## **VIII. FUTURE WORK**

We know that the current level of research may not reveal the exact parameters of stress in various industries of the economy. Therefore, intensive research shall be carried out in future research work in this particular field.

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