



Article on working women and their stress

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Introduction

Occupational stress is a growing problem all over the world at workplaces and may be a problem of particular magnitude for working women, in part because of sex-specific job stressors (sex discrimination and difficulties combining work and family). Although such stressors have received little research attention until recent years, new research indicates that these stressors may have a negative impact on health and well-being above and beyond the effects of general job stressors (work overload, skill underutilization, etc). A number of stress-reduction strategies have been shown to be useful for working women, ranging from the more common individual stress management techniques to higher-level interventions focused on removing the sources of occupational stress. This article provides a brief overview of occupational stress as it affects working women and presents research on approaches for reducing the negative effects of job stress.

Too much work, too little money and not enough opportunity for growth are stressing us out on the job, according to a new survey from the American Psychological Association.

Problems faced by working women

- 1. Gender inequalities 'rooted':** Researchers said the survey results meant women would not achieve equal opportunities at work until their men folk contributed more to looking after the home."Gender inequalities in all areas are rooted in social structures but also in attitudes," said Professor Gillian Robinson, of the University of Ulster."It is difficult to see how women will ever have the same opportunities in the labor market if equality at home is not achieved." In the survey, 1,800 men and women were asked about everyday

chores, such as the laundry, cleaning, cooking, food shopping, looking after sick relatives and carrying out repairs. But men only made a significant contribution by mending faulty items around the house. At least two-thirds of women said it was usually them who carried out the other tasks, rising to 85 per cent for doing the laundry.

2. **Discrimination at Workplace:** 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. Also, Indian women are often deprived of promotions and growth opportunities at work places but this doesn't apply to all working women. A majority of working women continue to be denied their right to equal pay, under the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 and are underpaid in comparison to their male colleagues. This is usually the case in factories and labor-oriented industries.
3. **Safety of Working Women While Traveling:** 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.

Working Women Can Claim Maintenance

A woman's legal right to claim maintenance from her husband is recognized under section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code. Section 24, of the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956, entitles a woman to claim maintenance from her estranged husband. Also, the claim for maintenance is extendable to her minor children. Further, these laws provide that maintenance can be claimed even prior to divorce, during separation. Initially, it was believed that a working woman in India is not entitled to claim maintenance, as she is capable of maintaining herself. However, the ambiguity was cleared by a significant



decision in *Bhagwan v. Kamla Devi*, (1975) 2 SCC 386. The Supreme Court held that a working woman can claim maintenance from her estranged husband, if her monthly income is not enough for her maintenance. Further, the Court clarified that the term 'Unable to maintain herself' does not require a woman to be absolute destitute, to entitle her for maintenance. The legal right of a woman pertaining to equal pay at the work place remains unaddressed most of the time because few women are confident enough to complain. About right to maintenance, it is restricted, if she remarries or converts to another religion. Further, there have been instances where the Court has ordered women with substantial earnings, to pay maintenance to their husband.

An example: A survey released in Feb 2013 in the Wall Street Journal by the consulting firm Accenture found 75% of respondents work frequently or occasionally during paid time off. The most common activity was checking email—71% reported doing this—but 30% said they participated in conference calls, and 44% said they use these nominal days off to catch up on work. "The running joke is that you can take time off, but when you come back, you pay the price for it," said Nellie Borrero, Accenture's managing director of global inclusion and diversity. According to the Journal published Updated in March 5, 2013, Wall Street Journal, a new survey from the American Psychological Association, One-third of employees experience chronic stress related to work, the survey found. Women report higher levels of work stress than men, as well as a gnawing sense that they are underappreciated and underpaid.

Suggestions for working women

- 1. Go with your gut feeling:** More often than not, women don't trust their instincts and opt instead for what others feel about them. They then over-analyse and that is where the problems start, feel experts. Intuition always makes the best business decisions.
- 2. Don't fear failure, but learn from it:** Getting up after a fall is hard but gives the best perspective. Women, unfortunately tend to get too emotional over a failure and that is what stops them from taking up the challenge again. Instead, just take a failure as part of the daily drill and move ahead.
- 3. Be diplomatic:** Don't lose out on the game, instead play it by the rules that govern it. Be fair and ethical, but be diplomatic too and sometimes go with colleagues' suggestions. You will get outperformed and struck off not because you are haven't performed a task well, but because you didn't work as a team player.



- 4. Realistically Assess Your Abilities, Goals, And Family Needs:** This is sometimes difficult to do. Women, especially, are barraged with media and societal messages that push them to climb the corporate ladder and/or demand what they're due. I know many woman who have left the corporate zoo for better quality of life in a "lower" level position. Most readily tell me it was the best decision they made and they wish they had done it sooner. Many share they worked hours more than they needed to in the hopes of climbing the proverbial ladder only to realize in hindsight they never had a chance of climbing up one more rung.
- 5. Find A Position Within Your Abilities:** In A Work Culture That's Comfortable: You can tell a lot during an interview, but it still behooves you to ask for a tour and/or to meet or even interview some of the employees. How was your reception upon arrival – formal? Warm? What are you comfortable with? If you do have special considerations at home try to gauge the employer's tolerance by asking questions that might clue you in to whether or not the culture or your supervisor's approach would be a good fit for you.
- 6. Talk with Your Spouse And Family About Your Desires At Work And Home:** It helps to have a clear discussion BEFORE something happens or there is an issue. Think about it now. Will your current position be a match for you three years from now when you plan to start having children? If not, what will be? How much unhappiness should you expect to have at work and feel like it is worth what you are being paid? What are your options? All things to consider and talk about, now.
- 7. Share Concerns From Work Rather Than Try To Handle It Yourself:** If something is causing stress at work, don't be tempted to internalize it and keep from worrying your spouse. This does not work. Even if you can pull it off in the long run, you won't be able to for long. You will find that it will strengthen your relationship and relieve your stress as well. In truth, it will likely relieve your stress at work as well.
- 8. If Possible Share Concerns From Work With Your Supervisor:** Your supervisor may not be approachable if your situation is tenuous. However, in most cases they are. Take the time to identify your concerns. Write them down. Say them out loud. How will you present them to your boss? Actually right out full sentences of what you will say and practice voicing your concerns out loud. It may feel silly, but it will help you control your emotions when you are actually in front of your supervisor. Remind yourself it is "just business" and work very hard to keep emotion from clouding your concerns.



- 9. Don't Wait To Seek Another Position if Your Current Position Is Not A Good Match:** Consider ending your employment on YOUR terms at if your situation is untenable. Your family and your well-being should come first. Sometimes the type of treatment received from the company culture and sometimes it is from your supervisor or next line supervisor. You may be able to figure out the real agenda and who is responsible, but it won't change the bottom line: This job is not a good fit for you and your family.

Conclusion

Occupational Stress cannot be abolished fully but it can be diluted in following ways:

- 1. Concentrating At Work:** Since you are working for a company, you must ensure that your full concentration should be on your work. Do not use company time to handle domestic administration unless it is of utmost importance. You are also entitled to take emergency time-off if needed so it is crucial that you keep your superiors informed.
- 2. Getting External Help:** If you and your husband have busy schedules, it is also good to source out for part-time external help to assist in the cleaning and cooking. Alternatively, you can seek the help of your parents to supervise the welfare of the children or register your children to a nearby student care centre. However, it must be remembered that no amount of external help can substitute for quality time with your children. Try to set aside at least the weekends to spend undisturbed time with your family.
- 3. Time Management:** Time management is an under-rated virtue. You should draw up a weekly chart to manage your time. This weekly chart must be realistic and take into account your children's tests, extra-curricular activities, household shopping needs. Remember to get the active involvement of your husband.
- 4. Communicate With Your Husband:** It is important that you communicate with your husband about sharing household and domestic chores. This should not be a difficult process as your income also helps pay the bills and your husband must be a team player. A high priority should be the area of the children's well-being and study supervision.

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**CHANDIGARH
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Campus : Jhanjeri, Mohali

International Journal Of Business Management

Available at www.ijbm.co.in

ISSN NO. 2349-3402

VOL. 2(1),2015

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