

Work-Status as an Influencing Factor for Stress among Women

Dinesh Kumar

Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, PBPG College, Pratapgarh, Uttar Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT: Women are playing a very important role in the economic and social development of the nations all over the world. Research suggests that females globally rarely manage time to feel relax and are stressed and overworked most of the time. Working women have a whole set of problems involving both family and professional lives. Women have to play their role as a wife, a mother and an earner. They have to manage their career while maintaining traditional roles. That means for working women it is two sets of overlapping responsibilities. Therefore, in addition to their traditional roles, professional roles seem to be one of the major sources of stress that working women have to face. This review of literature gives information about working women stress, factors in the working environment that cause stressful situations among working women. Based on the review of the literature, stress could be classified according to the nature of the stressor (physiological, psychological), its influence on individual (positive eustress, negative distress), and the exposure time of stressor (acute or short-term, chronic or long-term).

KEYWORDS: women, stress, work, status, influencing, factor

I. INTRODUCTION

Emails that arrive day and night, a travel schedule that interferes with family life, the age-old struggle with work-life balance — data from the American Psychological Association show that 65 percent of Americans cite work as a top source of stress. It can happen, even if you usually love your job.



Women in particular face a unique set of challenges at work due to issues like childcare and interpersonal relationships, explains Johns Hopkins psychologist Jennifer Haythornthwaite, Ph.D., director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Mind-Body Research .[1,2,3]

Stress happens when there's an imbalance between the demands of a situation and a person's resources for managing it, says Haythornthwaite.

“Think of the brain as stress central,” she says. It's responsible for organizing the stress response that happens throughout your body.

Stress produces physical symptoms, and many of its roots can be traced to the workplace. Here are Haythornthwaite's top sources of on-the-job stress.

- Work-life balance. American women are spending more hours working than ever before, leaving less time for personal obligations. Meanwhile, they shoulder a large caretaking burden, she notes. “More often than not, women are still the caretakers for children and are involved in elder care,” says Haythornthwaite. “We have caretaker obligations at both ends of the life span.”
- Relationships. “The inflexibility of work environments is a huge stressor for women,” says Haythornthwaite. For instance, some women might want to telecommute or maintain nontraditional hours to enable them to fulfill



personal obligations, but many employers still dislike flexible working arrangements. Other women struggle with pervasive issues, like sexism or discrimination.

- Technology. Mobile devices, like laptops and smartphones, creep into our personal time. “Some people may leave the office at 6 o’clock, but they’re checking their email in bed,” says Haythornthwaite. Ever-present technology makes it more difficult for already time-strapped women to unplug from work and to have any real downtime.

Ways to Cope with Stress

1. Exercise

Incorporate regular spurts of movement into your day, particularly if you spend most of your time sitting behind a desk. The exercise doesn’t need to be vigorous. Even short daytime walks are helpful. Use a fitness tracker or app on your phone to track your progress.

2. Sleep

“The health effects of sleep are unbelievable. As a society, we haven’t given it enough priority,” Haythornthwaite says. Sleep boosts mood and helps us to deal with daily challenges more effectively. Wind down two hours prior to bed by stopping work, and avoid caffeine beginning in the late afternoon. Studies suggest that mobile phone use in adults can ruin your chances of getting a good night’s sleep. So shut off your devices in the evening and wake up at the same time each day to allow your body’s natural sleeping rhythm to express itself.

3. Seek out happiness

“Find time for pleasure and joy,” Haythornthwaite advises. Prioritize hobbies and do them on a regular basis, whether it’s family time or community activism. “Having purpose and meaning in your life is key to job satisfaction,” she says.

4. Social support[4,5,6]

Treat your social network as a stress buffer that boosts health and longevity, Haythornthwaite says. Your group doesn’t have to be large, as long as it supports your sense of connection and shared experience. Friendship and connectedness are “critical to being able to cope with stressors,” she says.

II. DISCUSSION

The ‘do it all’ generation of females is feeling the strain, with working women far more stressed than men.

Women aged between 35-54 - who are likely to be juggling many roles including mother, carer for elderly parents, homemaker and sometimes breadwinner - experience significantly higher stress than men, according to latest Health and Safety Executive (HSE) statistics. Recent anxiety statistics also highlight that women are twice as likely to be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder compared to men, which could be a result of trying to manage it all.

The figures prompted calls from a leading Priory psychiatrist for more to be done within the workplace to help women struggling to combine family life, target-driven jobs and often a hefty sleep deficit to achieve a better quality of life.

Women more likely to be stressed than men

The number of women experiencing work-related stress is 50% higher than for men of the same age, the data shows.

Dr Judith Mohring (MBBS, MRCPsych, MA, CCST), said women had taken on more responsibilities at work while retaining their responsibilities at home.

And they often felt that when a company cut its workforce, men who had spent time networking with senior colleagues were better positioned to retain their jobs, while women who had responsibilities to children at home were not always able to have bonded in the same way.

According to the HSE’s figures, for the period 2011-12, 2013-14 and 2014-15, men aged 16-24, 35-44, and 55 and over, had “statistically significantly lower rates of work-related stress” than the average.

By contrast, women aged 35-44 and 45-54 had “significantly higher rates”.

Among the 35-44 age group,[7,8,9] 68,000 of women reported stress, compared to 46,000 men.

In the older age group, 45-54, the figure for women rises to 78,000 compared to 58,000 men.

The HSE figures are based on a survey of more than 40,000 households with the results extrapolated to give an estimate for the UK as a whole.

Overall, there were 590 cases of stress per 100,000 workers for men and 920 cases for women, meaning that women workers are one and a half times more likely than men to be stressed.

Workplace stress caused by workload

The HSE cites the predominant cause of workplace stress as workload – specifically tight deadlines and too much pressure, work and responsibility.

In 2014-15, stress accounted for 35% of all work related ill health cases, and 43% of all working days lost due to ill health.



Previous studies, including by Tel Aviv University in Israel, found that the quality of the working environment was perceived to be significantly lower by women than men – with women unhappy about lower pay than men, lack of flexibility around working hours, job insecurity and lack of potential for career progression.

Dr Mohring said stress among women frequently related to pressure on them to fill many different roles – but there were also body image and other pressures.

Women still performing traditional roles in the home as well as achieving great careers

“In professional terms, women’s place in the world has been transformed over the last 50 years. We now achieve all that men can. Perhaps what we haven’t managed so well is to transfer responsibility for some of the more traditional women’s roles. So while we might excel at work, we’ll usually pile the pressure on at home too; and that can lead to major stress.

“Women with children will know all too well the tension between being a hands-on mum and managing a busy job. But it’s not just mothers who feel they fail to live up to an imaginary feminine ideal. Women have so many arenas in which they can compete:[10,11,12] how we look, the quality of our friendships, and, of course, the work we produce. Sometimes it can feel that there are just too many ways to fail. And that’s when self-doubt, low self-esteem and self-criticism can come to the fore.”

She said women tended to be “under quite intense time pressure” outside work because of external responsibilities, and this had an impact on informal networking, professional development and career development more broadly.

High-achieving women have traits in common

High-achieving women also tended to have a number of traits in common – perfectionism, a strong inner critic, and a desire to be approved of by others.

“All of these traits make for excellent, diligent employees; self-motivated, reflective and naturally seeking high standards. But they often go hand in hand with being sensitive and a tendency to lack self-confidence, which can tip over. We are twice as likely to suffer from anxiety disorders and 2.5 times as likely to develop depression. The reasons for these gender differences are complex, but include elements of role strain and a tendency to internalise negative feelings. Overall, about 1 in 5 women will develop depression during their lives.

“Often, the people I work with are frightened that if they open up and share their feelings, they may fall apart. What I have found is the opposite. The process of sharing your emotions with someone you trust actually builds your inner strength and emotional resilience, giving you tools to cope better in future.”

Some researchers say women are more likely to report stress than men, who may prefer to suggest they are suffering back pain or another physical ailment than acknowledge stress, for fear of looking psychologically weak.

Stress levels high everywhere

Dr Mohring said: “From what I see, stress levels are high everywhere. Everybody working today is being driven harder, and asked to deliver so much more than they were even five years ago, and digital saturation means that work follows us home and often, via smartphones, to our bedside. Most people I see are too tired to enjoy life outside of work as a result.

“In the city, 60+ hour weeks are not rare.[13,14,15]

“Women often don’t come to the clinic until they are at absolute breaking point or they turn to alcohol as a work ‘anaesthetic’. But still many senior business managers do not believe stress, anxiety or depression is a serious enough reason for employees to take time off work.”

The impact of work-related stress

The Priory Group, which runs the largest network of mental healthcare hospitals and clinics in the UK, has recently opened high street clinics in London, Canterbury and Birmingham to help to treat work stress and other conditions including alcohol and drug addiction.

According to official figures, there are now a record number of women in work - with more than 14 million saying they are in some form of employment.

Meanwhile, a Government report in 2014 calculated that 70 million days a year are lost due to stress, depression and other mental health conditions. The cost to the economy is estimated to be £70bn-£100bn a year.

III. RESULTS

Sanam Saleh, a UK-based chartered accountant, likes to start her day early. By the time the first fingers of ochre are streaking across the sky, she has already logged on, dispatched replies to urgent emails and set her priorities for the day, followed by coaxing her two kids awake and into their uniforms. At her desk by 9am, the solid six hours of work that she should be clocking in are eroded by the need for continuous professional development, innovation, opportunities outside her role to progress her career and other social aspects of keeping up with colleague and client relationships. Today, it isn’t an uncommon sight for her to be found tapping away furiously at her laptop in the parking lot of her kids’ extracurricular activities or listening to a lecture on accounting standard updates while folding laundry.



While she believes that her struggles are unique to working parents, Saleh also concedes the undeniable truth that women are used to taking on more in the belief that they can do it all. “As daughters, friends, girlfriends, wives and mothers, we are used to doing everything for everyone and we believe that we can translate this into our working lives,” she shares. [16,17,18] However, the sudden onset of a pandemic, homeschooling duties and looking after her elderly parents coinciding with the most hectic phase of her career meant that Saleh was almost driven to the point of collapse. Unable to sleep, she decided that her work life needed an overhaul and, with the help of a supportive partner, transitioned into a new role.

Today, when she looks back to analyse her chronically over-committed schedule, she finds that it stems from a need to be as worthy as her male counterparts. “The thought of asking for more time on a deadline, even if it is flexible, feels foreign and almost scary to me,” she admits, and then pauses to unpack the sentence. “While men have work pressure too, the corporate realm is still significantly a man’s world that women are aiming to fit into. I am scared that putting my hand up and saying that I am struggling will reflect poorly on me as a professional because needing more time is seen as a weakness. I feel like I’ve fought to get here and I’m always trying to prove my worth. Expecting every opportunity to fit into a 9-5 schedule feels like a ‘me’ problem.”

Her thoughts are seconded by Riddhi Gandhi, therapist at The Mood Space. “How women perceive and respond to work-related demands on their time is driven by their sense of perfectionism, the desire to avoid failure and the weight of societal expectations. The fear of disappointing colleagues or appearing incapable can drive women to undertake more than they can bear. Factor in the ever-present spectre of imposter syndrome, where accomplishments are perceived as mere luck rather than competence, and these internal narratives can amplify the sense of urgency, pushing women to prove themselves with every tick of the clock,” she says.

Against this backdrop, the notion of time stress—the feeling of having too many things to do and not enough time to do them—has been deemed a societal epidemic that compromises productivity, physical health and emotional well-being. Recent studies have concluded that women are more liable to time stress than their male counterparts at work, as they avoid asking for additional time to complete work tasks—even when deadlines are explicitly adjustable—ultimately undermining their well-being and task performance.

How to combat time stress in the workplace

The first step towards a more equitable workplace starts by setting clear priorities, believes Gandhi. “Setting boundaries, delegating when possible, seeking mentorship, negotiating flexible work arrangements and learning to assertively say no can help prevent feelings of guilt and inadequacy. Building a support network, both at work and at home, can facilitate a healthier work-life balance,” she recommends.

On the managerial side, Gandhi believes that regular check-ins are necessary. “Assessing the workload through regular one-on-one meetings can be an effective way to discuss challenges, offer guidance and provide an opportunity to address time stress before it escalates. Most importantly, managers need to take an empathetic lens in their approach to create a supportive environment.” [19,20]

For Saleh, the road towards unlearning the feelings of unworthiness started with putting her hand up and making it known when she needed support at work. “I am trying to make sure colleagues are aware of what I am able to commit to and not just saying yes to everything I can. I do still feel FOMO and worry that I’m not progressing as much in my career as I could be but the only way to break through is with a positive working environment where colleagues, male and female, are working with each other, rather than against each other,” she signs off.

IV. CONCLUSION

In today's competitive era work stress has become a major issue for working women in every sector. Information technology sector is not exception for this. In IT organizations work stress level is very high. Sometimes women employees in IT organizations are not able to cope with the drastic new technological changes and due to poor organizational environment they faced the problem of heavy work stress. Through the present study an attempt has been made to highlight the major factors that causes for increasing work stress among women employees and highlight the impacts of work stress on their physical and psychological healths. This study focused on the various measures adopted by women employees and management of organizations to overcome the issue of work stress. An attempt has also been made to know whether IT women employees are supported and helped by their family members and spouse. [20]



REFERENCES

- [1] Archived November 7, 2007, at the Wayback Machine
- ^{a b} Burnette, Joyce; Stanfors, Maria (March 2020). "Understanding the Gender Gap Further: The Case of Turn-of-the-Century Swedish Compositors". *The Journal of Economic History*. 80 (1): 175–206. doi:10.1017/S002205071900086X. ISSN 0022-0507. S2CID 213712971.
- ^a "Statistical Overview of Women in Global Workplaces: Catalyst Quick Take". *Catalyst*. Retrieved May 20, 2021.
- ^a "Graph". *Gapminder World*. Retrieved February 17, 2015.
- ^a "How advancing women's equality can add \$12 trillion to global growth | McKinsey". www.mckinsey.com. Retrieved February 28, 2021.
- ^{a b c} "Women's solutions stories create a world where everyone thrives". *European Investment Bank*. Retrieved February 28, 2021.
- ^a Feloni, Richard (March 8, 2019). "If we closed the gender gap by 2025, the global economy could see a \$28 trillion windfall". *Business Insider Nederland* (in Dutch). Retrieved February 28, 2021.
- ^a How women can make money married or single, in all branches of the arts and sciences, professions, trades, agricultural and mechanical pursuits (Philadelphia, 1862)
- ^a *The Employments of Women: A Cyclopaedia of Woman's Work*
- ^a Gensemer, Susan H. (April 2010). "Penny, Virginia". *American National Biography Online*. American Council of Learned Societies. Retrieved December 21, 2016.
- ^a "Penny, Virginia 1826-". *OCLC WorldCat Identities*. OCLC Online Computer Library Center, Inc. Retrieved December 21, 2016.
- ^a Anne Witz (1990). "Patriarchy and Professions: The Gendered Politics of Occupational Closure". *Sociology*. 24 (4): 675–690. doi:10.1177/0038038590024004007. S2CID 143826607.
- ^a S. A. L. Cavanagh (March 2003). "The Gender of Professionalism and Occupational Closure: the management of tenure-related disputes by the 'Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario' 1918–1949". *Gender and Education*. 15. *Gender and Education*, 15.1: 39–57. doi:10.1080/0954025032000042130. S2CID 144632048.
- ^a Karen Mahony & Brett Van Toen (1990). "Mathematical Formalism as a Means of Occupational Closure in Computing—Why "Hard" Computing Tends to Exclude Women". *Gender and Education*. 2 (3): 319–331. doi:10.1080/0954025900020306.
- ^a "Women in informal employment as share of female employment". *Our World in Data*. Retrieved March 5, 2020.
- ^{a b} King, Elizabeth; Mason, Andrew (January 31, 2001). *Engendering Development*. doi:10.1596/0-1952-1596-6. ISBN 978-0-19-521596-0.
- ^{a b} Duflo, Esther (2012). "Women Empowerment and Economic Development". *Journal of Economic Literature*. 50 (4): 1051–1079. doi:10.1257/jel.50.4.1051. hdl:1721.1/82663. S2CID 17267963.
- ^a Kinnear 2011, p. 222.
- ^{a b} Tubeza, Philip C. (April 7, 2012). "Overseas deployment of Filipino domestic workers continues to rise". *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. *Inquirer Global Nation*. Retrieved May 12, 2012.
- ^a King, Russell (2010). *People on the Move: An atlas of migration*. University of California Press. pp. 78–9. ISBN 978-0-520-26151-8.