

## Women, Work and Stress: Analysing the Liaison

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### ABSTRACT

The article aims to discuss stress among women in relation to their work. This issue has important implications to understand and evaluate stress among women especially in view of the changing socio-economic scenario. Correlation, t-test, and ANOVA were employed on a sample of 200 women comprising 100 working and 100 non working. Overall, working and non working women exhibited insignificantly different level of stress however variations were noticed with respect to different factors.

**Keywords:** Age, Conflict, Family, Gender, Marital Status, Work.

Work and family are the two most important aspects in people's lives. Balancing of work and family roles is a fundamental issue as the smooth functioning of a society depends on the proper articulation of the interdependent parts. Contrary to the belief that they are distinct parts of life; these domains are closely related (Huang, Hammer, Neal, & Perrin, 2004, Boyar, Maertz, Pearson, & Keough, 2003, Ford *et al.*, 2007). Traditionally, the major responsibility of women was assumed to be the maintenance of the family including home and childcare whereas breadwinning was the main responsibility of men. However, overall development of a country requires an integration of both male and female forces. Economic, social and political development during the recent decades has resulted in more and more women entering the workforce and pursuing careers, thus forcing to change the conventionally defined gender roles. There has been an increase in families headed by two working spouses (Perrone, Wright & Jackson, 2009). Most women do not have responsibility only in one domain anymore; they have to balance the competing demands of both work and family (Biçaksiz, 2009). This increase in female representation in the workforce means that more women are juggling both work and family roles (Gupta & Jenkins, 1985). These transitions have put substantial strain on women to balance their work-life and family-life. How individuals can be successful in their working lives without sacrificing their personal lives is a debatable issue (Lewis and Cooper, 2005).

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### *A Conflict Of Work And Family*

Work and family have increasingly become antagonist spheres, equally greedy of energy and time. This conflict resulting because of simultaneous pressures from work and family roles seem to be mutually incompatible. Such conflicting demand is likely to threaten the peace of mind, quality of work and the process of family integration which in turn can lead to absenteeism and burnout, affecting productivity and turnover.

Work conditions may involve role ambiguity and conflict; poor relationships with co-workers and supervisors; heavy workload demands; job insecurity; gender discrimination; little control over work; long working hours; and work that are narrow, repetitive and monotonous along with challenges in the work environments characterized by heightened competition, lack of time, lack of space, lack of autonomy, conflicting demands from organizational stakeholders etc. An employee, who “brings home” these strain symptoms from work, is unlikely to participate fully and happily in the family domain. Interactions with family members can be difficult under conditions of “negative emotional spill over” from work (Evans & Bartolome, 1980), just as concentration and well being at work can be threatened if one carries family induced stress into the workplace which may not only refer to major life events but also encompass ongoing minor events like electricity failure, maid not turning up, unexpected guests and child’s misbehaviour, illness of a family member etc. Less cooperation from family, more responsibilities and difficulties at home and workplace have deleterious effects on psychological well-being of working women (Kessler & McRae, 1982).

Exposure to job stressors along with family demands combine to account for poor mental health and well being of women (Lennon & Rosenfield, 1992). It has been linked with depression, musculoskeletal disorders, cardiovascular disease and burnout (Abdullah *et al.*, 2008). Frone, Russel and Cooper (1997) have identified that work-family conflict leads to depression, exhaustion, physical health problems and hypertension. Empirical data shows that working women were unhappier (Stokes and Peyton 1986), aggressive and frustrated (Sexena, 2009), anxious (Mukkhupadhah, 1996) and depressed (Dudhatra & Jogsan, 2012; Hashmi, Khushid, Haman, 2007) as compared to non-working women. Sadiq and Ali (2014) in their study found working women had significantly more social dysfunction, anger and hostility than non-working women. However, working and non-working women did not significantly differ on the variables of insomnia and depression. Perception of insufficient time and energy to successfully perform work and family roles has also been associated to dissatisfaction with job and family including marital dissatisfaction (Allen et al. 2000, Kinnunen & Mauno 1998, Aryee et al.1999, Kossek and Ozeki, 1998). Gornick and Meyers (2003) report deterioration of relationship quality at family front including marital relations and child-parent relationship while Avery (1986) reports of inhibited sexual desire and Allen et al. (2000) relates it with reduced fertility. Other negative consequences reported are lowered productivity at work as well as at home, adverse effects on individuals’ physical health and psychological health resulting in psychological distress and psychological strain, (Kinnunen & Mauno 1998, Aryee et al.1999), work and family tension, role ambiguity and role conflict (e.g., Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1991; Greenhaus, Collins, Singh, &

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Parasuraman, 1997; Kopelman, Greenhaus, & Connolly, 1983; Watkins & Subich, 1995, Greenhaus, Parasuraman & Collins 2001).

The work family literature has been dominated by a conflict perspective (Barnett, 1998; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999; Haas, 1999). However, Marks (1977) and Sieber (1974) were sceptical of the conflict perspective and suggested that the advantages of pursuing multiple roles are likely to outweigh the disadvantages. Researchers have called for a more balanced approach that recognizes the positive effects of combining work and family roles (Barnett, 1998; Frone, 2003; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999), and Grzywacz (2002) has recently proposed one theory of the positive interdependencies between work and family roles. The increased emphasis on positive interdependencies between work life and family life is consistent with emerging trends in psychology (Seligman, 2002), organizational behaviour (Luthans, 2002), and family studies (Patterson, 2002) that focus on strengths rather than weaknesses on health rather than illness in understanding the potential of individuals and social systems. The positive impact of work-related affect on family life also has been suggested by studies that have observed relationships of work satisfaction with family satisfaction; positive parenting or positive child outcomes (Barling, 1986; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999; Stewart & Barling, 1996).

Researches also provide convincing evidence that unemployment adversely affects a person's wellbeing. Women occupying multiple roles have added pressure and time constraints in their lives. Yet studies have suggested that being in job does not result in negative health (Agarwal, 1994; Mathur, 1997; Tharakuran, 1992). Researchers have increasingly examined constructive relationships between work and family lives, employing such concepts as enrichment (Kirchmeyer, 1992a; Rothbard, 2001), positive spill over (Crouter, 1984b; Grzywacz, 2000; Grzywacz, Almeida, & McDonald, 2002; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000a,b; Hammer et al., 2002; Hanson, Colton, & Hammer, 2003; Kirchmeyer, 1992b, 1993, 1995; Stephens, Franks, & Atienza, 1997; Sumer & Knight, 2001; Voydanoff, 2001), enhancement (Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2002; Tiedje et al., 1990), and facilitation (Frone, 2003; Tompson & Werner, 1997; Wayne, Musisca, & Fleeson, 2004). Rich experiences out of the home may endorse intellectual stimulation, problem solving, and handling challenges. These experiences have been associated with positive outcomes like higher self-esteem, self-confidence and life satisfaction (Barnett & Baruch, 1985; Barnett & Marshall, 1992; Roskies & Carrier, 1994). Also they have their own income, which offers independence, security and freedom. Working women can meet the financial needs of their family in trying circumstances. Along with financial distress the housewives may experience lack of satisfaction, boredom and feelings of worthlessness. These problems become serious as their children get older. Enveloped up in their own lives, children assert their independence and husbands are busy with their careers. At this point in life non working women may find the empty nest traumatic indeed, whereas working mothers with rewarding careers have ample chances for positive reinforcement outside the home. Ferree (1976) and Ferree (1984) concluded that the working wife is happier compared to the housewife (c.f., Nathawat and Mathur 1992 on India). Compared to employed individuals and those in low paid jobs, the

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unemployed are more likely to suffer: anxiety; depression; hostility; paranoia; loss of confidence; reduction in self-esteem; poorer cognitive performance; loss of motivation; learned helplessness; lower happiness; suicidal ideation; lower levels of coping; psychosomatic problems; and behavioural problems (Theodossiou, 1997; Goldsmith et al., 1997; Layard, 2005; Morrell et al., 1998; Flatau et al., 2000; Creed et al., 1999; Shamir, 1986; Murphy and Athanasou, 1999). According to Khanna and Shirali (1989) depression was reported most often in non-working women. Acevedo, Lopez and Fernandez (1993) concluded that employed mothers reported better mental health adjustment than their unemployed counter parts. Field (1964) compared non-working and working mothers on measures of mental health, self-esteem, and mother role. He found that working women had better mental health as well as reported less depression. Almost similar results have been mentioned in another study by Anderson (2009) and Rout, Looper & Kerlake (1997).

Al-Modallal, Abuidhail and Sowan (2010) reported that depressive symptoms experienced by working women have been rarely observed in studies. The results of their study showed that the causes of women's depressive symptoms are imbedded in their social and familial environment, rather than only their jobs. Likewise, Bhadoria (2013) and Iqbal, Nadeem, & Fatima (2004) reported working women with lower anxiety than the corresponding non-working women. Bhadoria (2013) reports, that apathy is high in non-working women because their social circle is very limited than working women. Sleep disturbances is affected in both working and non-working women. In terms of pessimism, the working women tend to be more optimistic whereas, nonworking women more pessimistic in nature. Working women suffers more from fatigue as compared to nonworking women. Non working women are affected more from irritability to working women. Non working women feels self centred and self dislike more than working women because working women is busy with their routine in schedule of their work. Level of self acquisition is significantly high in non working women. Non working women are more self preoccupation and indecisiveness compared to working women.

Surprisingly some studies also show that working women have better health with lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol levels, and lower weight. A longitudinal survey conducted over 28 years found that by age 54, women who combine multiple roles as employees, parents, and partners were significantly less likely to report ill health than women whose lives did not include all three roles. Homemakers were the most likely to say that their health was poor (Hoffman, 1986).

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Since work and family are the two major role domains for adults therefore the stressors embedded in work and family role are detrimental to their psychological wellbeing. Work and family roles, having permeable boundaries between them, induce stress spill over from one domain to the other. Time spent in one role may leave little time for other role; similarly strain within one role may spill over to other role. Besides, in Indian society the societal gender role standards have failed to change. Most men and women today are not clear about

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the societal roles and the concept of sharing in the family system. Husbands may feel that it is against their masculinity to perform home making. Mothers feel guilty when they are unable to take care of their family responsibilities. So life in such a situation results in work family issues which ultimately lead to stress. On the other hand, women who do not work do not have the advantage of having psychological compensations and financial benefits that working women have, thus leading them to stress. They may suffer from frustration by giving too much time to domestic pursuits at the cost of their careers and individual growth. In the present context, there is a need to study particularly in conservative socio-cultural Indian family context, that working women have greater stress than non working women. The employment might have positive psychological consequences for women either as a primary source of well-being or as a buffer against depression and frustration and thus it can be said that due to paid work it helps to reduce stress in life whereas, working women experience greater work related tension, strain and anxiety than non-working mothers and thus increases stress. At this juncture the present study therefore intends to explore the relationship of work with stress.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The Women from urban cities of Uttar Pradesh state of India was the target population. A sample of 200 women including 100 (50%) working women as teachers and clerks in 14 different educational institutions and 100 (50%) non-working was drawn from the target population by purposive convenient sampling technique. All respondents (working and non-working) had at least a high school education. The age of the participants ranged from 25 to 60 years. Participants had 1 to 38 years of work experience in their institutions.

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) developed by Sheldon Cohen (1983) was used. The scale comprises fourteen items, designed to assess the extent to which respondents find their lives unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded; the three key components of stress experience (4, 5). The responses of PSS-14 vary from 0 to 4 for each item, ranging from never, almost never, sometimes, fairly often and very often respectively. PSS-14 scores are obtained by reversing the scores on four positive items, for example 0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2, and then summing across all 14 items. The scale yields a single score with high scores indicating higher levels of stress and low scores indicating lower levels of stress. Therefore, the scale can produce a range of scores from 0 to 56. The original version of the instrument had established validity and reliability. However, since the instrument was developed in a different setting, the reliability had to be recalculated under Indian conditions. Pilot study was undertaken on a sample of 30 women. Reported reliability coefficient of the original scale and extrinsic scale was 0.78 while the pilot study showed reliability coefficient for the tool as 0.77 (estimated by Cronbach's alpha method). Hence, the tool was thought to be suitable for data collection from urban women of India.

The scale along with a covering letter explaining the purpose of the survey and detailed instructions to fill up the scale was distributed to the women from different educational institutions after the approval of their management.

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By convention, an alpha level of .05 was established *a priori* for determining statistical significance. Scores on the scale was taken as the dependent measure and working status of the subjects as the independent measure in order to test the research questions and draw conclusions raw scores were reorganized and subjected to appropriate statistical analysis using the SPSS version 12.0 statistical package. Correlation, t-test, and ANOVA were employed to evaluate the impact of working status on stress scores. ANOVA was followed by Duncan's Multiple Range Test (DMRT) where F -value was found to be significant so as to identify the trend of the difference in mean values.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mother's In order to establish the relationship between working status and stress of women, correlation was calculated and it was found to be insignificant ( $r_b = 0.114, p > 0.05$ ) which indicates that in the present study, work had no significant influence on the overall stress of women. This finding is further corroborated when the stress scores are subjected to student's t-test (see Table 1). Though working participants recorded slightly higher stress scores than non working but this difference was found to be not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). The present results are in consistent with the earlier findings of Mukhopadhyay. S. (2009) The findings of the result also gets support from the study of Ojha & Rani (2004) and Mankani & Yenagi (2012) who reported no significant difference between working and non-working women in mental health.

*Table No. 1 Difference in level of stress among working and non-working women*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	df	t- Value	Level of significance
Working	100	29.00	14.59	1.458	198	1.655	0.10
Non working	100	25.61	14.38	1.438			

The result may be due to the fact that both working women as well as non working women are under strain and tension albeit for different reasons. Generally working woman may face difficulties in attempting to fulfil the demands of both worlds, at home and outside. They are involved in many tasks simultaneously and they have little time for making friends and enjoying leisure time making them more stressed up. On the other hand, a housewife may feel tired and irritated with her household chores and financial dependence. The major responsibilities of housekeeping and child care make them depressed and bored. Eventually this boredom leads to the feelings of self-worthlessness which further may cause stress.

Age is a crucial factor in determining the level of stress experience by people. For the purpose of the study, age was classified into the following categories viz., 25-34 years, 35-44 years, 45-54 years and above 55 years. The sample of working women consists of 39 (9.8%) respondents in the first category, 31(7.8%) in the second category, 15 (3.8%) in the third category, and 15 (3.8%) in the fourth category. The sample of non-working women consists

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of 39 (9.8%) respondents in the first category, 30 (7.5%) in the second category, 16 (4.0%) in the third category, and 15 (3.8%) in the fourth category.

Average stress scores of working and non-working women with respect to their age were found to be significantly ( $F=5.89, p>0.05$ ) different (see Table 2). A post hoc analysis using Duncan's procedure further revealed that the highest stress values observed for working women of 25-34 years was comparable ( $p>0.05$ ) to those obtained for non-working women of the same age group as well as working women of 55 years and above. The result is in conformity with the study of Balaji, Sarumathi, and Saranya (2014) that accounts the mean age of severe depression among the study population as 30.8. Similarly, Madhavi and Vimala (2011) infer from their study that employees in the age group 25-35 years are found to have more work family issues than other age groups. The more work-family issues among such women may be due to more commitment in the organizational roles and family roles. They might have got promotion in the office, which is associated with more responsibility and complexity. And in the family they might have responsibilities like children's higher education. So, all these lead to more stress. The stress values observed for women of 25-34 years was comparable to those obtained for women of the same age group as well as working women of 55 years and above. This might be because of retirement blues, old age health and menopausal concerns in addition to the usual stress of life.

However, the stress scores of these groups were significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) different from the women of 35 to 54 years irrespective of their working status which might be due to the fact that usually at these age group a stability and maturity sets in their lives. The stress of both working and non working women of 55 years and above was not significantly ( $p>0.05$ ) different from that of non working women of the age group 25-34.

**Table No. 2 Level of stress of working and non-working women with respect to their age**

Age Factors	N	*Subset of Means for alpha = .05			SD	Std. Error
		1	2	3		
NW25-34	39		31.38	31.38	13.705	2.195
NW35-44	30	20.77			15.154	2.767
NW45-54	16	22.06			12.928	3.232
NW55 and above	15	24.07	24.07		11.774	3.040
W25-34	39			36.56	12.324	1.973
W35-44	31	21.84			15.100	2.712
W45-54	15	22.00			11.922	3.078
W55 and above	15		31.13	31.13	11.445	2.955

\*Means in the same column are insignificantly ( $p>0.05$ ) different from each other.

One-way ANOVA of the average stress scores of working and non-working women with respect to their marital status (married/unmarried) revealed that there were significant differences ( $F= 8.45, p<0.05$ ) in stress levels among the four groups (Table 3). A follow-up analyses using Duncan test was done to understand the nature of the differences. Lowest

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stress values observed for unmarried-working women were comparable ( $p > 0.05$ ) to those obtained for unmarried-nonworking women but significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) different from married nonworking and married working women. Highest stress values observed for married working women was significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) different from the other group. Thus it is evident from the study that under Indian culture marriage puts a significant amount of stress on women. An unmarried woman irrespective of her working status has few familial diversions and distractions that can cause stress. Women irrespective of her marital status are more stressed than women irrespective of her working status.

**Table No. 3 Level of stress with respect to their marital status**

Factors	N	*Subset of Means for alpha = .05		SD	Std. Error
		1	2		
<b>unmarried-working</b>	49	25.428		13.121	1.874
<b>unmarried-nonworking</b>	58	20.931		13.027	1.710
<b>married-nonworking</b>	42		32.07	13.783	2.127
<b>married-working</b>	51		32.431	15.212	2.130

\*Means in the same column are insignificantly ( $p > 0.05$ ) different from each other.

This can be explained by the factor that leading marital life along with employment puts dual responsibility on married working women that demands equally time and energy. They deal with home and family issues as well as job stress on a daily basis. Married working women have to pay second shift at home (Hochschild, 1989) as household activities are deemed as women's domain. These women assuming the demanding role of an employee are typically not free to relinquish any of their previous traditional roles. At home, after returning from workplace, they pay additional duty of a home maker socially assigned to them. Assuming the dual roles of bread earner and homemaker, married working women spend more time and energy on daily tasks of two opposite environments (Gani & Ara, 2010). In addition, women usually have a feeling of guilt for sparing less time for their maternal and family responsibilities. There are instances where the mothers could feel guilty in working as they believe that they are abandoning their child's well being in order to benefit themselves. Another factor that contributes stress in married working women is that they have less time for themselves and incapable to make personal relations with limited social circle. Consequently, married women who obtain paid employment typically experience significant role 'expansion', coping with which is no easy feat. Such an expansion has repercussions not only for the women themselves but also for their families and their employing institutions. These multiple roles increase work load with more input of energy, time and resources that put profound impact on women's health (Waldron, Weiss & Hughes, 1998). This huge burden on women leads psychological ill-being. In comparison to them, married non-working women are confined to single environmental activities. They were having less time pressure and are only responsible for home related tasks. Previous researches also show that full time house workers, as compared to working women, reported fewer time pressure and less responsibilities regarding the situation beyond of their control (Lennon, 1994). Whereas, married working women are engaged with two different environmental activities, as also

reported by participants of the present study. As a result, they get exhausted and eventually suffer from more psychological problems in form of stress as compare to non-working women. It was also documented by a study conducted in Malaysia that married working women were found exhausted while balancing work, family and studies (Davendran, 2008).

### CONCLUSION

The article examined stress among working and non-working women. The results showed that in general there was no significant difference in the stress levels of working and non working women. But the tables turn once if marital status is taken into consideration, with married working women's higher stress is more apparent than non-working married women. Age also has a positive quadratic relationship with stress; that is, stress tends to decline with age and, after a turning point, it tends to increase with age. The present study underlines the fact that it is not the career opportunities and employment of the women that affects stress: rather it is the nature and working conditions at home as well as at office that contribute to their experience of psychological well being. However, promoting psychological well being of employed women requires co-operation of people at individual, community, government and at the societal level at large.

Though men are increasingly contributing to family responsibilities, women still provide more than their fair share of care giving responsibilities at home. Therefore, an effort should be made to reframe work and family issues. Findings of this study can produce important information allowing development of tools and interventions and can raise awareness of work family issues; by which stress around the working women can be decreased. These findings can be useful for organizations, companies and health professionals to help working women reduce problems related to work-family issues. There is a great need for research on working women, especially concerning the impact and occurrence of job stress on children mental health. Longitudinal data on young childbearing families are needed to examine the complex issues of work-family surrounding the family in today's world.

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