

Values, Rumination and Perceived Stress in Middle-aged Working Women during the Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The present study focused on studying the relation between values, rumination and perceived stress in middle-aged working women during the pandemic. The pandemic has been a tough time for almost everyone and has added more stress to our lives. Working women have been at the receiving end due to the added responsibilities of home and work. Women have been found to ruminate more and it further adds to the negative implications of stress. The study found that values are negatively related to rumination and perceived stress, which may imply that values help mitigate the effects of rumination and stress.

Keywords: *Values, Rumination, Perceived Stress, Middle-aged Working Women, Pandemic*

The pandemic has had a huge impact on our lives. Everyone has been grappling with the added stress that the pandemic has thrust on us. A survey of over 700 households carried out in India's National Capital Region found that women report feeling more burdened because of all the pandemic-induced mental stress compared to men, and have comparatively longer lasting effects on their well-being and productivity (Afridi, Dhillon and Roy, 2021). In the present social setting in the country, women's roles often include many tasks like family obligations, looking after children and elderly parents, household chores and workplace responsibilities. As the demands of these various roles increase, women can feel a bit more overwhelmed with time pressures and all the obligations that haven't been met. They may also experience a sense of failure when they are unable to meet all the expectations that the society and the family has of them. Various researches have proven that high stress levels are associated with depression and anxiety. It has also been found that women report greater sadness and anxiety due to stress as compared to men (Chaplin et al, 2008).

Juggling between work, home, relationships, children, health and pandemic related stress is adding to the stress levels of women. Increased pressure of work at home and workplace impacts one's physical well-being, makes it difficult to balance work and home commitments and also may impact their mental health causing stress and burnout. Also, it has been even more challenging for women who are taking care of older parents. And for women with children, there is an increase in childcare responsibilities and home-schooling.

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The present study aims to determine the relationship among Values, Rumination and Perceived Stress in Middle-aged Working Women. Growing stress is a part and parcel of the developing world and it has escalated because of the pandemic. Chronic stress influences health and well-being in relation to mental health, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, etc. (Toussaint, Shields, Dorn, Slavich, 2016). Perceived stress is a concept with multiple facets, with a wide range of causative factors, and it comprises various physical, psychological, and social aspects and is dependent on social context (Moore and Cooper, 1996). Stressful events are perceived and handled differently by men and women. Perceived stress constitutes the feelings and thoughts that people have about how much stressed-out they are at a given point in time. It incorporates feelings about not being able to control one's life and the unpredictability of life. Instead of focusing on the frequency of stressful events which have happened to a person, perceived stress emphasizes on how an individual feels about the stressfulness of their life and about their ability to handle stress.

A popular psychology theory, the response styles theory (RST; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991), says that women have a greater tendency to ruminate on their depressive symptoms and stress than do men, and this contributes to greater stress in women. According to the RST, rumination involves repetitively focusing on symptoms of distress and on the possible causes and consequences of these symptoms. Because rumination enhances the effects of depressed mood on thinking, impairs effective problem solving and interferes with instrumental behavior, the initial symptoms of depression among people who chronically ruminate are likely to become more severe and evolve into episodes of major depression and rumination may also prolong current depressive episodes (Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008). Rumination is also an established risk factor for the onset of depression and anxiety (Michl, McLaughlin, Shepherd and Nolen-Hoeksema, 2013). Thus, research shows that rumination has been found as a contributing factor to various negative-affect states.

Due to the ongoing pandemic, the levels of stress have risen considerably in everyone. Owing to the lockdown restrictions and work-from-home scenario, women are experiencing added responsibilities, leading to greater brooding and rumination. Studies have established that rumination has an influence on the responses to stressful life events (Aldao et al, 2014). Increased rumination has also been linked to perceptions of increased stress (Hu et al, 2014). People who have a tendency for rumination are more prone to experiencing stress due to unfinished tasks (Cropley & Millward, 2009). Thus, working women who find it difficult to deal with all the pressures to complete work and home related tasks may end up ruminating more and experiencing greater levels of stress.

Studies indicate that values may have a positive effect on psychological functioning and physiological responses to stress. Living one's life in a way that is consistent with one's core values has been recognized as the key to happiness, authenticity and meaning (Kashdan and McKnight, 2013). Thus, values can help in coping, and have been found to be reducing psychological and physiological indicators of stress. Knoop (1994) reported that intrinsic work values such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, and value of work were negatively related with stress. Creswell and colleagues (2005) found that compared to the control group, participants who affirmed their personal values had significantly lower cortisol responses to stress. Khodarahimi, Hashim, Mohd-Zaharim (2012) in a study found that stress had a negative relationship with values. Thus, values may act as a buffer against stress.

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Objectives:

- To examine the Importance of Values in middle-aged working women.
- To examine the extent of Rumination in middle-aged working women,
- To examine the levels of Perceived Stress in middle-aged working women.
- To investigate the relationship between Value-Importance and Perceived Stress
- To investigate the relationship between Rumination and Perceived Stress.
- To investigate the relationship between Value-Importance and Rumination.

Hypotheses:

- It is expected that there will be a negative relationship between Value-Importance and Perceived Stress.
- It is expected that there will be a negative relationship between Value-Importance and Rumination.
- It is expected that there will be a positive relationship between Rumination and Perceived Stress.

METHOD

Sample:

Middle aged working women who meet the following criteria:

Inclusion Criteria-

- 35-55 years
- Have been working for a minimum of 5 years
- Married
- Have at least one child
- Have their working hours from 9am-5pm

Exclusion Criteria-

- Divorcees will be excluded
- Women with major health issues (chronic diseases) will be excluded

Tools:

The following standardized tests and tools will be used for the study-

- **Valued Living Questionnaire (Wilson and Groom, 2010)**
The *Valued Living Questionnaire* is a reliable and valid self-report measure that assesses values-action consistency. Respondents rate the degree of importance of 10 different value domains (e.g., family, friends, work, recreation) on a 10-point scale from 1 = “not at all important” to 10 = “extremely important.” Next, they rate how consistent their actions were with the same 10 value domains within the past week from 1 = “not at all consistent with my value” to 10 = “completely consistent with my value.” In addition to the Importance and Consistency Subscale totals, a Composite Score is calculated by calculating the mean of the product of the importance and consistency ratings, such that higher scores indicate greater values-action consistency. The Importance Subscale was used for the present research.
- **Rumination Response Scale (Nolen-Hoeksema and Morrow, 1991)**
The Ruminative Response Scale was compiled by Nolen-Hoeksema, to assess the severity of depressive rumination. It is the most widely used measure of Rumination. It consists of 22 items that are responded on a 4-point Likert-type scale.

- **Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al,1983)**

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the perception of stress. It is a measure of the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful. Items were designed to tap how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded respondents find their lives. The scale also includes a number of direct queries about current levels of experienced stress.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study reveals that working women show moderate levels of Perceived stress, moderate levels of Rumination and high importance for Values. Working women are exposed to a number of stressors at home as well as at the workplace. Today, Indian women represent the workforce in bigger numbers than before. The workplace roles demand a lot of time of women due to which work-life balance becomes a challenging and stressful task. However, the extent to which one gives importance to values in life may help mitigate the level to which one perceives stress and also reduce the extent to which one ruminates about their problems and negative experiences. Since the women scored high on values, the levels of stress and rumination tendency could have been reduced to some extent.

The study found significant positive correlation between Perceived stress and Rumination. Recent research has emphasized rumination as an important maintaining factor in various mental disorders (Rosenbaum et al, 2021). Studies have also shown the reciprocity of stress and rumination, in a way that stress induces depressive rumination on the one hand (Gianferante et al., 2014; Hilt et al., 2015; Shull et al., 2016) and that the stress itself is influenced by rumination on the other hand (Ottaviani et al., 2016).

A significant negative correlation was found between Values and Perceived stress. When facing overwhelming moments, stress can be managed by contemplation of one's values. Creswell, Welch, Taylor, Sherman, Gruenewald and Mann (2005) suggest that reflecting on personal values can keep neuroendocrine and psychological responses to stress at low levels.

A significant negative correlation was found between Values and Rumination. There is a lack of research focusing on the relationship between Values and Rumination. The significant negative correlation suggests that women who assign greater importance to their values end up ruminating less. Sticking to one's values may give one a readily available value-consistent behavior to fall upon and thus ruminate less about the stressful situation. Kamijo and Yukawa (2018) suggest that negative affect is positively related to intrusive rumination. And values may help one navigate stress and reduce negative affect, and thus in turn reduce rumination.

Most Indian studies on perceived stress have been conducted within some specific population subgroups, but there is a lack of data regarding perceived stress and associated factors in the general population (Pangtey, Basu, Meena and Banerjee, 2020). Understanding the factors associated with stress in Indian populations can help towards the development of community-based interventions and therapies for stress management. Furthermore, early identification of individuals and subgroups with a propensity towards stress-related risk factors may provide opportunities for timely strategic interventions for prevention of negative behavioral and health outcomes (Nielsen, Curtis, Kristensen and Rod Nielsen, 2018). Also, there isn't much research in the area of values as related to rumination. This could be an area that future research could focus on.

Table 1 Perceived Stress, Values and Rumination in Middle-Aged Working Women

Variable	M	SD
Perceived Stress	20.48	7.94
Values	81.9	11.07
Rumination	53.38	13.92

Table 2 Correlation Coefficients

	Perceived Stress	Values	Rumination
Perceived Stress	1		
Values	-0.617298906*	1	
Rumination	0.692060278*	-0.600983862*	1

Table 3

Variables	t-value	p-value
Rumination and Perceived Stress	5.91	0.000001
Values and Perceived Stress	4.87	0.000019
Values and Rumination	4.62	0.000043

N=40 *p< 0.01

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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