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Research Paper

Household Environment and Mental Stress in Married Women: Micro-Level Study from Odisha

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how household environmental conditions influence the perceived mental stress of married women residing in Nimapara Block, Puri District, Odisha. A descriptive-analytical design was adopted, using primary data from 137 married women aged between 22 and 50 years, selected through purposive sampling. Mental stress was measured using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10). Statistical analysis was performed using multiple linear regression after verifying assumptions such as normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity. The regression model demonstrated strong explanatory power (Adjusted R^2 = 0.706), with education level, overcrowding index, household chores burden, air ventilation, lighting, kitchen type, sanitation, and monthly income emerging as significant predictors of stress. Education had a strong negative relationship with stress, while overcrowding and domestic workload significantly heightened stress levels. Interestingly, better sanitation facilities showed a positive association with stress, possibly due to increased domestic responsibilities. Variables such as employment status, type of housing, and fuel used were found to be statistically insignificant. The findings highlight that both structural and domestic environmental factors substantially influence women's psychological well-being. The study emphasizes the need for integrated interventions that combine household infrastructure improvements, promotion of women's education, and redistribution of domestic responsibilities to enhance mental health outcomes among married women in semi-urban areas.

Keywords: *Mental Stress, Household Environment, Nimapara, Odisha*

Mental health is a crucial yet often neglected aspect of public health in India, particularly among married women. While physical health typically takes centre stage, psychological well-being remains under-discussed, despite its vital role in ensuring family harmony, economic productivity, and social cohesion (Panigrahi et al., 2014). World Health Organization also emphasis on social determinants of mental health) to enhance international relevance. In patriarchal settings like India, marriage frequently imposes new stressors on women—ranging from emotional labour and domestic responsibilities to adapting to unfamiliar household norms (Khanna & Khatri, 2021). These challenges often involve relocation, caregiving duties, and suppressed autonomy, leading to

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heightened stress (Sankalp & Agrawal, 2013). The burden intensifies in rural and semi-urban areas where access to mental health care is minimal, and societal expectations are rigid. Economic dependency and unequal household roles further compound emotional strain (Lee et al., 2022). This highlights the urgent need to recognize and address women's mental health within household and community frameworks.

Relevance of the Study

Mental health is a critical aspect of well-being for married women, influencing their personal lives, caregiving roles, and social participation. Studies across India have shown that poor marital adjustment, lack of emotional support, financial stress, and traditional gender roles contribute significantly to anxiety, depression, and somatic symptoms in women (Daran & Thenmozhi, 2016; Rema & Kaur, 2020; Bora et al., 2023). In regions like Haryana and Assam, mental health outcomes were better among women who had supportive home environments, even when juggling work and domestic responsibilities (Kumari et al., 2017). In the context of Puri District, a region shaped by traditional joint families, caste norms, and growing economic pressures, married women often face limited autonomy and dual burdens without sufficient support. Recent studies in Odisha reveal similar stress patterns caused by family conflict, substance abuse, and financial instability (Panigrahi et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2022). As more women in Puri engage in informal work to support their families, the lack of a supportive household environment can intensify rather than alleviate stress (Banu & Zochedh, 2024). Given this backdrop, the present study is timely and locally relevant, aiming to explore how household environmental factors directly impact the mental stress of married women in Puri District and to inform targeted public health and social interventions.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to examine the influence of household environmental conditions on the perceived mental stress of married women residing in Nimapara Block, Puri District, Odisha. The research aims to identify specific environmental such as overcrowding, ventilation, lighting, sanitation, and household workload that significantly contribute to variations in stress levels. The study further seeks to determine the most influential predictors through a multiple regression framework to inform targeted interventions for mental health and household well-being.

Hypothesis of the Study

- **H_0** (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant relationship between household environmental factors and the perceived mental stress of married women.
- **H_1** (Alternative Hypothesis): Household environmental factors significantly influence the perceived mental stress of married women.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Understanding the mental stress experienced by married women requires examining both the socio-cultural environment and physical household conditions. Past studies have shown that stress is shaped by interpersonal dynamics, domestic roles, and infrastructure-related challenges. This section explores key themes emerging from Indian and international literature.

Socio-Cultural Stressors in Patriarchal Households

Family structure significantly influences the mental well-being of women. In patriarchal societies, traditional expectations often limit women's autonomy and increase stress.

Panigrahi et al. (2014, 2017) found that women in Odisha reported poor mental health when household support was absent, especially from husbands or in-laws. Similarly, Sankalp and Agrawal (2012, 2013) highlighted that married women in Uttar Pradesh experienced behavioural changes due to limited decision-making power and role adaptation pressures. Rema and Kaur (2020) observed that poor marital adjustment frequently led to anxiety and depression, while Bora et al. (2023) linked emotional neglect and spousal conflict to higher stress among women in Assam. The type of family which is joint or nuclear, plays a critical role in determining stress levels. Ranjan et al. (2020) and Kaur et al. (2023) found that joint family systems often restrict women's choices and demand conformity to traditional roles, especially during sensitive phases such as pregnancy or childbirth. While nuclear families may offer more freedom, Gupta and Pillai (2007) pointed out they can also result in social isolation and reduced emotional support, particularly when extended networks are absent.

Domestic and Occupational Dual Burden

Many women face a "double burden" of balancing professional and domestic responsibilities, particularly when family support is minimal. Daran and Thenmozhi (2016) and Bakhshi et al. (2008) reported that married working women often struggle with time management and role conflict, which elevates their stress levels. Khanna & Khatri (2021) further demonstrated how women experience internal pressure to conform to the idealized roles of wife and daughter-in-law, sometimes leading to emotional exhaustion. These stresses are magnified when women receive little recognition or emotional support at home.

Influence of Family Structure and Marital Adjustment

Financial hardship, caste norms, and rigid gender roles often amplify mental stress. Banu and Zochedh (2024) and Unni (1993) emphasized that even educated women experience emotional strain due to the uneven division of labour and economic dependency. However, emotional support can mitigate such effects. Kumari et al. (2017) found that supportive families improved psychological well-being among employed women. Reen & Orji (2022) added that technology-based mental health tools, like mood-tracking apps, help women manage stress discreetly, especially in conservative settings. Economic constraints are another significant contributor to mental stress. Conger et al. (2010) emphasized that women responsible for managing limited household finances are more likely to experience anxiety. This financial strain often intersects with gendered expectations, further exacerbating mental health issues.

Environmental Infrastructure and Psychological Well-Being

Environmental factors within the home such as ventilation, lighting, sanitation, and spatial layout also contribute to mental health outcomes. Overcrowding is a prominent stressor; Baum and Paulus (1987) explained that crowded living spaces can lead to emotional fatigue, particularly for women who spend most of their time indoors. Globally, household environmental stressors such as poor ventilation and overcrowding have been strongly linked with elevated psychological stress (Evans & Kim, 2020). Saxbe et al. (2011) showed that repetitive domestic tasks without recognition can cause psychological exhaustion. Air quality and lighting also matter World Health Organization (2010) linked poor ventilation to stress and fatigue, while Boyce (2003) found that proper natural lighting improves mood. In terms of kitchen infrastructure, (Otu & Oduwole, 2023) discovered that shared cooking spaces cause distress due to lack of privacy and control. Similarly, Sahoo et al. (2015) found that women in joint families often shoulder the burden of maintaining hygiene and shared living spaces, increasing their mental load.

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory provides a holistic framework to understand how individual mental health is influenced by household, community, and societal factors. This theory posits that personal well-being is shaped by interactions between the individual and multiple environments such as family, workplace, and community. Within this framework, education emerges as a powerful buffer. Vikram (2023) demonstrated that educated women are better equipped to manage emotional challenges and assert their autonomy. The stress-vulnerability Model also helps in explaining how environmental pressures like overcrowding or high domestic workload can trigger psychological strain, especially in vulnerable individuals (Zubin & Spring, 1977).

Research Gap

While studies on women's mental health in India are increasing, most focus on urban settings or reproductive health, often ignoring how household environments influence stress in rural and semi-urban areas. There is limited research that examines both physical conditions (like ventilation, lighting, and sanitation) and socio-demographic pressures (like chores burden and family roles) as combined contributors to stress. Nimapara, a semi-urban area in Puri District, remains underexplored despite its unique blend of traditional norms and infrastructural challenges. Population-specific research from this region is scarce, creating a critical contextual and demographic gap. Additionally, existing studies seldom apply structured statistical models to assess these factors together. This study aims to fill that gap by quantitatively analysing the impact of the household environment on mental stress among married women in Nimapara.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical research design, which is widely used in social science research to examine relationships between observable phenomena. The descriptive part helps to capture the socio-demographic and environmental profile of married women in Nimapara, while the analytical dimension facilitates the identification and quantification of household environmental factors that significantly affect mental stress.

Study Area and Sample

The study was conducted in Nimapara Block, a semi-urban area of Puri district, Odisha, selected for its mix of rural and urban socio-cultural traits. The region reflects varied family types, infrastructure, and housing conditions, making it suitable for assessing household environmental diversity. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 137 married women aged 22–50, ensuring representation across housing types and family structures. Inclusion criteria included being legally married, residing with their husband for at least one year, and having no reported psychiatric illness. Local health workers (ASHA/AWW) assisted in rapport-building and access, ensuring culturally sensitive and ethical data collection.

Data Collection Tools

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire that included socio-demographic details, household environmental conditions, and a mental stress assessment. Mental stress was measured using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) by Cohen et al. (1983), a 10-item Likert scale with scores ranging from 0 to 40. To ensure the reliability of the stress measurement in the local context, the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) was translated into Odia using a standard forward–backwards translation method. A pilot test

was conducted with a sub-sample of 30 married women and we got Cronbach's alpha value of 0.81, indicating good internal reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). This confirmed that the scale was appropriate and psychometrically sound for use in the main study population.

Variables and Definitions

This study uses structured primary data to examine the relationship between various household environmental factors and perceived mental stress in married women. The variables have been categorized as dependent, independent, and control variables, and each is operationally defined for statistical analysis.

Table 1: Dependent Variable

Variable	Definition	Measurement Scale
Perceived Stress Score	Self-reported stress levels are measured using a standardized perceived stress scale (PSS)	Continuous (Scale: 0–40)

Table 2: Independent Variables (Household Environmental Factors)

Variables	Definition	Measurement Scale
Type of Housing	Structure of residence (Pucca, Semi-pucca, Kutcha)	Nominal
Overcrowding Index	Number of persons per room	Ratio
Lighting Conditions	Quality of natural and artificial lighting in the living space	Ordinal (Dim → Bright)
Air Ventilation	Availability of cross-ventilation and number of windows	Ordinal (Poor → Good)
Sanitation Facility	Type of toilet used (Private, Shared, Open defecation)	Nominal
Kitchen Type	Cooking area arrangement (Separate Kitchen vs. Same Room Cooking)	Nominal
Cooking Fuel Used	Type of fuel used (LPG, Biomass, Kerosene, etc.)	Nominal
Household Chores Burden	Average hours spent on daily domestic work (cooking, cleaning, caregiving)	Ordinal (<3 hrs → >6 hrs)
Family Type	Household structure (Nuclear or Joint Family)	Nominal

Table 3: Control Variables

Variables	Definition	Measurement Scale
Monthly Income	Total household monthly income	Continuous (INR/month)
Education Level	The highest level of education completed by the respondent	Ordinal (No Schooling → Graduate+)
Employment Status	Whether the respondent is employed in any form	Nominal (Employed/Unemployed)
Age	Current age of the respondent (in years)	Continuous (Years)

Statistical Techniques

Once data were collected, they were entered into IBM SPSS v26 for analysis. The data cleaning process involved handling missing values, validating consistency, and coding categorical variables for statistical modelling. Frequency distributions, means, and standard deviations were computed for all key variables. To identify the key household environmental factors influencing mental stress, a multiple linear regression model was employed. The dependent variable was the Perceived Stress Score (PSS), while the eight independent variables represented household environmental conditions. Nominal variables were dummy-coded, and ordinal/continuous variables were appropriately coded for analysis. Multicollinearity was tested using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). To assess the model's strength, adjusted R-squared was calculated. This approach ensured statistical rigour and helped isolate the most influential predictors, offering actionable insights into improving the household environment to reduce mental stress among married women in Nimapara.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics provide an overview of the demographic profile and household environmental conditions of the 137 married women surveyed in Nimapara, Puri District. The respondents' ages ranged from 20 to 49 years, with a mean age of 33.6 years (SD = 6.7), indicating a predominantly young to middle-aged population. In terms of education, 41.6% had completed secondary education, 29.9% had primary education, 19.7% were graduates, and 8.8% reported no formal education. Regarding employment, 62.8% were housewives, 20.4% were self-employed, and 16.8% were in salaried positions. The average monthly household income was approximately ₹15,300 with SD ₹4,900, positioning the sample within a lower-middle-income bracket. Housing types varied, with 52% residing in pucca houses, 31.4% in semi-pucca structures, and 16.6% in kutcha houses. The mean overcrowding index stood at 2.3 persons per room, suggesting a moderate level of residential crowding. Lighting conditions were described as moderate by 48.2%, bright by 32.1%, and dim by 19.7% of participants. In terms of sanitation, 61.3% had access to private in-house toilets, 28.5% relied on shared facilities, and 10.2% reported practising open defecation. Regarding kitchen infrastructure, 70.8% of the women had access to a separate kitchen space, while 29.2% cooked in shared or multi-purpose rooms. The primary cooking fuel used was LPG (62.0%), followed by biomass (18.2%), electricity (10.2%), and kerosene (9.6%). When examining the burden of household chores, 31% spent less than 3 hours daily, 39.4% spent between 3 and 6 hours, and 29.6% spent more than 6 hours. On air ventilation, 51.8% reported adequate ventilation, 30.7% reported good ventilation, and 17.5% described it as poor.

As for family structure, 51.1% lived in nuclear families, 38.0% in joint families, and 10.9% in extended households. Mental stress, assessed using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), yielded a mean score of 21.9 (SD = 6.4). Among the participants, 23.4% experienced low stress, 52.6% reported moderate stress, and 24% fell into the high-stress category. These findings reflect a noteworthy mental health burden and underscore the relevance of further statistical analysis to identify the household environmental factors most strongly associated with mental stress among married women in the region.

Assumption Testing for Regression Analysis

Before conducting the multiple linear regression analysis, it was essential to assess whether the dataset met the core assumptions of linear regression.

Table 4: Regression Assumption Diagnostics

Assumption	Diagnostic Method	Result	Interpretation
Linearity	Scatterplots, Partial Regression Plots	Linear patterns observed	The relationship between dependent and predictors appears linear
Normality of Residuals	Shapiro-Wilk Test	Shapiro-Wilk $p > 0.05$	Residuals are normally distributed
Homoscedasticity	Breusch–Pagan–Godfrey (BPG) Test	$p > 0.05$	Residual variance is constant across levels of predictors
Multicollinearity	Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)	All VIFs < 5	No significant multicollinearity among predictors
Independence of Errors	Durbin–Watson Statistic	DW ≈ 2	Residuals are independent; no autocorrelation

These diagnostic results confirmed that the dataset met the necessary assumptions for multiple linear regression analysis. Therefore, the subsequent model estimates and inferences drawn from the analysis can be considered statistically robust and reliable.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

To identify the most influential household environmental factors contributing to the mental stress of married women in Puri District, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted.

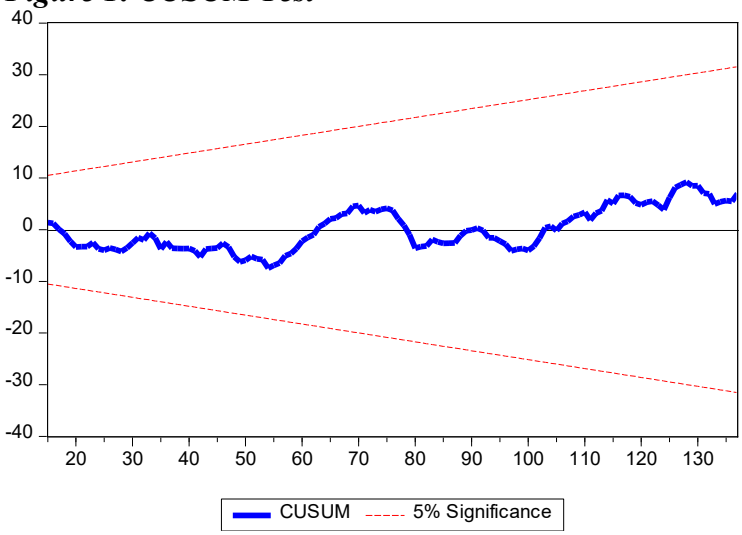
Table 5: Multiple Linear Regression Results

Dependent Variable: PERCEIVED_STRESS_SCORE				
Method: Least Squares				
Included observations: 137				
Variables	**Coefficient**	**Std. Error**	**t-Statistic**	**Prob.**
Air_Ventilation	-1.735736	0.525611	-3.302318	0.0015
Cooking_Fuel	-0.154628	0.394176	-0.392282	0.6960
Family_Type	1.097595	0.577733	1.899832	0.0614
Household_Chores_Burden	3.223985	0.458526	7.031197	0.0000
Kitchen_Type	-1.748529	0.808945	-2.161493	0.0339
Lighting_Conditions	-1.247040	0.559053	-2.230630	0.0288
Overcrowding_Index	2.515118	0.428320	5.872050	0.0000
Sanitation_Facility	1.450646	0.529608	2.739095	0.0077
Type_of_Housing	-0.347762	0.421587	-0.824888	0.4121
Monthly_Income	-0.000115	4.82E-05	-2.389680	0.0194
Education_Level	-2.956876	0.442353	-6.684426	0.0000
Employment_Status	0.167978	0.704932	0.238290	0.8123
Age	-0.018776	0.041449	-0.452985	0.6519
C	18.01888	2.506915	7.187671	0.0000
R-squared	0.71553	Mean dependent var		18.86421
Adjusted R-squared	0.706131	S.D. dependent var		5.810301
S.E. of regression	3.149749	Akaike info criterion		5.278913
Sum squared resid	724.2269	Schwarz criterion		5.675726
Log-likelihood	-215.6327	Hannan-Quinn criteria.		5.438697
F-statistic	16.89592	Durbin-Watson stat		1.701098
Prob(F-statistic)	0.000000			

The regression model demonstrated strong explanatory power, with an R-squared value of 0.713, indicating that approximately 71.3% of the variance in perceived stress among married women could be explained by the included household and socio-demographic variables. The adjusted R-squared value of 0.706 confirmed a good model fit after accounting for the number of predictors and sample size. The model was statistically significant, as indicated by the F-statistic ($F = 16.90$, $p < 0.001$).

Several variables emerged as significant predictors. Education level had a strong negative association ($\beta = -2.95$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that higher education contributes to lower stress. Overcrowding index ($\beta = +2.52$, $p < 0.001$) and household chores burden ($\beta = +3.22$, $p < 0.001$) showed significant positive relationships with stress, indicating that dense living conditions and high domestic workload increase psychological strain. Environmental factors such as air ventilation ($\beta = -1.74$, $p = 0.001$) and lighting ($\beta = -1.25$, $p = 0.028$) were negatively associated with stress. Surprisingly, sanitation facilities ($\beta = +1.45$, $p = 0.008$) showed a positive association, possibly reflecting added responsibilities with better amenities. A separate kitchen also lowered stress ($\beta = -1.76$, $p = 0.033$), while monthly income had a modest but significant negative effect ($\beta = -0.0001$, $p = 0.020$). Other variables like employment status, housing type, fuel type, and family structure were not significant. Further to check the stability of the model CUSUM test was applied to assess the stability of regression coefficients over time.

Figure 1: CUSUM Test



As seen in the chart, the cumulative sum (CUSUM) line remains well within the 5% significance boundaries throughout the sample period. This indicates that the regression model is structurally stable, with no significant parameter instability or structural break detected during the analysis.

FINDINGS & CONCLUSION

Findings

This study explored the impact of household environmental factors on the perceived stress of married women in the Puri District. The regression results offer key insights into the predictors of mental stress, revealing both environmental and socio-demographic influences. One of the most significant findings was the inverse relationship between education level and stress ($\beta = -2.96$, $p < 0.001$). Educated women experienced lower stress, likely due to

better-coping strategies and greater decision-making autonomy (Vikram, 2023). Overcrowding ($\beta = +2.52$, $p < 0.001$) and household chores burden ($\beta = +3.22$, $p < 0.001$) significantly increased stress, confirming that dense living spaces and heavy domestic workloads contribute substantially to psychological strain, consistent with Baum and Paulus (1987) and Saxbe et al. (2011). Environmental conditions were also influential. Air ventilation ($\beta = –1.74$, $p = 0.0015$) and lighting ($\beta = –1.25$, $p = 0.0288$) significantly reduced stress levels, in line with the World Health Organization (2010), who emphasize the mental health benefits of healthy indoor environments. Separate kitchens ($\beta = –1.75$, $p = 0.0339$) were associated with lower stress, underlining the importance of functional domestic design (Otu & Oduwole, 2023). Interestingly, sanitation facilities ($\beta = +1.45$, $p = 0.0077$) showed a positive association with stress, possibly reflecting increased domestic expectations in better-equipped households (Sahoo et al., 2015). Monthly income ($\beta = –0.000115$, $p = 0.0194$) had a modest but protective effect, aligning with Conger et al. (2010). Other variables, including cooking fuel, housing type, employment, family type, and age, were not statistically significant, suggesting their influence may be indirect or context-specific.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the relationship between household environmental conditions and mental stress among married women in Puri District. The findings reveal that both physical settings and domestic roles significantly affect women's psychological well-being. Key predictors of stress included education level, overcrowding, household chores burden, air ventilation, lighting, kitchen type, and income. These results show that mental stress is not only psychological but also shaped by everyday structural and environmental challenges. The study emphasizes the need for multi-level interventions. Improving household features like ventilation, lighting, and kitchen space can offer immediate stress relief. Simultaneously, promoting women's education and encouraging shared domestic responsibilities are vital for long-term well-being.

In conclusion, mental health policies must extend beyond clinical care to include social, architectural, and gender-responsive reforms at the household level. Such integrated efforts are crucial for creating healthier and more empowering environments for married women, especially in semi-urban and rural contexts like Puri District.

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Conflict of Interest

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