Research Paper

Social and Family Role Stress, Feminist Identity Development, Meaning In Life and Quality of Relationships among Working and Non-Working Women

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ABSTRACT

Indian women have had their fair share of power struggle over the decades. Even though the gender equality and women empowerment has been on the rise, Indian women still continually face increased stressors in their personal as well as professional life domains. This study was designed along the same lines to investigate the social and family role stress, feminist identity development, meaning in life and quality of relationships among working and non-working women in Jaipur city. The sample size of 100 was segregated on the basis of their working status (50 non working women and 50 working women). The objective of the research was to find the discrepancy in the aforesaid variables among the two groups. The following research tools were employed to test the hypotheses: Social Family Role Stress Scale (SFRS) (Vadra & Akhtar, 1990), Feminist Identity Development Scale (FIDS) (Bargad & Hyde, 1991), Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) (Steger et al., 2006), and Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988).

The sense of one's own identity or self is an important dimension of an individual's personality giving each one of us unique individuality. For centuries, women's have been expected to fulfill the ideal role of both perfect wife and mother, and this meant putting the family first before their own needs. If for whatever reason, a woman acted out of the norm chose to speak her mind, chose to work outside the home then her husband was criticized for not handling her properly. Thus, the woman is placed in the difficult position of having to balance the multiple roles expected of her with the roles she wants to carry out for herself. Even though most women are choosing to opt for a career, there are still females rooting for

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the traditional roles expected of a woman. So the stress faced by working and non-working females might vary significantly as the stressors faced by the former group is considerably diverse as compared to the latter group.

Being an Indian woman comes with a responsibility of being the homemaker, but with changing times more and more women are becoming career oriented in their lifestyle approach. As an increasing number of women enter the work force, they are progressively more exposed not only to the same work environment as men, but also to unique pressure created by multiple and conflicting expectations (Nelson & Burke, 2000; Chang, 2000). This, as a result has created a dual role stress for the female to justify to, one being the work role and other the family role. Role stress is referred to as a stress or a demand created by the role (or job) at the workplace. Role stress may be viewed as the consequence of disparity between an individual's perception of the characteristics of the role and what is actually being achieved by the individual currently performing the particular role (Lambert & Lambert, 2001). Lazarus (1966) maintains that stress occurs when there are demands on the person, which tax or exceed his adjustment resources. According to McGrath (1976), stress is an interaction between person and environment. Thus, role stress occurs when there is incongruence between perceived role expectations and achievement. Role stress components include: stressors that exist outside the organization (e.g., traffic, pollution, etc.); stressors that come from within the organization (e.g., promotion, job security, etc.); stressors that relate to duties and responsibilities of work; and stressors that relate to various work roles. The two major life domains are: work (social role) and non-work (family role). Apart from the work or social role stress, family stressors act as a catalyst in the whole role stress paradigm. These can be interpreted in the form of unsupportiveness by the members of the family, lack of understanding among family members and their constant wanting you to leave your job.

Even though each role/responsibility can take a toll on the mental resources, they are not completely void of positive effects. Organization policies, if implemented appropriately, can create an environment of productivity and healthy competition among its employees. On the other hand, if the members of the family are more cooperative and understanding towards the role of the female as a working woman, it can not only create strong bonds in the family but also increase the satisfaction and happiness in the female which will later be reflected in her job performance.

Every role in an organization comes with its own set of conducts and expectations. As a result, people try to change themselves to fit into these roles and changes can be felt into their attitudes and behaviors. It can also be seen at home, when family members try to adjust themselves to the certain role expectations that pertain to their family dynamics. But when role strain is created, it can easily lead to frustration and stress among women. Not only will this increase stress in the female but it affects other vital dimensions of her life as well. Keeping the cultural aspects in view, be it the social and family role stress for the working women or non-working women, it can affect her sense of gender identity.

Social and Family Role Stress, Feminist Identity Development, Meaning In Life and Quality of Relationships among Working and Non-Working Women

Feminist identity development refers to the extent to which a woman might conform to the traditional gender roles or confront the existence of a patriarchal system. This can either range from complete hatred towards the opposite gender to complete submission to the effects of sexism. Downing and Roush (1985) proposed that feminist identity development for women progresses from passive acceptance to revelation to embeddedness-emanation, synthesis, and active commitment. Passive acceptance involves acquiescence to an inferior role in life to men, traditional sex roles, and discrimination against women. Some types of crisis precipitate questions of gender roles in the revelation stage. Women in the revelation stage exhibit anger, guilt, and a negative attitude towards men. In the embeddedness-emanation stage, women are relativistic in their thinking and willing to interact with the males. They concentrate on building connections with other women and affirming their identity as women. During the synthesis stages, women develop a genuine and affirmative feminine identity by transcending traditional gender roles. At this point, women recognize men as individuals rather than the collective patriarchy. The active commitment stage involves a well-formed feminist identity and taking action to eradicate sexism. Women in the active commitment stage consider males as equals yet distinctly different from females. For the working women, glass ceiling and gender discrimination at workplace is more obvious, as compared to non-working women. The correspondence of the feminist identity orientation and the degree to which autonomy is provided to the female at home front as well as workplace is both important. If females feel oppressed by patriarchy, it might eventually lead to an effect on her meaning of life and subjective well-being.

Meaning in Life is one of the essential variables in positive psychology. A meaningful life is a construct that is based on sense of purpose, feeling of fulfillment, significance and satisfaction in life. It is a global schema to understand one's life and the belief that one's life is meaningful. Victor Frankl (1963) argued that people function best when they perceive a sense of meaning and possess a life purpose, a unique mission to strive for throughout their lives. Thus, meaning in life is seen as a super ordinate term that encompasses two main dimensions (Steger, 2009; Steger et al., 2006). The first dimension is comprehension, which is the ability to make sense of and understand one's life, including one's self, the external world, and how one fits with and operates within the world. In essence, comprehension refers to an interconnected network of schemas crafter into a meaning framework for life. The second dimension is purpose, which is one or more overarching, long-term aspirations that are self-concordant and motivate relevant activity (Steger, Shelin, Merriman, & Kashdan, in press). Therefore, as the stress of role increases and the feeling of being unjustly treated are present, it can take a toll on the sense of meaning of life in one. This, in turn, eventually affects the quality of relationship that one shares with the others at home as well as the workplace. Since significant others or the partners are the most intimate relationship in any women's life, over exhaustion in her life, will directly affect the quality of relationship she shares with her spouse.

Quality of Relationship refers to the subjective assessment of the relationship, i.e., the extent to which the woman feels satisfied or dissatisfied with the current status of the relationship she shares with her partner. Quality of relationship is therefore, a subjective global evaluation of a relationship. It is one of the main constructs in the literature on relationships such as marriage. Sometimes the term marital satisfaction or marital happiness or relationship satisfaction is used interchangeably for said variable (Trost, 1985). There are many big theories exploring the dimensions of intimate relationships. One such theory is social exchange theory, which states that relationship partners focus on the positive outcomes (rewards) and negative outcomes (costs) of their relationships. Rewards include social rewards and material rewards and costs include opportunity costs. According to this theory, people evaluate their relationships both in terms of actual rewards and costs and in terms of anticipated rewards and costs. Another important theory is social ecological theory which focuses on the external circumstances of the events. These external circumstances include the Microsystems (immediate environment with friends and family), mesosystem (more removed environment including neighborhood), and macro system (even more removed environment including country). However, according to attachment theory, peoples' intimate relationship is related to their relationship with their attachment figures. These figures are their primary caregivers. The extent to which the presence of social and family role stress exercise their effects in the life of the working or non-working female, their relationship assessment quality will vary greatly.

These premises give us an insight into the formation of different types of intimate relationships at its core. Further, how these relationships exist in coalition with the other variables of our study. The support of a spouse and other close relations can act as a beneficial coping resource, when the woman is dealing with the social and family role stressors.

However, the aforementioned variables might vary for the working and non-working women since the dynamics of their life is slightly distinct. The non-working women might not be affected by the social stressors as much as the working women; the orientation of the feminist identity can be expected to be traditional than the latter group thus affecting the meaning in life and quality of relationships for both the groups.

METHODOLOGY

Aim
1. To explore the Social and Family Role Stress in working and non-working women.
2. To study the Feminist Identity Development in working and non-working women.
3. To investigate the Meaning of Life in working and non-working women.
4. To examine the Quality of Relationships in working and non-working women.

Hypotheses

1. There will be a significant difference between working women and non-working women on the measures of Social and Family Role Stress.
2. There will be a significant difference between working women and non-working women on the measures of Feminist Identity Development.
3. There will be a significant difference between working women and non-working women on the measures of Meaning of Life.
4. There will be a significant difference between working women and non-working women on the measures of Quality of Relationships.

Sample

To fulfill the above aim, a sample of 100 women (50 working and 50 non- working women) was selected from Jaipur city. The sample was selected using Purposive Sampling Approach. With the following criteria of inclusion and exclusion:

- Only married women were selected
- Age range of 25-35 years
- Who at least have one child
- Women from urban domicile
- Who have working knowledge of English language.
- Women who were separated or divorced were excluded.

Research Design

Two Group Research Design was employed.

	Working Women	**Non-Working Women**
Social And Family Role Stress		
Feminism		
Meaning Of Life		
Quality Of Relationships		

Tools

1. **Social Family Role Stress Scale (SFRS)** *(Vadra & Akhtar, 1990):* A 25-item scale is used to measure stress emanating from social and family situations. Participants have to respond to each item using a 5-point likert scale: '1' if you find yourself in total disagreement with the statement and '5' if you find yourself in total agreement with the statement. There are nine factors included in the scale: Role Related Tension, Untrustworthy Colleagues, Bleak Future, Lack of Family Support, Adverse Affect on Health, Family Responsibilities, Underpaid, Forgoing Career Development Opportunities and Unsuitable Job.
2. **Feminist Identity Development Scale (FIDS)** *(Bargad & Hyde, 1991):* It is a 48-item scale to measure an active commitment of feminist ideals and an egalitarian

society. Participants have to respond on a 5-point likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

3. **Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ)** *(Steger et al., 2006)*: A 10-item questionnaire designed to measure two dimensions of meaning in life: (1) Presence of Meaning (how much respondents feel their lives have meaning), and (2) Search for Meaning (how much respondents strive to find meaning and understanding in their lives). Respondents answer each item on a 7-point likert-type scale ranging from 1 (absolutely true) to 7 (absolutely untrue).

4. **Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988):** A 7-point scale designed to measure general relationship satisfaction. Respondents answer each item using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (high satisfaction).

Procedure

Firstly, The sample was selected on the basis of the above mentioned inclusion and exclusion criteria. Then, an informed consent was obtained from all the participants. After which the tools for the study (viz., Social and Family Role Stress, Feminist Identity Development, Meaning of Life and Quality of Relationships) were randomly administered to members of both the groups. Finally, the data was analyzed on these variables.

Statistical Analysis

Following statistical techniques were used:
- Mean
- SD
- t test

RESULTS

Table 1: Mean, SDs and t-value of Social and Family Role Stress, Feminist Identity Development, Meaning in life and Quality of Relationships for working and non-working women

Variables		Groups	MEAN	SDs	t-value
SOCIAL AND FAMILY ROLE STRESS		Working Women	66.208	12.9085	.859
		Non-Working Women	68.571	14.8619	
FEMINIST IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT		Working Women	159.660	12.8466	2.237*
		Non-Working Women	165.531	13.6567	
	Presence Of Meaning	Working Women	22.604	5.3398	1.150
		Non-Working	21.286	6.2283	

Variables		Groups	MEAN	SDs	t-value
MEANING IN LIFE		Women			
	Search Of Meaning	Working Women	23.811	5.0576	.056
		Non-Working Women	23.755	5.0022	
QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS		Working Women	22.566	5.9824	3.024**
		Non-Working Women	26.449	6.9793	

*Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels　　　** Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels

Table 1 gives an account of results showing Mean, SDs of Social and Family Role Stress, Feminist Identity Development, Meaning in life and Quality of Relationships along with Mean differences (t-value) for working and non-working women.

It is clear from the above table that there is a significant difference between the working and non-working women on Feminist Identity Development (t-value= 2.237; p<.05), and Quality of Relationships (t-value= 3.024; p<.01). On the other hand, there is no significant relationship between the working and non-working women on Social and Family Role Stress (t-value= .859; p>.05), Meaning in Life {Presence of Meaning (t-value=1.150; p>.05), and Search for Meaning (t-value= .056; p>.05)}.

DISCUSSION

All the variables of the present study are vital in understanding the major life aspects of working and non-working Indian women. The aim of this research was to compare the levels of Social and Family Role Stress, Feminist Identity Development, Meaning in Life and Quality of Relationships in working and non-working women in Jaipur city.

It is evident from the results that there exists a significant difference between working and non-working women on Feminist Identity Development, the same being higher for non-working women. The possible cause for the evidence might be that degree of feminist identity orientation is independent of the employment status of the woman but is dependent on her level of education, gender-related experiences, prior exposure to feminism and awareness of sexism, if any (Leaper & Arias, 2011). The level of these variables might be different for working and non-working women, hence the results.

It is evident from the results that there exists a significant difference between working and non-working women on Quality of relationships. This indicates that working women cannot pay full attention to their homes and are unable to satisfy their family members. Whereas, the non-working women can do their household task easily and their life goes smooth. According to the researches working women cannot properly adjust with their life because they have many tasks to perform at a time. Reduced autonomy and an ever increasing workload, combined with the added burden of responsibilities at the home front, can lead to emotional

and psychological stress and exhaustion which not only leads to poor job performance but reduced harmony in close relationships as well (Hashmi et al., 2007). Working women confront problems like long working hours, lack of job security, lack of supervisor, co-workers, and social support, work demands or overload, work-role conflict, work-role ambiguity, job dissatisfaction. All these factors and extensive use of communication technology have contributed to high level of work-family conflict among the women workforce. Furthermore, it was found that high job involvement, job demands, lack of career opportunities were some of the sources of dissatisfaction which led to high levels of work-family conflict which in turn has contributed to lower quality of relationships among women working (Narayanan & Savarimuthu, 2013).

On the contrary, there exists none whatsoever significant difference in the levels of Social and Family Role Stress and Meaning in life between the two groups. Even though it is assumed in many cases that due to increase in the responsibility working women tend to face higher levels of role stress, it is not always significant (Ahmad & Nia, 2002). It can, thus, be concluded that woman's adjustment and level of stress, whether employed or not, is a function of her own personality traits, expectations, and perceptions combined with those of her spouse and family members (Bhattacharjee et, al., 1983). Social support for the women is very essential to maintain balance between work and family affairs and diminishes stress (Cohen & Syme, 1985) In such countries where people feel bad for a women to have a job, social support is very much important for a women to continue her job. Moreover, in those organizations where there is a flexible schedule women can work more easily as compared to other organizations. Basically Work-family balance helps to reduce the social and family role stress (Frone, 2003; Rossi, 2001; Grzywacz and Marks, 2000).

It can also be seen that there is no significant difference between working and non-working women on meaning in life. This might be due to the reason that even though a working female perceives herself as independent and self sufficient, the pressure of dual responsibility at home and at work generates the same stress as of a non-working woman (Bhatt, 2013).

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