



Working Women and Stress Management: A Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Women are no longer confined in the four walls of the house. They are marching ahead with their male counterparts equally. A working woman is equally fit in the role of a mother, home-maker or an employee. For the woman who wants to make the most of life, what is undeniably tough is finding a way to handle the situation that demands multiple roles to be played, no matter how efficient the person is, takes a toll in the long term.

The paper is an attempt to discuss the causes of stress which a working women experiences. The impact of such stress on their performance & efficiency is also highlighted along with possible and practical solutions to minimize and prevent the stress at work or home. Further the paper also explores how stress is being managed by prominent top women executives from reputed companies.

KEYWORDS : Working Women, Stress Management, improved performance, multi-tasking.

INTRODUCTION:

The position and status of women in any society is an index of civilization and progress. The number of women in leading positions seems to be on rise especially in business such as banking and financial services. The dynamic work environment and high pressures at work is putting increasing stress on working women. Workplaces are becoming more competitive, and women are now not just a part of an enterprise for namesake, but also they are expected to keep rising bar to keep their jobs in place. They are the real builder of a Nation's Destiny. But success do have some dark side, the demanding job and struggle to keep up with the expectations of family has resulted into high level of stress among working women. Apart from work, women have to look into their home and family responsibilities as well. This continuous job of performing dual

Objectives of the Study:

- To identify the causes of stress among working women.
- To bring out the consequence of stress in their performance.
- To suggest some stress management techniques to minimize stress.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The research is based on extensive review of literature and primarily utilizes secondary data to provide the stress related issues faced by working women and how to face them. Also it presents the opinions of leading women executives working in different areas regarding their strategy to face stress.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Dr. Rekha Shekhar Lilhare & Dr. Sunita Borkar observed the following conclusions in their study titled, "Comparison of Stress in Working Women Performing Shift Hour Duty and Administrative Duties". (1) The working women performing shift hour duty having more stress score than the working women performing administrative duty

Dr. J. Vijaya Durai, Mr. S. Venkatesh studied various factors to stimulate stress level among women teachers in college level. Parveen Nagina in her research paper "Investigating occupational stress among married and unmarried working women in Hyderabad city" determined the comparison in the degree of occupational stress as experienced by married and unmarried working women of Hyderabad city.

Kumar Sunil in his article "Working Women and stress", provides a brief overview of occupational stress and its effect on working women and identifies some major sources of stress such as: Sex-Specific Occupational Stressors; Sex Discrimination; Insufficient Funding and Resources; Work Overload; Poor Management Practice; Job Insecurity; Insufficient Recognition; Reward and Combining Work and Family.

STRESS: AN INTRODUCTION

Stress is the body's mental, physical and emotional reaction to everyday activities. Stress is an issue that at some point in life reaches everyone. There are hundreds of stressors that affect us in every aspect of life. Some stressors can be positive, which is referred to as eustress, and others can ultimately be harmful termed as distress. "Stress is an inevitable part of life, occurring as it does in all aspects. Indeed, the almost omnipresent nature of stress is indicated in its very definition as "the nonspecific response of the body to any demands made upon it". (Crampton et.al., cited Selye, 1995)

CAUSES OF STRESS:

- External Factors – physical conditions such as heat or cold, stressful psychological environments such as working conditions and abusive relationship, e.g. Bullying.
- Internal Factors – physical ailments such as infection or inflammation or psychological problems such as worrying about something.

SPECIFIC WORK STRESS:

Although many do not think work stress is substantively different for men and women, there are some specific work stressors that raise the levels of stress in women. For example, in general for the female employees working fraternity work stress increases due to lack of support from employers/subordinates, not much of an exciting job, preference given to male counterparts because of the pre decided bias about the capability of a lady, gender related biases, favorites played or comparisons made, subjugation in any way, opportunities give to male counterparts or any indication of lagging behind in the competition.

As per the opinion shared by Anita Guha, Global design team member, IBM India Ltd (2010), "If I have put in a big effort and delivered what I believe to be outstanding results, but, my manager and colleagues don't recognize this in any way that would be extremely de-motivating for me and probably lead to work stress". Also she adds that politics within one's team and within the organization can also result in work stress as they make decision making less transparent and reduce the clarity around one's mission and objective.

In fact according to Kenexa Research Institute, women in India report they are more likely to achieve balance when their stress level at work is reasonable, they enjoy, get excited about their work, they feel there is a promising future for them at the company, the company values their contribution and their growth and development.

Impact of Stress on Performance of Working Women:

Certain tests have shown to 50% loss of performance in cognitive tests performed by stress sufferers. Some health effects caused by

stress are reversible and the body and mind reverts to normal when the stress is relieved. Other health effects caused by stress are so serious that they are irreversible, and at worse are terminal.

Exhibit 1.1

Work stress drivers for Women
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am paid fairly for the work I do • All employees, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and culture have equal opportunities for advancement. • Where I work, ethical issues and concerns can be discussed without negative consequences. • My company strives to serve the interests of multiple stakeholders (e.g., customers, employees, suppliers and community), not just the shareholders. • I feel there is a promising future for me at my company. • My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment. • I get excited about my work. • I excel at my job. • My performance on the job is evaluated fairly. • Senior management is committed to providing high quality products and services to external customers.
Source: Kenexa Research Institute [Juggling work and life by Arva Shikari, Human Capital, Sept 2010]

Coping to achieve work/life balance:

According to Aparna Ranadive, VP & Head – HR of Sony Entertainment Network, “it becomes a little more pronounced, when it comes to striking a balance between work responsibilities and home front, that one is expected to manage, and deciding which one is of more importance, and at the same time, being in the rat race with an equally high competitive spirit, coupled with the aspiration to grow and succeed. Sometimes toggling between the different facets of leadership, and striking a balance between getting work done, sometimes, rarely though at the cost of being a task master, and some other times letting the softer side of the personality surface, and balancing that is stressful”.

Besides to achieve a work-life balance, it is important for an individual to get involved in activities which help to reduce stress and spend ample time with family as well.

Iti Kumar, vice president, human resource at Global Logic, spends a lot time on reading books, listening to music and goes for family outings which help her to rejuvenate and have a good time. Madhumita Basu takes her family into confidence, especially children. She shares with them the stressed out phases of the year – say month/quarter/year-end pressures, conferences, products launches – those time demanding activities, which might also entail staying away from home, as children, she feels have a tremendous capability to plan with you, but, do not like surprise”.

In Simran Oberai's view (Asia-pacific chemicals sector leader of Hay Group, 2010), the most important first step is to define work and life boundaries clearly and respect or manage these boundaries as diligently as possible.

Stress Management for Working Women:

- Take a brisk walk: exercise is a well-known but often overlooked method of stress management for women, or anyone for that matter. This works well with or without kids.
- Listen to soothing music: steal just five minutes from the busy schedule and listen to soothing music of one's choice.
- Read good book: cultivating the habit of reading good books will help a long way to cope up with a stressful situation.
- Clutter free house: this may not sound like an idea of relaxation, but a messy house only adds to stress level. There's also something about mindless activities that calms the soul.
- Modify your perspective: much of our experience with stress can be eliminated with a change in the way we look at things.

Global Perspective on Working Women and Stress

MANAGEMENT:

As per the reports of Kenexa Research Institute, in the United

Kingdom, 62% of women state that they can meet career goals and still devote sufficient attention to their personal and family life. Also it has been discovered that in UK 56% of women report their company supports employees' efforts to balance work and family/personal responsibilities. In the case of US, 61% of women claim that they can meet career goals along with devoting sufficient time to family and kids.

KRI's research discloses that it is reassuring to realize that women can find a balance between work and family time since in India 66% of women report their employers support employees' efforts to balance work and family. Companies that sustain a cooperative environment for their women employees tend to gain endowed and hardworking employees thus firming place in the corporate world.

SUGGESTION & CONCLUSION:

The bottom line is – to manage it all stress-free is not possible at all times, but some efforts on a regular basis can help the working woman be happier at work and efficient at managing family demands as well as job expectations. It is important to reminisce that the responsibility of a well-balanced work life scenario lies as much with the working women as with the organizations they work in.

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