

Role of Stress on Mental Health of Women

Dr. Rekha

Abstract:

Women in India have proved their mettle in this work domain. Behind such success lies a big story of struggle and freedom in the traditional social archa. Besides changing roles of working women, they have maintained the traditional work ethos of household. This research is devoted towards finding the root cause of the existing problems faced by working women. It also aims at finding feasible solutions that have been practiced elsewhere and needs to be adopted at other social fronts.

Key words:

Working Women, stress, Workplaces, Social Status, Working mothers.

INTRODUCTION:

WORKING WOMEN:

The Industrial Revolution in part was fuelled by the economic necessity of many women, single and married, to find waged work outside their home. Women mostly found jobs in domestic service, textile factories, and piece workshops. They also worked in the coal mines. For some, the Industrial Revolution provided independent wages, mobility and a better standard of living. For the majority, however, factory work in the early years of the 19th century resulted in a life of hardship.

Women in India have come a long way after independence. From just a skilled homemaker, women today have acquired skills and capabilities of not just being a homemaker but being at par with their male counterparts. This is the new generation of women, who wants to pursue their dream career. But this life is not a bed of roses for all.

More conflict arises with the working mother. One has to fulfill the demand at work followed by various demands at home. In today's scenario the husband and wife both work towards creating a balance with their work life as well as at home with their children. But it is still difficult for women as she has to play multiple roles of a cook, a family maid, a tutor, a nurse as well as cater to the demands of office work. This can leave a working woman stressed and anxious; more so if the family is not supportive. "My office is quite far from my home. By the time I get home my husband takes care of my children's studies and sometimes also prepares food. He gets time as his office is nearby and he reaches home early. If it was not for his support I would have left my job long time back", says a working professional.

WHAT IS STRESS:

We live in stressful times. We are holding down two or more jobs. We are putting up with heavy job loads and unreasonable demands. We are swallowing outrage and frustration with unfair situations and irrational superiors because we cannot afford to be laid off or fired. Or we have already been laid off and we are struggling to find another job. Or we have given up and are coping with unemployment. Outside strains like these are called **stressors**. Stressors are the barely-tolerable pressures that bring us unhappiness and, eventually, disease. Some people hardly seem to be affected by stressors. They maintain a sense of perspective and a sense of humour. They remain calm in the midst of adversity and catastrophe. Other people are overwhelmed by a lesser number and intensity of stressors and slide downhill, losing relationships, jobs, and eventually their mental and physical health. The physiological and psychological responses to situations or events that disturb the equilibrium of an organism constitute stress.

While there is little consensus among psychologists about the exact definition of stress, it is agreed that stress results when demands placed on an organism cause unusual physical, psychological, or emotional responses. In humans, stress originates from a multitude of sources and causes a wide variety of responses, both positive and negative. Despite its negative connotation, many experts believe some level of stress is essential for well-being and mental health.

Some researchers have revealed that mothers who return to work after their baby is born risk causing serious damage to the child's prospects in later life. Such children are more likely to do worse at school, become unemployed and to suffer mental stress than youngsters whose mothers stay at home to bring them up. The findings from the Institute for Social and Economic Research are a severe blow to the Government, which has used the tax and benefit system to encourage mothers to work while stripping away tax breaks such as the Married Couple's Allowance. They are an endorsement of the instincts of thousands of women who either give up work or drastically cut down their job commitments to devote most of their time to raising a young child

According to the study, the impact of having a full-time working mother on a child's education is similar to growing up in a single-parent family. If a mother returns to work, say the researchers, the child is 20 per-cent less likely to get an A-level. They also reject the idea that a child is helped if the father stays at home, showing that his absence has little effect on the child's educational success. The research, published yesterday by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, followed the lives of 1,263 young people across all social groups who were born in the 1970s.

Researchers attempted to allow for other factors such as income, the parents' education and family break-up, and made comparisons of the performance of brothers and sisters. It found that the

children between one and five whose mothers worked for the longest periods tended to have lower educational attainment, greater risk of unemployment as a young adult, and a greater risk of psychological distress. In only one field were the children better off than most others: Daughters of working mothers were less likely to become teenage mothers themselves. The findings showed that the average mother during the 1970s and early 1980s worked for 18 months full-time before her child was five. Nearly two thirds of their children, 64 per cent, achieved at least one A-level or equivalent qualification. However, among mothers who worked for a longer period - 30 months and over before their child was five - only 52 per cent of the children achieved one A-level pass. The likelihood of unemployment rose from seven to nine per cent for those whose mothers had worked full-time, and the chance of psychological stress went up from 23 per cent to 28 percent.

Part-time work had much less damaging effects on children. The child's chance of passing an A-level fell by six per cent, but there was no evidence of other harm. Fathers who worked full-time had a similar impact on their children's development to mothers who worked part-time. But their children were less likely than others to be unemployed later in life and less likely to show signs of mental distress. Study author Professor John Ermisch said increases in family income were positive for children and could offset the damage of a full-time working mother. 'The large proportion of employed mothers with young children who are in part-time jobs is evidence that many mothers already prefer this option. 'But the Department for Education and Employment dismissed the findings, claiming that the development of childcare improves the educational chances of children of working mothers.

It said a study of more than 2,000 children had 'shown that quality pre-school and child-care has a positive impact on children's education'. 'This report is based on children born 30 years ago when there was little quality child-care and nursery education. The Government has changed that by creating the largest ever expansion of childcare. Meanwhile, a U.S. study has found that growing up in a clean home can boost youngsters' exam grades and even the salaries they earn as adults. The study of 3,400 volunteers over 25 years found that the length of time a child stayed in education and their future earnings was directly linked to the hygiene in their homes.

OTHER COMMON ISSUES:

Working mothers still perform most of the household chores, while childcare costs can eat up much of their wages. Even when both parents are working, the responsibility of care for sick children usually falls on the mother. Stress loads are high for working mothers. Women's access to jobs may

once have been a political issue, but in today's tough economic climate, working is now a necessity for most mothers. The bulk of families can no longer afford to live on one wage. Despite women's greater participation in the workforce, most men have yet to increase their share of domestic duties. This means that the majority of working mothers are also responsible for housework and looking after their children.

STRESS LOADS ARE HIGH FOR WORKING MOTHERS:

Recent survey in a health magazine reported that managing the dual roles of mother and worker is extremely hard. Findings include:

- Over 60 percent of working mothers feel they take out their stress on their families.
- Close to half of all working mothers would prefer to be full-time mothers, while around one fifth would like to work from home.
- Just four percent of working mothers would elect to work full-time if they had the choice.
- Nearly eight out of 10 working mothers would quit their jobs if they could.

HOUSEWORK IS STILL CONSIDERED AS 'WOMAN'S WORK'

Various Researches indicates that married women with children are worse off than ever before, which is why they are initiating divorce in higher numbers and having fewer children. Some of the findings include:

- Working mothers still perform most of the household chores.
- Full-time mothers and women who work full-time have similar working hours.
- Working mothers work more hours (paid and unpaid) than working fathers.
- Mothers who work part-time have the longest working hours of all.
- Most divorces are initiated by women.

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