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Handling Workplace Challenges through Life Skill Approach

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Abstract

Working women in India are faced with lot more challenges than their counterparts in the other parts of the world. They have to handle harassment's at their work place, sometimes just over look things to ensure that their job is not jeopardized in anyway. The biggest challenge a woman is to face is from own self also. Many times she feels stretched between family and work, it is she who works for longer hours in home also to take care of needs of all family members. In case of married working women is they are not allowed by family members to go for business tour. Gender discrimination is another problem faced by women in case of pay. Even women professional are in high position in their office, they have to return from office in correct time, cook, clean and look after their family affairs. This makes them more stress and leads to some health problems. Another most difficult problem faced by working women who have small children is they forced to leave their child in daycare or in hands maid on whom they have little faith. This creates more tension in them and less concentrate on their work. This research is to find out more challenges faced by working women and how do they handle the work place stresses. One hundred and sixty women working at Panchkula were judged for handling stress using questionnaire. The results revealed that among mental, physical and emotional stress, respondents felt mental stress the most followed by emotional and then physical stress. Majority of the respondents felt need of creating strong support network system and communication for keeping stress at bay.

Keywords: Working women, Workplace, Challenges, Life skill approach

1. Introduction

India's economy has undergone a substantial transformation since the country's independence in 1947. Agriculture now accounts for only one-third of the gross domestic product (GDP), down from 59 percent in 1950, and a wide range of modern industries and support services now exist. In spite of these changes, agriculture continues to dominate employment, employing two-thirds of all workers. India faced economic problems in the late 1980s and early 1990s that were exacerbated by the Persian Gulf Crisis. Starting in 1992, India began to implement trade liberalization measures. The economy has grown-the GDP growth rate ranged between 5 and 7 percent annually over the period and considerable progress has been made in loosening government regulations, particularly restrictions on private businesses. Different sectors of economy have different experiences about the impact of the reforms. In a country like India, productive employment is central to poverty reduction strategy and to bring about economic equality in the society. But the results of unfettered operation of market forces are not always equitable, especially in India, where some groups are likely to be subjected to disadvantage as a result of globalization. Women constitute one such vulnerable group. Since the times immemorial, worth of the work done or services rendered by women has not been recognized. India is a multifaceted society where no generalization could apply to the entire nation's various regional, religious, social, and economic groups. Nevertheless, certain broad circumstances in which Indian women live affect the ways they participate in the economy. Indian society is extremely hierarchical with virtually everyone ranked relative to others according to their caste (or caste-like group), class, wealth, and power. This ranking even exists in areas where it is not openly acknowledged, such as certain business settings. Though specific customs vary from region to region within the country, there are different standards of behavior for men and women that carry over into the work environment. Women are expected to be chaste and especially modest in all actions that may constrain their ability to perform in the workplace on an equal basis with men. Another related aspect of life in India is that women

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are generally confined to home thus restricting their mobility and face seclusion. As in many other countries, working women of all segments of Indian society faces various forms of discrimination including sexual harassment.

Even professional women find discrimination to be prevalent: two-thirds of the women in one study felt that they had to work harder to receive the same benefits as comparably employed men.

2. Methodology

Present study was carried out in Panchkula district. Primary data One hundred and sixty women working in government institutions served as sample for the study. Information on their ecological profile was gathered using an interview schedule. A self structured and pre tested interview schedule was given to the respondents to judge the stresses they are experiencing and how do they handle those stresses. Eight point questionnaire was used to judge the quantum of stress faced by respondents. Frequency and percentages were calculated to arrive at results.

Secondary data Reviews 's were collected from various journals, magazines like Journal of Applied Psychology, Journal of Human Resources, Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, Journal of Social Psychology, European Journal of Business & Management. The model used for study is conceptual model

3. Results and Discussion

Results revealed that majority of the respondents (80%) were in the age group of 30-40 years. Majority of them (85%) belonged to nuclear family and were having small size of family. 88% of working women were married and remaining were unmarried. Out of 88%, 78% were having children. 49% of respondents were having working experiences of 10-12 year. 43.5% of women spent half an hour for travelling. Working women in India are faced with lot more challenges than their counterparts in the other parts of the world. In India men do not share on most of the household chores, it is women who have to cook, clean the house, do the dishes, wash clothes, get their children ready for school etc. Men just took care of few chores that are to be dealt outside the house. So the major burden of running the family is on the shoulders of women. It was alright for women to handle all the chores as long as they were homemakers. Now with their increasing need for getting some income for the family, they have to work all the more harder. They have to take up a 9 to 5 job plus handle all the household chores that they handled as a homemaker. Men's role has not changed much. Women have started sleeping lesser than before because only when they wake up early they can cook for the family, get themselves ready for the job, get their children ready for the schools, so on an average, women lost 2 hours of sleep per day and up to 14 hours sleep per week. If they happened to work in a highly pressurized environment, then they will bring home their work and that cuts few more hours of sleep. It is not just about the reduced sleep, but such a lifestyle builds stress. This stress is passed on to the family and frustration level builds up in the family. They have to handle harassment's at their work place, sometimes just over look things to ensure that their job is not jeopardized in anyway. The biggest challenge a woman is to face is from ownself also. Many times she feels stretched between family and work, it is she who works for longer hours in home also to take care of needs of all family members. She has to go through emotional trauma also which goes unreported. Somewhere or the other every working mother

feels that she is supporting the family economically at the cost of childhood of her children. She feels guilty of not being with children many times when they actually need her. So to cover up that guilt she tries to spend quality time with her children forgetting her personal life. Women going to work are often subject to sexual harassment. Public transport system is overcrowded and men take advantage of the circumstances to physically harass women. Colleagues offer unwanted attention which can still be shaken off but a woman is placed in a difficult situation if the higher officer demands sexual favours. Table 1 shows type of stress faced by respondents. It is depicted that 75% respondents experienced physical stress in the form of weight loss or gain, headache, digestion related issues due to irregular eating pattern, muscle aches and pains and lack of sleep. More than 80 percent respondents faced emotional stress by feeling frustrated, irritable, nervous and angered along with having mood swings. Nearly 85% respondents were having mental stress by being confused, lack of interest, concentration and experienced forgetfulness. Among all the three types of stress, mental stress was at the highest level depicting that majority of respondents had been through mental disturbance of one or the other kind.

Table 1. Types of Stress Faced by Respondents N=160

Type of Stress	Frequency	Percentage
Physical: Experiencing weight loss or gain, headaches, fatigue, changes in sleep patterns, stomach problems, muscle aches, and tightness	120	75.00
Emotional: Feeling easily angered or frustrated; experiencing nervousness, irritability, and mood swings.	130	81.25
Mental: Feeling confused, demonstrating a lack of interest in favorite activities, loss of concentration, and forgetfulness.	136	85.00

Some commonly reported challenges faced by women at workplace are as below-

- **The Infamous Glass Ceiling**

Of late this is a term thrown around a lot with respect to women in the corporate sector. The imaginary ceiling up to which a woman can grow in her career is a concept that is taken for granted in the Indian society. There are several reasons why very few women make it to the top rungs of a firm – family commitments and gender discrimination in the workplace are just a couple. When two people are considered for the same role, many a time a male employee is chosen over a woman simply because they don't have as many strings attached like pregnancy and childcare.

- **Unequal Pay**

Women in a lot of firms are paid 20-30% less than their male counterparts, often without valid reasons. Again, the skepticism of a firm to invest in their women employees is very evident. "What if she resigns because she needs to take care of a parent or a child?" "What if she quits because her husband needs to move out of the city?" – these are just a couple of questions that run through the employer's mind. Unless women are paid the same as men for the same work, it is very difficult to retain female workforce.

- **Employee Security**

Many times women, especially in the BPO setup and in many IT firms are required to work for very long hours. There have been several cases of women employees of BPO organizations

being raped and murdered by cab drivers in the wee hours of the morning. Security is a factor that is extremely important when a woman makes a choice about working.

• **Sexual Harassment In The Workplace**

However, Indian women still face blatant discrimination at their workplaces. A major problem faced by the working women is sexual harassment at the work place. Further, women employees working in night shift are more vulnerable to such incidents. Nurses, for example, face this problem nearly every day. There is nothing that is done in hospitals to tackle and address the danger they face. Such blatant disregard of current Indian laws is one reason why sexual harassment at the workplace continues to increase. Today, almost all working women are prone to sexual harassment irrespective of their status, personal characteristics and the types of their employment. They face sexual harassment on way on transports, at working places, educational institutions, hospitals, at home and even in police stations when they go to file complaints. It is shocking that the law protectors are violating and outraging modesty of women. Public transport system is overcrowded and women become easy targets for physical harassment. Most of the women tend to be concentrated in the poor service jobs whereas men are in an immediate supervisory position, which gives them an opportunity to exploit their subordinate women. Suggestive statements made by bosses or peers, a careless brush of the backside, conversation with sexual overtones – these are not uncommon in corporate India. Organizations usually have a system in place for women employees to report sexual harassment and take legal action. However, there are two major issues here – inability to recognize sexual harassment in some cases, and fear of career setbacks if they report a superior.

• **Lack Of Support From Immediate Superiors**

Many a time women have a tough time dealing with immediate bosses who are male. This is due to factors like lack of sensitivity of the boss towards the employee’s health concerns or family commitments, and assumptions about her capabilities on the basis of her gender.

• **Lack Of Support From Family**

While this is not an issue directly at the workplace, if a woman doesn’t have the support of her family, it affects her performance at work. Spouses and parents in law sometimes are unwilling to share responsibilities at home and with respect to childcare. This makes it all the more difficult for women to focus on work. Typically, the orthodox mindset in the Indian society makes it difficult for a working woman to balance her domestic environment with the professional life. In some families, it may not be acceptable to work after six o’clock. Those families that do accept these working hours may experience considerable anxiety every day about a woman’s safety while traveling. So many issues affect a working woman because she is closely protected or watched by her family and the society. According to survey conducted by ASSOCHAM, on 1000 women professionals, around 80 per cent of the households expect their daughters-in-law to prioritize household requirements over the official work. Further, many of them are physically and psychologically abused, by their in-laws and husband but they do not complain or let others know about it, particularly if they have children.

• **Insufficient Maternity Leave**

Some Firms have women employee friendly policies for maternity leave. But in a lot of other companies, women are forced to either quit or cut short their break post childbirth, depending on their financial condition.

• **Rewarding Face Time As Opposed To Results At Work**

This is a predominant culture in the Indian workplace, where the more you are “seen”, the better you are rewarded. So while measures that give flexibility like working from home or flexi-hours work well for women, they lose out on a lot of recognition in spite of the hard work that they put in, simply because they are not physically present.

Table 2: Activities Adopted By Respondents for Keeping Away Stress N=160

S. No.	Activities	Frequency	Percentage
1	Identify your stressors	90	56.25
2	Manage your time	120	75.00
3	Organize	120	75.00
4	Prioritize	130	81.25
5	Ask for help	90	56.25
6	Say no	80	50.00
7	Avoid procrastination	100	62.50
8	Take time for yourself	80	50.00
9	Keep your perspective	100	62.50

Table 2 enlists various activities adopted by respondents for keeping away stress. Majority of the respondents found prioritizing activities as a tool to avoid stress followed by organizing the activities and managing time as an aid to avoid stress. Keeping one’s perspective, avoiding procrastination followed by asking for help were taken up by respondents for avoiding stressful situations. It can further be highlighted from the table that identifying stressors, saying no and taking time for oneself are few other activities that are adopted by more than half of the respondents.

Life Skill Approach in Handling work Related Stress

- **Self-awareness** – The ability to recognize your emotions and their impact while using gut feelings to guide your decisions.
- **Self-management** – The ability to control your emotions and behavior and adapt to changing circumstances.
- **Social awareness** – The ability to sense, understand, and react to other’s emotions and feel comfortable socially.
- **Relationship management** – The ability to inspire, influence, and connect to others and manage conflict.

Table 3: Life Skill Approach in Handling work Related Stress N=160

S. No.	Activities	Frequency	Percentage
1	Create a strong support network	140	87.50
2	Get professional guidance	50	31.25
3	Burnout	100	62.50
4	Admit it	90	56.25
5	Take care of yourself	136	85.00
6	Nurture your relationships at work and beyond	110	68.75
7	Take a break	90	56.25
8	Draw the line	100	62.50
9	Make time for fun	100	62.50
10	Communicate	130	81.25
11	Reclaim your power by making a plan	140	87.50

Respondents felt that making a plan is the best possible solution for handling stress. Sharing the stress in network or support system was opted by more than 87 % respondents. Taking care of oneself and communication are other good life skill approach techniques appreciated by more than 80% respondents. Importance of nurturing relationship with others beyond work also or creating support system of friends, recreation, fun time with them, burnout and drawing line between work and own time were other approaches that respondents agreed for being stress free. Professional guidance was not recommended by more than one-third of the respondents.

4. Conclusion

Policies and legal mechanisms alone cannot help in curbing the problems faced by women at work place - the overall attitude and acceptance level of the people of needs to change. Just letting women work outside home does not mean that society treats men and women equally. The issues and problems that women face in their workplaces should be put to an end and then only it can be said that men and women have equal status. Although there are various laws that are made for protection of women even in workplace but due to lack of proper implementation and interpretation of law, it has not been quite effective in protecting women from the crimes and inequality in the workplace. Organizations are going out of their way to ensure they provide safe work environment for their women employees, and are also putting up policies to ensure the women feel motivated to work and continue their career, even after child birth.

5. Recommendations

There are five key skills that are need to master in order to raise emotional intelligence and manage stress at work.

- Realize when stressed, recognize particular stress response, and become familiar with sensual cues that can rapidly calm and energize you. The best way to reduce stress quickly is through the senses: through sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. But each person responds differently to sensory input, so you need to find things that are soothing to you.
- Stay connected to internal emotional experience so you can appropriately manage own emotions. Your moment-to-moment emotions influence your thoughts and actions, so pay attention to your feelings and factor them into your decision making at work. If you ignore your emotions you won't be able to fully understand your own motivations and needs, or to communicate effectively with others.
- Recognize and effectively use nonverbal cues and body language. In many cases, what we say is less important than how we say it or the other nonverbal signals we send out, such as eye contact, facial expression, tone of voice, posture, gesture and touch. Your nonverbal messages can either produce a sense of interest, trust, and desire for connection—or they can generate confusion, distrust, and stress. You also need to be able to accurately read and respond to the nonverbal cues that other people send you at work.
- Develop the capacity to meet challenges with humor. There is no better stress buster than a hearty laugh and nothing reduces stress quicker in the workplace than mutually shared humor. But, if the laugh is at someone else's expense, you may end up with more rather than less stress.
- Resolve conflict positively. Resolving conflict in healthy, constructive ways can strengthen trust between people and

relieve workplace stress and tension. When handling emotionally-charged situations, stay focused in the present by disregarding old hurts and resentments, connect with your emotions, and hear both the words and the nonverbal cues being used. If a conflict can't be resolved, choose to end the argument, even if you still disagree.

Policies and legal mechanisms alone cannot help in curbing the problems faced by women at work place - the overall attitude and acceptance level of the people of needs to change. Just letting women work outside home does not mean that society treats men and women equally. The issues and problems that women face in their workplaces should be put to an end and then only it can be said that men and women have equal status. Although there are various laws that are made for protection of women even in workplace but due to lack of proper implementation and interpretation of law, it has not been quite effective in protecting women from the crimes and inequality in the workplace. Organizations are going out of their way to ensure they provide safe work environment for their women employees, and are also putting up policies to ensure the women feel motivated to work and continue their career, even after child birth. The UN Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 at Beijing, recognizes and also acknowledged that sexual Harassment is a serious problem and has categorized it as gender discrimination and a form of gender based violence. Most developed and developing countries are a signatory to it. This puts the onus on the employers to provide a safe and healthy workplace to all its employees. To accomplish this, the employers deploy various policies. Few of them are listed below

- Education campaign for women employees about their rights.
- Training for managers and others in workplaces including acceptable and professional workplace behavior, and diversity training.
- Forming a complaints committee, which will keep the privacy of the employee complaining and investigate the complain independently.
- Creating appropriate work conditions to ensure that there is no hostile environment towards women.
- Ensuring women do not work late hours, except in secure situations.
- Ensuring participation of women at all level of management.
- Providing safe pickup and drop facility in odd hours.
- Providing adequate maternity leaves.
- Providing day care facilities for working mothers.
- Retention of performance ratings - this means that organizations secure the performance ratings of women during maternity leave.

Organizations need to understand that unless they put in genuinely effective measures that will encourage women to work with little hassle, not just the companies, but Indian economy as a whole will take a big hit. Counsellor should be appointed by Organization for understanding more about problems of Working Women. Administrators need to create a climate where employees do not fear bringing up a family. Managers can provide a supportive environment that permits flexibility in schedules, telecommuting options, personal time off, onsite child care, and other family-focused program. Internal social network (forum, blog, mentor, coaches) for working parents. Wellness/resource room (for meditation, prayer, back-up child care Thus, organizations need to formulate guidelines for the management of WFCs since they

are related to job satisfaction and performance of the employees. Further the research should be conducted on illiterate people. Additional research is also needed to compare the both men and women because experiences may be differ with regard to work and family balances and also helps to find out more consequences of work and family conflict. In order to attain in-depth understanding of one's work and family life, researchers has to study multiple perspectives such as job stress, quality of life, mental health and work demand

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