

LIFE SATISFACTION AND STRESS AMONG WORKING WOMEN AND HOUSEWIVES

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Abstract

In India, especially in urban areas an increase in female employment outside the home has occurred during the last few decades. This has greatly increased the number of multiple role women. A working woman may face difficulties in attempting to fulfill the demands of both worlds, at home and outside, while a housewife may feel tired and irritated with her household chores and financial dependence. All these may cause stress in these two groups and may affect their life satisfaction. The present study was undertaken to examine and compare the level of life satisfaction and stress among working women and housewives. Altogether 80 married working women and housewives whose age ranged from 25 to 40 years were randomly selected from Moradabad city. Alam Life Satisfaction Scale was used to see the level of satisfaction among the two groups of women whereas Singh Personal Stress Source Inventory was administered on the subjects to examine their level of stress. It was found that magnitude of life satisfaction was significantly higher among working women whereas housewives were significantly better in terms of the level of stress. Incompatibility between work and family life disturb the thought process of working women that is manifested as higher stress among them.

Key words: Life Satisfaction, Stress, Working Women, Housewives, Multiple roles

Introduction

There is no doubt that we are in the midst of a great revolution of in the history of women. Today Indian womanhood is marching towards liberty and equality. The forces of urbanization, education and employment have provided women new avenues to express themselves. In India, especially in urban areas an increase in female employment outside

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the home has occurred during the last few decades. They have come out of their four walls of their homes in search of economic gain as well as fulfillment of their desires and hopes. This has greatly increased the number of multiple role women. A working woman may face difficulties in attempting to fulfill the demands of both worlds, at home and outside. The consequent outcome is that work for majority of Indian women becomes a source of conflict with the spouse and other members of the family and a doubt and guilt about one's role as a wife/mother. This, in turn, leads to a number of stresses among working women. On other hand, majority of Indian women still worked within the framework of the family system as housewives. They also feel tired and irritated with their household chores and financial dependence. All these may cause stress in these two groups of women and may affect their life satisfaction.

Stress is defined as an organism's total response to environmental demands or pressures. Stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that "demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize" (R.S. Lazarus). It is what we feel when we think we've lost control of events. Stress is therefore a negative experience. It is not an inevitable consequence of an event. It depends a lot on people's perception of the situation. An agent, condition or other stimulus that causes stress to an organism is called stressor. Stress tend to raise the level of adrenaline and cortisol in the body which leads to increase in the blood pressure, heart rate, respiration and puts more physical stress in our body. Stress risk factors can be found in hypertension, chronic fatigue syndrome, coronary artery disease, mental disorders and a range of other illnesses. Factors for stress related illnesses are a mix of personal, interpersonal and social variables. People who are dependent on others (children or elderly) or who are socially disadvantaged (due to gender, caste, religion and education level or similar factors) are at greater risk of developing stress-related illnesses. These factors include lack or loss of control over one's physical environment and lack or loss of social support networks. Other factors include feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, extreme fear or anger and distrust of others.

The last decade has seen a dramatic increase in research on the construct of subjective well being. Research has identified two broad categories of subjective well being: an affective component and a cognitive component, which is referred to life satisfaction (Diener, 2005). When assessed, these components of subjective well being are at least moderately correlated (Chamberlan, 2003). Generally, the life satisfaction component of subjective well being has received less attention (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin, 2001). Life

satisfaction frequently forms a separate factor and correlates with predictor variables in a unique way; it seems worthwhile to separately assess this construct. Life satisfaction refers to a judgmental process in which individuals assess the quality of their lives on the basis of their own criteria. A comparison of one's perceived life circumstances with a self-imposed standard or set of standards is presumably made, and to the degree that conditions match these standards, the person reports high life satisfaction. Therefore, life satisfaction is a conscious cognitive judgment of one's life in which the criteria for judgment are up to the person. In other words life satisfaction means person's global judgment of his life, based on comparison of life circumstances to one's standards.

Mohan (2006) studied the psychological correlates of role stress in working women belonging to different professional groups. Finding revealed that total role stress was experienced most by nurses followed by bank employees. University and college teachers experienced least role stress. Doctors experienced maximum inter role distance while it was minimum among gazetted officers, researchers, university and college teachers. Role inadequacy stress was experienced most by nurses, bank employees and researchers. Nalwa (2007) studied the job stress and job satisfaction in professional and non professional working women. The relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction was found to be significantly associated with the professional qualifications of the women. Professional working women experienced greater work related stress than non-professional working because of the expectations of the former were much higher than those of the latter. Kumar & Tripathi (2003) compared three groups of working women, i.e., gazetted officers, bank employees and school teachers, on the types of role stresses experienced by them. School teachers were found to be lower on all kinds of role stresses in comparison to both gazetted officers and bank employees. It was found that gazetted officers scored significantly higher on all the dimensions of role stress.

Newberry, Weissman and Myers (1980) assessed the psychiatric states and social adjustment of married working women and housewives. There were no significant differences in psychiatric symptoms. Working women differed from housewives in their attitude towards work and home. Housewives suffered from greater 'work impairment', feeling of inadequacy, disinterest and work maladjustment than working women. Gupta and Murthy (1984, 2004) carried out a study to analyze role conflict and coping strategies of Indian women. The results indicated that role conflict was a reality for both working and non-working women but it was higher among women with a heterogeneous workload than a homogenous workload. The 'self versus homemaker' type of role conflict was the

highest, while the 'mother versus working women' type of conflict was high among employed mothers. The 'homemaker' role provided the least satisfaction while the 'self' role provided maximum satisfaction. S.S.Nathawat and A. Mathur (2003) conducted a study to compare marital adjustment and subjective well-being in Indian-educated housewives and working women. Finding revealed significantly better marital adjustment and subjective well-being for the working women than for the housewives. Working women reported higher scores on general health, life satisfaction and self esteem measures and low scores on hopelessness, insecurity and anxiety, compared with the housewives, although the housewives had lower scores on negative affect than working women. Singh and Mishra (2002) conducted a study to identify occupational stress and role conflict problems among working women belonging to the service sector. Significant differences were found between executives and assistants on such occupational stress dimensions as role overload, role ambiguity, and role conflict, responsibility for persons, intrinsic impoverishment and low status.

On one hand stress provides the outlet to express our talent and energies and helps us to pursue happiness while on the other hand it causes illness and mellows down the strength. Distress generally produces unhappiness for the individual, in the sense that it causes uneasiness and discomfort, eustress leads to immense joy and happiness and is good for the individual. Too little or too much stress is bad. An optimal level of stress, varying from individual to individual, is good and necessary. A certain event being stressful or not depends on the perception or the appraisal of the event by the individual. Events which are perceived as being stressful are not restricted to those causing major upheavals in life. The cumulative effects of daily hassles of the life or mundane activities can be equally stressful. Against this backdrop, the present study was undertaken to examine and compare the level of life satisfaction and stress among working women and housewives. The following hypotheses were proposed:

1. Level of Stress among working women will be significantly higher than the housewives.
2. Magnitude of life satisfaction among working women will be significantly different from housewives.

Method

Sample: Altogether 80 married working women and housewives whose age ranged from 25 to 40 years were randomly selected from Moradabad city. Out of the sample 40 were married working women and 40 were housewives. Only bank employees, school teachers,

nurses, and government employees were included in the working women sample. Likewise only graduate women were included in the housewives sample.

Tools: For assessing stress of women a 35 items Singh Personal Stress Source Inventory was used. The Inventory was developed by Arun Kumar Singh (2004). Similarly, for examining the magnitude of life satisfaction, a 60 items Life Satisfaction scale by Q.G. Alam and Ramji Srivastava (2001) was administered on the sample.

Results and Discussion

Table -1: Mean, SD and t-value of Stress Scores of Working Women and Housewives

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Working women	40	68.57	16.27	6.021**
Housewives	40	48.90	13.47	

** Significant at .01 level

Table -2: Mean, SD and t-value of Satisfaction Scores of Working Women and Housewives

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Working women	40	52.87	7.322	2.525*
Housewives	40	47.95	9.29	

* Significant at .05 level

From the results given in table 1, it appeared that there is substantial difference on level of stress between working women and housewives. The mean of stress scores were 68.57 and 48.90 respectively for working women and housewives. The results indicate that working women were found to be suffering from significantly higher level of stress than the housewives, as the difference between the two groups was also found statistically significant ($t= 6.021$). On the basis of results it could be said that work–family conflict had severe effect on working women, perhaps due to dual roles and responsibilities. Working women face difficulties in attempting to fulfill the demands of both worlds, at home and outside. Working women felt that their work created difficulty in their family roles performance. Employment had twofold consequences for women as it yields rewards as well as costs. Stress had become omnipresent in today’s women life. The social context in which most working women function in India seldom allows them to redefine and remodel their

marital roles ; they are essentially home makers with added responsibilities (Ramu,1989; Tripathi, 2006). Happy employees tend to store, evaluate and recall positive information while unhappy people become obsessed by the negative aspects of work and work environment. They also perceive themselves negatively. On the basis of this Judge and Locke (1993, 2003) have hypothesized and validated statistically, that dysfunctional thought processes cause stress in the person, and by implication, depression. This seems true for the working women of India. Thus, hypothesis presuming higher level of stress among working was found to be proved.

It was apparent from the results presented in the table-2 that magnitude of life satisfaction among working women was higher than housewives as the mean scores for life satisfaction were found to be 52.87 and 47.95 respectively for the working women and housewives. The difference between the two groups of women with regard to their level of life satisfaction was also statistically tested and found significant ($t= 2.525$). Life satisfaction was found better among working women than the housewives probably because of their financial independence, confidence and larger social interaction. It seems that the housewives feel tired and irritated with their household chores and financial dependence. Hence hypothesis of significant difference between the two groups of women with regard to their level of life satisfaction was also found to be proved.

Thus, it may be concluded that working women by and large suffer from higher level of stress than the housewives. Though working women faced with the task of juggling the roles of mother and employee but their life satisfaction is hardly affected due to their multiple roles. Housewives seem to be affected by their household chores and financial dependence that can be seen in the form of lower life satisfaction among them. The most important implication of the present study is the need to enhance the stress management for the working women. Quick stress relievers such as breathing exercises and cognitive reframing techniques as well as long term stress management strategies like a regular exercise, meditation, hobby and supportive social circle can relieve significant stress for the working women. The results of this study will also help the housewives to become aware of their problems, inner conflicts and to come out of it effectively.

This study attended a very limited part of the working women and housewives. There is a need to have more comprehensive and complete random studies covering larger aspects of the Indian working women and housewives.

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