

## IMPACT OF STRESS AMONG WOMEN EXECUTIVES PERTAINING TO ROLES – A STUDY IN CHENNAI

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### **Abstract:**

In an era of high technology speed and global competition stress has been found to be on an increasing trend . Stress at work place is related to the role performed by the employee in the organization and it is considered to be one of the important determinants of successful adjustment and subsequent performance of an employee. In today's highly competitive scenario women are found to be taking up managerial responsibilities which prompts them to balance multiple roles both at work and at home. This automatically gives rise to considerable amount of stress. This paper has a special focus on the different role stressors encountered by women executives and the coping strategies adopted by them, to deal with these stressors. The sample size of this study is determined to be 200 and convenience sampling method is adopted to collect the data. Results showed that women executives exercise more of proactive style of Approach Mode of Coping with Role Stress wherein they deal with Role Stress through own efforts, seeking help from significant others and using organizational resources to reduce role stress.

**Key words:** work stress, roles, stressors, women executives, coping strategies

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**INTRODUCTION:**

Women in the current scenario tend to be more career conscious and professional in their outlook. From the traditional women preferred jobs like nursing, teaching, clerical women also has started to have their attention executive jobs. The reasons that contribute to such a change are increase in women's education, changing socio-cultural values, increasing awareness and consciousness in women and the rise in economic independence. The working woman, regardless of whether she is married or single, faces higher stress levels. Women are found to be perform dual roles in the organization as well as at home. Hence, it is important to understand the role transition of women over the years and the challenges that they are facing in coping with the stress of handling multiple roles in organization.

Stress is associated with impaired individual functioning in the workplace. A number of aspects of working life have been linked to stress. Elucidating these causes has been imperative for it may have direct implications for the assessment of the demands on the physical, psychological and emotional well-being of the employees as stressors may lead to ill health, anxiety, dissatisfaction, irritation and depression amongst employees (Sparks et al., 2001) A survey in 2007 by Associated Chamber of Commerce and Industry of India also reported that work related stress and mental fatigue is affecting the Indian employees (www.assochem.org). In such an environment, it becomes the responsibility of the employing organizations and the individual to identify the causes of stress at the workplace and make efforts to reduce them for the effectiveness and efficiency of the individual and the organization itself.

Role stress is the stress experienced by the person because of their role (job) in a social system. They assume a role based on the expectation of the self and others at work place. Role has two subsystems: Role Space and Role Set. Any conflicts among these are referred to as role space conflict or stress. Role Space Stress has the following dimensions - Self-Role Distance, Intra-Role Conflict, Role Stagnation, Inter-Role Distance and Role Irrelevance. Role Set Stress has the following dimensions Role Ambiguity, Role Expectation Conflict, Role Overload, Role Erosion, Resource Inadequacy, Personal Inadequacy, Role Isolation, Result Inadequacy, Role Inadequacy and Challenge stress according to Pareek (1997).

In today's highly competitive and dynamic world, a certain amount of role stress is always present. Women executives need to cope effectively with role stress by gaining awareness, balance and they need to concentrate more in achieving control over the stressful situation. According to Pareek (1997); there are primarily two modes of dealing with stress. First is the, the Dysfunctional or Reactive or Avoidance Mode of Coping with Role Stress. This person adopts a behavior of aggression and blame, helplessness, denying the presence of stress or finding an explanation for it. Second mode of coping with role stress is the Functional / Proactive / Approach Mode of Coping with Role Stress. The approach mode is characterized by hope that things will improve, effort made by the subject will help to solve the situation, expectations that others will help, or asking for help in relation to stress, and jointly doing something about the problem.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW:

A Study by Jones, **Lawrence and Roberts (2007)** revealed the fact that role overload has displayed inconsistent relationships with many job attitudes, turnover intentions, and performance measures in studies of salespeople. According to **Khetarpal & Kochar (2006)**, the key stressors which affected maximum number of women were poor peer relations, intrinsic impoverishment and under-participation.

A research made by **Kartape et al (2006)** indicated that gender has a moderating role on the relationships between role ambiguity and self-efficacy, and role conflict and job satisfaction. **Aziz (2007)** in his research suggested that while designing and implementing any stress management program, the information technology organizations should ensure that they factor in the differences in stress patterns among female and male employees .

When analysing psychological aspect, it was noticed that increases in role overload were positively related to both depression and conflict (**Perry-Jenkins et al 2007**). **Culbreth et al 2005** in their study identified that Employees who have a belief, that the job matched their initial perceptions, and who were adequately trained, and that peer supervision was available, reduced role stress among the group . Turning to the impact of work-role characteristics on adjustment

domains, role novelty was positively correlated with work adjustment. Both role ambiguity and role conflict are negatively correlated with work adjustment according to a study made by **Michael & Mary, 2003**.

**Floyd & Lane (2000)** found that dissensus in managers' perceptions about the need for change created strategic role conflicts within individual managers and between managerial roles. Similarly, **Lui et al** in 2001 found that discrepancy of the role requirements leads to inter-role conflict

**Marginson (2006)** in his study found out that role ambiguity may be countered or avoided through the acquisition of clear information about expected role behaviours. The results showed that both role conflict and role ambiguity completely mediated the relationships between psychosocial support and role modeling with job attitudes (**Lankau et al 2006; Elloy et al 2001**).

The study by **Conner & Douglas (2005)**, whose implications included more flexible workplace rules for female executives to eliminate stress associated with work-family conflict as well as improved effectiveness of social support and person-organization fit based on individual bureaucratic orientation. On Coping with Role Stress and some psychosocial variables, **Vanden-Berg & Schalk (1997)** identified that role-related stress and work overload strongly affect well-being of the employees at work.

**Babin & Boles (1998)** suggested that role stress affected female service providers' job performance more negatively than it did to that of males', and that job satisfaction was related more highly to quitting intent among males. There has been research conducted to understand specifically the concept of Role Stress and women. It is found that Role involvements and conflicts are generally greater for working women than housewives, although full-timers differ greatly from part-timers and seem to be the most satisfied of the three groups. Also, multiple roles are associated with competing demands that can lead to role overload and the resulting strain.

**Tubre et al (2000)** found that role ambiguity was negatively related to performance, with a range of moderators such as job complexity and conscientiousness. **Fogarty et al (2000)** hypothesized that role stress was negatively related to professionalism. On the contrary, **Nygaard & Dahlstrom (2002)** presented alternative perspectives that examined the relationship between stress and performance. Their view frames role stressors as linear, negative antecedents to organizational outcomes. The authors contrast this perspective with theories that espouse triphasic, parabolic, and interactive influences of stressors on organizational outcomes.

### **NEED FOR THE STUDY:**

The role of women in the globalised economy has undergone a transition as they have shifted from their traditional preferred jobs like teaching and nursing to managerial jobs. The stress level that they experience in their respective jobs is also considered to be tremendous as they have to prove themselves competitive in par with men. Apart for this reason they are also expected to play multiple roles in their jobs to accomplish the organizational objectives effectively and efficiently. It is in this context that the need for the study arises since women executives need to adopt to suitable coping strategies to combat role stress.

### **SCOPE OF THE STUDY:**

Since this study has attempted to emphasise more on understanding certain role stresses which will have a psychological impact of women executives in their work arena, the study has a wider scope. It will be helpful for the women executives not only in Chennai but also to the women executives working in India as a whole. It can help understand the challenges that women face in their role, the coping mechanisms that women have in their role and in turn help in strengthening the role by gradually changing where required or learning new interventions.

### **HYPOTHESES:**

- H1: Coping Strategies adopted by women executives will have a positive influence on control of Role Stress.
- H2: Role Space Stress and its Dimensions will positively influence Avoidance and Approach mode of Coping with Role Stress.
- H3: Avoidance mode of Coping with Role Stress and its Dimensions by women



executives will positively influence Role Space Stress and Role Set Stress.

- H4: Approach mode of Coping with Role Stress and its Dimensions by women executives will positively influence Role Space, Role Set Stress.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The research design adopted for this study is descriptive. The study examines the various dimensions of role stress and coping ability of women executives with respect to role stress, and their typical mode of coping like functional or proactive approach and dysfunctional or reactive or avoidance approach, level of coping high or low, and the various sources of coping etc.

The study attempted to examine the types of role stress, coping ability of women executives with respect to Role Stress, and their Role Efficacy. The sample unit of the study comprises of women executives in the age group of 23-58 years. This age group has been selected because in this age group, individuals would have settled in their chosen vocation and career path. Initially the sample size of the study was considered to be 240 through pilot study but only 215 questions were returned out of which 15 were half filled. Therefore the final sample size of the study is arrived at 200. Sources for women in executive jobs who are employed in public sector and private sector enterprises. Convenience sampling technique was used.

The tests were administered in a group setup and were scored as per the scoring procedure described by Pareek (1997). Statistical software was used to compute the results of correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis (MRA).

### ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

Multiple regression analysis was done, taking Level of Stress as dependent variable and all the dimensions of Coping approaches as independent variables. There was no significance found between High Role Stress and Approach Coping and Avoidance Coping. From table 1 it can be inferred that 28% of Impulsive style of coping characterized by low internality and low

externality i.e. leaving everything to fate is explained by Low Role Stress. However, from the Beta values, it can be inferred that among all eight variables only Impunitive style ( $\beta = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) of coping significantly affects Low Role Stress.

**Table 1: Results of MRA between Level of Stress and Coping Styles**

Dependent Variable	Intercept	Beta (significant)	R <sup>2</sup>	t value
Low Role Stress	Impunitive	.45	.28	2.72*
Low Role Stress	Defensive	-0.83	0.24	2.06*
	Interpersistive	0.58	0.24	2.66*

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ,  $df = 199$ .

It is also inferred from table 1 that Defensive style of coping (.83) has negative Beta weight which means that executives who have low internality and low externality do not take efforts by themselves or from outside to resolve Low Role Stress. This is an avoidance strategy to deal with this Low Role Stress. It is also inferred from table 1, Interpersistive style of coping (.58) has positive Beta weight which means that executives who have high internality and high externality under low Role Stress will try to resolve low role stress through joint efforts by themselves and from outside to resolve low role stress. This is an approach strategy to deal with this Low Role Stress. Therefore Hypothesis 1 which states that Coping Strategies adopted by women executives will have a positive influence on control of Role Stress is partially sustained.

**Table 2: Results of MRA between Level of Coping and Role Stress**

Dependent Variable	Intercept	Beta (significant)	R <sup>2</sup>	t value
High Avoidance Coping	Self Role Distance	-0.70	0.34	2.09
	Resource Inadequacy	0.93	0.34	3.24

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$   $p < 0.1$ ,  $df = 199$

MRA was done taking High Approach Coping , Low Approach Coping and Low Avoidance

Coping. There was no significant difference found between High Approach Coping and Role Stress. There was no significant difference found between Low Approach Coping and Role Stress. There was no significance difference found between Low Avoidance Coping and ORS. MRA was done, taking High Avoidance Coping as dependent variable and all dimensions of Role Stress as Independent variables. From table 2, it can therefore be inferred that 34% Self Role Distance and Resource Inadequacy Stress is explained by all the High Avoidance CORS. However, from the Beta values, it can be inferred that among all ten variables only Self Role Distance ( $\beta = 0.70$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and Resource Inadequacy ( $\beta = 0.93$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) dimension of role stress significantly affect High Avoidance CORS. As it is evident from table 2 that Self Role Distance Stress (-.70) has negative Beta weight suggests that women Executives may experience a distance between self and their role and may resort to high avoidance CORS. Positive Beta weight suggests that women Executives may experience stress if they lack resources and may resort to High Avoidance CORS. Therefore under the influence of certain dimensions of role stress executives prefer a high level of avoidance mode to deal with role stressors. It is therefore be inferred that Hypothesis 2 is accepted which states that Role Space Stress and its Dimensions will positively influence Avoidance and Approach mode of Coping with Role Stress

**Table 3: Results of MRA between Dimensions of Coping with Role Stress and Organizational Role Stress.**

Dependent Variable	Intercept	Beta (significant)	R <sup>2</sup>	t value
Defensive	Inter Role Distance	-0.16	0.027*	2.33*
	Role Expectation Conflict	-0.14	0.021*	2.07*
	Role Space Stress	-0.14	0.019*	1.97*
Interpersistive	Role Erosion	0.15	0.023*	2.18*
	Role Overload	0.15	0.022*	2.18*
	Self Role Distance	0.17	0.029**	2.47**
	Role Space Stress	0.16	0.027**	2.37**
	Role Set Stress	0.14	0.021*	2.06*

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ,  $df = 199$

It is evident from table 3 that Role Space Stress (.16) and Role Set Stress (.14) which is



identified to have positive Beta weight suggests that women Executives may experience uncertainty if they lack a risk taking profile and cannot deal with the unexpected may resort to interpersistive style of taking responsibility on self. This is a approach style because in both Role Space Stress and Role Set Stress the executives expect both themselves and the Organization to resolve the conflicting demands within self, the Organizational role and the other roles that they play and the varied expectations of others within her role set.

**Table 4: Results of MRA between Dimension of Organizational Role Stress and Coping with Role Stress**

Dependent Variable	Intercept	Beta (significant)	R <sup>2</sup>	t value
Role Expectation Conflict	Defensive	-0.17	0.04	2.17*
Self Role Distance	Interpersistive	0.199	0.049	2.24*

\*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001, df= 199

When the data was treated to a MRA wherein dimensions of both the variables of organizational Role Stress and Coping with Organizational Role Stress were treated as both independent and dependent variables.

When Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) is done, taking Role Expectation conflict and Self Role Distance (dimension of Role Stress) as dependent variable and all eight dimensions of CORS as Independent variables it is inferred that 4.29% (R<sup>2</sup>: 0.04) of times Role Expectation Conflict is explained by all the eight dimensions of CORS. As can be seen from table 4, Defensive style of coping (-.17) is negative. Beta weight which suggests that executives, who have high internality and high externality, when feel stressed out because of conflicting expectations or demands of various role senders avoid aggression or blame with the help of defense mechanism. Probably because they always deny that there does exist some kind of stress, due to which they will never be able to resolve and satisfy conflicting expectations of various roles. Interpersistive style of coping (.199) has positive Beta weight which means that women executives who have high internality and high externality when feel stressed out because

of the conflicts between the self-concept and the expectations from the role as perceived by them are found to have joint efforts to resolve the problems. This means that women executives rather than rejecting self or role try to integrate with the role. They analyze various aspects of the role which cause self role distance and try to acquire skills which will help them bridge the gap. This is an approach strategy to deal with this stress.

Therefore hypotheses 3 which states that Avoidance mode of Coping with Role Stress and its Dimensions will influence Role Space Stress and Role Set Stress and hypothesis 4 which states that Approach mode of Coping with Role Stress and its Dimensions will positively influence Role Space, Role Set Stress are found to have marginal sustainenance.

### CONCLUSION:

On examining the relationship between Role Stress and Coping with Role Stress among women executives it is found that there is a significant negative correlation between Inter Role Distance (IRD) and Defensive (D) avoidance mode of Role Stress. It is also identified that there is a significant and positive correlation between Self role distance (SRD), Role Space Stress (Role Space) and Interpersistive (n) approach mode of RS. Women Executives, who have high internality and high externality, when feel stressed out because of conflicting expectations or demands of various role senders avoid aggression or blame with the help of defense mechanism. Probably because they always deny that there does exist any kind of stress, due to which they will never be able to resolve and satisfy conflicting expectations of various roles. Executives who have high internality and high externality when feel stressed out because of the conflicts between the self-concept and the expectations from the role as perceived by them try joint efforts to resolve the problems. This means these executives rather than rejecting self or role try to integrate with the role. Executives who have low internality and low externality when under low stress do not take efforts by themselves or from outside to resolve Low Role Stress. This is an avoidance strategy to deal with this Low Role Stress

Role Erosion Stress, Role Overload Stress and Self Role Distance Stress significantly affect Interpersistive style of Coping. Role Space Stress of ORS significantly affects Defensive style of

Coping. At times Role Erosion Stress, Role Overload Stress and Self Role Distance Stress suggests that women Executives may experience uncertainty if they experience that their role is becoming lack luster because of erosion, or it is bursting due to too much load and the executive perceives a distance between herself and her role the executive may resort to interpersistive style of taking responsibility on self and expect both themselves and the Organizational to resolve stress through rationalizing the demands of her role and helping her integrate with her organizational role. Women Executives may experience uncertainty if they lack a risk taking profile and cannot deal with the unexpected may resort to interpersistive style of taking responsibility on self. Most of the times, Self Role Distance and Resource Inadequacy Stress is explained by all the High Avoidance CORS.

It appears that executives in Coping with Organizational Role Stress prefer to use more of Approach Mode wherein all efforts, self-help; help from significant others and organizational help, is expected by the executives. This is a healthy sign which indicates that organizations if they help women executives to be more self reliant in resolving own role stress can have fruitful benefits.

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