



Challenges and Issues of Working Woman in 21st Century

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Abstract:

Hardship of woman in every stage of life is always difficult to categorize as she is the only entity in the world that is facing such a changing phase in her life like birth as a girl child, becoming wife and finally becoming mother. In the era of 21st century, woman wants be equal opportunities as man and foremost challenge is how to balance work and home. Gender bias, unequal pay, mental and physical harassment, insufficient leave are some of the key issues of working woman at the workplace. Apart from all these, woman has to deal with almost all family duties like duty as mother, duty as wife, house hold and daily routine as well as many social duties. The main intention of this paper is to focus on such key areas and challenges faced by working woman in today's era and to put the psychological view of the issues, chllalenges and role of society to help for balancing the life of working woman in psychological, physical, social and mental aspects.

Keywords: Hardship, Social Duties, Working Woman

1. Introduction: Scenario of Working Women

Women are the backbone of the society. ^[5]She plays a vital role in the economic development of the country and her contribution is as equal as their male counterparts. ^[4]Without active participation of women in various national, social, economic and political activities, the progress of the country will be stagnant. Traditionally, Indian women had been Home makers but in 21st Century, due to higher education, better awareness and increasing financial demands of family, women also go out and choose careers. Although Indian women have started working outside their homes, but still there are several issues and challenges that working women face today. ^[5]Sometimes they are not treated equally in their workplace. They do not get the same benefits as that of male employees too. Gender bias, unequal pay, security, mental and physical harassment, lack of proper family support, insufficient maternity leave are considered as major issues and challenges that working woman faces nowadays.

The working and social scenario in today's era is far different than that of twenty-thirty years ago. Advances in technology plus evolving work and the role of family for women in India have changed the contribution to the business environment of 21st century. The financial demands for Indian families are rising day by day. Higher cost of living, increasing expenses on education of children, increasing cost of housing properties in India force every family in India to look for ways and means of increasing household

income. As a result, women in India, who were mostly known as homemakers, are forced to go for jobs and take the challenges that were considered only suitable for men such as working in night shifts in call centres or BPOs. Today women are giving their best and active contribution in all the male-dominated fields such as sports, medical, law, military, academics, politics, bank, top level corporate positions etc. In recent era working women can spend less time in household works than they did thirty years ago.

Moreover, Indian working women are facing lot more challenges than their counterparts in other parts of the world. In India, still men are considered as the primary winner and boss of the family. Although working women handle their professional life in facing competition and challenges at work place and personnel life in managing household work, handle children, family, cooking, social responsibilities are still considered as the duty of women only. They have to take up a full day job plus handle all household activities that they handled as homemaker. Due to such multitasking efforts of woman increased stress becomes by-product for her. Sometimes, the relationship with her Saul mate becomes unbalanced, if proper balancing act is not delivered in both personal and professional life.

If we consider women's role in corporate environment, then sometimes they have to bring their work at home also and it cuts few more hours of sleep. It is not just about the reduced sleep, but this type of lifestyle creates stress in working women and it directly affects her family. ^[1]Waking up early, ignoring her health issues and get all the stuffs ready for children and her husband is big practical challenge. So on an average, women have lost 2 hours of sleep per day and up to 14 hours sleep per day. Many Indian families are still living as joint families along with their in-laws and parents. This adds more stress to women because they have to handle them and please all the family members of her husband.

^[5]The belief of male superiority in the society creates several hurdles for women at their workplace. Women discover that they must be much better than their male colleague to reach at the top. When she achieves that top position in the company, again it is much difficult for women to work with male employees. Also because of social and psychological tradition in the society, the women colleagues too don't lend support to their own woman boss. Working in such conditions inevitably put much greater strain on women than man. These types of problems make women less eager to progress in their career. It has been observed that the family responsibility expands the working women have to change their job, select part time job or leave the job. This situation creates unnecessary stress for losing their job.

Generally women are more hesitant in financial investments. They are more cautious about money. There is a saying for women: "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world". Saving is the habit of women. In earlier days also, when women were only homemakers, they were used to save money for emergencies as well as for future planning. In those days, women did not have knowledge of various investment outlets. But in 21st Century, the working women have become more aware about the financial investments and they have the great potential to bring a positive change in socio economic conditions of the country. Today's working women invest in various investment avenues like shares, debentures, mutual funds, commodities etc.

2. Challenges for working women in India:

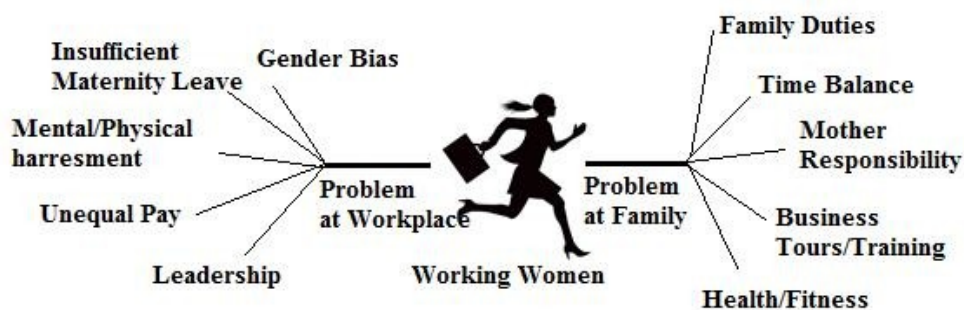


Figure 1 – Challenges faced by Working Women

The above figure 1 state the major challenges faced by the working women in 21st century and they are discussed as follows.

2.1 Gender Biases

Gender biases begin to take place at a very early stage for Indian women. It is very difficult to accept the fact that women are also capable of working shoulder to shoulder with men. Indian society supports male dominance in all major, important and challenging tasks whereas women are considered to be weak and only capable of bearing lesser work pressure at the work place. The potential and capabilities of Indian women have always been underestimated in regard of their recruitments, salary issues and promotions. In many families, even if woman is working, her all salaries are given to her husband, father-in-law or elder member of the family and in this way, her independence is on the superficial level ^[7]. Though woman is working, still she has to depend on somebody.

2.2 Balancing Personnel and Professional life

It is a very big challenge for Indian working women to maintain a balance between their work and family. She has the responsibility to fulfil all the expectations of family members and particularly from kids. In India, the career and professional aspirations are still considered as secondary for women. In majority of the families, there is a lack of emotional and moral support given to the working women. And at the same time, there are many official expectations and deadlines that women have to fulfil to continue their job. In this type of dual roles to become perfect in all tasks, the working women fill very much stressed in her day to day life ^[7].

2.3 Mental and Physical Harassment

In order to achieve success in corporate sector, women feel that they must do better than their male colleague. This leads to higher expectations and efficiency by their boss. This type of condition creates strain for woman. Insufficient Maternity leave is also the cause of stress for working women as they have to take care of their baby as well as achieve the targets given to them in office. Indian working women also feels unsecure at their workplace. There are many cases where women subordinates are asked for sexual favours from their male superiors in return of the promotion and growth granted to them. The male superiors show that they have done some mercy or extra favour that should be repaid with much of a regard from women. In corporate sector, usually women are treated as weak and vulnerable and hence male colleagues and superiors think that they can take any advantage of their female colleagues and subordinates ^[7].

2.4 Negligible Personnel Space

Indian working women have to maintain a balance between their families and career if they want to achieve independence and success in their lives. In this hassle, women get restless. They try to increase their working power for their work which makes them lacking in sleep. They gradually feel frustrated and helpless because no one is there to help and support them. They sometimes feel isolated and due to this, they have to face many emotional and psychological problems. Insomnia and depression are two major mental problems that Indian working women usually suffer from. They feel an immense lack of personnel space. They have no time for themselves. They feel unable to share their feelings with anyone because they know that no one will understand them. Under this psychological pressure, they are left with only two options: either to give up the job or to accept the depression as a part of their working life ^[7].

3. Issues

- i. Insufficient maternity leave is a major issue that is faced by a working mother. This affects their performance at work as well as their personnel lives.

- ii. Lack of proper family support is another issue for working women. The household work is still considered as a duty of women only. They resist women for working till late in office which affects the performance of the women and their promotion.
- iii. Poor security is another issue for working women at workplace. Women working in corporate sectors and other private organizations mostly face the various crimes at their workplace because of lack of security provided to them.
- iv. Unequal pay is another issue for working women. It has been observed that women are paid low salaries as compared to male employees. Although women prove themselves more efficient than male employees, most of the time they are not paid equally. This creates depression and demotivation in them which also affects her personnel life.
- v. Due to dual roles to perform, working women cannot give proper time to their children in their various activities and school functions. This also creates stress in women.
- vi. Despite of her full dedication towards her profession, still their job priority is considered as secondary in the family and society. In today's time also, it is expected that women's primary duty is only to handle their family and children. This creates de-motivation towards career development^[5].
- vii. If working women have to go for business tour or any training programs for their career development, then they have to take permission from the husband & family members. They also have to do proper arrangements for their children. But this is not the case for men in India.

4. Psychological Aspects of the Problem

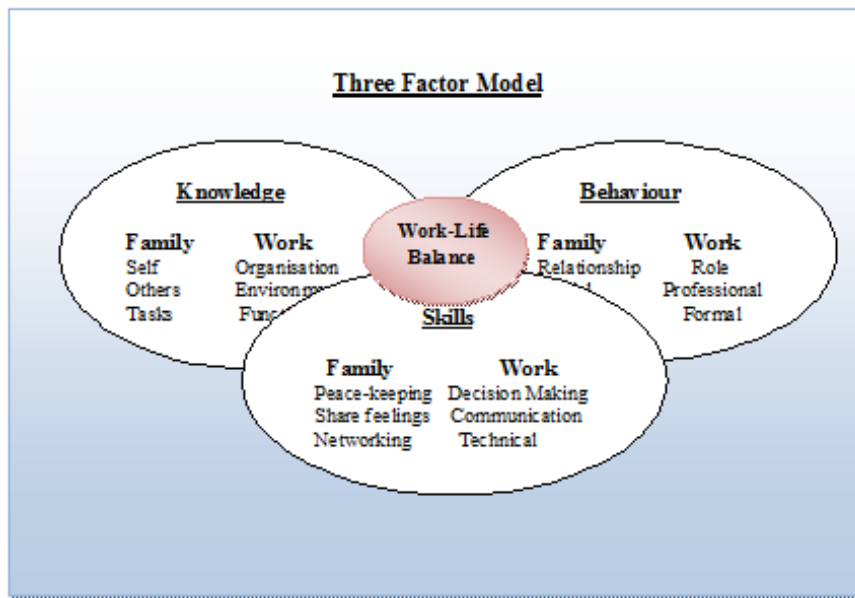
It has been observed from the analysis that majority of working women are suffering from stress caused by role conflict or multiple roles. They have to perform multiple roles like managing work at their workplace, manage family and children demands, fulfil social responsibilities etc. Working women face a big dilemma in managing work-family conflicts. Working women with rigid schedules report more family difficulties than working women with flexible schedules. This can cause many health issues such as frequent headache, hypertension, obesity etc.^[5].

By analytical study, it is found that the stress level in working women increase in direct proportionally to their age. This may be because of the additional responsibilities imposed on elder women both in family as well as at workplace. Also the number of working hours affects the stress level of working women. This may be due to the nature of work they undergo which leads to physical and mental tiredness. The childcare arrangement is also another aspect of creating stress in working women. Working mothers have to make proper arrangements for the care of their children and their daily activities which again create stress in them^[2].

These all types of stress creating problems can be managed if the institution provides a helping hand for working women in the form of superior's support, subordinate's support and proper number of paid or unpaid leaves. Also some stress relief strategies like spending time with family, yoga and meditation, entertainment and music etc. can help working women to reduce their stress level.

5. Tips of Work life Balance

In the words of Jim Bird^{[3][8]}, CEO of worklifebalance.com, work-life balance does not mean equal balance between professional and personal life. It is careful synchronisation of an individual's varied pursuits that may include family, work, leisure, social obligations, health, career and spirituality. While some of the pursuits need greater attention, others may require lesser focus. Striking a fine balance by prioritising these human quests will result in work-life balance.



The Three Factor Model advocates the tips for Work-Life Balance. According to this model, the key to healthy work-life balance lies in maintaining a balance of three factors: Knowledge, Skills and Behaviour in both family as well as work life.

The Knowledge of self, others and tasks in family life enables the working women to engage effectively in her multiple roles mother, spouse, sister, daughter and so on. It also enables them to develop healthy relationship with others and provides clarity of tasks in their various roles. Having the knowledge of their organisation, the working environment and functions that they have to do can establish the right balance for their career and personnel life.

Another factor that affects the work life balance of the working women is the skill to deal with both family and work place. In family, she should be peace-keeping by sharing feelings and encouraging others to do the same. She also should network effectively. In the work place, women must have decision making capabilities, technical skills and ensure that they build effective communication with their team.

The working Women also have to manage their behaviour by maintaining the relationship with family members, being socially active through their informal interaction. Their behaviour in work place also should be role based and therefore professional and formal.

6. Conclusion

The paper discussed the issues and challenges of working women in the current era of 21st century. The problems of personal and professional life are highlighted in the paper and described in detail. To apply the balancing act between personal and professional life and keep her-self fit and fine women has to undergo many situations and challenges. Finally, the paper is concluded with tips on balancing act in which focus is given to the three major components like knowledge, skills and behaviour. Hence, in 21st century, woman needs more psychological and social support from the society as well as governing body.

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