

An Exploratory Study of Problems of Working Women in Indore City

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ABSTRACT

Abstract: The status of Women in India has remarkably changed, there is a significant change in the socio-economic status of working women, they have become independent financially and are more aware of the rights and equal treatment at their workplace however, they still face certain problems while working outside . Generally Women prefer employment as nurses, doctors, teachers, secretaries, managerial, banking or Government jobs. But even if well qualified women engineers or managers or geologists are available, preference will be given to a male of equal qualification. . Most of the problems that snowed down working women are in reality rooted in the social perspective of the position of women. Traditionally men are seen as the bread winner and women as the house-keepers, child bearers and rearers. This typecast role model continues to put obstacles before the working women. This paper throws light on various obstacles faced by working women in Indore city and tries to identify the reasons behind these problems and suggesting measures to overcome these obstacles.

Keywords: Working women, Working women Evolution, Problems of working women

INTRODUCTION:

Working women are referred to those who are in paid employment. There is a significant change in the socio-economic status of working women. They have become independent financially and are more aware of the rights and equal treatment at their workplace, their legal rights in property etc. but the case with illiterate lower income group of working women are still behind and are still made to be aware of these rights and other factors which will affect their quality of life. These women in their families have no voice of their own and hence one can find that women empowerment is highly unbalanced with huge gaps. But the trend is changing as more and more women are getting exposure to professional and vocational education.

Working women of the 21st century have attained a stature and position in society which has already proved beyond doubt the innate capacity, drive and determination of the 'fairer sex' to the world. At the same time, the situation is not a bed of roses too, as they are faced with challenges in the form of gender discrimination, prejudice, doubts, derisive, opinions, lack of opportunities and last but not the least, their own health.

Evolution of Working Women

The 20th century modern institutions, social ideas and life itself distinguishes themselves by the characteristic feature of regarding all human beings as free individuals capable of employing their faculties to achieve their goal, if they get an opportunity. This was true in the case of women too, who were till then considered as 'weaker sex' who were capable of performing domestic duties of housekeeping and family care only.

Education and democracy played the role of the wheels that moved the world of women from 'darkness to light' .The position of working women has evolved over the centuries from that of a 'housewife', whose world revolved around her family catering to their needs, feeding ,stitching garments, housekeeping, attending them during illness, etc. to that of a paid housemaid pursuing the same chores for a wage, slowly graduating to that of a paid labour in farms and textile factories to make up for the lack of 'manpower'. In this period the owners of textile factories employed them for a very poor wage and they had to work in very poor conditions.

Women preferred to come out of the domestic 'fortress' and work rather than languish within the walls. Industrial revolution saw industries facing shortage of workers and women made good to the lack of manpower. The 1900's saw women breaking through many doors of knowledge and employment which were hitherto closed to them.

Women entered the portals of education in increasing numbers and they had the taste of technology, arts, science and myriad forms of scientific studies that opened up a whole new world to them. The definition of her 'work' changed from that of a housewife, a paid housemaid, graduating through the stages of hard labour to sophisticated technical work due to their education. Working women donned the overalls and portrayed a look of feministic power that was never seen before. Thanks to the increasing opportunities made available to them in higher levels of studies and research they entered the domain of men as surgeons at hospitals, as technically qualified labour in shipyards, aircraft plants and other jobs requiring use of heavy tools and machinery when the men were away at warfronts during World War II. The growth of service sector and emergence of globalization have catapulted women to a much superior level on par with men. They strived to venture into every field of science and industry, learn, contribute, discover and invent. Steadily and surely the stature of women in developed nations improved and acted as a beacon for women in the newly independent countries to pursue their dreams. By the late 1900's, there weren't many areas left where women had not made their presence felt. Women gradually covered all possible tracks from that of a surgeon and Olympic downhill skier to that of a hardnosed business executive and a space traveler. The development of service sector attracted women's workforce who joined the rank and file in increasing numbers.

21st century bore the fruits of women's struggle for emancipation and placed her on an equal footing with men in the professional front of life. They rose in ranks as they worked alongside men running Fortune 500 companies. The achievement by women has not come without a price.

Problems faced by Working Women

At every stage of evolution, women had to struggle against formidable forces in the form of intangibles like the mindset of the society about her place and function in the society, which had become deeply entrenched since the centuries; conditions that made opportunities to progress and prosper a scarce commodity. Absence or lack of education had a cascading effect on women's evolution and emancipation as it prevented the women from becoming a significant force that will enrich the society in particular and the mankind at large; with their contributions in different fields of economic and social life. Women still have to persevere and struggle to prove her capacity in the male dominated world to earn her rights and equality with men. For instance, according to "101 facts on the status of women" compiled by the Business and Professional Women's Foundation, "Women are still only making slightly over 80% in salaries of what men are".

Objectives of the Study:

- 1) To find out the reasons that pose a hurdle to working women and impact their efficiency and performance.
- 2) To analyze the reasons behind these hurdles.
- 3) To suggest measures to strike work-life balance to increase their productivity.

Research Methodology:

Sampling: The study was Exploratory in nature. In this study, working women from Indore were selected for data collection.

Sampling method used was non-probability sampling. It was a purposive sampling where 75 respondents each were chosen based on total monthly income of the family. It was divided into four bands or four

stratas (i.e. monthly income upto Rs. 10000, income Rs. 10001 to 30000, income Rs. 30001 to 50000 and income more than Rs. 50000). In this way, it was a purposive and quota sampling that included major chunk of the working women in Indore city.

Tools for data collection: To determine the factors affecting performance of working women, questions based on Likert scale were used which measured the improvement in terms of satisfaction ranging from excellent to not satisfactory, where 5 meant highly satisfied, 4 means satisfied, 3 means neutral, 2 means dissatisfied and 1 means highly dissatisfied. A final sample of 300 respondents was included for study.

Tools for data analysis:

After collection of data, weighted means were taken out and accordingly ranking of factors was done.

Results and Findings:

Table 1 shows the results.

Table 1: Factors affecting Performance of Working Women

Factors Affecting Performance	5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neutral	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree	Weighted Means	Rank
Work -Life Balance	140	80	52	10	18	4.05	1
Health	129	59	62	27	23	3.81	4
Gender Biasness	111	57	39	38	55	3.69	5
Stereotyping	99	57	25	49	70	3.22	9
Relationship within organization	101	51	26	46	76	3.18	10
Policy Change	95	43	27	65	70	3.09	13
Lack of proper training	97	57	32	22	92	3.15	12
Working Environment	98	50	32	46	74	3.17	11
Dominating attitude of male colleagues	121	57	47	48	27	3.66	6
Safety at workplace	132	59	63	20	26	3.84	3
Time Management	137	62	51	42	8	3.93	2
Glass Ceiling	116	32	63	14	75	3.33	8
Sexual Harassment	117	62	47	33	41	3.60	7

1) **Work-Life Balance**

From the study, maximum i.e. 140 respondents strongly agree that Work-Life balance does pose the greatest challenge for the working woman. According to **Beard et al (2010)**¹, domestic as well as professional life perspectives are crucial for working people; specially women. They find it very difficult to strike a balance between the two. Things become easier for them to handle, when they are either independent or when they get adequate support from the family members.

A woman is comfortable, when she is either a spinster or is just married and lives in a nuclear family. Also she is able to strike a balance even after being in a joint family if well supported by the rest of the family members.

During the interaction with the respondents, many were of the opinion that they found it difficult to convince their in-laws about the professional challenges they faced at the work place. Secondly they got very less time to handle their household affairs, especially, if they lived in a joint family or if their children were infants. Many respondents sometimes find themselves in a fix with their conflicting priorities between their office work and household chores. As the life becomes more complex, work life balance is adversely affected leading to stress and burnout (**Crooker et al., 2002**)².

2) **Time Management**

The second biggest challenge; with weighted mean as 3.93 , that working women face is of managing time at the work place and at home. Working women are constrained by time allocation factors (**Stier and Epstein, 2003**)³. Having being overloaded by many responsibilities at the work place, be it a job or business, they are not able to manage time. In other words, due to dearth of time, they; many times become disorganized and are not able to prioritize the jobs and end up making a mess of things. This leads to frustration, which spills over in their personal life as well.

3) **Safety at Workplace**

From the study it was known that this factor with weighted mean value as 3.84 and at position third; took a higher place in the perception of working women to factors even like Health. They were much concerned about the safety measures and factors at the workplace. They said that adequate measures were many times, not taken by the management to provide safety to woman. Firstly, unknown people were not questioned by the security personnels, who fearlessly walked in the office. Secondly, alarm systems were not in order. Thirdly, no facility was provided to females, to send them home safely after odd working hours.

The number of sales women in marketing jobs is quite less .Very few are seen as marketing managers as well. The only issue is regarding odd working hours.

4) **Health**

Women were of the opinion that health was a major issue and concern for them. Health ranks 4th with a weighted mean of 3.81 A matter of concern for them was lack of medical facility at the workplace. Because of the absence of it, they had to either take medical leave or had to continue working even after being unwell.

They opined that failing to strike a balance between work and life led to bad time management, which resulted in bad health.

At the same time, some women confessed that their own careless attitude, many a times led to this situation.

Working women have to play multiple roles as an employee, a mother, a maid, a daughter in-law, a cook, a nurse etc. Struggling hard to manage all these roles efficiently, they experience a lot of strain

and sometimes may undergo mental stress or physical trauma. The respondents have reported high levels of stress and stress related illness and maximum said that job stress was their main problem.

5) Gender Biasness & Dominating attitude of male colleagues

This did not come as a surprise to the researcher, when respondents said that they were facing and at times victim of gender biasness. Office discrimination has been prevalent in major parts of the society (Handy et al, 2007)⁴. Both factors ranking very close to each other i.e at 5th and 6th position and weighted mean as 3.69 and 3.63 respectively ,dominating attitude of male results in women being considered incapable or rather the job seems to be practically difficult to be handled by the working women. Women managers deal with male-dominated environments where they become tougher (Marshall, 1995)⁵. In many organizations, Gender Biasness is seen at the time of recruitment, selection , appraisal and promotion in designation and hierarchy. Gender bias creates an obstacle from staffing itself (Torun, 2010)⁶. Men are easily promoted whereas women are expected and forced to work doubly hard to prove their worth for the same designation or gradation. This discrimination faced by the working women instill in them a feeling of 'left out of the race' leaving them highly demotivated . Majority of the respondents have felt that although the Constitution of India talks about equal rights for all; it is still not followed in our country. The view that certain jobs are still not be done by women is still prevalent in the society and this causes prejudice during recruitment process. Also the women are offered lower-level designations than men even if they possess the required skills. Hence even when a woman is well qualified for a particular position, it is seen and also experienced by the respondents that job is made available to the male candidate. Also the remuneration paid is sometimes not equal to the salary paid to men.

6) Sexual Harassment

Sexual Harassment has got 7th position with weighted mean as 3.60.Women complained about sexual harassment at the workplace. Workplace harassment has been a crucial issue for women (Nath, 2000)⁷. This kind of harassment had many forms. It was physical as well as mental. This has resulted into friction with husband and family members especially in lower income group. According to the respondents other forms of sexual harassment is in the form of telling them that they are weaker sex and will not be able to perform certain jobs .In spite of the fact that these women have all the qualification and required skills, they are not given an opportunity to do few particular jobs and this is also made evident right from the time of recruitment to remuneration.

7) Glass Ceiling

Glass Ceiling is experienced by the respondents who were on the managerial position. According to them, men still do not prefer to report to women bosses. Organizations do not take interest in promoting female employees. In spite of all the efforts and hard work, reaching to the topmost position becomes too difficult. Women are said to encounter a glass ceiling over their aspirations which allows them to see where they might go but stops them from getting there (White, 1995)⁸.

Occupying 8th position and weighted mean as 3.33;Glass Ceiling is still prevalent in many organizations especially in Indore.

8) Stereotyping

Roles and responsibilities of a woman are decided by the society and if somebody try to come out of these defined roles will have to suffer. This is the opinion of 99 respondents who have strongly agreed that these expectations of women's roles and gender stereotypes keep women out of certain professions and into others. They also keep women from excelling and from getting leadership positions in their work place.

9) Relationship with organization

101 respondents have strongly agreed that if the relations at home or at workplace are strained; sometimes they become a barrier and results in less energy to do the work and make them pessimistic. They get de-motivated and less creative affecting the overall efficiency and performance both ; at workplace and at home.

10) Work Environment

Work Environment has to be conducive. Happiness at work place play an important role in boosting efficiency and productivity. Respondents feel that if problems, complaints and grievances are addressed at the right time, a feeling of job engagement and job commitment will automatically be inculcated and women will be more loyal to her job. An OCTAPACE culture is a must to create a harmonious and conducive environment.

11) Lack of Training

Proper Training and Development Programmes should be organized for working women to make them enhance their skills .They will be able to work smartly and in a better way. Respondents agree that many organizations are not taking care of the training required to be given to help these working women climb the ladder.

12) Policy Change

Organizational policies are a must and should be women friendly. Proper maternity leaves protection from sexual harassment and gender discrimination, paid family leave, health care and policies for working mothers will bring higher levels of commitment and attachment to the organizations among the women employees; resulting in better performance and also not at the cost of neglecting their families. Some of the organizations these days have extended support to these women by allowing them to work from home.

Conclusion

Due to Domestic Responsibilities, working women get less time to concentrate on their work. At the work place, especially in Private jobs men are preferred in terms of authority, responsibility, which give them better recognition and promotion compared to women. Since they are considered to be weaker sex, they are sexually harassed at their workplace. Not only this when they travel to and fro from their workplace; they are not safe.

The performance and outcome of the work of women is largely affected due to imbalance of work and life. Most of them are unable to manage their personal and professional life. This is due to upbringing their children, taking care of the in-laws and at times non-co-operation from their husband.

Suggestions:

- 1) Women at the workplace are still facing gender discrimination. This is due to the old beliefs that she does not have the capacities and capability of producing results as men do. This gender discrimination can only be removed by the women. She should work more harder, more sincerely to prove her that she is no less than men.

- 2) Sexual Harassment at workplace is a brutal fact. It has risen to innumerable proportions due to the fact that women have silently tolerated the atrocities of men. This will only stop when women, instead of quietly leaving the organization should face the situation boldly and should show the door to the victimizer.
- 3) In order to encourage more and more women to work, the Government should think of giving more reservations and quotas to women.
- 4) Sometimes a woman goes for a job when the need arises and sometimes she takes a break from her job and then rejoins; in both cases she does not get her due as she is considered as a fresher for the job. This affects her performance. Organizations should welcome and encourage such woman with a higher start.
- 5) The employers should provide timely and objective feedback, other developmental assignments and support and women should be allowed to participate in career oriented appraisals.
- 6) Working women should also be provided with career oriented training and development opportunities, career management programmes which will help the working women to enhance their skills and increase their performance.
- 7) Flexibility should be given to choose alternate career tracks within the organization itself.
- 8) Alternative work schedule options and Quality of Working Life will have more efficient, productive, committed, happy and satisfied women employees.
- 9) The principle of equitable administrative justice has to be applied in disciplinary actions, grievance procedures, promotions, transfers, work assignments, etc.
- 10) To bring about higher levels of commitment and attachment to the organizations and to keep employees happy means understanding and appreciating work and non-work aspects of an employee's life.
- 11) Appraisals should be biasfree. Increments and promotions should be implemented at proper time duration.
- 12) The HR managers have to create an environment of trust and confidence where all the working women can work in cooperation with each other and their male colleagues and contribute to the organizational objectives.
- 13) For those women, who are married, it is very important for the husband to be co-operative and they should communicate with their spouse about sharing household and domestic chores.
- 14) In case of bachelor girls, the mother has got most significant role to play. She has to make her daughter ready to take challenges and create strong emotional support to make her an ideal daughter as well as an ideal employee.

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