

**INVESTIGATING OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AMONG
MARRIED AND UNMARRIED WORKING WOMEN IN
HYDERABAD CITY**

Nagina Parveen
Department of Psychology
University of Sindh, Jamshoro

ABSTRACT

The present study was designed to determine the comparison in the degree of occupational stress as experienced by married and unmarried working women of Hyderabad city. This study provides valuable information about the stress levels of both groups of respondents. It also discovers the main causes of women's occupational stress. The sample consisted of 180 working women. Among them 90 participants of the study were unmarried working women and 90 were married working women with at least one child, who responded on the occupational stress scale (OSS) (Sohail & Khanum, 2000). It was assumed that married working women would have higher work related stress than unmarried working women. Statistical analysis by computing the t-test revealed a significant difference among the scores of the two groups of women. According to the results of the study, the overall work related stress measured through OSS was obviously greater in married working women as compared to the unmarried working women. These findings confirm the hypothesis of the study. The higher level of occupational stress among married women than unmarried women are explained in terms of traditional trends, demands of society and more roles and responsibilities assigned to them as a mother, wife and homemaker, as compared to unmarried women.

INTRODUCTION

Work gives a sense of identification to an individual within a community it satisfies needs. Creates sense of worth and emotional well being. While the unpredictable working conditions, increasing competition and rapid technological changes at various workplaces have intensified. In such a working environment the mind of employees have to adopt the burden which leads to restlessness and stress. Ali (2008) discussed that jobs and careers are an important part of an individual's life. Alongwith providing a source of income, it helps to fulfill personal aims, build social networks and serve communities. They are also a major source of emotional stress.

D'souza, et al., (2005) argued that the specific stress experienced by people often depends on the nature and demands of the setting in which people live. In this modern life, occupations of the people govern these settings. Thus, people in various professions experience different types of stress to different degrees. Asad and Khan (2003) interpreted that job stress is the effect of tension on an employee by the job pressures to fulfill job assignment and to respond to deadlines. Salik and Kamal (2007) mentioned that most people spend a considerable amount of their lives at work. It is a dynamic context, and may conduce to a solid sense of purpose and satisfaction, or to a wide range of negative health outcomes resulting from stressful encounters. Work stress has been described as an incompatibility between the individual and his/her work environment.

There is no doubt that stress at work is an important factor contributing to ill health and leads to societal costs and productivity losses. Job stress and its negative consequences for employees' health and well being are significant problems throughout the industrialized world. Currently, job stress is an

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important area of research. Jex (1998) reported that the topic of occupational stress has generated a tremendous volume of research in a surprisingly short period of time. According to Frese (2000), a research shows 2, 371 entries on job stress for the years 1991-1997.

Recently because of far-reaching changes the employment opportunities for women have increased all over the world that have promoted them to take up employment. Consequently these women employees face the difficulties to balance home and work related issues. It may expose them to stress and other health hazards. Now “Stress of women employees with dual career” has become growing problem of workplaces and discovered as the main cause of disturbances of working women and organizations. According to national surveys in the United States 60% of the working women respondents confirmed that job stress was their number one problem (Reich & Nussbaum, 1994). In fact, occupational stress of women has little research attention. There is a stern need to conduct research in this area. Researchers have conducted to explore whether existing theories of job stress are sufficient to determine the stress of working women (Bell and Lee, 2002; Zalcquett and Wood, 1998). Some research findings confirm that the stress experiences of working women may be attributable to their “token” status in non-traditional jobs (Davidson & Cooper, 1992). Occupational stress may be a problem of particular magnitude for working women, in part because of sex-specific job stressors, i.e., sex discrimination and difficulties in combining work and family (Swanson, 2000). Another key source of job stress arises at the interface between work and family life (Parker and Arthur, 2004). Women still take most of the responsibility for child-care and for household chores (Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2003). Sax and others (2002) reported that the American college students agreed that “The activities of married women are best confined to the home and family” (cited in Myers, 2008). Researcher

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also shows that working women experience more guilt when they feel they are not meeting role expectations in the family domain (Iwasaki et al., 2004). The working female who still takes on the burden of responsibility at home and for the children may suffer from the inevitable stress associated with trying to be “superwoman” (Nicholson, 1995). Sulsky and Smith (2005) reported that “women may experience certain stressors more often than men e.g., sexual harassment and work/family conflict”. Some qualitative approaches to explore stress in the female only groups at workplaces declared that female managers were more open about the emotional distress because of their juggling work and home responsibilities (Iwasaki, et al., 2004). Galinsky and Bond (1996) found that 80% to 90% of married working women reported primary responsibility for cooking, cleaning, and shopping and that two thirds had primary responsibility for bill paying which creates high burden for them. Hochschild (1997) argued that even when child care or household clearing services were used, working women still had responsibility for their arrangement. Hughes and Galinsky (1994) argued that one’s ability to juggle various roles has its limits, however. When women lack sufficient child care and household help from their spouses and work in psychologically demanding jobs, their health, and well-being may suffer.

In the current advanced age the ratio of women employees is also increasing at the diverse workplaces in Pakistan. Najam and Ghazal (1998) state that “The Pakistani women of today are in dilemma. Females are sent to schools to achieve, which they do and excels her male classmates in academic performance. Subsequently she gets more lucrative job offers. The problem arises when she gets married and has children, her job and family requirements place her in a demanding and stressful situation”. Haque and Sohail (1997) found that marital status in Pakistani culture is significantly related with home and work stress. They also found that all mothers respondents

reported more stress as compared to non mothers.

Actually, in traditional societies like Pakistani society, even today, only women are frequently expected to look after the children, to handle the household responsibilities and to care the elder members of family. In our society working women may be prone to stress because they endure the heavy load of work at home and outside the home. They have to work in two entirely different settings, one is the family environment and other is the workplace environment. These women are supposed to perform various kinds of responsibilities at home as well as at office. In this regard married working women are assigned more roles as mothers and a wives, as compared to unmarried working women. Work related stress among women needs a great deal of research. The author was motivated to carry out the present study due to the lack of researches aimed at exploring and comparing the occupational stress of unmarried and married working women in Sindh, Pakistan. Therefore, it was proposed to test the occupational stress levels of unmarried and married professional women of Hyderabad, Sindh. These two groups of women were analyzed on the dimensions of all the subscales of occupational stress scale (OSS) developed by Sohail and Khanum(2000). Keeping in view the literature focusing the dissimilar experiences of work pressures, societal demands and liabilities of these two groups of professional women. It was hypothesized that overall scores of married working women will be greater than unmarried working woman on occupational stress scale (OSS).

METHOD

Participants:

The total sample of the present study consisted of 180 working women. It was equally divided into two categories, i.e. 90 unmarried working women and 90 married working women with at least one child. The sample was selected through random sampling technique from various work settings of Hyderabad city. All the respondents were highly educated belonging to different prestigious professions (ie. Teachers, Physicians, Bankers, Lawyers and Administrators, etc.) The range of their service period was 5 to 23 years. They were between 29 to 55 years of age. Majority of the selected professional ladies belonged to nuclear family system. All the participants belonged to either upper middle or upper social class.

Measures:

The Urdu version of the occupational stress scale (OSS) developed by Sohail & Khannum (2000) was used in the present study to find out the levels of stress among married & unmarried working women of Hyderabad. It is a Likert type occupational stress scale. This scale is an authentic research instrument to evaluate the job stressors which are frequently observed in Pakistani organizations. OSS has 90 items on ten subscales as described below:

- i. Inter Role Distance (IRD)
- ii. Role Stagnation (RS)
- iii. Role Expectation Conflict (REC)
- iv. Resource Inadequacy (RIN)
- v. Role Overload (RO)
- vi. Role Isolation (RI)

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- vii. Personal Inadequacy (PI)
- viii. Self Role Distance (SRD)
- ix. Role Ambiguity (RA)
- x. Role Erosion (RE)

The Scale has a high test-retest reliability and construct validity. There were 09 items on each subscale. Each item of the scale was rated on a Likert type 5-point scale ranging from 0 to 4. These ranges indicate the extent of stress perceived by the employees at various workplaces. The ‘0’ on the scale indicate “Never”, 1 “Occasionally” 2 “Sometimes” 3 “Frequently” and 4 “Always”.

Procedure:

All the participants of the study were informed individually about the purpose of the investigation and applied the said occupational stress scale (OSS) at their respective workplaces. In addition, the information on demographic variables, such as, age, occupation, education, service experience, marital status, number of children, family system (Nuclear/Joint) and socio economic status were also taken from the respondents.

The obtained scores were statistically analyzed to find out the significance of the differences between the responses of married and unmarried working women on all the subscales of occupational stress scale (OSS).

RESULTS

Table: 1

Means, S.D. and t-test of the responses of unmarried and married working women on Occupational Stress Scale.

| SUBSCALES | MARRIED WORKING WOMEN | | UNMARRIED WORKING WOMEN | | t | P |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-------|-------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | | |
| IRD | 33.21 | 6.18 | 20.15 | 5.53 | 10.82 | 0.001 |
| RS | 22.81 | 4.88 | 19.10 | 4.61 | 2.87 | 0.01 |
| REC | 31.84 | 5.34 | 18.38 | 5.15 | 9.68 | 0.001 |
| RIN | 25.72 | 6.37 | 21.71 | 6.21 | 2.71 | 0.01 |
| RO | 32.72 | 9.46 | 20.13 | 8.50 | 9.88 | 0.001 |
| RI | 20.85 | 6.40 | 18.97 | 6.07 | 2.61 | 0.01 |
| PI | 11.92 | 3.18 | 10.73 | 3.19 | 0.74 | NS |
| SRD | 13.06 | 4.13 | 12.56 | 3.92 | 0.92 | NS |
| RA | 24.56 | 5.18 | 20.92 | 4.28 | 2.80 | 0.01 |
| RE | 17.80 | 6.21 | 15.82 | 6.13 | 2.50 | 0.01 |
| Over all O.S. Level | 157.66 | 19.84 | 82.27 | 13.61 | 9.57 | 0.001 |

DISCUSSION

The present study was aimed at comparing the occupational stress level of married and unmarried working women at various work places in Hyderabad city. According to the results of the study as shown in Table-1, the scores of married working women are higher as compared to unmarried working women on various subscales of OSS, except two subscales, i.e., Personal Inadequate and Self-Role Distance. Whereas, the overall scores of both groups of women reveal the highest difference ($t=9.57, p<0.001$). This is indicative of the fact that married working women of Hyderabad city are facing more occupational stress than unmarried working women. Hence, it verifies / confirms the hypothesis which states that “Overall scores of married working women would be greater than unmarried working women on Occupational Stress Scale”.

It is interesting to note that the low means of the respondents of both groups on PI indicate that they feel themselves as adequate and skilled to perform their specific jobs. Whereas, their low means on the subscale SRD declare that the roles assigned to them at workplaces are not conflicting with their self-concept and personal values. Whereas, the mean values of married working women on the subscales IRD, REC and RO are much dominant as compared to the mean scores of unmarried working women which are shown in Table-1. Higher scores on IRD reveal that married working women have difficulty to combine the demands of their professional life with those of their family lives. Higher scores of married working women on RE indicate their perception and other people’s expectations from them are inconsonant. The greater scores of married working women on RO reveal that they have to perform several roles as employees which make them unable to spend more time for their other personal life roles. Whereas, the married working

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women's higher scores on Resource Inadequacy, Role Ambiguity, Role Erosion, Role Isolation and Role Stagnation indicate their high stress levels because of insufficient resources to achieve job targets; unclear goals, expectations and requirements of their jobs; lack of challenge at job; lack of authority and experience to occupy isolated role from the main stream of organizational life. On the other hand the lesser scores of unmarried working women on all the subscales of OSS point out that they are not feeling much difficulty to balance their work and personal life roles.

The distinction in occupational stress scores between married and unmarried working women is due to their dissimilar life patterns, experiences, obligations, and work/ family pressures. On the basis of the overall lower score of unmarried working women on OSS, it may be suggested that they face less work and home conflict. It means they are more relaxed and enjoy their working and personal lives as compared to married working women. It is also true that sometimes unmarried working women may face stressful situations at their specific workplaces, but they do not find themselves compelled to perform such type of multiform roles in their lives as married women do. It is the actual cause of the difference between the stress levels of married and unmarried working women, as exposed during the present study.

However, IRD, REC and RO were declared as highly dominant sources of Occupational stress in married working women as per their maximum scores on these dimensions. Such high level of Occupational stress among married working women is due to the fact that married working women occupy multiple roles as mother, spouse, homemaker, and worker which are inconsistent and create conflicting situations. Consequently married professional women experience more stress than single professional women.

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The results of the present study are supported by a considerable amount of earlier research evidences. For example, Freudenberger (1992) investigated those women who have to combine a professional role with that of family, experience more stress. Bardwick (1972) argues that the combination of two roles and the effort to fulfill all the responsibilities of house, motherhood and job seems more likely to put the working women under pressure. Munaf and Ahmed (1999) reported that although Pakistani working women do fulfill their dual responsibilities however have some difficulty in managing stress.

According to Hitt et al. (2006) women report more stressors resulting from work-family conflict. Because, women traditionally take on more roles related to the care of family and home, they are more likely to experience work overload and role conflict.

In fact, contemporary Pakistani Sindhi society is in transition. As yet the working women phenomenon is connected with old patterns of our cultural traditions. Our society still demands the traditional roles of women as homemaker. Obviously, married working women have overflowing list of various liabilities. They have to consider their professional achievements, household responsibilities, marital adjustment, child caring issues and family relationships. Such type of constant fight for survival, recognition and goal achievements in the expanding global village entail various problems. Thus, combing career and family roles by women raise peculiar issues at workplace and home. It may be the major cause of discrepancy between the achievement of career goals and family obligations creating occupational stress in married working women. There arguments are supported by Najam and Ghazal (1998) describing that women are taking on their newly acquired status as professionals but at the same time they are continuing with their roles as housewives and caretakers as well.

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In summary, the diverse workplaces of the current advanced age are increasingly populated with women, even married women with children. Obviously, these married working women are more liable to fulfill all commitments equally at home and at workplace, as compared to unmarried working women. The potential for work/family conflict and stress increases as most of the professional women struggle with the demands of balancing their paid work and domestic liabilities. It is really the most difficult task for married working women to integrate their multiform obligations of career, household, spouse and children. Evidently, the consequence of women's feelings of incompatibility to deal with these demands is the occurrence of high level of occupational stress, as proved by the findings of the present study. These findings are in accord with some earlier researches conducted on women's occupational stress (e.g., Biernat and Wortman, 1991; Zedeck, 1992; Najam and Yusaf, 1994; Maynard, 1994, Raber, 1994). Aryee and Luk, 1996; Barling and Sorenson, 1997; Cohen et al., 1997; Brown and Campbell, 1998; Webster and Bergman, 1999; Kossek and Ozeki, 1998; Kodz, et al., 2002; Greehaus, et al., 2003; Iwasaki, et al., 2004;.

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