
WOMEN WORKING IN URBAN: THEIR PROBLEMS, CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract: India is a country with diverse traditions and customs. In all the religions, women hold a venerable position. Unfortunately, in the male-dominated Indian society, women have so far had only a secondary status. It is well known that the economic dependence of women upon men is one of the primary reasons which has pushed them into the background and resulted in their having only a secondary status both within and outside the family. This paper focuses on problems and issues faced by urban working women. The paper reflects about that different age group of working women have different kinds of problems and challenges and different categories as married, single, divorcee, single parent, separated, have different issues at stake in the workplace.

This paper explores some problems which are definitely common, like mental and physical stress, lack of proper balance between employment and family care, unfair treatment in the workplace, stressful life and work place discrimination etc. But some challenges are age or category specific, like prejudiced and stereotyped thinking, safety and security issues, ego hassles with colleagues, etc.

Some probable solutions for problems plaguing urban working women that could help them to overcome the problems that they face in the workplace are proper safety and security measures by the parent organizations, sensitive and supporting partners at home, effective child care policies and appropriate grievance redressal mechanisms for women in place at the workplace.

Keywords: Urban, Workplace, Discrimination, Stereotyped thinking.

Introduction: In the history of human development, women have been as vital in the history making as men have been. In fact higher status for women vis-à-vis employment and work performed by them in a society is a significant indicator of a nation's overall progress. Undoubtedly, without the active participation of women in national activities, the social, economic or political progress of a country will deteriorate and become stagnant. But ironically and tragically, women employees in general, are not taken very seriously by their superiors, colleagues, or society at large. Having a career poses challenges for women due to their family responsibilities.

Traditionally Indian women had been home makers but in the recent decades, proper education and better awareness, in addition to the ever increasing cost of living has made them to go out and choose careers. In a patriarchal society like India it is still believed that a man is the primary bread winner of his family. Although Indian women have started working outside their homes but still they have a long way to go both culturally, socially and economically, to bring in positive attitudinal changes in the mindset of people. It is generally perceived that gender bias against working women starts right from the stage of recruitment. Most of the Indian men are not ready to accept that women are capable enough to work side by side with men in all the sectors, other than in a few limited ones like teaching, nursing and in clerical sectors. Their capabilities are generally underestimated as a result of which Indian women have a tendency to opt for less demanding jobs even if they are highly qualified.

Women have the responsibilities to effectively manage their multiple roles in domestic as well as professional lives. Men generally do not offer any help in the households work. This makes the life of working women extremely stressful.

Background Information: While a majority of the women still face discrimination and gender bias, in the last few decades, the number of women successful in politics, technology and business etc. is definitely on the rise. Society has started seeing women in a different perspective. They work as lawyers, nurses, doctors, social workers, teachers, secretaries, managers and officers etc. There is no profession today where women are not employed. However, it is true that working women have to face problems by virtue of their sex. For centuries women have been subjected to exploitation and torture, physically, sexually and mentally. There are innumerable challenge and problems faced by them both at home and workplace. What we generally see today, in addition to various media and journal reports is that in the workplace women generally face mental stress, sexual harassment, discriminatory practices, safety and security issues etc (Martin, 1989). India's patriarchal society thinks of women only as homemakers and sexual objects and is generally subjected to exploitation and torture (Dube, 2001).

Women have been playing vital roles in households since ages. Now women are also recognized for their value in the workplace and are engaged in wide range of activities of work in addition to their routine domestic work. Building a society where women can

breathe freely without fear of oppression, exploitation, and discrimination is the need of the hour, to ensure a better future for the next generation.

Rationale and Significance of the Study: Educated urban women are presumed to be more aware of the opportunities and challenges of the workplace or educated urban women can better understand their roles and limitations in the workplaces and are perceived to be bold enough to develop their own personalities, with or without encouragement from their families. An assessment of the problems and issues plaguing urban working women is therefore a necessity for better understanding of workplace dynamics related to women.

The major problems for working women arise out of the dual responsibilities of the working woman - domestic work as well as office work. Though more and more women are coming out in search of paid employment and their families also need their income, the attitude towards women and their role in the family has not undergone much change. Women continue to be perceived as weak, inferior, and second-class citizens. Even today, looking after the family and children is generally perceived to be the primary responsibility of the man. It is possible to accept that as more and more women have entered the workforce, there is no longer a solid family-support at home (Schwartz, 1992).

Women were taught to accept their position through the socialization process and also that all rules and regulation made only for women they were bound to follow including their 'initiation rites.' They are taught to be obedient wives and sisters and also to respect their elders; manners are taught to them, like how to walk, talk, sit, and work at home and many others. They are neither considered as individuals with a personality of their own, nor do they have any personal life. They are told that a man could marry more than one woman and they accept it silently, blaming it on their own fate. The inferior positions of women in the traditional Indian society have been reinforced by a number of traditional practices such as polygamy, early marriage, and illiteracy and by years of subjugation. Many of these practices are still found today in some places in the country.

Participation of women in prominent decision-making positions is limited by severe cultural and social constraints because men think that women are not capable enough to take a good decision. Women face challenges all over the world and sometimes these challenges are context specific. The literature on the challenges and problems women face at the workplace is not only limited to women in the unorganized sectors, but also in formal organizations too, as women continue trying to contribute to their

quality of life and that of their families and thereby to the economies of various countries through work.

Even though women prove they are efficient, authorities think twice before promoting them and even if women are given the chance, there is always a remark that they were given the position because they were women. Sexual harassment is another serious problem faced by working women. Whether in the organized or unorganized sector, whether illiterate, low paid workers or highly educated and highly paid executives, a large number of working women face sexual harassment at the workplace at one time or another. This is mostly from other male employees or their superiors. Women tend to hold lower-level positions than men even when they have sufficient skills to perform higher-level jobs.

Employment Trends for Women: The increase in the number of women in the labor market signifies an important trend regarding women's employment. This has been occurring alongside increases in labor force and workforce, especially for urban women.

The increasing share of women's participation in the labor force and its significant contribution to household income as well as GDP require some policy attention be paid to the gender dimensions of employment. Most women in India work and contribute to the economy in one form or another, much of their work is not documented or accounted for in official statistics.

Women in the Workplace: Women in the workforce earning wages or a salary are part of a modern phenomenon, one that developed at the same time as the growth of paid employment for men; yet women have been challenged by inequality in the workforce (N. Andal 2002). A woman is a social animal. To keep her in captivity, without access to work or finance or interaction with the outside world, is less than fair (Eisenhower, 2002). Economic, social and political empowerment of women is essential for the development of any society. Social, political status of women. Traditionally women have been the under-privileged ones in the society, not enjoying the same rights or standards of living as the other half of the population. According to Robin (2002)

Review of literature: The literature review shows that more focus is on married working women than on unmarried working women (Karl, 2009). It is also seen that focus is more on organized sector rather than unorganized sector of working women (Shalz, 2011). Eggin (1997) advocates for more facilities to women in the workplace, suggesting that "...it is an important part of developmental strategy as well as an act of social justice" The World Bank (1991) estimates that Indian Women make up one-third of the labor force. Singhal (1995) is of the opinion that, "Participation of women in workforce is essential for economic development and population planning."

Sophia J. Ali (2011) “investigated the challenges facing women in career development. She found that most of the women employees were dissatisfied with career development programmers and women were discriminated against in career development opportunities.

The study recommended that organizations should strive to ensure that career development programmers were set to enhance career development amongst women employees.

Ronald J. Burke, Mustafa Koyuncu and Lisa Fiksenbaum (2010) examined the relationship of the perceived presence of organisational practices designed to support women’s career advancement and their work attitudes and satisfaction and their psychological well-being. Data were collected from 286 women in managerial and professional jobs working in a large Turkish bank, a 72 percent response rate. Five organizational experiences were considered: negative attitudes towards women, equal treatment, support, career barriers and male standards. Women reporting more supportive organizational experiences and practices were more engaged in their work, more job and career satisfied, and indicated greater levels of psychological wellbeing.

Somjee (1989) has some very strong critical comments. She has said that “in the history of women’s studies, which is not very long, a variety of approaches have been adopted in order to understand women’s problems and find solutions to them. such approaches range from how women are perceived in various cultures and historical settings, given their biological functions and what nature ‘intended’ them to do, to their decline in power and status vis-à-vis men in the complex social ISSN : 2230-9667 Chronicle of the Neville Wadia Institute of Management Studies & Research 78 Human Resource Management evolution, to a widely shared emphasis on the need to make women equal through the economic on the need to make women equal through the economic and legal route which treats them as individuals rather than those having the sole responsibility for looking after the family.”

Mitra (1997) analyses the causes and comes to some important conclusions: “Relationship between women and professions could be perceived as one of women in full-fledged professions, medicine, law, academics, etc and another in the semi-professions-like nursing, teaching, clerks etc.” Okolo (1989) studied that another obstacle is the lack of role models of executive women due to their scarce presence in top managerial positions. Likewise, this study found out that there is no gender difference in organizational hierarchies when a woman has already gained access to them. “The lack of impact in women can occur because executive and managerial

women have developed survival features becoming immune to the effects of men’s hierarchies. A hierarchy composed by men solely may have an effect upon the election of a managerial board, and then its further influence is not very strong.”

Problems faced by working women

Occupational problems as stress: In women Occupational stress is stress involving work. Work and family are the two most important aspects in women’s lives. Balancing work and family roles has become a key personal and family issue for many societies. There are many facets in working mother’s lives that subject to stresses. They deal with home and family issues as well as job stress on a daily basis.

Reasons of occupational stress: Imbalance between work and family leads to occupational stress. Imbalance between work and family life arises due to a number of factors. Various factors are following.

1. Mental harassment: It is an age old convention that women are less capable and inefficient in working as compared to men. The attitude which considers women unfit for certain jobs holds back women. In spite of the constitutional provisions, gender bias creates obstacles in their recruitment. In addition to this, the same attitude governs injustice of unequal salaries for the same job. The true equality has not been achieved even after 66 years of independence. Working in such conditions inevitably puts strain on women to greater extent as compared to men, thus making them less eager in their career.

2. Sexual harassment: Today, almost all working women are prone to sexual harassment irrespective of their status, personal characteristics and the types of their employment. They face sexual harassment on way on transports, at working places, educational institutions and hospitals, at home and even in police stations when they go to file complaints. It is shocking that the law protectors are violating and outraging modesty of women. Most of the women tend to be concentrated in the poor service jobs whereas men are in an immediate supervisory position, which gives them an opportunity to exploit their subordinate women.

3. Discrimination at Workplace: However, Indian women still face blatant discrimination at their workplaces. They are often deprived of promotions and growth opportunities at work places but this doesn’t apply to all working ISSN : 2230-9667 Chronicle of the Neville Wadia Institute of Management Studies & Research 80 Human Resource Management women. A majority of working women continue to be denied their right to equal pay, under the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 and are underpaid in comparison to their male colleagues. This is usually the case in factories and labor-oriented industries.

4. No Safety of Working Women While Traveling:

Typically, the orthodox mindset in the Indian society makes it difficult for a working woman to balance her domestic environment with the professional life. In some families, it may not be acceptable to work after six o'clock. Those families that do accept these working hours may experience considerable anxiety every day about a woman's safety while traveling. So many issues affect a working woman because she is closely protected or watched by her family and the society.

5. Lack of Family Support: Lack of proper family support is another issue that working women suffers from. At times, the family doesn't support women to leave the household work and go to office. They also resist for women working till late in office which also hampers the performance of the women and this also affects their promotion.

6. Insufficient Maternity Leaves: Insufficient maternity leave is another major issue that is faced by a working mother. This not only affects the performance of women employees at work, but is also detrimental to their personal lives.

7. Job insecurity: Unrealistic expectations, especially in the time of corporate reorganizations, which sometimes puts unhealthy and unreasonable unreasonable pressures on the employee, can be a tremendous source of stress and suffering. Increased workload extremely long work hours and intense pressures to perform at peak levels all the time for the same pay, can actually leave an employee physically and emotionally drained. Excessive travel and too much time away from family also contribute to an employee's stressors.

8. Workplace Adjustment: Adjusting to the workplace culture, whether in a new company or not, can be intensely stressful. Making oneself adapt to the various aspects of workplace culture such as communication patterns of the boss as well as the co-workers, can be lesson of life. Maladjustments to workplace cultures may lead to subtle conflicts with colleagues or even with superiors. In many cases office politics or gossips can be major stress inducers.

9. Other reasons: It include Personal demographics like age, level of education, marital status, number of children, personal income and number of jobs currently had where you work for pay and Work situation characteristics like job tenure, size of employing organization, hours worked per week.

Challenges faced by working women in urban:

- Professional women feel isolated and burdened by the simultaneous demands of their new aspirations on one side and the traditional way of life on the other.

- Women are discriminated against in all walks of life. Women are subjugated, dominated and exploited both at work places and home.
- Some women face problems leaving kids at home and going to office early in the morning.
- People make particular perception or draw conclusion about characters of working women.
- The social system cannot accept the new roles of women who end up feeling misunderstood and distressed.

Solutions:

- Partners can be more sensitive to women's needs, and counter tradition by helping their wives perform daily tasks and take care of children.
- Organizations should have an internal code to ensure security of women employees and take measures to ensure that they discharge their job in a secure atmosphere.
- Governments should make it mandatory for companies to install Global Positioning System (GPS) in vehicles carrying women, in all industries which engage women in night shifts.
- Providing self-defense training to women; installing safety devices and CCTVs at the work place; undertaking police verification of cab drivers, security guards etc.
- Child care facilities and Child care leave for working women should be provided by every organization.
- Flexible timing and Possibility to work from home are required for working women.

Conclusion: Now a day's women workers are improved and promote in their workplace and in technological work. Trade Union should try to improve the conditions for woman's workers in many parts for example maternity leave is easily give to women and help the woman for achieve higher post actually women's nature is promotion to gain high quality in every field but if the condition is not ready then the reduction of promotion and optimization in work will be occur and etc..The general perception is that if some women are doing things differently, beyond people's limited imagination, and out of sync with traditional thinking, like going out for jobs, wearing different type of fashionable clothes, talking freely with male members etc., immediately they are branded as loose women. India probably has still a long way to go to make our workplaces free from any prejudices, abuses and harassments. Even then we can still try at solving some of the related issues and problems with some possible solutions that have been mentioned above so that women become stronger and are able to handle any adverse situations.

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