

## MULTIPLE ROLES - ROLE SHIFT – STRESS MANAGEMENT - MULTI TASKING: THE SOCIAL PROFILE OF MODERN WOMEN

SWATHI TEKUMALLA

**Abstract:** As per the Resolution adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations convened in Mexico City from 19 June to 2 July 1975 to coincide with the International Women's Year 1975 along with the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985) proclaimed by the General Assembly of UN a lot of attention demanded on the need to develop future oriented goals, effective strategies and plans of action for the advancement of women. To this end, the General Assembly identified three key objectives that would become the basis for the work of the United Nations on behalf of women: They are

1. Full gender equality and the elimination of gender discrimination
2. The integration and full participation of women in development and
3. An increased contribution by women in the strengthening of world peace [1]

And in the Declaration of Mexico Conference the expectations of society on women power is expressed very subtly as follows: 'Women have a vital role to play in the promotion of peace in all spheres of life: in the family, the community, the nations and the world [2]. These extractions reveal us the responsibility imposed on womankind with high authenticity.

Most of the working women especially those with children have to combine multiple roles and spend substantially more time on the household and childcare when compared to men. That results in an interface of their working role and domestic roles as a mother, wife and manager of the household. The advent of modern age with much emphasis on 'Gender Equality, Women Empowerment' and their visible participation in decision making along with technological advancements gave raise to new horizons. As a result there is a drastic shift in the roles with an enhancement in the magnitude of responsibility. Now the typical modern women have to balance between the combination of multiple roles i.e. their working role and family-related roles. Balancing between these dual multiple roles lead to stress or frustration. The author in the present study tries to provide a stress buster by means of 'Multi-Tasking.

**Key Words:** Multiple Roles, Role Shift, Stress Management, Multi-Tasking.

**Objective:** The objective of the study is to focus on the stress and frustration experienced by working women in balancing their personal and professional roles. Discuss the issues vividly in the light of relevant literary concepts. Find some possible practical ways and means for the benefit of the womankind.

**Introduction:** Roles and responsibilities are imposed on all organisms by nature. The modern structural organizations have bestowed rights as well to their member citizens to grow, develop and function within the framework. These systems, thus shaped gradually generate some norms and regulations to allow the activities within the structure happen smoothly. The intellectual supremacy of mankind in each era more or less exploited other species on the earth by interpreting these norms favourably. The uneven distribution of rights, suppression by the stronger bodies and playing favours resulted in many vulnerable groups. Unfortunately the womankind is one of them. Undoubtedly women are sensitive and physically inferior when compared to men. But recent studies have proved that women surpass men in IQ. The author of the new studies, James Flynn, who will publish his results in a forthcoming book, is known for the "Flynn Effect", he says, "In the last 100 years the IQ scores of both men and women have risen but

women's have risen faster,". He adds that the "improvement is more marked for women than for men because they were disadvantaged in the past." [3] Industrialization and globalization brought many changes in the life styles of people due to the culmination of cultures worldwide. Even during the transition period, Indian society retained its uniqueness through the process of socialization and acculturation<sup>2</sup>. It shaped a person's role within family and society with well-defined boundaries. When it comes to women they have well defined socio-familial roles related to parental family, in-law's family and children's. The raised new horizons annexed work environment where women are expected to bear the roles of superior, subordinate and colleague. Thus their entry into organizations to build careers made them part of two contexts. The family setting as well as work setting creates pulls and pushes [4]. Now the modern women have their roles shifted to work setting without totally detached from the familial setting. So the roles and responsibilities imposed are doubled. In the academic literature there is debate as to whether women who engage in multiple social roles experience more or less stress than women in fewer roles and men. Meeting all these limitations some women are able to meet their

targets, achieve laurels and fulfill their roles satisfactorily. That becomes possible with Multi-Tasking and Stress Management.

**Literary Review:** The choices of women reconciling work and family life, are influenced by economic developments and social changes in society (Hakim, 2008) [5], the experienced quality of their roles and the personal satisfaction of each of them (Barnett and Hyde, 2001) [6]. A general feature of working mothers is that they involve in paid employment while carrying on their traditional roles. Yang (1998) [7] recognizes this as a global phenomenon. Women combine their family-related roles as a mother, wife and housewife with their professional role. In fact it is one of the major differences between male and female employees. Women end their working hours more or less at mid night and start before the dawn. This situation forces working women to cope with the multiple demands and responsibilities of their employment and family responsibilities. "Women, particularly mothers, still experience the most work/family problems; this is demonstrated by the research finding that employed mothers with children are in poorer mental health than other employed women" (Hansen, 1991:349) [8].

Female identity is one aspect of social identity that often referred as women attach to their membership in the category "female" [9]. In the West, engagement in multiple roles has been regarded as a key characteristic of female identity [10]. Women are given many titles like "career woman", "soccer mom<sup>3</sup>", "domestic goddess", "super mom" and so on. Women really enjoy or accept these identities is debating. But the most acclaimed is "superwoman". It refers to a woman, who performs a combination of multiple concurrent fulltime roles such as wife, mother, worker, homemaker and caregiver [11, 12]. In the academic literature, "superwomen" are often said to be "double-burdened" with the responsibility of fulfilling both their domestic and career obligations [13]. Psychological and physiological stress among such women is a consequence of engaging in multiple social roles. The terms "Superwoman Syndrome" and "Good Girl Syndrome" have been used to describe the imposed attitude or self ascribed personality of a woman to fulfill the multiple-role functions, resulting the pressure associated with achieving perfection in the performance. Ware N, Klein man and Thompson MK described the context as a consequence of role conflict<sup>4</sup> [14, 15].

#### Methods:

**Stress Management:** Women take on multiple roles in society. Some roles are by choice and the other are chosen for them. These roles often include family obligations, caretaking for children, elderly parent or in-laws care, attending partner, work responsibilities and so on. In the studies and various workshops

conducted by Prof. Parikh, Life Space of Indian Working Women as divided by the participants is<sup>5</sup>:

- 30% spent with the family
- 70% with the professional work
- Out of the 30% with family {Motherhood takes up 80% ; - issues of in-laws 10 to 15%; Only 5% of space left to be with husband ; No space for themselves }

As demands increase to fulfill these roles, women feel overwhelmed with time pressures and unmet obligations. They may feel a sense of failure in not being able to meet expectations for themselves and others. Often time's women spend more time meeting the needs of others rather than nurturing their own needs. If functioning at high stress levels, women may not even recognize what their needs are. Stress is a response to daily life. It can also be positive and motivating to achieve notable goals. On the other hand the negative one is destructive in many life areas. The chronic or excessive stress cannot be adopted or coped with. Many a time the poor and sincere women cannot even trace the negative pressures working on them as they are so busy. But the imbalance can be sensed by experiencing any of these stress signs known as warning signs [16].

- **Physical**—headaches, insomnia, fatigue, appetite changes, smoking, alcohol
- **Emotional**—anxiety, anger, unhappiness, irritability, depression, frustration
- **Mental**—forgetfulness, worry, indecisiveness, negative thinking, boredom
- **Occupational**—work overload, long hours, tense relations, unfulfilling job
- **Social**—little intimacy, isolation, family problems, loneliness
- **Spiritual**—apathy, loss of meaning, emptiness, unforgiving, doubt, guilt, despair

For coping with stress and managing it women are advised to practice healthy self-care strategies in each of the six areas: physical, emotional, mental, occupational, social and spiritual.

- **Physical** - exercise, relaxation, yoga, healthy eating, leisure time, adequate sleep
- **Emotional** - emotional expression, positive emotions, healthy self-esteem
- **Mental** - positive outlook, realistic thinking, resilient attitude, creativity
- **Occupational** - doable goals, home-work balance, limit setting
- **Social** - loving relationships, healthy boundaries, friendships
- **Spiritual** - meaning/purpose, gratitude, present-moment focus

Keva Glynn [17] also prescribes 'A Personal Wellness Plan' as a preventive or post care measure.

- Review life areas. Examine the six areas for potential change.
- Identify goals. Be aware of what needs to be done and set goals.
- Be specific. Know what you want to accomplish.
- Set measurable targets. Move in the right direction.
- Be realistic. Set smaller goals that are achievable.
- Identify resources. Use helpful resources and minimize potential problems.
- Set time-limits. Consider reasonable, specific time limits.
- Evaluate progress. Make changes as needed

The other helpful tips are face and manage stress rather than avoid it, accept change as a challenging opportunity, **Integrate love, work, and play**, accept what can't be changed and change what can be changed, honor and love your inner self, do not hesitate to seek professional help in managing difficult stress.

**Multi-Tasking: To meet the time constraint, women often opt for 'Multi-Tasking'.** It is absolutely true that women are better than men at multitasking. Men were found slower and less organized than women when switching rapidly between tasks in some psychometric tests conducted by UK psychologists. In fact both sexes struggled to cope with juggling priorities, but men suffered more on average than women during the process. Productivity studies reveal that women take up the lion's share of household and childcare tasks, along with holding down part- or full-time work. Dr Etienne Koechlin, director of the cognitive neuroscience laboratory at the French National Institute for Health and Medical Research believes the belief that women may be better at multi-tasking "has some real roots." A possible hypothesis is that women tend to equate priorities, while men tend to more hierarchies priorities when facing multiple tasks," he says [18]. Professor Keith Laws at the University's School of Psychology looked at multitasking in 50 male and 50 female; women far excelled men when it came to planning. 'Planning and strategy is the key to women's success, he says [19]. David Meyer, PhD, a professor of psychology at the University of Michigan says 'Multitasking actually wastes time and reduces work quality'. According to him, juggling tasks can be very stressful. In the short

term, stress makes feel lousy. But in the long term, it can become a serious threat to health' [20].

In fact 'Multitasking' is not doing many tasks at a time, but it is monitoring and see that the multiple things are to be done. One needs to delegate work to make multitasking possible. But women are expected to take up their roles directly symbolizing love and affection. Delegating that responsibility is critical. They need to be wise and sensible to deal with the sensitive situation.

**Conclusion: The Feminists argue that in the traditional roles there was oppression and now with the culmination of personal and professional roles, women are burdened and exploited. Never had they enjoyed their rights. Finally to conclude with a positive note, today women are at the cross roads making trails to forge the new horizons of tomorrow. Let it be a humble attempt to support the great cause in the historical transition movement.**

**Explanatory Notes:** <sup>1</sup>The *Flynn effect* is the name given to a substantial and long-sustained increase in intelligence test scores measured in many parts of the world.

<sup>2</sup>Cultural modifications of an individual, group, or people by adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture or a merging of cultures as a result of prolonged contact.

<sup>3</sup>A usually white, middle-classed woman. Her kids are her "little angels" and are more important than anything or anyone else in the world and deserve to play game demos or do anything else better than everyone. She doesn't let her "little angels" waste their time.

<sup>4</sup>Role conflict occurs when there are incompatible demands placed upon an employee such that compliance with both would be difficult. One experiences role conflict when he/she finds themselves pulled in and pushed out in various directions.

<sup>5</sup> The author has participated in such a 6 day UGC sponsored National Workshop entitled ToT on 'Capacity Building of Women Managers in Higher Education (CBWMHE)' organized by the Center for Extension Studies and Center for Women Studies, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupathi from 19-24 Jan 2012.

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Swathi Tekumalla  
Dept. of S & H/VFSTRU/Vadlamudi-522 213/