

Study of Problems and Challenges Faced by Women in Performing Dual Roles in the City of Ahmedabad

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of the study was to understand the problems and issues faced by urban working women in India. The objectives also included identifying the key socio-economic attributes contributing to women's status, safety and security, and to study women's involvement in various activities/ organizations for improving of family, community and society. The study was confined to the urban working women in white collared jobs in the city of Ahmedabad, India. A mixed methods approach involving face to face interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaire technique including both close-ended and open-ended questions was chosen for effective elicitation of data from the respondents. The study was based on primary data collected from Rourkela city to find out the possible solutions for working women which could help them to overcome the problems that they face in the workplace. The results of the study showed 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.

1. 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 mind-set 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 9 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.

2. Literature Review

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). Eggins (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."

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 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 fullfledged 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 18 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."

Ronald J. Burke, Mustafa Koyuncu and Lisa Fiksenbaum (2010) examined the relationship of the perceived presence of organizational 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."

Wentling (2003) showed that the twin roles of women cause tension and conflict due to her social structure which is still more dominant. In her study on working women in Delhi, she has shown that "traditional authoritarian set up of Hindu social structure continues to be the same basically and hence women face problem of role conflict change in attitudes of men and women according to the situation can help to overcome their problem."

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. Top management should also be committed to the career development of women, and organizations should also introduce affirmative action to urgently address career development of women."

Skinner and Pocock (2008) investigated the relationship between work overload, work schedule control, work hours and their fit with preferences and work-life conflict among full-time employees (N=887). It was found that the "strongest association with work-life conflict was demonstrated by work overload, followed by work schedule control, work hours and work hours fit. Time-based work life policies, procedures and interventions were found necessary, but not sufficient, for addressing work-life conflict. They called for effective management of work overload to support a healthy work-life relationship."

3. Methodology

3.1 Objectives of the Study

The study attempts to address the following key research objectives:

1. To gain knowledge about the problems and challenges faced by urban working women in the workplace.
2. To identify the key socio-economic pointers contributing to women's status, safety and security.
3. To study women's involvement in various activities/ organizations for upliftment of family, community and society that can lead to their overall development.
4. To find out possible solutions that could help them to overcome the problems that they face in the workplace.

3.2 Implication of the Study

The study would help us in understanding the present status of women in our society what kind of problems they are going through

1. To find out possible solutions for problems and issues faced by working women.
2. To find out the gaps between the problems faced and probable solutions to the problems faced by working women.
3. The study can yield results that can help us in better understanding the problems and challenges faced by working women.

3.3 Data Collection Process

Both qualitative and quantitative aspects have been taken into consideration for the study. The methodology followed was a questionnaire-based survey among the urban working women of the selected localities, in addition to face to face interviews and FGDs. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items on various aspects of the study in addition to the demographic details of the respondents. A pilot study among 30 of different working women of Ahmedabad city was initially conducted to test the validity of the questionnaire. Subsequently certain items were dropped and certain others were modified for better elicitation of results.

Data were collected using the personal contact approach. Questionnaires were distributed to a sample of 100 working women located in Ahmedabad city, out of which 75 valid and complete responses were returned. Each of these 75 women was interacted with and interviewed face to face. Some related questions were asked of them and the comments noted down. In addition to face to face interviews, two focus group discussions were conducted with eight women in each group. These discussions also elicited information and data that have been discussed in the next chapter. Different methods were used for collecting data on the working women. The questionnaire consisted of 16 close ended and 4 open ended questions to meet the objectives of the study. The items in the questionnaire included urban working women issues related key parameters like sexual and mental harassment, promotion issues, family care issues, discrimination based on gender, workplace discrimination and prejudices, safety and security issues etc. The statements/items for the questionnaire were formed after consulting relevant literature and some preliminary study conducted in the area. Besides the attitude scale, the survey questionnaire also included a section to capture the general profile of respondents. They were asked about their

demographic background including age, education level, marital status, occupation, years of experience, nature of organization etc.

4. Major Observations after Data Analysis

1. Sexual harassment by male colleagues is a reality. Mental harassment by female colleagues is also a reality.
2. Working women face problems because of their female colleagues (jealousy, rivalry, competition etc.)
3. Colleagues, both men/women draw conclusions about women's character, sometimes without any basis.
4. Financial independence gives women more respect in the society as perceived by the working women.
5. Working women feel they are facing more mental pressure and depression than nonworking women.
6. Not much aware about Acts and Policies favouring women in the workplace.
7. Health issues are also an important problem for working women.

8. Working women are forced to leave their small children at home because of their work. There is Lack of proper support system.
9. Life as a single parent very challenging for working women.

In a patriarchal society like India a particular boundary exists only for women, and if they try to cross that boundary then people start maligning them. 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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