

## Mental health status of women at higher education institutions: Evidence from Tamil Nadu

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### Abstract

In the contemporary world, both men and women are in job for the survival of life. Job is mandatory to meet physiological, security, social, esteems, cognitive, aesthetic, self-actualizing, and transcendences needs. Women are facing psychological problems at workplace which do not exclude women working in higher educational institutions. This may have an impression on mental health and be a reason behind symptoms of mental disturbances, angry, depression, inactive or poor health. Work environment is good for physical and mental health at the same time bad working environment leads to illness of human being. Harassment and bullying at work place are normally reported issues and might have a considerable adverse impact on mental health. An organization will take actions that may promote physiological health within the work environment such actions may provide good result. Depression at the workplace is a leading cause of loss of work productivity, leave and premature retirement. The present study is analyzing the Mental Health Status of Women at Workplace with special reference to Higher Educational Institutions in Tamil Nadu.

**Keywords:** women, mental health problems, work life balance, depression

### Introduction

The modern-day woman struggles to beat a balance between work and family, often sacrificing latter to succeed and gain status in the working place and society. Women not only face these problems but their salary is also significantly less than their male co-workers in the unorganized sector. Working women have to face a lot of family issues, if she came's late from office, dresses well, talking with colleagues. If she has good dressing sense, she is typically commented by her own family members and at the office also. Another side it is difficult for women to manage the work- life balance because workload and the official environment are not natural and normal in today's situation. Hence it affects the physical and mental health of working women. Some women may commit suicide due to deep depression. After 2019 World Health Organization celebrates the world mental health day on October 10<sup>th</sup> in a year which is focused on the matter of "what can be done to prevent suicide". The risk may be related to job content and working environment. Many jobs may carry a heavy risk factor for women compared with men. This can have an impact on mental health disorders, lead to harmful use of alcohol or psychoactive drugs. Risk is increased in a situation where there is a lack of team or social support. In this circumstance, crimes against women have been increased and NCRB reported that there are 3, 29,243 (2015), 3, 38,954 (2016), and 3, 59,849 (2017) cases registered. Of these, Uttar Pradesh (15.6 %) has a top followed by Maharashtra (8.9%), Madhya Pradesh (8.3%), and least cases registered in Sikkim, Nagaland. Assam has top Crime Rate (143.6) which is calculated as a crime per one lakh of population. Hence, this study tries to understand how crimes have been incurred in and around the working place.

### Review of Literature

Johnson *et al*, (2005) [2] studied on work-related stress across occupations. They have pointed out three stresses as psychological well-being, physical health and job satisfaction. The occupations like ambulance nurse, teachers, social services, client services – call center, jail officers and police. The study rightly pointed out that emotional labour associate with high stress in work place.

Poulpunitha S. (2005) [7] mentioned the number of women pursuing high ranking positions within organizations has increased. Although women have advanced anthem workplace, there is still a need for gender equity in the workplace. The upward mobility for women still remains below and well behind men. There is also evidence that women face different barriers depending upon this level in the organization. Even after women have climbed the career ladder. Oftentimes they still face more barriers than their male colleagues.

Pawar *et.al*. (2007) measured occupational stress and life satisfaction among 413 naval personnel serving afloat and toward land. The result shows that naval aboard submarine and ship had lower levels of occupational stress as compared to those serving onshore institutions. The author says that occupational stress scores were higher among junior sailors (38%) as compared to officers and senior sailors (20%). Life satisfaction scores were lower in junior sailors. Larger occupational stress was linked to lower life satisfaction. The finding of high occupational stress in junior sailors must be investigated with a bigger sample.

Sophia J. Ali (2011) investigated the challenges faced by female in career development. She found that almost all the female staff were not satisfied with

career development programmes and females were discriminated against career development opportunities. The study recommended that organizations ought to attempt to confirm that career development programmes were set to enhance career development among women staff. The study says that high management ought to even be committed to the career development of female, and organizations ought to additionally introduce affirmative action to desperately address the career development programmes for women.

Varsha Kumari (2014) mentioned on issues of urban working women and includes women's status, safety and security, and to review women's involvement in varied activities/ organizations for rising family, community and society. Primary data were collected from hundred working women of the organized sector employing a mixed-methods approach. The study reveals that organizations should have an indoor code to confirm the protection of female workers and take measures to ensure that they discharge their job in a very secure atmosphere.

Manimekalai (2000) <sup>[6]</sup> studied women administrators in higher educational institutions in Tamil Nadu: Gender, Career Consciousness and Administration. Her study based on both qualitative and quantitative methods. The author tried to find out how far the level of career consciousness of women administrators impacts their functioning as administrators. She concludes that the term women should be redefined, by integrating heightened gender awareness, a deeper sense of academic and social values and responsibilities and rewarding responsiveness from the system.

Most of the studies on working women in India have found that women seek employment for financial reasons. Some of the educated women work outside the family only out of sheer economic necessity but also out of other socio-psycho- situational reasons. According to the various studies and observations made by various scholars, majority of the husbands did not accept the changed life pattern of a working wife in family.

### Concepts

Depression, loss, and the emotional impact of refusing to accept reality may turn in to stress. Depression is caused by a lack of secret agents in the brain. Depression is one of the main causes of diseases in the body. According to Medilexicon's medical wordbook, mental health state is: "Emotional, behavioral, social maturity or normality; the absence of a mental or activity disorder; a state of psychological well-being within which one has achieved a satisfactory integration of one's instinctual drives acceptable to each oneself and one's social milieu; an applicable balance of affection, love, work, and interests." (Tim Newman, 2017). WHO, worked to improve the mental health of individuals and society at large includes the promotion of mental well-being; prevention of mental disorders the protection of human rights and the care of people affected by mental disorders. World Health Organization's (WHO) definition of Occupational or job-related stress is the response people may have when presented with job demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope.

### Methodology

Sivagangai district of Tamil Nadu has been selected for this study with special reference to higher education institution and sixty-eight higher education institutions are running in Sivagangai District (District Statistical Department: 2018). In this paper Case study and direct observation methods have been adopted. Case analyses were discussed in this study and based on the descriptive method which is selected based on randomly. Researchers have visited in few institutions to find out the health status of women through direct observation methods and based on observation we found few peculiar cases.

### Working Women and Higher educational institutions

Indian women still face blatant discrimination at their workplaces. They are often deprived of promotions and growth opportunities at workplaces but this doesn't apply to all working. One of the major problems faced by the women at the workplace is sexual harassment. Some of the major challenges that hinder the progress of diversity and inclusion initiatives include ineffective implementation of policies, fewer women in leadership roles, lack of awareness about the benefits of gender diversity, the survey noted. Men versus Woman Issues, Gender Bias, Sexual Harassment, Work-life imbalance, Maternity leaves, Lack of role models, Power play, Ego clashes, Restroom gossips, and Security have been the main problems faced by working women (Krishna Reddy: 2019).

Manimekalai in her study she pointed out that stress at work affects a career woman at home and at workplace. She also highlights that career conscious women administrator's experience more stress. She rightly pointed out those career conscious women Administrators are not satisfied with what they have achieved (Manimekalai: 2000) <sup>[6]</sup>. According to her, women in administration or in any occupation have dual roles to perform, such as work force, roles of mother and housewife. These roles demand magnitude of work, stress, responses and adjustments. The domestic responsibility slows down the concentration of women as well as her career growth. The researchers try to understand how these problems have been affected working women in higher educational institutions. The problems like work-life imbalance, pregnancy discrimination, sexual harassment, gender bias are being discussed in her study.

### Work and Family Management

#### Work Life Balance

Work life balance could be a technique that helps employees of an institution to balance their family and work place. Work life balance encourages workers to divide their time on the premise on priorities and maintain a balance by devoting time to family, health, vacations etc in conjunction with creating a career, business travel etc. it's a very important construct within the world of business because it helps to inspire the workers and will increase their loyalty towards the institution. (Business Concepts Team: 2019). Work-life balance is that the lack of opposition between work and alternative life roles. It's the state of equilibrium which demands of public life and family life are equal. Work-life balance consists of, however it's not restricted to, versatile work arrangements that permit staff to hold out alternative life programs and practices.

Work life imbalance is not easy to define the imbalance of work life is a great challenge to working women,

particularly in higher educational institutions. Today the work life imbalance is the noticeable challenge among working women. The pattern of work life balance of women is different from men because women has to balance the child care, their food, studies, elder care, their food, social functions, maintaining relatives manage the other economic needs within the budget. These are not the problem of men.

### Case: 1

Kaveri (name changed) has 3 years old child studying pre-KG in the same town where she is working. She is working higher in educational institution and earning Rs.52, 000 pm. Kaveri migrated from her native to the place where she is working now and the distance is nearly 45km. she is staying in a rented house with her family. Her husband is working at another place which is 20 km away from their house where they are staying now and his earning is Rs.35, 000 pm. He used to go to office by two-wheeler. Kaveri's office time is 10am to 5pm, due to workload some time returns to home between 6.30 to 7pm, her husband regularly come home after 7pm every day. She is taking care of her child, while she is at home. Kaveri and her husband planned to engage a caretaker to take care of their child when they are not at home. She starts to do her domestic work at 5 am regularly due to heavy workload. Kaveri does not have time to take breakfast at home. She used to have her breakfast in the office daily. Some times in office also she does not have time to have her breakfast which affects her physical health resulted in an ulcer. As she is working in a higher educational institution her commitment to work is very high. When she is in office, she thinks of her child and unable to concentrate on work. Sometime she takes office matters to her house. Because of this her husband is not happy of her work. In this circumstance, he started fighting with Kaveri. It affects their child also. Kaveri said that work life balance is very difficult to manage and it creates conflicts between work and family. Her husband is enjoying the money earned by her, but he wants his wife to be a woman always and not committed to the job.

Experiment Krishna's work on work life balance as "The family feels neglected, friends feel lost and sad, she has round-faced the wrath of her entire network simply because she has forgotten to draw the line between work and life. This challenge is most voluntary and to urge out of this mess, the woman has to facilitate herself. Achieving work-life balance plays a very important role in one's life". Every human being wants a happy life such as a good job, relatives, family, and friends together always but this is impossible in practical life. It is very difficult to manage between work and life. Most of the women have a family to manage it.

### Pregnancy discrimination

Generally, pregnancy is an emotionally and physically challenging period for women. For a working woman it is extremely challenging when it comes to have a baby. The children at home are eagerly waiting for the mother's arrival and longing for her love and they never leave their mother once she comes home. Working mothers loose the lovable movements of their children. Many women are sacrificing their job to take care of their children.

### Case: 2

Deepa (name changed) working in a higher educational

institution at Sivagangai. Deepa has approached various educational institutions for her career, after a long journey, she got a temporary job, and working as a system manger. Few months later she got married to Mr. Vinoth. After 3 months she got conceived. Heavy workload and she return home after 7pm regularly, but her office time is 9.30 am to 4.30 pm. Her superior gives many works in-office time and she was not permitted to go for refreshment in between, she is not able to take lunch properly. Most of the time, she used to take lunch after 3 pm. Because she is pregnant she brings some eatable from her house even she has no time to eat that also. Her husband has observed that she is not taking proper food which affects the child in the womb. Her husband advised her to resign the job. A few months later she has resigned from her job.

We observed that temporary working women face lots of problems particularly during pregnancy time they have been facing both physical and psychological problems. Pregnancy is an important emotional part of the life of every woman. Women must be happy when she is pregnant to have a safe delivery and a healthy child. Every woman in the world feels that she is newly born after delivery. All woman are not in good health at the time of pregnancy and after delivery. Working women are affected by long-time sitting in the system, travelling, standing for along time, cannot take proper food at the correct time. Temporary workers are given pregnancy leave but are not paid. If women are doing too much of work, the authorities will try to finish the target within the time. Women manage so much workload on normal days. But women need highest volume of rest and strength during pregnancy. Hence, women are willing to do any type of work, but her expectations she must be emotionally and physically supported by her family and peer team members.

### Sexual Harassment vs. Mental Health

Sexual harassment is not recent problem faced by working women in the organized or unorganized sector, which includes physical contacts and advances, sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography, blackmails and sexual demands, either by words or actions. The pattern of mental stress among women is different from men. Women and men are different not only in their obvious physical behaviours attributes but also in their psychological makeup. There are many differences in the working pattern of women and men's brain, body structure, handling the situation, adapt to the environment. Good mental health leads to mental and psychological well-being (Savita & Shah 2015), includes the different type of communication among men and women. Most of women are not willing to share their sexual harassment with anyone, because WHO identified that there are many logical reasons women do not report sexual violence, including: inadequate support systems; shame; fear or risk of retaliation; fear or risk of being blamed; fear or risk of not being believed; fear or risk of being mistreated and/or socially ostracized (WHO).

The gender differences are based on physical and psychological attributes. In Tamil Nadu men are the family head hence they have to go to the job to earn for their families, woman is the home maker, she has to maintain the family and children. But in the modern world, all luxury goods have become necessary items to lead a smooth life like television, air conditioner, fridge, computer, cell phones, etc. To purchase the products and to maintain the

same it is essential to earn more. Hence woman started to go for a job. Majority of the women in male - dominated workplaces say sexual harassment is a problem in their institution. It can in general terms be defined as unwelcome behavior of sexual nature. In this regard, the workplace is an universal problem in the world against women workers.

It is a problem, giving negative effect on both men and women. It is seen to happen more with women as they are considered to be the most vulnerable sections of society these days. Sexual harassment is a serious problem in the workplace and it has been one of those issues that receive lot of negative attention to the women workers.

Recently the "MeToo" movement has raised the visibility of sexual harassment and assault at workplace and also the personal toll it takes on women's lives to new levels. Women who are targets could know a range of negative consequences, together with physical and mental state issues, career interruptions, and lower earnings. Additionally, molestation may limit or discourage women from advancing into higher paid careers and should contribute to the persistent gender wage gap. It should conjointly cross with different kinds of discrimination and harassment on the premise of race or quality, sexual orientation, age, or incapacity. It conjointly provides recommendations for preventing molestation and reducing the negative effects of harassment for people and the geographic point (Elyse Shaw: 2018).

When there are wrong access methods at the workplace, it is impossible to give a good result of work. Many women go to work because of their family situation. This has forced many women to suffer in the workplace, both physically and mentally. The solution is to set up a women's care centre to address the problem of women's safety in the workplace.

Sheetha (name changed) aged 31 and has a girl baby. Her husband is having an illegal relationship with another lady and he is living with her. He has not divorced his wife. She is living with her child along with her parents. In this situation she finds a job in a college and working as a junior assistant in a college at Sivagangai district. As she is new to the job, he had lot of doubt to complete her work. Hence she used to get the help from her HOD. The HOD has maintained a good relationship with her and he used to go to her house also. In course of time, she trusted the HOD and shared all her problems including personal. In the long run he came to understand that there is no one for her, hence he has taken the advantage and started misbehaving with her even in the department and whenever he goes to her house also. Further he has started sending unwanted messages and pornography videos also. She warned him many times, but he has not corrected himself and troubled her again and again. She approached the management, they are also helpless. Finally, she complained against him to the police station. The head has been arrested and punished.

It is observed from the above case study that the working women share their family and personal situation to office staff. Due to this reason, the higher officials take advantage on it. Hence we suggest that women should not share their family and personal situations to anyone and women can avoid the unnecessary calls/SMS. It is evidence that most of the women workers have been affected by sexual harassment. Now a days women's safety is a question mark and safety is not addressed in proper way in the working place, even though they have prevention cell. This kind of harassment is directly affecting the mental health and they

are unable to actively involve in the work at office as well as in family matters.

### **Gender Bias at workplace**

Women candidates face lot of problems during the interview because of gender bias. Women are primarily viewed as 'family oriented' further during the interview the committee members will ask or try to know about the family situation of a woman candidate. This is uncommon for a man. (Lin Gensing 2019).

"In our workforce, we might observe gender bias in many various forms and degrees. With regard to ancient jobs versus nontraditional jobs, ladies are typically relegated to low-paying, clerical and body jobs, whereas men are typically placed on career tracks that promise upward quality and career advancement. (Ruth Maythew, 2009). In this connection, There are two associate professor promoted to professor in 2017 one male (Selvam) another female (Rani) and they are working in the same department. In this situation, two separate rooms have been allocated to these professors. One room has toilet facilities and other one room has not toilet facilities. Selvam have been allocated a room with facilities of attached toilet and rani has been allotted a room without facilities of attached toilet. Rani asked Selvam to change the room and Selvam did not accept to change the room. Even nearby department, no separate toilet available for female working staff. So many times she has been politely asked him but no result. She used to go to Selvam's room for using the toilet when Selvam is not available. Most of the time she is waiting for long time because the room will be looked in his absence of Selvam. In this situation, she has suffered from orthopedic.

It is observed that gender bias at workplace is being practiced even in modern society and we also observed that due to tolerance character of female candidate, she has not made complaint against him to higher authorities. Hence he has been benefited for long time to make use of the attached toilet. In this circumstance, she has affected orthopedic illness and it is indirectly affects her mental health also. She was unable to concentrate her duties like research and extension activities.

### **Observation and Discussion**

Based on field experience, we make two kinds of observation namely general observation and specific observation.

#### **General Observation**

Most of the working women face imbalance between workplace and family, insecurity, not understanding between top-level management and low-level management. Due to communication barriers, most of the low level employees do not understand top level employees which create misunderstanding between employees and employers. Many Indian families are still living as a joint family along with the parents and in-laws. This adds to their stress further because they have to please all the family members of her husband. Since the times immemorial, worth of the work done or services rendered by women has not been recognized. Indian working women are not supposed to do extra hours' duty or night shift work due to lack of family support. In the case of married working women are not allowed many times to go to business tours as not permitted by family members. Today, almost all working women are

prone to sexual harassment irrespective of their status, personal characteristics and the types of their employment. Working women face sexual harassment on way on transports, at working places in public and private sector, educational institutions, and hospitals, at relatives and knowing persons also. Most of the women tend to be concentrated in poorer service jobs, whereas men are in an immediate supervisory position, which gives them an opportunity to exploit their subordinate women. Appropriate steps must be taken by employers or persons in charge of workplaces, public or private sector, to ensure a safe working atmosphere for women. Appropriate work conditions must be provided in respect of work, health and hygiene to further ensure that there is no hostile environment towards women at workplaces. The majority of the people with common mental disorders, however, are employed but struggling in their jobs. Neither are they receiving any treatment nor any supports in the workplace, thus being at high risk of job loss.

Based on field observation, we found that there are big problems with stability between work and family and due to this, no concentration at workplace and proper output have come up. While we have interacted with working women, they said that no proper recognize from family and society and they disappointed from family the as well as society. Working women have in higher education facing lots of problem such as no separate room with basic infrastructure, no restroom, and no canteen near workplace. All women employees are discriminated against by the top level of management which not gives separate rest room and it is either directly or indirectly affects their health problems, due for this reason, they cannot concentrate their work. New kinds of discrimination are being emerged in higher educational institutions. We found that institutional discrimination is being practicing among the educational institution and recommends state shall be appointed a committee to monitoring whether a separate restroom is available for working women and monthly twice psychological counseling gives to women workers. Institutions must to understand the needs of the women employees and they should provide good number of counseling sessions for their career development and organizing family day every year, for regular health checkups and frequent yoga classes can also help them, balance family and work stress.

**Action Plan**

Based on field experience, Present researcher made following action plan on basic requirements for sustaining mental health; 1. Profession autonomy, 2. Recognition and rewards, 3. Chances for promotion, 4. Considering suggestions of the Teaching and non-teach staff, 5. Technical knowledge, 6. Organizing training programme, 7. Separate rest room, 8. Canteen, Rest room and dining hall, 9. Crèche facilities, 10. Yoga centre and meditation hall, 11. Health centre, 12. Good infrastructure and 13. Working environment.



Basic Requirements for Sustaining Mental Health

Fig 1

**Conclusion**

A healthy environment at workplace can be expressed as the workers actively contribute to the working environment by promoting and protecting the health, safety and well-being of all working women. Based on field study, we recommends action plan to facilities and promotes mental health in the workplace as mentioned in fig.1 and it describes the implementation and enforcement of health safety policies and practices, including identification of distress, harmful use of psychoactive substances and illness and providing resources to manage them, informing staff that support is available, involving workers in decision-making, organizational practices that support a healthy work-life balance, programmes for career development of workers and recognizing and rewarding the contribution of workers.

Mental health strategies should be followed as a part of associate integrated health and well-being that covers interference, early identification, support and rehabilitation. Occupational health services may support organizations in implementing these strategies wherever the workers are available, but even when they are not, number of changes can be created which will protect and promote mental health. When mental health is supported, the number of absences, grievances, medical leaves, and disability claims can also be reduced. This is the key to success involving the workers at all levels when providing protection, promotion and support interventions and when monitoring their effectiveness. Working women will feel better coming to work in an environment where stress is manageable and services are available.

Workplaces likewise face many problems and are forced to work hard. So women have to realize the problem and have complete freedom for them. The status of mental health is very difficulties to understand even present researchers tried

it. The study found that women still face problems at work place as a result education administration does not give well fruitfully yield. Women have acted as the central nervous system in education institutions as well as the family also. If she is not treated as a good manner, the result may be negative. Hence, women can work without any discrimination. Women staff have a legal obligation to maintain a workplace that is free of sexual harassment.

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